

THE REQUALIFICATION OF ANCIENT ROADS FOR PUBLIC RECREATION

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Abstract

The shape that Man gave to his environment is evidenced by the legacy currently existing in several rural places. In many areas of Europe, the original design inspiration for roads has been unfortunately lost throughout the ages. A key strategy for the sustainable growth of rural tourism may pass through the requalification of some ancient roads. It could include the analysis of the historic route-based itineraries created on time, such those constructed in Europe by the Romans, or later for religious pilgrimages in the Middle Ages. Some of these paths, already existing – like the “*Francigena Way*” and the “*Herculia Way*”, crossing Southern Italy – currently constitute a collection of arterial roadways, dating back to the Roman Empire. In the present paper, the potential requalification of these ways has been examined. Together with the ancillary minor road network – known as “*tratturi*” (sheep-tracks), which are partially still in use - their potential structural and functional restoration may be considered, to valorize paths that could be traveled on foot, by bicycle, or by horseback. The preservation and improvement of these important landscape elements, aimed to an enhancement of rural historic heritage and sustainable environmental management, could thus improve the consequent promotion of public recreation.

Keywords: Historical Routes, Roman Vestiges, Historic Heritage, Sustainable Tourism, Landscape Protection

Introduction

The current heritage in a rural area represents the form that the man has been able to give to his surrounding environment (Picuno P., 2022). Throughout the ages, all over the European countryside, historical roads lost their traditional design motivation (Hruza et al., 2019). Their requalification in the framework of a sustainable development of rural areas can be even an important way for the sustainable development of tourism, focused on participating in a rural lifestyle (Statuto et al., 2017). It could also pass through the valorization of route-based itineraries designed by some ancient roads, as those built in Europe by the Romans, or during the middle-age for religious pilgrimages. The present paper aims to identify the characteristic elements of the rural landscape along a portion of the “*Herculia Way*” route, in the Basilicata Region (Southern Italy). This analysis, would suggest possible environmental and functional interventions, aimed to protect the historical identity of the local landscape (Cillis et al., 2021), while experimenting new forms of public recreation in rural areas.

Material and methods

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

This road was built during the Roman period, at the time of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian Herculius - from which, it takes its name - in order to connect (Fig. 2) the City of Grumento with the “*Appia Way*” in the north, as well as the “*Popilia Way*” and the Ionian Coast eastward. The stretch of the Herculia Way eastbound assumed historical significance for religious pilgrims, in consequence of the passage of Saint Mark the Evangelist and the Apostle Peter and his followers, travelling to Rome, in the Bishopric of Anglona, an apostolic foundation sited in the territory of the Tursi municipality, located along the Herculia Way in the Basilicata Region. It was subsequently used by commercial traffic crossing the region. In the Middle Ages, the main axis of road network of Basilicata Region reproduced the ancient Roman paths, linking, as far as possible, all the territory of the old region.



Fig. 1: The Herculia Way in Southern Italy, in the "Descriptio Augustea"

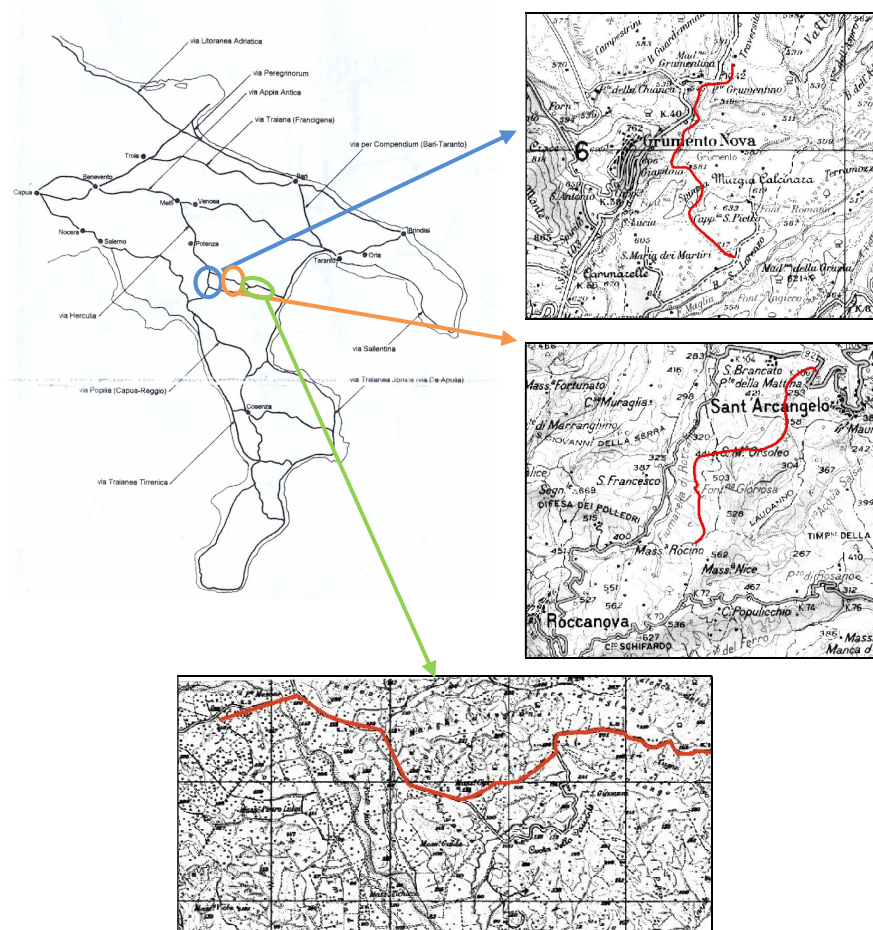


Fig. 2: Roman roads in the Middle Ages in the Basilicata Region (southern Italy) and sheep tracks identified.

In the present research, local rural architecture and sheep tracks along three paths of the Herculia Way were detected and analyzed by photographic surveys and GPS geographical coordinates. Their historical significance was assessed by consulting historical cartographic material (Statuto et al.,

2013), used to analyze rural buildings as well. This allowed for the identification of original sheep tracks, connecting the ancient buildings, near historical points of interest.

Results

The field survey that was conducted has allowed the identification of the main elements of the rural landscape, generally different in type and use, like rural buildings and sheep tracks. In particular, it emerged the presence of several distinguished rural constructions, both buildings and minor roads, characterized by a significant architectural, environmental and historical value (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Rural religious building in Anglona and a minor road thereby.

In some limited cases, medium and large buildings appeared as well preserved. They are often constructions - especially of a religious nature, such as churches and rural sanctuaries - testifying the great importance that these territories had in the past for religious pilgrimages.

A second type of construction, observed in a smaller number of cases, is referred to buildings of smaller size. They are related to small shelters, located in the area of internal roads, once used by local farmers, as auxiliaries for local agricultural activities carried out in the fields, or as a refuge for animals raised for family consumption (Picuno et al., 2017). In some cases, in the vicinity of these structures, fountains can be found, which were used in the past for local agricultural use or for the needs of travelers, traders and soldiers.

Concerning the three analyzed road paths, constructions of small and medium-size (Fig. 4) have been observed; currently they suffer of low maintenance, or they are completely abandoned. However, in some limited cases, medium and large buildings were well preserved.



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

Discussion

Over the centuries, agriculture has become progressively intensive (Picuno et al., 2019; Picuno et al., 2020; Sica & Picuno, 2000). This change, happened during time, has required less manual labour, causing economic pressure on some villages, and leading to an exodus of young people to urban areas, with consequent abandonment of farm buildings.

In the cases analyzed in this research, the observed structures are built with poor simple materials locally available - such as stones, clays and wood, wisely used. In a few cases, especially along the third section investigated, rural buildings for agricultural and husbandry of a larger size were observed. It was also important the presence of production facilities, used for the storage or the processing of agricultural products, such as small mills. A link between the identified structures has been observed,

through sheep-tracks, mainly private, identifiable in the natural landscape. From their positioning on the georeferenced cartographic material, a concentration of buildings along rural paths connected to roads of higher relevance was observed. In this way, it was possible to identify the traits of sheep tracks belonging to the Herculia Way. This result would confirm the role of this road in the Middle Ages, as one of the most important links within Southern Italy.

The current growing interest in rediscovering places of cultural and natural interest and the possibility of a recovery of the old rural routes, linked to local cultural traditions, is essential to raise awareness of landscape resources poorly perceived. The hypothesis of a structural restoration of the observed paths can be useful for new forms of alternative economic activities, compatible with the nature of the place, as the provision of accessible paths on foot or horseback. These activities could use the old abandoned rural structures, intended for sheltering pilgrims and their horses, on the way along ancient paths roads. Similarly, the presence of fountains along the roads could be useful. In this way, the natural equilibrium of the environment would remain unchanged, and especially the natural resources would be preserved and respected (Statuto et al., 2019). The preservation of the rural landscape and the sense of place in the long term, could then be achieved by increasing their economic competitiveness and environmental compatibility, in accordance with the mainstreaming international directives on sustainable development.

Conclusion

The analysis of rural elements along the Herculia Way revealed this road as an interesting cultural asset, strictly connected to the local history. However, the current state of abandonment could lead to the loss of this important legacy. Restoring pathways and structures could help regenerate the local rural heritage, especially in relation to the natural environment. Protecting and making these resources accessible for future generations is essential for an integrated conservation of the rural landscape. Creating new complementary activities could promote sustainable rural tourism, while deepening the knowledge about the ancient road network. New investigations are anyway needed in order to complete the path of reunification of the identified roads, deepening their knowledge, so as to stimulate a systematic study aimed to the promotion of the ancient road network all over Europe.

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Souhrn

Současné venkovské dědictví v určité oblasti představuje podobu, kterou člověk dokázal dát svému okolí. V průběhu staletí ztratily cesty v mnoha evropských venkovských oblastech svou tradiční motivaci k projektování. Jejich rekvalifikace v rámci udržitelného rozvoje venkovských oblastí může být důležitou cestou pro udržitelný rozvoj venkovského cestovního ruchu. Mohlo by to projít valorizací tras založených na trasách navržených na některých starobyklých cestách, jako byly ty, které v Evropě vybudovali Římané nebo ve středověku pro náboženské poutě. "Františkánská cesta" je kombinací dopravních tepen z římské éry; "Herkulova cesta" je součástí "Františkánské cesty", která byla vybudována v jižní Itálii. Tento článek informuje o výsledcích územní analýzy zaměřené na možnou rekvalifikaci části Herkulské cesty. Byly zjištěny a na historických mapách lokalizovány některé staré cesty, známé jako "tratturi" (ovčí stezky), a staré tradiční zemědělské budovy nacházející se podél těchto cest, které zčásti stále existují, pro případnou stavební a funkční obnovu s vytvořením trasy, po níž by bylo možné se pohybovat pěšky, na kole nebo na koni. Tato obnova by mohla přispět k ochraně a posílení zkoumaných prvků venkovské krajiny, jakož i k udržitelnému řízení životního prostředí a posílení historie venkova a obecněji k podpoře veřejné rekreace prostřednictvím vytvoření nových alternativních aktivit slučitelných se zvláštním charakterem místního prostředí.

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