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Can the architectural project offer new ways of interpreting, reading, and understanding heritage and the patrimonialization process?

What are the investigation tools and design actions useful for strengthening the relationships between heritage and context?

How can heritage sites best be valorized, while defining ways to sustainably use heritage and actions for its protection?

Starting from an idea of heritage seen as a *sense of time and a sense of place*, this book poses a hypothesis: that the perspective of the project, at architectural, urban and landscape scales, can be taken as an interpretative key through which to analyse potential and critical issues related to the tourist valorization of heritage.

ISBN 978-88-6242-673-2



Between Sense of Time  
and Sense of Place



# Between Sense of Time and Sense of Place

edited by  
Mauro Marzo  
Viviana Ferrario  
Viola Bertini



02

DESIGNING  
HERITAGE  
TOURISM  
LANDSCAPES

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Designing  
Heritage  
Tourism  
Landscapes

The series brings together a number of studies dedicated to the phenomenon of heritage tourism. A driving force for territorial regeneration processes and, at the same time, a factor in the alteration of the nature of places, this particular form of tourism represents a field of investigation for a vast number of disciplines. Open to dialogue with different fields of knowledge, the essays of the series present research focused on the relationship between heritage, landscape and architecture. In this framework, the analysis of contexts and the project's cross-scale perspective are assumed as lenses through which to read the potentialities and the critical issues related to the touristic use of material and immaterial assets. Can architectural design offer new ways of knowledge and interpretation of heritage? What are the analytical tools and the design methodologies useful for establishing a dialogue with that sense of past and sense of place proper to the concept of heritage itself? The series answers these questions by illustrating the results of research, teaching experimentations and design explorations which, in light of the complex problems posed by tourism, address the study of the relationship between architecture and the historical city, the transformation of landscapes, and the delicate balance between protection and the use of heritage.

Brazil, Rio de Janeiro from the Corcovado viewing platform, 1934. Fondazione Mazzotti photographic archive c/o FAST – Foto Archivio Storico Trevigiano della Provincia di Treviso



# Designing Heritage Tourism Landscapes

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ISBN 978-88-6242-673-2

First edition October 2022

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Book design: Francesco Trovato  
Layout: Gaetano Salemi, Alberto Scalia

LetteraVentidue Edizioni Srl  
Via Luigi Spagna 50 P  
96100 Siracusa, Italy

[www.letteraventidue.com](http://www.letteraventidue.com)

# BETWEEN SENSE OF TIME AND SENSE OF PLACE

DESIGNING HERITAGE TOURISM

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*edited by*

Mauro Marzo

Viviana Ferrario

Viola Bertini

# CONTENTS

---

14 **Foreword**

Mauro Marzo

**Introductions**

18 Benno Albrecht

22 Ana Luiza Massot Thompson-Flores

26 **On the sense of time and place in relation to heritage tourism**

Mauro Marzo, Viviana Ferrario, Viola Bertini

42 **Time and duration**

Luigi Franciosini

54 **Heritage and tourism: the experiential turn**

Maria Gravari-Barbas

64 **Heritage tourism in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic**

Mirella Loda

72 **Mass tourism, extraordinary heritage and valorizing the ordinary past of everyday life**

Dallen J. Timothy

78 **Recurring words**

Mauro Marzo, Viola Bertini

88 **Designing heritage tourism: 4 axes, 12 topics**

Susanna Campeotto, Mattia Coccozza

**SECTION 1**

**1.1 LANDSCAPES**

96 **Landscapes**

Luigi Coccia, Orfina Fatigato

- 102 **Historical evidence, the enigma of beauty in Italy's great war border territories**  
Claudia Pirina
- 110 **Experiential travel in protected areas**  
Projects, methodologies and case studies  
Olivia Longo, Davide Sigurtà
- 118 **Cultural map for a project on tourism**  
Ottavio Amaro
- 126 **Campania Felix**  
Ephemeral landscapes in the gulf of Cratere  
Simone Guarna
- 132 **Dwelling the landscape**  
Tradition and innovation  
Martina D'Alessandro
- 140 **Heritage interpretation and tourism**  
Architecture for archaeological routes in Alentejo and Algarve (Portugal)  
Laura Pujia
- 148 **Sense of past, loss of place**  
The case of the Palace of Versailles  
Francesca Talevi
- 156 **The heritage project in the shapes of civilization**  
The territory as an expression of meaning  
Ludovica Grompone

## **1.2 LANDSCAPE ITINERARIES**

- 164 **Landscape itineraries**  
Susanne Stacher
- 170 **Terrestrial lines**  
Cycleways and the heritage of historical infrastructures  
Riccardo Palma, Andrea Alberto Dutto
- 178 **Walking the invisible line**  
The landscapes of the Lucca–Pontedera railway  
Giacomo Dallatorre
- 184 **Fortified cities in Lombardy**  
An itinerary from Lodi to Cremona, between towns and castles along the Adda and Serio rivers  
Raffaella Simonelli, Piero Favino

- 192 **Walking the Appian Way**  
New life for an ancient route  
Egizia Gasparini, Valentina Dallaturca, Laura Sanna
- 200 **Designing a sustainable tourism**  
A project for Matera  
Anna Veronese, Silvia Parentini
- 208 **Contemporary transit itineraries**  
Prospects for the enhancement of the archaeological landscape  
of the inner Balkans  
Bruna Di Palma, Lucia Alberti, Francesca Colosi
- 216 **Distilleries in Ilhabela-Brazil**  
Designing a cultural itinerary  
Barbara Marie Van Sebreeck Martins

### **1.3 MARGINAL AREAS**

- 224 **Marginal areas**  
Giovanni Marras, Fabrizio Toppetti
- 228 **The inherited rurality and its sustainable enhancement**  
Pierluigi Grandinetti, Roberto Grandinetti
- 236 **Rural identity**  
Landscape, heritage, tourism in the mid-Adriatic areas  
Luigi Coccia, Sara Cipolletti
- 244 **Rural landscape heritage and tourism in the inner areas of Italy**  
Some considerations on community-centred practices  
Francesca Vigotti
- 252 **What's the meaning of heritage tourism in the inner areas of Italy?**  
Giovangiuseppe Vannelli, Angela D'Agostino, Piero Zizzania, Giancarlo Stellabotte
- 260 **Research and proposals for a new type of tourism**  
The Abruzzo case  
Claudio Varagnoli, Lucia Serafini, Clara Verazzo
- 268 **CultLANDS**  
Cultural heritage as a resilience reserve of inner areas in Marche region  
Maria Giada Di Baldassarre
- 276 **New strategies for the historic centre of Savoca**  
Emanuele Fidone, Vito Martelliano

## **SECTION 2**

### **2.1 SCENARIOS**

- 286 **Scenarios**  
Andrea Benedetti, Luca Merlini
- 290 **A tool for the evaluation of non-performing cultural heritage renovation projects**  
Elena Vigliocco, Roberta Taramino
- 298 **The reuse of Caprera's coastal batteries and other decommissioned military sites in Gallura (Sardinia)**  
Davide Pisu, Giovanni Marco Chiri
- 306 **Creative landscape: production and sociality as a care of cultural heritage**  
The case study of the Terra delle Gravine in Palagianello (Taranto)  
Rossella Laera, Roberto Pedone
- 314 **Tourism delivery – tourism toolkit in your place**  
The case of Matera  
Silvana Kühtz, Chiara Rizzi
- 322 **Earthquake damaged churches**  
A link between past and present in the sense of identity  
Gessica Sferrazza Papa
- 330 **Tourism and heritage after Covid-19**  
Reconsidering local tourism in the Greater Paris Region  
Susanne Stacher, Roberta Borghi

### **2.2 CITIES**

- 340 **Cities**  
Ángeles Layuno, João Rocha
- 346 **Beyond the Taj Mahal**  
A framework for enhanced visitation of the city of Agra  
Derek A.R. Moore
- 356 **Heritage and capital in contemporary China**  
Strategies and approaches in the case of Suzhou  
Elena Longhin, Luis Martin
- 366 **The memory of the territory**  
The case of the precolonial city of Maní, Yucatán, México  
Laura María Lázaro San José



- 374 **Touristocracy**  
The death and life of great tourist-historic cities  
Francesco Caneschi
- 382 **UNESCO historic centres**  
Experiences and synergies between ideal cities and consolidated realities  
Maria Grazia Turco
- 392 **Venice, Venices**  
Readings and strategies between the picturesque and contemporary  
consumption towards the search for new significance  
Paolo Gasparoli, Francesco Trovò, Katia Basili, Fabiana Pianezze
- 400 **Transitory vs permanent**  
Cultural explorations in Naples' heritage  
Orfina Fatigato, Maria Luna Nobile
- 410 **Matera, water and tourism**  
Heritage in balance  
Ettore Vadini, Monica Dell'Aglio, Mariafara Favia, Paolo Giannandrea

## **2.3 URBAN ITINERARIES**

- 420 **Urban Itineraries**  
Roberta Borghi, Emanuela Sorbo
- 426 **Heritage and the anti-city**  
Pizzo Sella in Palermo between modern ruins tourism and civic reappropriation  
Zeila Tesoriere
- 434 **Heritage tourism in Old Delhi**  
A second life for the historic havelis of Shahjahanabad  
Gianluca D'Agostino, Anuradha Chaturvedi, Valeria Minucciani
- 442 **Urban landscapes of memories**  
Three parks in Berlin  
Alessandro Gabbianelli
- 448 **New experiences of the heritage**  
OHN 2019: The architecture of Naples reveals itself  
Maria Pia Amore
- 456 **The underground tourist route as  
the object of the city tourism infrastructure**  
Kateryna Shklianka, Mykola Rybenchuk, Olena Rybenchuk, Mariia Moskalyuk

- 464 **Drawing the water heritage to understand Rome's cultural landscape**  
A travel towards liquid urban sceneries  
Francisco J. del Corral del Campo, Carmen M. Barrós Velázquez
- 474 **Digital journey toward experimental architectures**  
Skopje brutalism  
Marina Tornatora, Blagoja Bajkovski

## **SECTION 3**

### **3.1 ARCHAEOLOGY**

- 484 **Archaeology**  
Giuseppe Di Benedetto, Marco Ferrari
- 488 **The lesson of Villa Adriana**  
Project for the new UNESCO Buffer Zone  
Valerio Tolve
- 496 **Places and tourism**  
From real place to place as instrument of nostalgic memory  
Cristina Casadei
- 504 **Mapping the immaterial**  
The case of Centocelle Archaeological Park  
Irene Romano
- 512 **From enclosed to diffuse heritage**  
For a geographical view of archaeological remains  
Giulia Cervini
- 520 **Designing the past**  
A contemporary metaproject for the ancient Elea-Velia  
Chiara Barbieri
- 528 **Ancient and modern like water de-sign**  
Emanuele Navarra
- 534 **Operate on heritage: letter of intent**  
Milan towards a *Passeggiata Archeologica*  
Elisa Valentina Prusicki
- 542 **On the scene of the ancient**  
Studies and ideas for archaeological site of Delos  
Gianluca Sortino

### 3.2 HISTORY UNDERSTANDING

- 550 **History understanding**  
Fabrizio Foti, Laura Anna Pezzetti
- 556 **Images and cultural heritage**  
Sense of past and sense of place in Bodie American ghost town  
Emanuela Sorbo
- 564 **Approaching Italica through the lens of landscape**  
Marina López Sánchez, Cristina Vicente Gilabert
- 572 **Pre-Hispanic remains of the Mexico Basin as motivational resources for archaeotourism**  
An immersive proposal  
Abe Yillah Román Alvarado
- 578 **Venice reflected**  
The observations and impressions of Lawrence Halprin  
Barbara Boifava
- 586 **Does tourism generate ugliness?**  
The role of the building between knowledge, conservation and tourism: the case of Pollutri, a minor historical center in Abruzzo  
Michela Pirro
- 594 **Design of a cultural map as a tool of acquiring knowledge about sites**  
Experiment in the Area Grecanica Calabria  
Alessandro De Luca
- 602 **The *Nuragic Heroon of Mont'e Prama***  
From the excavation to the project  
Giovanni Marco Chiri, Davide Pisu

### 3.3 MUSEUMS AND MUSEALIZATION

- 612 **Museums and musealization**  
Francesca Mugnai, João Rocha
- 618 **The flow of history in the city**  
Museums to protect, connect, communicate  
Alessandra Carlini
- 626 **National Museum of Scotland**  
Heritage of a *becoming* architectural project  
Nikolia-Sotiria Kartalou

- 632 **Heritage and valorization**  
An integrated project for the San Marco Museum in Florence  
Elisabetta Matarazzo
- 640 **Memory and figures**  
Designing the new archaeological museum and service center at the  
archaeological site of Villa Romana de Rabacal  
Riccardo Renzi
- 648 **The transmission of the past in Basque country**  
Marco Russo
- 656 **Sensitive atmospheres and archaeological heritage**  
Museum as narration by Studio Azzurro  
Marianna Sergio
- 664 **An imaginary museum of the Manhattan Project**  
Ludovico Centis

## **SECTION 4**

### **4.1 ABANDONMENT, DEGRADATION AND REUSE**

- 674 **Abandonment, degradation and reuse**  
Federica Morgia, Marina Tornatora
- 680 **Banganga Tank in Mumbai**  
Sacred space and urban imagination  
Stefania Rössl
- 688 **Looking for the balance between patrimonial  
restoration, social revitalization and touristic development**  
Project for the enhancement of the fortress  
and castle of Beas de Segura (Jaén, Spain)  
Pablo-M. Millán Millán, Javier Muñoz Godino, Simona Belmondo
- 696 **The past and present sense of place**  
A project for an historical district  
Maria Rosa De Luca, Ilde Rizzo
- 704 **In *another* sense**  
Uncovering memories, rediscovering denied heritage  
Angela D'Agostino, Maria Pia Amore, Giovangiuseppe Vannelli,  
Giuseppe D'Ascoli, Marianna Sergio
- 712 **Megara Hyblaea and the landscape of contrasts**  
Strategic design and technological innovation for an inter-scalar project  
to enhance tourism in the archaeological park  
Simona Calvagna, Mariangela Liuzzo, Pietro Militello, Vincenzo Sapienza

- 720 **Liminal landscapes in transformation**  
Industry, nature and heritage  
Ángeles Layuno
- 730 **Mining narrations**  
Vocations and opportunities in abandoned places of Sulcis-Iglesiente  
Giorgio Peghin, Andrea Scalas
- 738 **Industrial tourism and heritage protection:  
architecture as a resource**  
The case of Mollificio Bresciano in San Felice del Benaco (Brescia)  
Silvia Bassani, Giulia Stefanina

## 4.2 PROJECTS

- 748 **Projects**  
Renato Capozzi, Gustavo Carabajal
- 752 **The reversal of time**  
Type, scale, and material  
Marco Ferrari
- 760 **Earthquake as heritage**  
Sense of past, sense of place, sense of time  
Paolo Belardi, Carla Zito
- 768 **Recycling to accommodate**  
Gonçalo Byrne: rhythmic of life  
Elena Mucelli
- 776 **Domesticated wilderness**  
Pietro Porcinai and the ENI holiday village in Pugnochiuso  
Viola Corbari
- 784 **Two stories about mountain ski heritage transformation**  
Roccaraso and Planica compared  
Federico Di Cosmo
- 792 **Between identity and otherness**  
The example of the Hakka villages  
Giovanni Comi
- 800 **Inclusive heritage**  
A project for the Olympic Theatre in Vicenza  
Federica Alberti

- 808 **Ephemeral architecture as a medium for regenerating the historic city**  
The case of the Venice Biennale and the proposal for a code of ethics to manage the staging of artistic events  
Alessandro Zorretto, Ángela Barrios Padura, Marta Molina Huelva

### 4.3 TOOLS, METHODS AND STRATEGIES

- 816 **Tools, methods and strategies**  
Mauro Marzo, Viola Bertini
- 822 **Hybrid/ephemeral/in motion**  
Experiencing places  
Anna Lorens
- 830 **From the neglected to the cherished**  
Abandoned lands and new archaeological landscapes  
Federica Morgia
- 838 **Designing branding actions**  
Working with communities on heritage enhancement to achieve more resilient and open habitats  
Maddalena Ferretti, Caterina Rigo
- 846 **Reconnecting Diuenses opportunities of heritage tourism for Diu Town**  
Anisha Meggi
- 852 **Revisiting the design of cities for culture-based tourism in a spatial context of social and economic heterogeneity**  
A case study of Jaffa, Israel  
Komal Potdar
- 860 **Methodological issues**  
The touristic enhancement of Albanian rural heritage  
Kamela Guza, Valbona Flora
- 868 **Heritage-led branding and marketing as the instruments to communicate the *sense of past* and *sense of place* in heritage cities**  
Özgün Özçakır, Anna Mignosa
- 876 **An idea of lagoon heritage**  
Territorial preservation between speculation and civic rights  
Michela Pace, Maria Chiara Tosi

# Research and proposals for a new type of tourism<sup>1</sup>

## The Abruzzo case

Claudio Varagnoli, Lucia Serafini, Clara Verazzo  
*Università degli studi G. d'Annunzio di Chieti – Pescara*

## Region at the crossroads of sea and mountains

The search for *sustainable and mindful* forms of tourism is also gaining ground in Abruzzo, with all the difficulties and slowness that usually accompany changes in the approach to the area and its resources.

Other examples include the long-standing green way project to replace the old tracks of the Adriatic railway, which in many places has been moved further up the coast thanks to an operation begun in the late 1980s and completed in 2005. However, only a few sections of cycle and pedestrian path have so far been built compared with the plans and, even where they are usable, they are located in areas that suffer from overcrowding and degradation, especially during the summer, with the remaining spaces being reduced to car parks and rubbish dumps.

Speaking of the sea, the so-called *Costa dei trabocchi*, dedicated to those *macchine da pesca* (fishing machines) made famous by Gabriele d'Annunzio, has only recently come to the attention of conservation institutions with regard to the possibility of safeguarding at least its most representative examples. Their physical and visual intermingling with the above-mentioned aspects is even more impactful in this case, not least because many of the trabocchi are themselves in an advanced state of decay, and those that have been restored were not always done so in the most *sustainable* manner. Some of them have been transformed into restaurants serving seaside tourism, while others have become small dwellings used directly by the owners themselves or rented out during the summer.

The inland areas are not so different. Here, the fashion for mountain tourism is more recent than that for the sea, and also less invasive, not least because of the difficulty of practising tourism in places that are often very rugged from a morphological point of view.

The success of tourism in Abruzzo in recent decades has been marked above all by the interest of foreign buyers, mainly Anglo-Saxon. The reputation of places that offer extraordinarily beautiful sea and mountain landscapes, both of which can be enjoyed with limited travel time and space, has quickly changed the local picture, making it a worthy alternative to the more celebrated destinations of Umbria and Tuscany.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic stopped tourism worldwide, not even the 2009 earthquake that struck the province of L'Aquila seemed to stop the interest in Abruzzo. In 2014, the region was the fourth most popular destination, after Tuscany, Liguria and Puglia, and the second most popular among US citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Single houses in the hills and coastline are almost always in demand, even when they require ordinary and/or extraordinary maintenance. Although not always in keeping with the characteristics and traditions of the area, such work has helped to overcome the image of poverty and backwardness that had marked the smaller towns during the years of the *southern question*, and has led to a re-evaluation of their urban and architectural aspects. In 2018, the prestigious Forbes magazine ranked Città Sant'Angelo, in the province of Pescara, as one of the ideal places to live, placing it sixth in a world ranking.

When the heavy repercussions that the virus is bringing with it are overcome, there is no doubt that tourism in Abruzzo will once again play a major role in the local



economy, not least because of the need to find new inhabitants for the many towns that are in the process of being depopulated, to expand the range of hotels on offer and to offer the widest possible range of cultural services.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the context in which this role will be applied is less certain. The abuse from which so many areas along the coast have long suffered risks contaminating even the region's coveted hill and mountain destinations, thus necessitating an approach to the problem that is capable of finding a balance between the legitimate rights to enjoy the heritage and the equally sacrosanct rights of the latter to survive with dignity.

### **Problematic cohabitation. Abandoned villages and *Alberghi Diffusi***

The first major experience that has attracted national attention in recent decades, with repercussions abroad as well, was without doubt the one carried out in S. Stefano di Sessanio, in the province of L'Aquila.

Of medieval origin, and located in the southern part of the Gran Sasso massif, the centre was practically uninhabited when, at the end of the 1990s, it was partly bought by the Italian-Swedish entrepreneur Daniele Kihlgren, with the aim of transforming the old houses into accommodation for tourists, on the model of the *albergo diffuso*, created in Friuli after the 1976 earthquake.<sup>4</sup>

In little more than eighteen years, Sextantio s.r.l., founded by the same entrepreneur, has acquired, within the historical centre, a real estate patrimony of about 3,500 square metres, creating 21 receptive activities, representing alone 27% of the utilisation index of hotel structures of the Abruzzi average in the last three years; foreign tourist presences equal to three times the regional figure: an extra-agricultural entrepreneurship index of 27% (compared to an Italian average of 7.4%) and an occupation rate of about 50% on an annual basis in the Sextantio structure.

The success of the S. Stefano model has been such that regional legislation itself has been adapted, passing from regional law no. 11 of 26 January 1993 – still aimed at traditional guesthouses – to regional law no. 22 of 9 August 2013, aimed at regulating the 'Recovery and restoration of ancient villages and minor historical centres in the Abruzzo Region through the enhancement of the Abruzzo model of diffuse hospitality'.<sup>5</sup>

Welcomed with great confidence by private enterprise, the operation carried out in S. Stefano has shown that it is possible to bring life back to abandoned centres and that it is also possible to do so while respecting local identities. The strength of Kihlgren's project – also reported in the foreign media – was in fact the maintenance of the rural and poor character of the inhabited area of Abruzzo, implemented by taking up not only Giancarlo De Carlo's lesson in Colletta di Castel Bianco, in Liguria, but also the teachings that Paolo Marconi and other researchers were conducting in those years on the technical and material culture of historic centres.

In line with these teachings, Kihlgren's operation respected, in principle, plaster, wooden beams and wall fixtures, limiting itself to the renovation of installations and furnishings: a sort of cultured gentrification set in a scenario of ancient poverty exhibited as a certificate of authenticity for a public that nevertheless remains profoundly alien to the historical and human context.



Detail of Santo Stefano di Sessanio.© courtesy of Giovanni Giangrande.



View of the installation of the artist Millo in Aielli Borgo Universo. © Andrea Lucente.

Compared to S. Stefano di Sessanio, the same entrepreneur has taken over other abandoned towns in Abruzzo and Molise, perhaps influenced by the interest his company has shown in the Sassi di Matera in Basilicata.

The initiative in S. Stefano has proved to be a point of distinction in the region's tourism policy, even when the challenge with the ancient elements has consciously chosen different paths. The case of Albe Vecchia is unique – the medieval town that emerged from the abandonment of the Roman Alba Fucens, a short distance from the remains of the ancient settlement, itself abandoned and buried after the 1915 earthquake.<sup>6</sup> Here the houses, which had been reduced to ruins, were rebuilt, focusing, unlike in S. Stefano di Sessanio, on the clear contrast between the old walls, preserved and exhibited in their authenticity, and the new inserts, designed according to modern construction and performance standards and discordant in terms of colour.

In the wake of Sextantio, the Borghi Project was also launched in 2006 by the Province of Teramo to promote the towns in the Monti della Laga and Gran Sasso areas.

One of the most touristy and commercial operations is Città Sant'Angelo Village, an outlet (sic!) opened in 2009 and presented as a copy of the nearby town in the province of Pescara. The clumsy imitation of the rural character of Abruzzo's

historic centres is as much in the functional distribution of the various levels as in the presence of external staircases, squares and fountains, simulating a stratification that is far removed, in effect, from the cultural values of a human settlement.

### **Art and tourism. A possible union**

An important contribution to the growth of tourism in the region has been made by those artists who, in recent decades, have intercepted its territories, promoting a different perception of them compared to the stereotype of a land on the edge of the world, fuelled above all by certain forms of romantic and decadent literature. The case of Josef Beuys, who arrived in Bolognano in 1972 and made Abruzzo his adopted home, is particularly unusual. In 1976 he founded the Istituto per la Rinascita dell'Agricoltura (Institute for the Rebirth of Agriculture), which he promoted with an approach that was not narrowly based on financial and productive objectives, but which was capable of generating a certain amount of interest in certain centres. Since then, the recurrence of exhibitions, installations and cultural events have been a strong factor in attracting tourists, especially during the summer season. An interesting example is Castelbasso, in the province of Teramo, where the *Castelbasso Progetto Cultura* project was launched in 2001, with exhibitions dedicated to young artists held outside and inside the ruins of old houses in the historic centre. The title of the 2008 exhibition *Spaesamenti* very well conveys the idea of a new approach to heritage, aimed at healing the detachment by re-appropriating its values and dimensions. Even the restoration of some of the most representative buildings has succeeded in fitting into the building context and reinterpreting its construction culture with intelligence.

The cultural project launched in Castelbasso, which now includes theatre and music seasons and attracts around 12,000 tourists from May to September, has been a great success throughout the region, with unprecedented developments in terms of artistic events, which are sometimes combined with festivals and promotion of local products.

The *Ripattoni In Arte* event in the municipality of Bellante in the province of Teramo, where cultural and artistic promotion initiatives have been attempting forms of local marketing for a number of years, is a very popular one.<sup>7</sup>

But it is the street art festivals, including international ones, that have monopolised the interest of many tourists and administrators in Abruzzo, especially in small and medium-sized towns.<sup>8</sup> The trend is common throughout Italy and undoubtedly inspired by the interesting experiences conducted in this sense in neighbouring Molise. The first *CivitaStreetFest*, held in Civitacampomariano in the province of Campobasso, dates back more than ten years. It was on this occasion that the intervention of writers such as Alice Pasquini, ICKS, UNO, Hitnes, David de la Mano, creatively and playfully rekindled the hope that the vitality of the streets could act as a tourist attraction to counteract the current depopulation. In Abruzzo, one good example is Aielli, a town in the province of L'Aquila that is one of the most depopulated in the entire region, partly because it has been hit several times by earthquakes in recent centuries and has many ruins still standing in their wake. The name *borgo universo*, which it has adopted over the last

few years, is synonymous with a wide-ranging programme that combines street art with music, theatre and local festivals: a mixture of traditions and international contributions that have transformed the town's alleyways into art galleries; the abandoned walls into canvases painted by artists from all over the world, or, with extraordinary efficiency, into sheets on which entire literary works can be transcribed. So-called street poetry, which has been gaining so much popularity recently, with the play of colours, shapes and words experimented on walls and shutters by artists such as Piger, Ste-Marta and Opiemme, has here used Ignazio Silone's tale of Fontamara, now entirely reproduced on the wall of a building at the foot of the mediaeval tower, and in union with the landscape described so effectively by the great Abruzzo writer. Here, as in so many street art festivals organised in Italy over the last few decades, the walls were made available directly by the owners and the focus was on themes linked to the agricultural-pastoral tradition of the area, one of the most evocative in the entire area of the central-southern Apennines.

Despite the good intentions behind street art, i.e. to raise awareness about the fate of forgotten places and to set them on the path to rebirth, it is clear that painted walls are not enough. On the contrary: the obsession with such expressions, especially when applied to historic centres, risks making them look like comic strips, reducing street art itself to a decorative intervention intended to deceive the eye of the visiting tourist and cover up and/or postpone problems of a very different kind. In fact, rather than street art, historic centres in the process of being abandoned need policies aimed at reversing their fate, to which congruent restoration and recovery operations of their building heritage should be associated. This is the only way to keep tourism within a virtuous and sustainable circle, and hence acceptable to all parties involved.

## Conclusions

The time is not yet ripe to draw up a clear and well-defined balance sheet of experiences in the field of sustainable tourism in Abruzzo, with richer, broader, and more informed scenarios than those currently available. The examples illustrated are in fact real and often promising, but at the moment they lack a broad vision that can leave aside particular and circumscribed situations. What is missing, in other words, is the approach that the whole of Italy still lacks, i.e., the approach capable of deactivating the waste of land and triggering its recovery and regeneration, not only in terms of built-up areas and contexts but also in terms of inhabitants, economies and cultures.

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## Notes

1. The results of this research are based on the studies carried out by the authors at the Department of Architecture of the University of Chieti-Pescara. Regarding the attributions, the first paragraph was written by C. Varagnoli, the second one by C. Verazzo, the third one by L. Serafini.
2. L. Dolce, 'Il caso, sempre più stranieri acquistano casa in Abruzzo', *Il Centro* [website], 10 July 2014, <<https://www.ilcentro.it/abruzzo/il-caso-sempre-piu-stranieri-acquistano-casa-in-abruzzo-1.340659>>, accessed 12 April 2021.
3. In the 2018 ISTAT ranking on tourist numbers, the Abruzzo region is in 17th place, preceding Umbria and Valle d'Aosta, with 6,193,473 tourists registered in accommodation facilities. The tourist numbers in Abruzzo recorded an increase in arrivals (+1.5%) and presences (+2.3%), especially in the province of Teramo, with +3.5% arrivals and +2.6% presences.
4. See the docufilm *La nostra pietra* [DVD], dir. A. Soetje, Alpenway Media GmdH Production, 2018. On the role of the connoisseur outside the places, see P. Clemente, 'Ibridazioni e riappropriazioni. Indigeni del XXI secolo', in A. De Rossi ed., *Riabitare l'Italia*, Donzelli Editore, Roma, 2018, pp. 365-380.
5. See also Abruzzo Region, *Regolamento attuativo ai sensi dell'art. 7 della legge regionale 9 agosto 2013*, no. 22, [website], 29 April 2014, <[https://www.regione.abruzzo.it/system/files/regolamenti/2014/DR32014\\_0.pdf](https://www.regione.abruzzo.it/system/files/regolamenti/2014/DR32014_0.pdf)>, accessed 10 April 2021.
6. A. Campanelli, M.J. Strazzulla & F. Galadini, *Poco grano, pochi frutti. 50 anni di archeologia ad Alba Fucens*, Synapsi, Sulmona, 2006.
7. C. Varagnoli, L. Serafini, & C. Verazzo, 'Pratiche di recupero dei centri abbandonati. Esperienze dall'Abruzzo e dal Molise', *ArcHistoR Extra*, no. 7, 2020, pp. 1160-1192.
8. *Street Art Abruzzo* [video], YouTube, 24 February 2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB4EMbT-c9Lc>>, accessed 14 April 2021.