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GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF (UN) POPULATED LANDSCAPES

Analysis and comparison between the Cilento National Park and the Province of Soria

Abstract

Starting from the analysis and comparison between two areas at risk of abandonment which are the Cilento National Park in Italy and the Province of Soria in Spain, this paper aims to analyse what these two almost abandoned areas have in common, and what distinguishes them from one another, with so different morphology and environmental characteristics. The research investigates and confronts the historical and environmental reasons that have determined the urban layout of these two regions, and then concentrates on the different approaches that two Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain have to the common problem of depopulation of inland areas. Additionally, it explores the effects that, also in light of the most recent changes we are witnessing and the necessary lowering of urban density, can be generated and expected for these territories.

Keywords: unpopulated landscapes; man-nature harmony; inner areas

Introduction

Nowadays, in Europe, many areas are being emptied. The strong disequilibrium between towns and the countryside is getting more and more clear, with the subsequent risk of abandonment of large areas whose cultural and environmental significance is based precisely on the human presence and the landscapes generated.

The link between economy and landscape carries the danger of a loss of valuable and qualitative territory once the primary sector is replaced by the industrial one. That is shown by rural areas and the harmony established between man and nature. As a consequence, all of this reflects on the progressive downturn of all those areas far from modern production centres, and the inexorable exodus by the local population, which is in every respect a sort of new "migration". Sometimes, however, the "emptied" areas of Europe that suffer from this crisis are historically characterised by a low population density and a distinctive remoteness from all the larger city centres. These are areas that are somehow used to live isolated, whose urban and productive development has never reached a significant momentum, remaining unchanged over time. In Italy, the Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park is a particularly interesting and perhaps unique reality. Its large size and the distance from the most important metropolitan areas,



Fig. 1. In the village of Amalafede, municipality of Stella Cilento, currently live 14 people. A family has tried to attract visitors by starting a home restaurant business, bringing life back to the village on weekends.

turn this region into a rural identity that only in recent decades has tried to capitalise on the tourism sector. As regards the centre of Spain, looking at the province of Soria in Castilla y León, it is possible to state that this area is one of the less populated ones in the whole of Europe, with so many villages under 1,000 inhabitants each, far away from each other. Yet, both in Spain and in Cilento we can find archaeological areas which testify the ancient origins of these territories. These areas have been settled and repeatedly abandoned over the centuries.

Internal areas of Cilento National Park

The equation "Cilento = small towns" is particularly interesting because this territory has always been characterised by the surprising lack, in such a vast area, of a town of reference. Throughout history and up to the present day, despite the constant change in population and social, economic and security conditions that have evolved, in the Cilento area, there has been a dispersive structure whereby many tiny towns have formed a landscape in which it is still impossible to determine a strong centrality. Such a peculiar situation has been a matter of debate for many historians, which have found a partial justification in the very low population density that has always characterised the Cilento territory over the centuries. As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Kingdom of Naples conducted a census of the population through the counting of "focolari", rather than

individuals, the paucity of the population in the territory became evident. The historian Francesco Volpe [1] by defining variable multiplier indices according to the epoch to determine a rough population, provides us with these data referring to the current extension of Cilento, except for the Vallo di Diano:

| Year | Fuochi | Population |
|------|--------|------------|
| 1532 | 10.313 | 51.000 |
| 1545 | 12.130 | 60.000 |
| 1561 | 13.263 | 66.000 |
| 1595 | 14.089 | 70.000 |
| 1648 | 12.775 | 57.000 |
| 1669 | 7.022 | 47.000 |

These data highlight two interesting elements. On the one hand, the fact that the demographic growth that characterises the 16th century suffered a halt and a strong collapse in the following century; on the other hand, it is noted that, even at the peak of 1595, the total population of about 70,000 inhabitants, dispersed over such a vast territory, corresponds to a density that does not even reach 30 inhabitants per square kilometre. We can, therefore, easily realise how, even during that epoch in which analysable demographics start to appear, the small presence of population has historically relegated Cilento to a marginal role in the events of the Kingdom

and has in a certain sense hindered its growth. We must always try to overlap demographic data with the territorial layout so that we can make a cross-reference and give back an overall view of the situation of isolation and fragility characterising this region. However, it is not only a question of attributing the causes of this condition to one or the other aspect, but also of being able to understand the mutual conditioning. As a consequence, the low population density has exacerbated a territorial structure in which the small towns have been scattered in a rarefied and widespread way in the region.

If the years at the turning point of the twentieth century showed a peak in demographic growth, after the Second World War these small mountain villages, which had grown and consolidated until then, will likely begin to depopulate again due to migration to northern Italy in search of work in the industrial sector. To date, there are 25 Cilento municipalities below 1000 inhabitants. Specifically, 14 of those are included in the Internal Cilento area by the National Internal Areas Strategy (Bellosguardo, Campora, Controne, Corleto Monforte, Magliano Vetere, Monteforte Cilento, Ottati, Perito, Roscigno, Sacco, Sant'Angelo a Fasanello, Stio and Valle dell 'Angelo), with high depopulation peaks, equal to -5.9% between 2001 and 2011 and -4.1% between 2011 and 2017. Therefore, 16 other municipalities below 1000 inhabitants remain excluded from SNAI, although often affected by similar problems and critical issues (Ispani, San Mauro Cilento, Rutino, Laurito, Stella Cilento, Pertosa, Morigerati, San Mauro La Bruca, Cuccaro Vetere, Salvitelle, Tortorella, Romagnano al Monte, Serramezzana) [2].

The area of the internal Cilento can be taken as a landmark example to understand the state of progressive depopulation and abandonment of the territory in the contemporary era. In fact, with an area of 949 sq. km, the population residing in 2017 was of 48,440 inhabitants, for an average density of 51, the lowest of all the areas of the Campania Region. And besides, the reduction in the percentage of the agricultural area used (-9.3 from 2000 to 2010) and the percentage of farmers under the age of 39 (-48, 4 between 2000 and 2010). These numbers are significant as they allow us to read the incidence of the abandonment of the rural economy, on which Cilento has historically been based, which must be identified as the main limit to the settlement development of a territory of this type, in recent times. This feature is common to many of the so-called "internal areas" in Italy

The Empty Spain

The so-called "empty Spain" brings together the Communities of Castilla y León, Asturias, Aragón, Galicia, Castilla-La Mancha, and La Rioja, which represents more than half of the national territory with the lowest density of population. In the territories around the Iberian System, we can find the most affected area in Spain by the phenomenon of depopulation. Specifically, three provinces located in this area, Cuenca, Soria, and Teruel, have the lowest population densities in

Spain, standing in the last two cases below 10 inhabitants per square kilometre and the first only slightly above. Subsequently, we are in the presence of one of the largest demographic deserts of the European continent. It is, therefore, a problem that affects a large part of its territory, in which 90% of the population is concentrated in 30% of it [3]. These regions have always had a low population density but have suffered predominantly the abandonment of the rural environment due to the change in the production systems, leaving a population mainly old and with numerous municipalities almost uninhabited [4]. In Spain, the great transformation of a traditional agrarian economy into an industrial society occurs in a very short amount of time compared to other countries in Europe such as France, Germany, England or Italy, where the transition was more gradual and with rural societies more socially articulated. This process has allowed the preservation of inhabited territory [5].

Additionally, due to the incorporation of Spain to the European Economic Community in 1986, the Common Agrarian Policy was implemented, reducing agricultural production and concentrating agricultural activity in fewer hands, decreasing the rural economic development and population. Over the years, all this has resulted in an asymmetric development that shows solid territorial differences within the same Community [6]. We certainly need to add to these causes the lack of generational replacement in rural areas.

All these issues are especially decisive in Soria, the most unpopulated province in the European Union where, in the Highlands area, the density is as low as two people per square kilometre. It is a particularly delicate case due to its extreme weather and its total dependence on agriculture throughout history, not having such a variety of natural resources that can encourage the introduction of new functions for its rehabilitation. However, it has some archaeological areas of great interest such as Tiermes and it is rich in ethnological heritage, which promoted the foundation of the first school-villages on the peninsula.

Nevertheless, the emptying of our towns is a problem with great socio-economic implications. Our public policies should focus on properly addressing these needs to correct the imbalances between the different territories. For this reason, it is important to provide the capacity to generate economic activity in all the territories of Castilla y León, through industry and infrastructure (being essential telecommunications and broadband), aiming at favouring the establishment of transformative activities that generate employment. There have been several particular and punctual actions, rehabilitation of old family properties as second residences that allow urbanites to escape from the big cities during the weekends and enjoy the always more difficult contact with nature in the city's environment. The problem is that a new interest in rural buildings is merely focused on residential and leisure, it ignores the territory, it does not generate continuity or produce a regeneration at different layers; the intervention is disconnected from the territorial reality, and, at the end of the weekend, the town becomes uninhabited again. In cases dealing with the recovery of entire villages, such disconnection causes dependence on the urban environment, to attract customers and workers, and to obtain provisions and all kinds of services. From the public sphere, efforts should primarily focus to promote actions that create a close relationship with the territory, adequate productive activity and continuity over time, with the support of strengthening and homogenising public services at the same level as large capitals. This is the only way to counteract migration looking for those benefits missing in the rural environment.

Policies for internal areas: comparison between the Italian National Strategy for Internal Areas and the Spanish plan for small centres

The two case studies that we have reported are examples of a phenomenon that is quite widespread in Europe, which the problem of the progressive abandonment of small centres is matched by the equally important criticality



Fig. 2. The isolation of Quintanarubias de Arriba (Soria) from Google Earth.

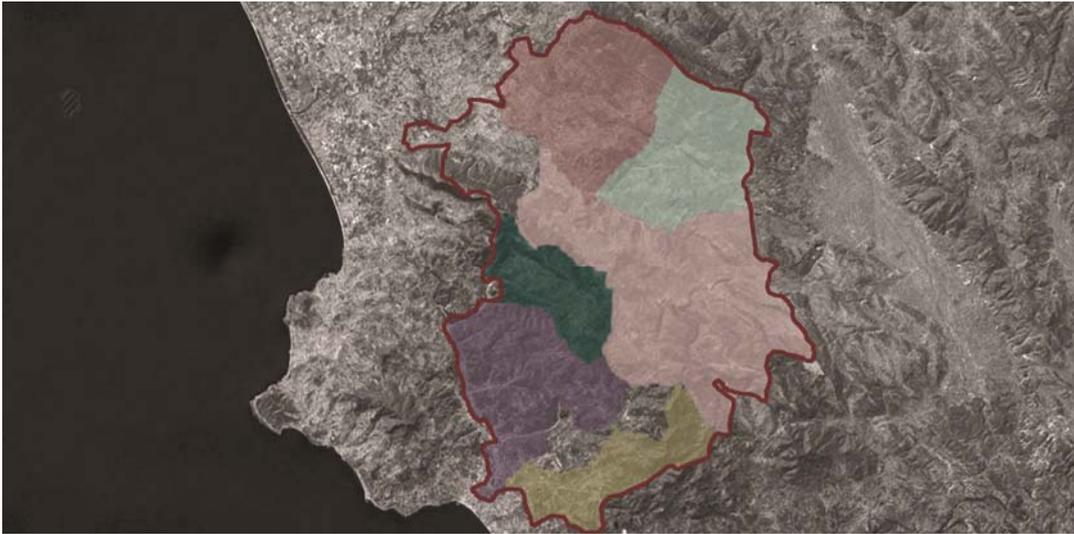


Fig. 3. The internal Cilento area, identified by the dark red line. The different colours identify the different associations between municipalities that were formed through the SNAI.

of the uncontrolled expansion of metropolitan areas. City and the countryside represent two realities linked by a two-way relationship of necessity and interdependence, which only when it is recognised as mutual and equal, it will be able to produce positive effects for both sides of the coin.

The importance of the phenomenon and the weight that exerts not only on the morphological and landscape structure of the territory but also on the social fabric and both the economic and administrative system of the countries has therefore pushed the different states to elaborate specific strategies and policies aimed at protecting and strengthening the so-called "fragile territories".

In Italy, the National Strategy for Internal Areas is undoubtedly the main tool through which is intended to "promote development projects that enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the internal areas of the country, focusing on the recovery of local production chains and the promotion of new ones" [7] using of all available Community funds (ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EMFF) for local development interventions. SNAI was born to operate in those contexts that have undergone, since the second post-war period, a marginalisation process marked by a drop in the population, sometimes below the critical threshold; reduction in employment and land use; declining the local offer of public and private services; social costs for the whole nation such as hydro-geological instability, and the degradation of cultural and landscape heritage [8].

What the SNAI has been most concerned with was how to make possible communication between town and country as two entities at the same level, thus rejecting a welfare perspective, and working on the institutional strengthening of small centres. To this end, the SNAI has focused on the promotion of associationism among municipalities.

The internal Cilento is one of the 4 areas identified by SNAI in the Campania region. The 29 municipalities have been detected in the most mountainous area stretching from the shoulders of Monte Gelbison towards the Alburni, excluding, however, substantial parts of the Cilento territory which, although

geographically less "inland", as they are closer to the coast, are often affected by the same problems that afflict the more mountainous areas. While seasonal coastal tourism can certainly represent a boost to the economy and liveliness of these areas, it should not, however, be considered as the solution to the problems that afflict the settled inhabitants, made up of infrastructural deficiencies, low school supply, inefficient distribution of health facilities in the territory, and so on.

Furthermore, it is important to underline how, according to the report on the implementation status of the SNAI in the Campania Region of the 31st of December 2019, "the greatest criticality is linked to the timing for the approval of the strategy; from the draft to the definition of the strategy, the average duration is over 24 months" [7].

Since the beginning of the '70s in Spain, when the depopulation processes of rural areas were accentuated, different public initiatives for their recovery have taken place, as well as requests for support from individual or collective entrepreneurs who seek to give new life to these uninhabited rural nuclei.

However, in Spain, the decentralisation of power in favour of the autonomous communities turns into not having a clear and unifying policy against depopulation. Only Aragón and Castilla y León have developed special programs to deal with it.

Aragón drew up a plan and its parliament unanimously approved a Comprehensive Demographic and Population Policy Plan in 2000, but they only manage to developed isolated measures; in Castilla y León instead, the two main parties in the regional parliament agreed, in 2005, on a program called "Fight against depopulation. Regional strategy", made up of 73 measures [9], but its subsequent development consisted of mere reports analysing the demographic evolution of the region, linking the trajectory to current measures [10].

It would be necessary to promote a common European strategy as it is something that is repeated in different countries, even being a local issue. Numerous associations have emerged requesting different taxation for the

recovery of these areas (III Framework Agreement for Competitiveness and Industrial Innovation of Castilla y León for business sustainability, report of the Research Group Sparsely populated areas in the south of Europe...) [3].

It is also necessary to highlight specific public aids such the scholarships that annually encourage students to spend some time in the county to study their ethnology, even if it is a measure to palely alleviate the problem. On the other hand, the first legislative commission on Depopulation and Demographic Challenge was recently created and will focus on job creation and cohesion of the welfare state, abandoning purely local visions.

Future prospects: post Covid-19 scenario, redemption opportunities for inland areas?

Due to what has been explained above, the questions that this field of study raises concern the possible outcomes and impacts that such policies may have in areas that, as we have previously seen, have never really reached a high level of urbanisation, rather than being subject to depopulation. Areas that have historically developed and then preserved in their state of isolation from large urban centres, somehow managing to find, in this peculiar condition, a balance that has preserved their characteristic cultural and environmental features.

The events of the last few months, caused by the worldwide explosion of the COVID-19 sanitary emergency, have also added supplementary opportunities for further reflection, never seen before in contemporary times, on the precious opportunity that internal areas would represent as a response to the need for a reduction in population density in large cities, today a scenario of relentless contagion, and, therefore, the victim of stringent measures of social distancing. Hence, in the last few months, a debate is taking place between the need for an immediate rethinking of the urban structure of our cities and the possibility of re-housing small towns, no longer seen as an endangered object to defend, but as a saving resource in which to find refuge; no longer, consequently, landscapes at risk of abandonment, but simply landscapes without involving any health risk.



Fig. 4. Navabellida (Soria). 0 inhabitants, 6 over the summer (source: image from the magazine XLSemanal, El País).

This observation, to whom it would be as easy as it would be comforting to yield, risks, nevertheless, generating distortion of the meaning of the policies for internal areas,

starting from a basic misconception. If it is very obvious that, as a result of the pandemic, there has been a massive movement back from the cities to what in many cases are the small towns to whom people come, if it is also true that many citizens have attempted to move to the so-called "second residences", repopulating many places of seasonal tourism, it is equally clear that all this happens in terms of "escape" and not "choice". Starting from the assumption that the COVID-19 emergency can be the driving force behind a shift from cities to small towns, that means relying on the naive illusion that such towns can continue to exert a strong enough attraction to counteract the magnetism of the city even when the emergency will be over. On the contrary, it is quite different to start from the opposite assumption, that is not that of the escape from the city, but that of the real attractiveness of the internal areas. The benefit that we can draw from this debate, therefore, is to consider as a priority all the efforts, policies, and investments that can concretely put small towns in a position to represent an alternative to the city. On the contrary, as highlighted by Carlo Petrini, founder of the Slow Food association, we must take the opportunity to reflect on how the villages can represent "help" for cities since these are the places where the "relationship economy" that generates benefits both in terms of sustainability and sociality is still preserved, although with difficulty.

Conclusions

Rural architecture is only the visible part of a much more complex system of construction, transformation and management of the territory, and both are inseparable. The layout of the architecture, its location, its relationship with other constructions are fundamental aspects, but even more than that, it is important its intimate relationship with the management of the environment and natural resources. The abandonment of the built heritage entails deterioration of the territorial, natural (loss of biodiversity associated with traditional uses), and human capital, much more difficult to reestablish. Last but not least, we must mention the ruin of social capital, the disappearance of the collective memory on the management of local resources, achieved over centuries. The only territorial capital that has not suffered an appreciable decline is the image one. The extraordinary concentration of population, activity and economic value in cities, revalues the uniqueness and evocative capacity of the rural world. For this reason, sporadic contact with the countryside generates a great amount of interest and appeal in the urban population. We can deduct from what said above that it is preferable to intervene on social capital, promoting the viability of new models of recovery the relationship of the rural community with its territory, adding the economic activity and re-designing the relations of the community with its territory out of the conventionality. A public initiative for the recovery of an uninhabited town cannot be understood without the complete and complex reflection on the models that guarantee the

conservation, and even revaluation of the territorial capital with all their components, promoting linkage between integration and interexchange with the territory.

Recovering its value should imply recovering its complete content and context as a whole, the global strategy, avoiding standard and mechanised solutions that could dissolve the local imprint.

We should look at each town as a new scenario in which it is possible to live in balance with the territory, and within an equitable social model. And, in conclusion, it should be an investment in social and territorial cohesion and the strength and sustainability of the economic and social model.

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