

Angela D'Agostino

Maria Cerreta

Giovangiuseppe Vannelli

Piero Zizzania

A WAY FOR THE ITALIAN INNER AREA

MONTAGNA MATERANA

Rethink the abandonment from Craco

Abstract

The tiny village of Craco towers on a ravine in the middle of Basilicata. Craco is a ghost village among the towns in the Inner Area Montagna Materana. It is totally deserted, while not so far away, a new town has been built. Indeed, following on from the abandonment, some local organizations have started several ventures to boost studies about this place, as well as temporary uses of spaces.

This paper presents the results of a research that starts from the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) and investigates on the potential of design for inner districts. The hypothesis of a strategy for the Montagna Materana made up of widespread projects arises from the coexistence of different landscapes and communities.

For this reason, the architectural proposal in Craco is a part of a broader incremental strategy proposed considering the uncertain future of this area, and admitting the possible abandonment: somehow, learning from Craco.

Keywords: cultural landscape, heritage, ghost town, landscape design, incremental strategy.

Introduction

The Italian landscape, one of the most beautiful, visited and praised in the Mediterranean, is now the subject of new attention. It is relevant not only for what concerns long-standing issues such as the protection of the coasts, natural beauty, historical and monumental heritage, and ecosystem services, but also for a national question concerning a large portion of territory: the inner areas are at risk of depopulation and abandonment, defined as margin-territory or other Italy.

The National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) refers to the Europe2020 programming of EU funds 2014-2020 [1]. It constitutes the programmatic document which recognizes the need for interventions in favour of the "other Italy". This definition includes 60% of the Italian territory, 52% of the municipalities, 22% of the population.

The definition of "inner areas" is elaborated starting from the lack of essential education, health and mobility services and the distance from cities defined as "service offer centers". Nonetheless, the inner areas are rich in critical environmental resources (water resources, agricultural systems, forests, natural and anthropic landscapes) and cultural heritage (archaeology, historical settlements, small museums, trade centres, traditions) [2], [3]. To

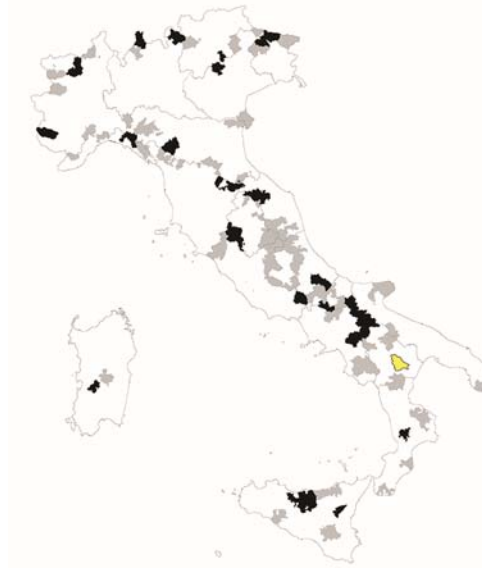


Fig. 1. The 72 internal areas of the SNAI. The pilot areas in black and the Montagna Materana in yellow.

counter the abandonment processes and to enhance local, territorial resources, SNAI proposes a territorial model that aims at a sort of shared self-sufficiency, generated starting from a territorial synergy between municipalities that are called to give up their local autonomy in the name of "common good". Of the 72 inner areas in Italy, of which 1 or 2 per region identified as pilot areas, this contribution relates to studies and research concerning the Montagna Materana, pilot area of the four regions of Basilicata (Fig. 1). Matera, the offer centre of the reference services is defined as a "forcedly included pole" because it does not meet all the criteria for determining the poles envisaged by the SNAI.

The inner area of the Montagna Materana extends for about 645000 square kilometres, includes eight municipalities and has a resident population of 11.000 inhabitants. The Lucania is defined as a land of migration and abandon. A condition that Carlo Levi describes in his "Cristo si è fermato a Eboli" where the centre of the story, however, remains the beauty of the Lucanian landscape far from the world and suspended in time.

In fact, in the area of the Montagna Materana we find: a low part, mainly agricultural, characterized by widespread clay formations called badlands; a large part, mostly wooded, where the Gallipoli Cognato and Piccole Dolomiti Lucane Park is located; a central part, where forests and badlands mix, defining an intermediate landscape (Fig. 2).

These morphological specificities extend the area towards its outside, beyond the administrative border, inducing possible relationships between landscapes. In this part of Basilicata, the landscape seems to hold together the two extremes of the times Braudel speaks of, that of the *longue durée* and that of the *événementielle* [4].

Compared to this vast dimension of landscape systems, dotted with small villages, farms spread along the course of sheep tracks, marked by the perpetuation of rites and traditions, Craco emerges as a "landmark" recognizable and observable by most of the other small villages and paths that cross these landscapes.

In this landscape of abandonment, the small village of Craco, the ancient center of one of the eight municipalities in the Montagna Materana area, stands out not only for its elevated position on a bad relief but for a series of events that led it, today, to define oneself as one of the most important ghost towns in Italy. Craco is a double village: not far from the uninhabited village, in the plain towards Pisticci, the new built-up area was built after the landslide, which forced the inhabitants to abandon the historic village in the middle of the last century. Today, in the face of abandonment, local institutions have launched a series of initiatives to promote knowledge of the village and a

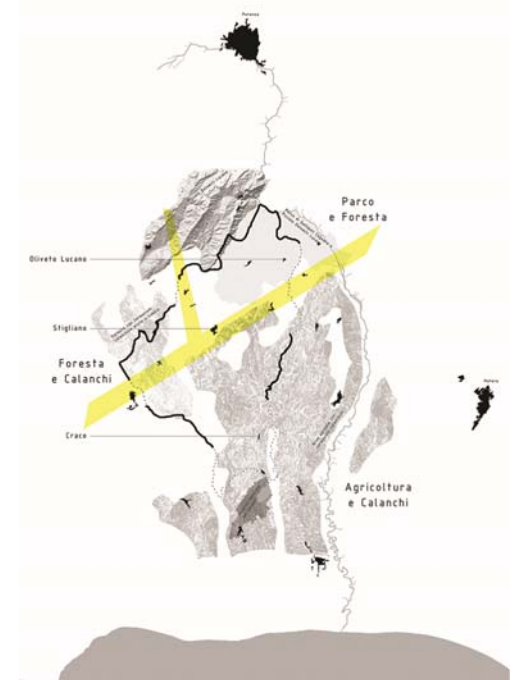


Fig. 2. The types of landscapes of the Montagna Materana in relation to the perimeter of the inner area.

temporary use of its spaces: Craco is a film set and for some years the Craco Ricerche Foundation has organized guided tours, workshops, seminars that keep the abandoned village in a network with Italy and Europe. On the other hand, the village of Craco is still external although strategic compared to those systems of weak relationships that are woven into the landscape to which it belongs: the landscape of central Basilicata, a natural and cultural heritage made of multiple relationships. The fundamental regulatory and cultural contents of the European Landscape Convention are thus denied.

In the research, we worked on the definition of a network strategy that allows to distinguish or integrate issues, elements, subjects, which assume different positions and roles becoming strategic elements of the enhancement of landscapes through the highlighting, and in some cases the construction, of new relationship systems [5]. With this look, therefore, we looked at the landscape of the inner area of the Materana Mountain starting from Craco considering its physical and immaterial characters and relationships. Work was carried out on the road from Craco to Oliveto Lucano crossing and opening to the various landscape systems. The road is seen as a path marked by stops and marked by intertwining according to an idea that, rather than highlighting layers (geographical, of the construction of villages, of material history, etc.), builds networks that hold identity and values together.

The road becomes the thread of union of relationships [6] and outlooks in the perspective of a strategy of widespread and incremental forecasts, culture-led, which interpret changes, and which do not exclude the scenario of abandonment (Fig. 3). If it is difficult, in fact, to imagine a trend reversal on a national scale such as to bring people back to inner areas, it is even more so if you think of the area of the Montagna Materana which, under the conditions described, could be defined as

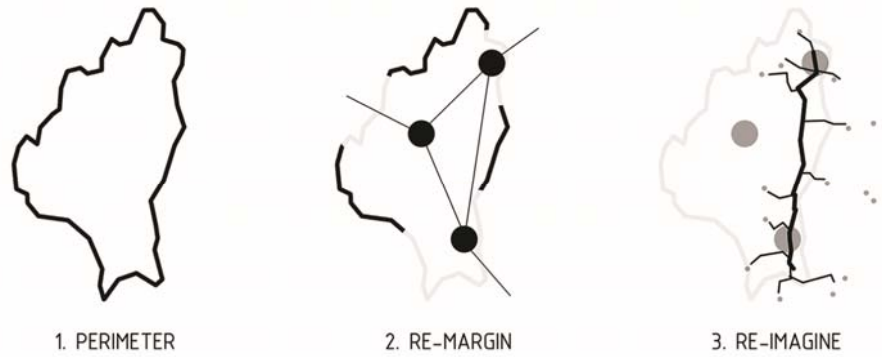


Fig 4. The three phases of the methodological path.

more “inner” of the others. In this sense, Craco’s situation becomes exemplary concerning the need, which is accentuated in such contexts, to include the abandonment hypothesis in the project, to be considered not as a failure but as an eventuality [7].

Methodology

The structuring of a multi-methodological process, which makes use of heterogeneous tools and the intersection of different points of view, constitutes the approach to address the case study of the Montagna Materana. The methodological path was structured in three main phases, identified respectively to three objectives: 1. “Perimeter”, in which the research question was defined concerning the theme chosen as the interpretative key for these places; 2. “Re-margin”, in which, after the exploration phase, new territorial opportunities were identified; 3. “Re-imagine”, which outlined the strategy that guided the hypothesis of an open project (Fig. 4).

In phase one “perimeter” we started from direct observation of the territory studied through inspections in the municipalities around and within the area of the Montagna

Materana and through a series of interviews. The interviews carried out on the whole territory of the province of Matera had the primary purpose of capturing the perceptual aspects linked to the marginal condition of the territory, to the tools perceived available to overcome those conditions that seem inescapable, to future desires and hopes. The interviewees were a selected sample identified among different social groups (local administrations, representatives of associations, citizens particularly active in small communities, local businesses from different sectors) and chosen for their awareness of the criticality and possibility of the territory [8].

At this phase it was produced textual and multimedia material necessary for a thorough and widespread knowledge of local peculiarities. By linking the results of this first exploratory investigation with the institutional perimeter of the inner area, continuity and discontinuity of the types of landscapes became evident, in their dual material meaning, linked to the morphological components and the territorial, and immaterial characteristics, linked to the lifestyles and traditions of settled communities.

Parallel to the experiential path of research in the field, a series of critical maps have been produced at different scales to interpret the elements and relationships that structure and design the various types of landscapes. These maps visualize the distribution in the territory of some particular social and economic indicators through Gis software. The starting point were the “indicators for open diagnosis” provided by the Agency for Territorial Cohesion. These indicators have been updated when possible, and integrated with others, based on the interviews and the peculiarities of specific landscapes [9].

From the comparison and the synthesis of the results, profound differences emerged which accentuate the difficulty of defining objectives shared by the municipalities that are part of the same internal area and make it necessary to remargin starting from the types of landscapes. The objective of phase two “re-margin” was, therefore, to “re-centralize the margin beyond the administrative border” [10], identifying new territorial hierarchies capable of interpreting the different types of landscapes. These hierarchies highlighted the need for a network strategy consisting of points capable of



Fig 3. The ghost village of Craco. Guided tour in safety in august 2019 (photo credits: P. Zizzania).



Fig 5. Three poles and related types of landscapes for an incremental network strategy.

activating a process of “inclusive prosperity” [11], where the individual contribution is considered to benefit general well-being. Inclusive prosperity is possible only by first identifying those places imbued with the special evocative force for the territory and subsequently triggering among them a network of reciprocal and complementary exchanges capable of spreading practices, services, values, meanings, identity throughout the territory. The identification of these strategic points was carried out based on the knowledge and description conducted during the first phase and subsequently verified through the TOPSIS method [12], a combination of spatial analysis tools of the collected data and multi-criteria analysis to support decisions. The identification of the territory descriptive categories (natural landscape, urban landscape, the landscape of abandonment) and the definition of a series of ideal future visions defined the framework for the TOPSIS application. The result of the municipalities evaluation suggests a selection of them potentially closer to the respective scenarios [13]. This methodological step was fundamental to confirm the initial interpretation according to which some areas are particularly polarized to certain types of values connected to the descriptive categories of the territory. Thus, three reference villages have been identified for each of the redefined territorial systems: Oliveto Lucano for the natural landscape, Stigliano for the urban landscape and Craco for the landscape of

abandonment. However, considering the concept of inclusive prosperity, to activate a network of exchanges between these poles, it was necessary to investigate (through CATWOE approach, SODA method and Decision Explorer software) [14] an immaterial, yet an extremely concrete, component of this marginal landscape: a synergy of inertia and localisms where the prolonged condition of marginality has produced deep internal fractures, weakened the sense of community and the feeling of belonging to the places. Therefore, in the specific case of the Montagna Materana, the functional assumptions proposed by the SNAI seem to need to be accompanied by a transversal cultural prerequisite that can support a large-scale synergistic collaboration between the parties involved. A cultural infrastructure capable of interconnecting the various consolidated poles with any and exceptional micro-realities [15] scattered throughout the territory is necessary, thus structuring an incremental network strategy (Fig. 5). Thus, in the last “re-imagine” phase, the proposal of a strategy of widespread projects for the Montana Materana is outlined, configured as a meeting multiple possibility in a synergistic vision that allows multiplication of opportunities and results. The cultural infrastructure starts from Craco, a prominent element, not only geographically, of the landscape of the inner area. Along the road that

connects the ghost village with Oliveto Lucano, points strategically to build a system of architectures and places that trigger new ways of interacting between people and between different types of landscapes.

Results

The municipalities of Stigliano, Oliveto Lucano and Craco are identified as potential poles of the landscape of the inner area. They are configured as thematic territorial hubs from which multiple networks branch out that reinterpret the different types of landscapes. Along the road between Craco and Oliveto Lucano, a series of widespread projects trigger a strategic process of incremental networking (Fig. 6).

The hypothesis is part of the logic of wanting to intercept, consolidate or increase those realities of the area defined as “constellations of new urbanities” [16]. The condition of territorial and social marginality has guaranteed in the Montagna Materana the permanence of cultures and values linked to the land and the development of unprecedented possibilities of interaction with the landscape. Among these, Craco Ricerche certainly stands out, but they can also be counted: ENI, Festival della Paesologia of Aliano, Teatro dei Calanchi in Pisticci, Museum of the Arboreal Cultures in Accettura, the Corner of the Memory of Stigliano.

These practices tell of a value that cannot be reproduced in other places. This value is closely connected to the landscapes of the Montagna

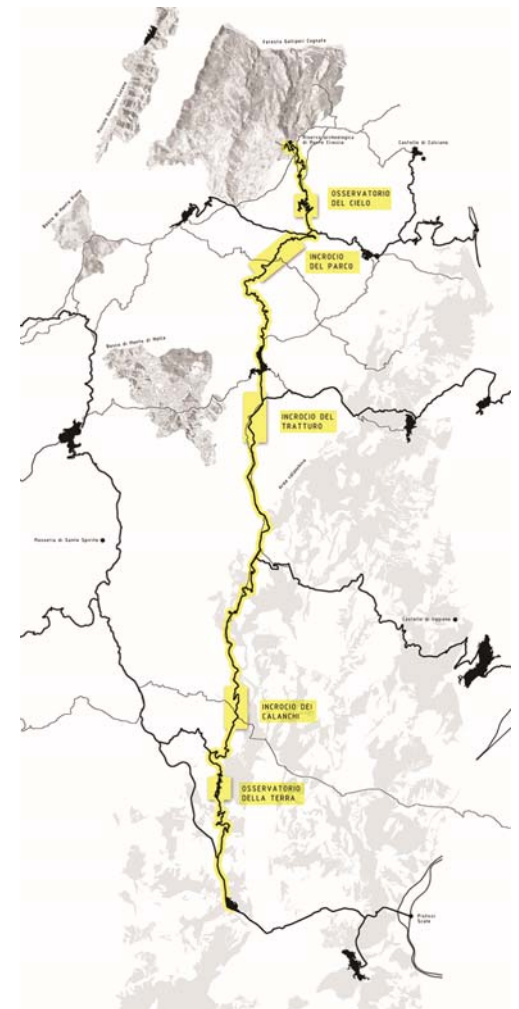


Fig 6. A road of widespread projects and thematic hubs for the Montagna Materana.

Materana, but the different practices are actions that have little dialogue with each other. The proposal aims to “connecting distant elements together” recalling the intentions of the works of Maria Lai (Fig. 7).

Work has been done on an incremental network strategy that starts from Craco. The road that leads from the ghost village to Oliveto Lucano becomes the physical and immaterial device through which to re-imagine the Montagna Materana. The road, infrastructure of geography, crosses diversity, connects distant and profoundly different landscapes and people and transforms the territory into a cultural product.

The road can, therefore, be conceived as a line that connects a series of places that define a system of points of reference, orientation and opening to other places.

In inner areas, the road is the element of the structure as well as landscape infrastructure. The proposal provides, along the road that starts from Craco, a series of hubs, observers, stops shelters, which intersect other systems, other networks, other landscapes. This is part of the strategy for the Montagna Materana, “Piccoli borghi grande vita”, which identifies the roads as the main elements on which to invest.

Along the road, significant places are identified to the grafting of landscapes and other roads, stopping places that open at the intersection with a sheep track, to the graft of a path between badlands, at the entrance to the

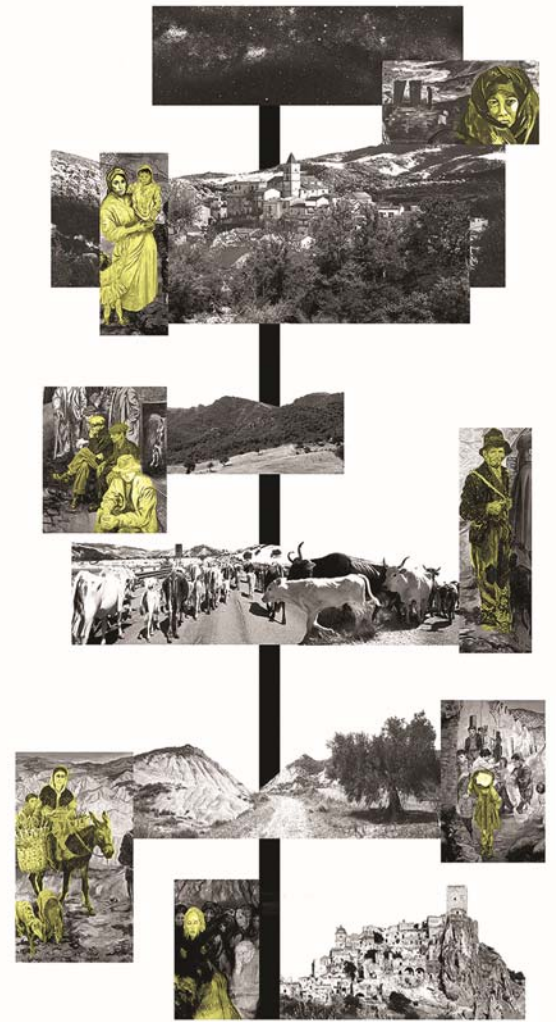


Fig 7. The road: physical and cultural infrastructure intersects and reconnects landscapes and people. Different values of the landscapes are represented through a collage of photos with fragments of the "Lucania '61" painting by C. Levi.



Fig 8. The beginning of the road in Craco.

Gallipoli Cognato Park. At the ends, an “Earth Observatory” (Fig. 8) introduces the ghost village of Craco and, along the hairpin bends at the end of the path, embedded in the geography of the soil, the “Museum of the dark” is an observatory of the sky, a place to live in the woods at night, a refuge for passers-by with small support equipment for free camping. Craco, therefore, for positional conditions - of geographical emergency and proximity to the access roads to the inner area - and for the presence in the territory of actors committed to relaunching the ancient village, is proposed as the hub from which to start to rethink the landscape of the Montagna Materana. The earth observatory (Fig. 9) is a soil redefinition that interprets the characteristics of the landscape. The large retaining walls on which the stairs that go up to the village climb and the small spaces included always perform a double function: to contain to live and to contain to support.

A pair of large walls define the proposed architecture: the first supports the access road to the village with three buttresses, the second supports the staircase that leads to a series of terraces on different levels.

Therefore, regardless of the use or fate of the earth observatory, as well as the village of Craco, architecture remains at the scale of the landscape as a substructure and path. In this sense, indeed not recalling a romantic and

contemplative vision of the concept of ruin, it can be said that even in the event of abandonment, the project configures an architecture that retains its sense in the dimension of the landscape [17].

The project, therefore, interprets the conditions of today while remaining open to the uncertainty of tomorrow. The proposal, therefore, identifies a strategic solution that defines different objectives for different types of landscapes and that allows you to open to the outside of the area and include the municipalities that do not fall within it. The road dotted with widespread hubs. A first cultural awareness, without which it is not possible to speak of development in these contexts. It is a strategic project that accepts addition, overlap, growth as much as its abandonment.

Thus, in the Montagna Materana “precisely because they remained marginal to the development processes, and thanks to the extraordinary peculiarities they contain, these stones could be transformed from discarded stones into cornerstones from which to start” [16].

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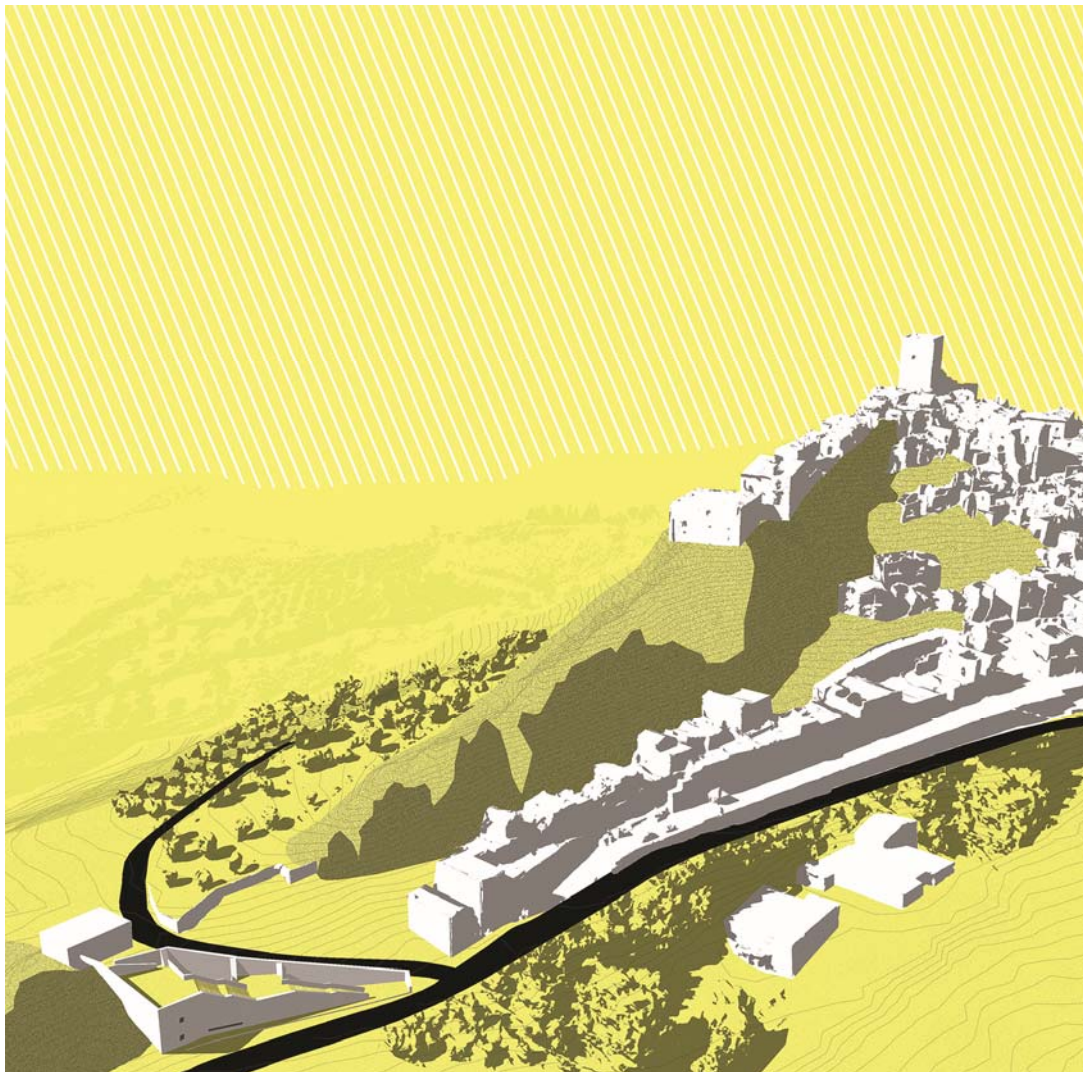


Fig 9. The road and the Earth Observatory (bottom left), at the foot and in continuity with the abandoned village of Craco.