MINOR CENTRES LOOK TO EUROPE

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1. Introduction

Territories show a landscape that is formed by material and non-material elements that have accumulated in time and defined historical and cultural identity. Therefore, the management of the cultural heritage and the formulation of development strategies cannot be based on the analysis of a territory that is considered as the sedimentation of the historical identity of a well-determined economic and social system.

The aim of this paper is to analyse an actual opportunity for the promotion of the artistic, cultural, environmental and historical heritage of the Mezzogiorno, of both the known heritage and the features that have not been 'discovered' yet: the creation of a European net of quality tourist accommodation located in historical and cultural sites.

Such a project will contribute to the promotion of the tourist and commercial supply of areas that are off the large regional tourist paths, and to the rehabilitation of depressed tourist areas, both in rural and urban contexts. The so-called minor centres will be at the centre of this project, especially those centres that are a part "of socio-cultural territorial units, of settlements that have given birth to original landscape and to city-countryside relationships that are typical of a civilisation deeply rooted in the territory. These systems can represent [...] points of reference for tourist itineraries based on the principles of [...] environmental rehabilitation and sustainability, with the purpose of creating a net of dynamic relationships, which aim at a revival of the socio-economic fabric of some of the weakest areas of the Mezzogiorno" (Ruggiero, 2001, p. 92).

2. Preservation and development

The promotion of cultural heritage was included among the strategies of sustainable development several years ago. In particular, the "Development Scheme of European Space" (DSES), which is the result of a long debate among European institutions, promotes cultural heritage policies that aim at "educating local populations about the preservation of cultural heritage as a factor of identity" (Carta, 1999, p. 103) on one hand, and at exploiting the heritage itself as an endogenous factor for economic growth on the other. This implies that great significance is attributed to cultural heritage and to the socio-economic role that this can play. Monuments, archaeological sites, ancient palaces, and historical squares are only the most striking evidence of a historical, architectural and artistic sedimentation which does not represent the entire concept of 'culture'.

Cultural heritage should be regarded as an expression of a given civilisation, as the evidence of the history of a community, as something that, beyond visible manifestations (monuments), "has an immaterial dimension which allows a population to identify, recognise and discover itself" (Carta, 1999, p. 153). A cultural heritage that is regarded as such can – and must – be rewarded in the planning and management processes of the territory. The 'safeguarding' approach – focused on cultural and environmental heritage as a 'patrimony to be preserved' – must join an 'operative' approach that considers such heritage as a 'patrimony of opportunities' for an economical development based on local specificities and identities. The union of cultural heritage promotion policies and strategies of sustainable growth can trigger the heritage-based development which enhances the potential of a territory, its cultural patrimony, its environmental system and its human and social resources.

Turco (2003) argues that opening up to the future without denying the past means considering transformation as an identity practice. Identity and transformation – often regarded as opposing concepts – are not necessarily in conflict, as transformation does not always imply the cancelling pre-existing conditions. Therefore, the suitable type of transformation is a 'passage' towards the future, which can adopt traditions as the key tool of such 'passage'; protection should not be conceived simply as preservation, but also as the
opportunity for retrieving local potential. Hence, each location possesses the actual conditions for its own transformation, and "the preservation of these possibilities of transformation – rather than transformation itself – is placed at the heart of identity dynamics" (id., p. 11).

This kind of approach seems particularly suitable for some centres in the hinterland of the Mezzogiorno, where cultural heritage has not been affected like the areas on the coast; these internal centres have experienced demographic (and economic) decline and the deterioration of the built environment. Nevertheless, in the past some of these small towns have carried out economic, cultural and administrative tasks much more significant than today's activities, so they have gathered a notable wealth of historical and cultural heritage (Manieri, 1978). These are the so-called 'hubs' of a network of relationships that are typical of a civilisation that is strongly rooted in the territory (Ruggiero, 2001). These villages have been given the opportunity to emerge from the negative cycle of desolation and socio-economic decline and to enter the virtuous cycles of modernity and development. First of all, the built environment needs to be preserved and restored, in order to exploit it for non-residential purposes, with due respect to the building typology and to local, historical, cultural and environmental identities. In other words, re-utilisation will not be translated into a radical transformation of the urban fabric and its features, but into the promotion and enhancement of such peculiarities. Historical buildings should be therefore assigned a function that at the same time guarantees their preservation and allows the economic growth of a given community.

3. Tourism in the Mezzogiorno and in Campania

A reasonable answer to this need can be found in the tourist promotion of some centres of the Mezzogiorno. For years it has been argued that tourism could represent the main 'resource' for the socio-economical revival of Southern regions, and that growth margins in that sector (and precisely in that section of national territory) are interesting. After all, also in 2001, for the eighth consecutive year, the Mezzogiorno has demonstrated a more positive trend (in percentages, not in absolute values) than Central-North Italy, in terms of both Italian and foreign tourists.

Despite this, the presence of tourists in Southern Italy is still well below the average for the rest of the country: only one tourist out of five goes South of Rome, and the percentage of foreign tourists is even lower (12.6%) (Svimez, 2002, p. 201). Southern tourist activity pivots mainly on Italian customers, except for Campania and Sicily, where the amount of foreign tourists corresponds to the national average. Also from the point of view of supply, the gap between the Mezzogiorno and Central-Northern Italy is particularly wide. Southern Italy has only 16.3% of the national hotel industry and 23.1% of bed sits. Camping sites and tourist villages have a slightly better situation, as they cover 34.7% of national bed supply. Apulia and Calabria, with 108 and 118 thousand respectively, are the leader regions in this sector.

Nonetheless, the Mezzogiorno cannot be regarded as a coherent territory with harmonic dynamics. Between different regions, and within regions themselves, differences are striking. On one hand, there are saturated tourist areas, in which tourist flows need to be limited not to exceed the threshold of environmental sustainability, and mature areas, where the supply needs to be rationalised and specialised in order to keep suitable levels of attractiveness and usability. On the other hand, there are developing or potential areas, which have unexpressed specificities that are liable to changes; these require proper structural intervention (creation of accommodation facilities and complementary services) and infrastructure (public works for access improvement and connections to national and regional tourist flows).1

In particular, in Campania there is a profound gap between the coast and the hinterland in terms of total capacity of tourist supply, reception and flows. Along the entire coastline of Campania, from the Domitian coast (on the border with Lazio) to Naples, from the Sorrento Peninsula to Sapri, on the border with Basilicata, one finds 80% of the region’s hotels, camp sites and tourist villages. Thus, whereas the localised tourist industry systems get stronger on

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1 Regional planning cannot consider a specialised and differentiated tourist supply. The delimitation of geographical areas with homogeneous features is therefore the first step in the development of a planning process for tourist activities; the definition of areas where tourist supply can be diversified and enhanced will be necessary for targeting precise market segments and creating a specialised, well-organised and marketed tourist product (Russo Krauss, 2002).
the coast, in internal areas there are a few weak spots, which are fragmented and far away from each other, connected by scattered sites of cultural interest (a sanctuary, a particularly beautiful site, typical craftsmanship activities, a village fair, a holiday farm), which are not ready to receive significant tourist flows. (Ioizzo, 2001, p. 12).

Tourist promotion of historical centres in internal areas, and the development of corresponding rural areas, is necessary given the current concentration of tourism on the coast (Adamo, 2001, p. 12). In addition to this, such promotion can be favoured by the exponential increase of the demand for 'alternative' tourism, which focuses more on cultural heritage than on the traditional kind of holidays by the sea or in artistic cities.

Certainly, the main tourist centres are located on the coast. However, there is a concrete opportunity for shifting part of the tourist flows from overcrowded and expensive coast locations towards quieter and cheaper internal areas. Such a shift could increase a local development that goes beyond restaurant activities, which should be supported by measures for the preservation and restoration of historical centres, the promotion of events and cultural activities, the revival of traditions and the promotion of typical quality products.

4. "Villages of Europe"

"Villages of Europe" is a pilot project presented by the Department of Regional Policies of the European Commission (DG XVI) at the beginning of 1993 and developed by Association Méditerranéenne, which aims at defining some European countries for the creation of a network of characteristic villages. These villages were to be located in mainly rural areas that could be exploited as high quality holiday resorts in areas that are far from the large tourist trails and financed by EU structural funds.

The initiative started in 1994, when DG XVI decided to finance the preliminary feasibility study according to article 10 of the European Fund for Regional Development (Reg. 2058/88), and was divided into three stages.

During the first stage, the analysis focused on the juridical, fiscal and financial aspects of the initiative, as well as on the definition of the existing and unfulfilled demand, and the kind of new supply to be launched on the market; other studies focused on the identification of sites of interest. Later, new funds were allocated for a further advance towards the application of the project to different sites in involved countries, i.e. Italy, France, Portugal and Spain; this second phase began in 1996 and it brought about the development and the approval of the first 10 feasibility studies; later on, 30 more studies were carried out on new sites.

Finally, the third current stage represents the actual realisation of initiatives: raising funds for the operation within regional planning, establishing the local investment and management company, establishing the international company for coordination, marketing and common services, taking over real estate to be transformed and restored, the realisation of restoration and transformation work, putting all suitable sites on the market through international specialised operators.

The project aims at fulfilling the demand for green tourism, based on environmental and cultural values, which is increasing in all European countries. This kind of demand is growing in terms of comfort, services and quality activities, so significant investments are needed. In this respect, rural tourism promotion can represent a valuable answer to the fight against unemployment and it can become a useful instrument for the diversification of the economic structure, the preservation of the building and natural heritage, and for triggering a real process of growth in the local economy.

The chosen sites have valuable historical and cultural features and they represent the ideal location for quality accommodation, respecting local traditional architecture, as well as the use

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2 Association Méditerranéenne pour le Développement Local et la Cooperation Transnationale.
3 Objective areas 1, 2 and 5b for period 1994-1999, objective areas 1 and 2 for period 2000-2006.
4 In Brussels the data on de-population and the impoverishment of internal areas for various member states have been analysed and a map of housing discomfort has been delineated. As far as Italy is concerned, more than 2800 municipalities are threatened with extinction: this phenomenon has been observed in the small centres on the Alps of Piedmont, Lombardy, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and the Apennines in Liguria, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Campania and Calabria.
of materials, shapes and colours. This is an original operation that joins local development, territory planning and enterprise economy; its purpose is the development of a network of accommodations that are integrated with local attractions and tourist potential, and the creation of an innovative tourist product.

The suggested approach is focused on the theme of discovery: holidays turn into an opportunity for discovering a new place, its people and its heritage. Guests will become temporary citizens of the village that hosts them, they can freely organise their time, and they can enjoy plenty of information about what to see or do in the village, an easy booking process, and a discount pass for taking part in a series of activities and accessing a number of sites of interest. The achievement of this initiative concerns recovering and restoring buildings in historical centres, but this is just one of the aspects of a necessary process for the improvement of the villages' general conditions according to the goals of the project.

The targeted customers (both from Italy and from the rest of Europe) will have a good socio-cultural level, while attractive elements will concern culture in a broad sense: artistic heritage, gastronomy, folklore, leisure and relaxation activities.

The development of a European network of tourist accommodation will put a new product on the global travel market; this implies that the accommodation facilities (about 50 for each village, totalling 200-250 bed sits in each "Village of Europe" in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal) are created in a renovated ancient building located in the centre of the village or in close proximity, guarantee a good level of comfort and favour a relationship with the exterior, in order to suggest unique accommodation conditions and a wide range of attractions.

The search for buildings to be restored will aim at the promotion of both the buildings and the urban context. So the selected buildings will represent local architecture and will be suitable for restoration work that promotes local identity. Restoration will concern not only valuable architectural features, but also the whole of building elements that are connected to local traditions. Original spaces will be preserved along with their peculiarities: internal heights, windows, terraces, porticoes, decorations, hearths, etc. Building solutions will be rich of traditional meanings, rather than aseptic and functional.

An analysis of different situations will be detailed and will carefully estimate the feasibility of the project. Every technical test will be carried out according to the owners' consent, and local administration will vouch for the regular conduct of the initiative. The transformation will have to guarantee high comforts and quality standards, so special attention will be paid to accommodation fittings, internal finishings and materials, for a simple but refined atmosphere.

This public-capital, local investment enterprise will receive the building heritage both from the Municipality and from private agencies through a binding agreement that observes legal regulations, it will mobilise public financing for the restoration of such heritage and it will follow the process of restoration work under observation by VEI (a duly-incorporated Belgian company established for this purpose). Later on, this company will have to hand over management of accommodation units to VEI itself, which will pay a fee to the local public structure and will guarantee maintenance of equipment, marketing of the product (either directly or through different operators) in the principal tourist markets, and will take care of receiving guests and providing necessary services.

The owner of the building will benefit from the assignment of the property (for 20-25 years) due according to the building lease: upon assignment of the building and without any agreement charge, the owner will receive one fifth/fourth of the value of the building and he/she will transfer to the purchasing company the expenses from direct taxation, ICI (real costs of materials, shapes and colours. This is an original operation that joins local development, territory planning and enterprise economy; its purpose is the development of a network of accommodations that are integrated with local attractions and tourist potential, and the creation of an innovative tourist product.

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5 Accommodations will be spacious (average 85 sm), well-furnished and equipped, with a solid modern acoustic isolation.
6 According to the project, initiatives will be coordinated and concentrated in order to work simultaneously on the accommodation unit and on the entire building, to highlight the identity of the original single building; such identity will be necessary in order to recreate the atmosphere of the "village".
7 Different solutions have been suggested: emphyteusis, long-term lease, etc.
8 Villages d'Europe Internationale.
estate tax) and the lease; the owner will not be charged for any ordinary or extraordinary maintenance, and he/she will have the right to regain possession of the building upon expiration of the lease.

Elite tourism, accommodation facilities, cultural initiatives, promotion of the artistic heritage: these are the main elements in the future of those centres which have entered the circuit of the "Villages of Europe", and have been given the chance to make use of funds for the development of tourism potential. The European networks counts 40 villages; in Italy, 20 villages have been selected on the basis of three main criteria: location of the village in a micro-region with a high tourist potential; the presence of architecturally interesting buildings and their availability for long-term tourist tenancy; the presence of necessary tourist services; local participants' solid enthusiasm.

Tab. n. 1. Italian Villages of Europe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Villages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>Alta Val d'Elvo: Comuni di Sordevolo, Muzzano, Graglia (BI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venetia</td>
<td>Feltre (BL)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuscany</td>
<td>Villafranca Lunigiana (MS)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S. Giovanni d’Asso (SI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marche</td>
<td>Alta Val Marecchia: Comuni di S. Leo, Pennabilli, Casteldelci, S. Agata Feltria (PS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Molise</td>
<td>Guglionesi (CB)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trivento (CB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campania</td>
<td>Teggiano (SA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scala (SA)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Agata dei Goti (BN)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Altavilla Irpina (AV)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Griffoni Sei Casali/Sieti (SA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basilicata</td>
<td>Trecchina (PZ)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nova Siri (MT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apulia</td>
<td>Martano (LE)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trani (BA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calabria</td>
<td>Villapiana (CS)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comuni di Scilla, Gerace, Bova, Stilo (RC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>Siracusa/Ortigia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sardinia</td>
<td>Castelsardo (SS)</td>
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</tbody>
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The work carried out in pilot sites have reached so far an analysis of site tourist potential, the identification and the analysis of restoration conditions (especially in terms of cost) of available characteristic buildings, negotiations with owners about their participation in the operation, as well as the juridical and financial organisation of the local structure that is in charge of the restoration of buildings and of fund management.

5. A possible development for 'villages' in Campania

Campania tourist supply, one of the most significant on a national scale, is sufficiently diversified. Cultural tourism and green tourism are certainly the market segments with the highest potential. Actually, from the point of view of tourist marketing, there is no "Campania" product: there are some strong poles within the region but the territory on the whole cannot be perceived as a single tourist product. In any case, Campania exhibits many contradictions in development and resource exploitation; there are various opposing situations of under-exploitation and over-exploitation of environmental, historical, cultural and artistic resources.

In other words, before a consistent national and international growth of tourist demand and competition, besides a profound change of the concept of tourism itself (due to a diversified
demand), the tourist system in Campania has not always satisfied this demand in a proper way, despite the fact that the region is characterised by excellent differentiation of potential.

With respect to the ways these resources have been exploited, a general policy of economic and territorial re-balancing is necessary, which aims at decongesting metropolitan conurbations on the coast and the development revival of internal areas. For this purpose, two strategies can be adopted: one for strengthening and promoting under-exploited territorial areas that favours the development of integrated tourist systems; another for promoting decongestion in over-exploited areas through the reorganisation of coastal systems and the re-balancing of tourist flows. In both cases, it is necessary to deal with deterioration problems of opposite natures: on one hand, physical, hydro-geological and environmental deterioration, caused by de-population and neglect; on the other hand, decay caused by pollution, improper exploitation of resources, and excessive population.

The regional administration of Campania has pinpointed tourism as one of the key sectors for the development of the Mezzogiorno. Given the large extent of unexpressed potential, the Regional administration in Campania intends to favour the growth of new productive realities that pivot on the innovative promotion of resources and traditional tourist products, and the recovery of local identities and cultures. For these reasons, the five selected sites of Campania for the "Villages of Europe" project (Sant’Agata dei Goti, Altavilla Irpina, Scala, Teggiano e Giffoni Sei Casali/Sieti) represent typical situations in terms of resource exploitation, and due to their strategic location, represent a good starting point for the promotion of an extended sustainable development of the territory. Tourism can bring notable innovation to pre-existing demographic, economical and urban arrangements; but constant flows of tourists will translate into concrete socio-economic progress only if landscape and local life conditions will be respected.

The experience with these samples will be necessary for tackling different situations; this is a 'pilot' initiative with a strong experimental and demonstrative value for the entire regional tourist system. The goal is developing a model of quality tourist hospitality through a two-fold promotion process: that of physical sites, represented by historical centres and cities architectural heritage; and that of local communities with their specific social and cultural values. The approach will be integrated and consistent with the guidelines of the Piano di Sviluppo del Mezzogiorno, the specific goals pinpointed in the Programma Operativo Regionale and with EU rules and regulations concerning local development and cohesion policies; the initiatives will be both tangible (urban upgrading, rehabilitation and promotion of historical centres and buildings, environmental promotion) and intangible (training of skilled personnel, introduction of new services, marketing activities, etc.).

Tourist hospitality in these centres will be aimed at the promotion of farm tourism as well as at the restoration of real estate in historical centres. Currently, about fifty billion liras are available, which can be invested in urban recovery and in the identification of specific strategies for the promotion of restored accommodation units: each municipality will be responsible for allocating the funds for the different projects in agreement with the corresponding Provincial administrations. Local authorities will be invested with maximum

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9 Mass tourism and the "sun-sea" kind of holiday are still the leading trends, while entrepreneurial strategies are still based on small working units which are not supported by specific skills.
10 Accommodation facilities are inadequate, quality is quite poor, and many locations are not easily accessible.
11 Coordinated initiatives on a regional scale will optimise the use of available resources and trigger a rapid process of improvement that can gradually influence and involve other sectors as well.
12 For example, sites of interest or geographic macro-areas nearby each tourist pole could form a regional network of "village hotels".
13 This approach is in line with the orientations of the Programma Operativo Regionale of Campania as for the need of an increase of the regional tourist system’s competitiveness, which means increasing the supply of services and resources that characterise the crossover nature of tourism, and improving local tourism systems that characterise the region (districts).
14 Initiatives concern the establishment of a network of infrastructures to be exploited for leisure activities, historical centres upgrading, housing rehabilitation for increasing tourist attractiveness, improving street furniture, developing professional profiles for training skilled personnel to be employed in "Villages of Europe" activities.
responsibility and a local partnership will be established through an agreement between Regions and Municipalities, and through the assignment of the management of the initiative to a partially public-capital company.

Tourists will have the chance to choose between different alternatives, both for a short or long-term stay, surrounded by art, natural beauties and the joy of good food.

In conclusion, any initiative that aims at the recovery and promotion of minor centres, which respects the value that local communities assign to different places, must regard the history of these villages, its socio-cultural aspects, its economic life and productive activities, and the organisation of the territory. The primary need is preserving the historical identity of each village (which is in any case facing a process of evolution), rediscovering local identities that have been lost in development processes that have not considered local specificities and differences; local communities claim the same need and right to manage their own environmental, cultural and human resources. Preservation and re-utilisation are the key to this initiative: minor centres will need to revive the ties to their own space and the sense of belonging, in order to regain their own identity and the significance of their places and histories (Carta di Gubbio, 1990).

Deplano argues that the historicization of anthropological processes shows the persisting features of places, which can be used to detect the elements and the motivations that have given significance to the relationships between architectural objects and their space relation space over the evolution and transformation of the urban system. The environmental features of a historic town represent the result of the transformations of a site, and through the interpretation of such changes one recognises the evidence of the passage of men (1997). The environment becomes the background for the communication space formed by the intense relationships between people and buildings, functions and resources, which are today a reference for uses and actions that are compatible with the features of a place.

Structural changes in a community (the configurations assumed by a given community) are not only physiological but are also necessary for its survival: if a settled community is not able to transform its own structure according to the changes of its territory, it will end up upsetting its own organisation and losing its own identity. The planner should consider that all changes should be subordinated to the maintenance of the identity of the settled community, because such a community will preserve its own identity until its organisation will retain its value.

The "Villages of Europe" project seems to fulfil this need. The creation of thematic itineraries that join tourist destinations (in the Mezzogiorno and elsewhere) and less famous areas, can boost intelligent exploitation of the historical heritage and of environmental resources. The restoration of old accommodations and surrounding spaces will contribute to the survival of local identities and the beginning of a lasting development process. The revival of these areas through the spread of an alternative quality tourism can be the opportunity for the implementation of an example of sustainable development, which will transform territorial and local specificities into strengths.

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