

Special Issue
Enhancement, Management,
and Sustainability of Tourism in Italian
Small Villages

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Ilaria Marotta

Salvatore Monaco

Marina Novelli



Editor in Chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Managing Editor: Carmine Urciuoli

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EDITOR IN CHIEF

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✉ redazione@fuoriluogo.info

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Development Policies for the Valorization of Italian Villages: an Apulian Perspective²

The NRRP urban renewal leanings

On a global perspective, the pandemic effects of the last two years have had a significant impact not only on economic dynamics, but also on the processes of regeneration of entire territories. In the current context of rising inequalities, made worse by energy crisis and ecological transition, people and communities, especially those in inner areas and small villages, can be considered as a good sample to experiment a profound change in the way of work, and generally speaking, in the way of life (Carrosio, 2019).

In the Italian scenario, the opportunities offered by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) impact very much on local governments, as proven by the "Bando Borghi", which granted an investment of one billion euros aimed at the recovery of Italian villages³. In the light of this situation, what could had been considered as an intervention of social nature up until the period before the pandemic from Sars-cov-2, nowadays can be seen as concrete opportunity of economic growth and civic development (De Rossi; 2019; Barbera & Parisi, 2019).

Since the "Bando Borghi" framework aims at recuperating the ability of small villages to attract inhabitants and to empower employment, the NRRP final goal is to generate social shared values. For this reason, like a sort of social mission, the "Bando Borghi" aims to invest in projects based on the preservation and enhancement of the pre-existing natural and cultural heritage.

Focused on increasing the attractiveness of the Italian villages and fighting depopulation (Bruno *et al.*, 2021), the "Bando Borghi" emphasizes the scope of each action in terms of possible impact on communities and territories (Graziano, 2021). Directed at villages with fewer than 5000 inhabitants, the "Bando Borghi" is rightly dedicated to the recovery of historic villages and provides EU funds for financing urban regeneration projects in small villages. It's therefore clear that the intentions of both the European Union and the Italian legislator tend towards the development of the marginal territories through infrastructure growth projects in the broad sense. For this reason, it deals not only with buildings, roads, railways, but also with security, digital and welfare systems assumed as strategic issues to activate cohesion and innovation among public power, citizens and private stakeholders (Fanizza, 2019).

Within this general context, the depopulation of small villages, not only in the province of Foggia but throughout the Italian peninsula, represents one of the most difficult challenges for the entire territory (Reynaud & Miccoli, 2018). Indeed, in recent decades, many communities, once vibrant and full of traditions, have seen their population gradually decrease, due to their youth emigrating to the cities and the job opportunities that these offers (Carrosio, 2020). The consequence is a progressive lack of essential services, such as schools and health facilities, which, combined with the absence of economic attractiveness, has led new generations to seek fortune elsewhere, leaving behind once prosperous towns, now decadent and silent (Quaranta *et al.*, 2020).

The themes of depopulation and youth mobility not only undermine the social and economic vitality of these places, but also put at risk the cultural and historical heritage they hold. The small villages, with their traditions, artistic and cultural heritage, popular folk festivals and typical cuisine, represent a fundamental identity fabric for the province of Foggia. The challenge is to find effective strategies for revitalizing these communities, attracting new residents and promoting

1 Fiammetta Fanizza, University of Foggia, fiammetta.fanizza@unifg.it, ORCID: 0000-0001-7330-0766 ; Fireolla Spallone, University of Foggia, fiorella.spallone@unifg.it, ORCID: 000-0002-5598-2772.

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3 In terms of content and requirements, the "Bando Borghi" involves historic villages with less than 5000 inhabitants (according with ISTAT data at 31 December 2020).

sustainable tourism that enhances local features. Therefore, it is in this perspective that the “Bando Borghi” of the NRRP aims at preserving the wealth of a heritage that risks succumbing to the silence of abandonment.

1. The “Bando Borghi” theoretical framework and methodological approach

For the most part, the planners’ job is helping a community to achieve a vision of the reality. Unfortunately, planners often try to impose what they perceive as the best, so they consider participation as a merely listening activity. Planners collect social needs but this “public hearing” is not what people want (Fanizza, 2015). Since it is very difficult to transform “public hearing” into commitments, one of the expected results of the “Bando Borghi” focuses on helping a community to achieve a vision of the actual reality.

Mostly inspired by radically trans-disciplinary approaches, especially by recalling the Innovation Studies (Ramella, 2013), the participative planning between the University of Foggia and INU provides conceptual and methodological tools to support the effort of a new social design of communities (Fagerberg and Martin, 2013). It deals with a methodological approach that makes it possible to understand regeneration as a social process, or, better, on improving a general model that can act as a base for actions of collective scope.

In order to identify the regeneration projects in the villages of Chieuti, Zapponeta, Rignano Garganico and Serracapriola addressed in this article, it is important to focus on the integrated and inclusive approach adopted; a result of an agreement between University and INU, it is a valuable tool for presenting a different participative practice in planning activity. Following this parameter, the steps for defining each project have been supported by:

- 1) detailed analysis of socio-economic and historical-cultural context of each village;
- 2) tutoring activities on local public decision-makers for explaining the aim of Bando Borghi;
- 3) operative activities both technical and related to the collection of communities needs and expectations;
- 4) writing proposals and assistance for the submission.

These steps were fundamental, because these Villages are very tiny and municipalities lack of officials with either knowledge or expertise on project activities. To put it more clearly, even if the officials are present, they don’t have time because they are busy in a wide variety of activities, that normally don’t involve the skills and expertise useful for project submission.

Thanks to the connection with University of Foggia and the Apulian section of the National Institute of Urban Planning, these little Villages submitted projects and, no matter the outcome, they had been involved into a NRRP process.

The methodological approach for identifying regeneration projects in the villages of Chieuti, Zapponeta, Rignano Garganico and Serracapriola was based on an integrated and inclusive approach. First, a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and historical-cultural context of each village was carried out, involving public decision-makers and the Apulian section of the National Institute of Urban Planning. This process has identified community needs and expectations, facilitating the co-creation of sustainable solutions for communities, public decision makers and the territorial ecosystem in general.

The connection with University of Foggia and the Apulian section of the National Institute of Urban Planning allowed the definition of territorial ecosystems, open both for the achievement of sustainable goals and for the empowerment of the local communities. Then, in accordance with this ecosystemic vision, each Village developed targeted action plans, combining the preservation of historical and cultural heritage with the development of strategies that can promote innovation and architectural renewal at the same time. Subsequently, in order to respond to the NRRP call, targeted action plans were developed, combining the preservation of architectural heritage with the development of strategies that can simultaneously promote innovation.

So, in order to respond to the NRRP call, a shared activity of validation of projects involved all categories of stakeholders, to:

- identify community needs and expectations;
- facilitate the selection of strategies;
- ensure projects effectiveness towards spatial dynamics over the time.

Finally, the validation phase of projects was shared with all major stakeholders in the boroughs to ensure resilience and adaptation of strategies over time, ensuring that projects respond effectively to evolving spatial dynamics.

Since discussing the function of participation involves the role of civic engagement, one of the most important aspects in this planning activity was to avoid the trend to consider villages as commodities (Fanizza, 2013). Against the tendency which evaluates villages only from an economic point of view, the participative planning between the University of Foggia and INU was founded on a different link between the urban environment and citizenship condition (Wagenaar, 2014). Strictly related to the significance of new models of urban living, these planning proposals focus on the interaction between cultural roots and historical memories, especially because any planning sets itself as a storytelling (Diers, 2004).

By following a modern village dialectic, these planning adopt an inter-organizational approach for translating the variety of social identities and cultural signs into a code able to both put into practice the concepts of village living (Torres, 2003) and to promote social behaviors useful to spread new urban rights.

Sociologically speaking, it possible to assert that these planning select rules and criteria useful to develop empathy toward NRRP choices (Desideri & Ilardi, 1997), because they involve both the quality of social organization and the general state of well-being. So, more than just an abstract goal, they enforce social integration processes and challenge a collective intelligence lifelong learning program.

In contrast with many planners who start from their own expertise and add community participation as a necessary but secondary component of their proposals, the planning team by the University of Foggia and INU identified what people might debate on (Rosenberg, 2007).

To start, the planning team created a very interesting scenario with ethnographic tools (thanks to photographs and reportages) and with deliberative meetings with any groups and categories of people. In doing so, the team both reduced the scope of dialogue with politicians and contained the interferences of designers.

Lastly, the very same concept of space of resilience can be functional to support the collective intelligence lifelong learning program (Pellizzoni, 2017). It leads to the improvement of participative citizenship, because it goes beyond the involvement of politicians while also being focused on the importance of social identity (Neal, 2003).

Specifically, when communities are unable to deal with some specific aspects of urbanism - in these specific cases because they are little villages - cultural roots can create new urban geographies to confer significance both to urbanism and village living. Cultural roots can ensure a proper use of public space if they provide for a substantial re-thinking of planning's social function. Together with the replacement of the contents for selecting the government's choice, cultural roots can be essential for an over-structural and infrastructural filling of villages and to avoid or reduce any forms of territories' discrimination (Low, 2000).

2. The “Bando Borghi” purposes and expected results

The analysis presented below aims to describe the process that allowed four municipalities in the Apulia Region - Chieuti, Rignano Garganico, Serracapriola and Zapponeta - to design ideas for urban regeneration (Bindi *et al.*, 2022). Thanks to the description of project activities carried out by the University of Foggia in collaboration with INU, National Institute of Urban Planning, Apulia

Section, the intention is to show the fundamental guidelines for the potential investments of the NRRP toward the micro-reality of internal areas and small villages. Far from the multiple regulatory and administrative aspects, the aim is to address the importance of identity roots and local history for territories' local management and, above all, for growth and development of villages. The methodological steps which drove the process were particularly relevant, since they stimulate the partnership cleverness.

Undoubtedly, we can consider the entire process as the result of common learning that links together all the project activities, especially because the final output turns around the opportunity of triggering widespread well-being (Farnsworth *et al.*, 2016).

The scientific coordination by University of Foggia was important for the definition of drafting activities with the direct involvement of municipalities. Therefore, if on the one hand there was the direct involvement of the clients (municipalities), on the other hand the collaboration between the University and INU concretized the idea of valorizing the villages as a dimension capable to better define the collective identity in order to impose new trends in local policies management. To do this, some concepts were revised to align the expectations of local authorities with the assessment of the feasibility of the project ideas themselves. The revision of these concepts was carried out through a multi-context analysis of geographical, historical and cultural features of the villages.

To put it more clearly, the context analysis phase was the main tool for drafting the project proposals. By doing so, some concepts were used both to take into great consideration the expectations of local authorities and to evaluate the concrete feasibility of the project ideas.

According to this perspective, the potential impacts on the territories of the financing of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan define a new strategy focused on the need for new governance levers of territories. Putting the attractiveness of the villages at the center of the stage, considering them as engines of cultural and social regeneration, ensues the creation of public space and highlights that territories need participatory administrative work (Fanizza, 2016; Minguzzi & Solima, 2012).

Specifically, the information relating to the knowledge of the villages constituted a wealth of knowledge, mostly because it helped both to decode and understand the complex and composite articulation of the Call, while also providing preliminary reading and interpretation of various elements that characterized the "Bando Borghi" structure.

The deep knowledge of the villages avoids the simplistic reduction of regeneration project ideas, and in particular tackles the risk of homogenization among different projects. In other words, knowledge is the wealth to be evaluated and on which to develop well-being. Accordingly, the rediscovery of the history of the villages became fundamental to design the proposal. Especially when this history is unknown, it becomes important to rebuild the community and act on the identity roots (L'Erario, 2017).

This is inextricably linked to the fight against the abandonment of the territory: the extent of the depopulation processes, the mobility problems, the gap between large cities and inland areas and hydrogeological risks make the definition of intervention strategies urgent and necessary for the implementation of a territorial welfare system, which has the ultimate goal of guaranteeing fundamental social rights to villages as well (Lucatelli, 2015). They must be considered as social innovation processes, especially if they concern cultural heritage.

3. The planning activities: four proposals in the territory of Foggia

The entire design process lasted three months, from January to March 2022. The design experience, established on a very close collaboration among University, INU and the four municipalities in the province of Foggia, was focusing on strengthening the network of knowledges and skills which are useful firstly for achieving regeneration goals, and also for framing the items

necessary for the redevelopment of villages involved. In short, we can assert that the real opportunity of "Bando Borghi" concerned the possibility to transform culture heritage, slow tourism and green mobility into economic growth objectives.

When looking at the characteristics and social dynamics that develop within the four small villages of the province of Foggia - Chieuti, Rignano Garganico, Serracapriola and Zapponeta - it is really evident the desire to be attractive and to become a beautiful place in comparison with other places all over the Italian land. The idea of urban regeneration is therefore supported by a sort of social redemption, perhaps linked to their peripheral geographic position. This position seems like a kind of stigma, a sort of segregation that awaits final liberation.

Being more attractive with respect to the national and the EU context is the principal intention of local administrators who ask the University of Foggia for help. Actually, the local administrators of the villages grasped the potential of Bando Borghi, but they were not able to design an idea, also because no one in the municipalities is expert enough in project activities. To put it more plainly, the local governance of small villages is mostly composed by a mayor and municipal bodies (Giunta and Consiglio) largely busy with more tasks and responsibilities and not capable of managing the entire load of responsibilities entrusted onto them.

In particular, the local administrators were aware that local welfare is not generated only through top-down processes, but it is born and spread according to a precise definition of strategic actions. In this view, their request to the University of Foggia regards the possibility of developing a model of co-planning to be allocated almost exclusively to a portion of population and territory defined as disadvantaged. Because this co-design interventions to innovate the territories of the internal areas qualify themselves as devices to manage the issue of internal areas and communities in a specific territory, the University of Foggia became the promoter of local development. Given the absence of planning expertise within local administrations, the University of Foggia took the responsibility of identifying objectives useful for defining new development strategies. Founded on the in-deep analysis of the characteristic aspects of each village, the University of Foggia discovered that for the "Bando Borghi", sustainable development and the potential for valorizing the cultural heritage represent the two main themes, or rather two "experimental fields". Accordingly, the application of policies for the ecological transition, and more generally of sustainability, synchs well with the theme of well-being.

Since what is called civic engagement depends on the relationships between welfare and society, over the time the identification of public skills within local governance has become an implicit interpretation scheme into the paradigm of civic participation. However, civic participation dynamics are affected by rhetorical discourses who generate endless problems of inadequacy of local policies while taking as a fact the invisibility of civic engagement in planning activities. It is quite possible to read these contrasting dynamics as the reason of the request for methodological and instrumental support advanced by the municipalities at the University of Foggia.

The presentation of the project resulted into the four case studies shown below, and the intention is to highlight the lens of observation used for each project planning.

The need to utilize the issue of regeneration of the villages through a different lens of observation starts from the awareness that the numerically understood demographic aspect is inadequate. It is actually necessary to consider the increase or decrease in population as possible effects of different aspects: methods of participation, community building, perception of social welfare, sustainability features, new forms of social capital, levels of resilience of villages citizens. The following tables summarize the peculiarities and the main thematic focuses developed in the individual projects.

What clearly emerges is how the use of tools such as the NRRP could enable both the promotion of a diversified use of the Apulian cultural heritage and the proposal of forms of social innovation in terms of community involvement.

Tab.1 - Chieuti

Title of the project	The door to Apulia
Brief description of the context	Chieuti has an extension of 61.52 km² and is located at the extreme north-west of the Gargano coast. Thanks to its position (on the border with the Molise Region and overlooking the Adriatic) Chieuti represents a natural door to Apulia. Chieuti represents one of the two Arbëreshë countries in the Province of Foggia so it maintains a very strong link both with Kosovo and with the ancient Albanian culture (archaic customs and language). Historically speaking, Chieuti is part of the settlement structure of the lagoon of Lesina and Varano, characterized by a series of early medieval and Norman centers. Its geomorphological patrimony involves the panoramic range (from Gargano promontory to the coasts of Maiella) and the presence of numerous farms (called masserie).
Brief description of the strategy	"The door to Apulia" enhances agricultural traditions to boost the social empowerment by promoting new forms of turistic accommodations. Focused on gastronomy, the proposal of journeys into local tradition are the key point to promote a broad tourist seasonality, slower and more immersive, able to mix together cultural trips with emotional experiences.

Tab.2 - Rignano Garganico

Title of the project	The Gargano Amusement Park
Brief description of the context	With less than 2000 citizens, Rignano Garganico is the smallest village in the Province of Foggia. To fight the stigma caused by the presence of the biggest immigrant land-workers ghetto, Rignano Garganico wants to preserve the medieval matrix of its ancient neighborhood, with particular regard both to the houses embellished with stone portals and to the cave houses that define a mediterranean urban plot, characterized by narrow streets and white-washed houses (called mugnali).
Brief description of the adopted strategy	The Gargano Amusement Park envisions a theme-park reconstruction of prehistoric settlements. Thanks to the strength of popular knowledge, the Park aims to bolster local empowerment, with particular regard to the promotion of historical heritage, integration and social innovation.

Tab.3 - Serracapriola

Title of the project	The village of ancient streets of well-being
Brief description of the context	From 1991 onwards, Serracapriola has been part of the Gargano National Park with a population of 3,759 people. It has a strategic biogeographical position - between the hills of the high plateau at almost 300 meters above sea level and the valleys of the rivers Fortore and Saccione - and a very charming urban layout, emulating the Parisian tree-lined avenues.
Brief description of the adopted strategy	The village of ancient streets of well-being aims to increase and de-seasonalize the flow of tourism focusing on the direct involvement of families, citizens, companies and non-profit associations. The slow tourism concerns a public-engagement process, based on the link among landscape preservation, heritage enhancement and human relationships.

Tab.4 - Zapponeta

Title of the project	Well-being on the beach
Brief description of the context	Zapponeta is a small coastal village inhabited by 3,320 citizens and its territory is filled with locations strategically important for the long-term maintenance of natural habitats and endangered or rare flora and fauna species.
Brief description of the adopted strategy	The well-being on the beach consists in the redevelopment of the waterfront area, by enhancing some peculiarities and geographical features. So, it does not consist in socio-urban interventions, but rather in the planning of social activities, addressed to increase both happiness and health lifestyles.

Final comments

The process of designing and writing the regeneration projects for the Apulian villages has been a crucial moment in defining possible local development strategies. Nevertheless, this paper wanted to highlight how the drafting of such projects is not only a technical act, but should be a highly collaborative process, in which different visions, expectations and skills are intertwined. This approach is valid for all the Villages, whose characteristics and dynamics are often the same. More specifically, although the villages of Chieuti and Zapponeta are maritime areas, and therefore apparently affected by tourist logic, they are in fact in the same condition as the villages of Serracapriola and Rignano Graganico because they are all affected by dynamics of depopulation and the needs of local communities represent the unsolved constant of local governance. Despite this, the traits linked to historical and cultural identity remain unchanged.

These proposals are innovative because they open perspectives onto the villages, whose political economy acquires a lifelong learning perspective. This is possible when the forces of interaction between individuals and territories manage to synthesize and create «learning regions» (Florida, 1995), namely forming a relationship between the socio-logical perspective and the typically economic one.

These four proposals can become a model only if the mere economic goals can trigger a rethinking of the social function of the economy, or, even better, to spread the innovative ability that resides in the knowledge acquired through processes of socialization and sharing.

The possibility for success of a «learning region» in the province of Foggia depends on the ability to bet on its solidarity, which can produce «contagious social forms», or rather behavior that is capable of connecting (material and immaterial) resources with social practices in a truly sustainable and generative manner (Ramella, 2013).

From the sociological point of view, these proposals have been supported by multidisciplinary approaches with methodological tools that characterized the cultural and social regeneration. Developed by some small municipalities in collaboration with the University of Foggia and the Puglia Section of the INU, Institute National Urban Planning, these tools triggered a learning by doing process, which set up the improvement of the participative citizenship.

Since the planning activities have been focused on the importance of social identity, this experience teaches the importance to go beyond the involvement of politicians and local leaders.

Going beyond the involvement of local leaders created the conditions to better understand how to organize the villages' future. Especially when villages are structurally unable to deal with some specific aspects of urbanism, going beyond the involvement of local leaders can stimulate civic knowledge while encouraging people to offer suggestions and options: in short, a local empowerment strength (Sclavi, 2004).

Overall, when any decision-making is supported and tutored by cultural roots (Bovone *et al.*, 2002), going beyond the involvement of local leaders means that cultural roots can create new urban geographies to confer significance both to urbanism and the villages' life.

Since social sciences can be the stage and not only the frame on which urbanism can find the right way to be implemented, understood and shared, the cultural roots can ensure a proper use of public space and the replacement of contents into public policies together with a substantial re-thinking of the social function of planning.

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