

sous la direction de
LAMIA HADDA
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Villages et quartiers à risque d'abandon

*Stratégies pour la connaissance,
la valorisation et la restauration*

TOME 3


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TOWARD SUSTAINABLE REGENERATION OF HISTORIC ENDANGERED TOWNS: STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING RESILIENCE



Photographic report of the case studies:

- a) Château de Germolles (Mellecey, France);
- b) Castello di Riolunato (Modena, Italy);
- c) Castaño de Robledo (Huelva, Spain);
- d) Terena Parish (Alandroal, Portugal).

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Europe has numerous urban sites ranging from towns to hamlets with valuable heritage significance that are experiencing progressive and harmful abandon because of urbanization and globalization phenomena. Tangible heritage values (historic buildings and urban settings), as well as intangible ones (history, cultural and social values, and handcraft) contribute in preserving the site identity and maintaining the collective memory of local communities. The town architecture, together with its complex of symbols, conserves the place identity and characterizes the site historic development. Several reasons are responsible for this abandon process, such as unfavourable location, ending of industrial/commercial activities, natural disasters, lack of services, progressive aging of the local population, and social replacement. Globalization has a deep impact on community development, town improvement and economic growth; meanwhile it presents several vulnerability aspects that hinder the system adaptation capacity to react to environmental changing and to control citizens' health and safety. The recent COVID-19 pandemic experience clearly demonstrated a transnational system weakness. Urbanization provides economic, social and cultural opportunities that can enhance life quality; on the other hand, sudden changes in urban density and growth can weaken the sense of place (the specific 'genius loci'), the integrity of the social fabric, the traditional character of urban areas, and the identity of communities. Here we propose a new approach for contrasting the impoverishing of historic towns, which takes into consideration the different evolution of plant and animal organisms. While the animal organism functions as a unique one, in which single organs are strictly interdependent on each other, plants are modular organisms, where each single part functions independently on the others. In this way, single parts of the plant individual can be removed without threatening the organism survival. The regeneration strategy we propose tends to assimilate the functioning of small towns and hamlets to the plant organism, i.e. small communities independent on large and globalised societies and characterised by high resilience potential for contrasting unfavourable situations. Opposite to this model, globalisation represents centralised operative authorities that are responsible for the whole country, thus recalling the animal organism regulated by a single operation centre. Our model is based on a conscious and sustainable improvement of site resilience involving public administration and citizens by mitigating the impact of globalization process and re-discovering the cultural identity, history and traditions of urban areas, in other words, we propose to diffuse the "vital resources of the towns" at different levels and contexts. Abandoned, neglected or disused villages and towns require restoration of their integrity in every respect: historic, artistic, architectural, social and cultural. This regeneration strategy should follow sustainable procedures, which requires the detailed knowledge of building material, of monuments and

urban vegetation, as well as their decay phenomena in order to design an effective restoration program considering long-term conservation and durability. In order to realize a real regeneration, restoration should not be limited to building recovering and compliance, rather, it should aim at drawing a new cultural and social identity. This target represents a challenge that should take into account architectural aspects linked to: accessibility, historical and artistic context, as well as economic sustainability including agri-food excellence and specific traits of the territory. The rationale of this strategy is to maintain a balance between historical and landscape features, to avoid isolation of towns, and to promote their employment not only as tourist destination but also as living centres.

Keywords: Resilience, Sustainable Restoration, Multidisciplinary Approach, Mitigation of Globalisation Effects

Introduction

In Europe, numerous urban sites ranging from towns to hamlets with valuable heritage significance are experiencing progressive and harmful abandon because of urbanization and globalization phenomena. Most of them result from different construction layers, originated in different historic eras, through different civilisations, testifying continuous re-foundation events that shaped and modified both landscape and territory (Sloan 2018). Several hamlets have been completely abandoned and are now described as 'ghost towns', whereas others are still inhabited, even if they are experiencing depopulation, social and economic decline and depletion as globalization consequence. Many countries, particularly in southern Europe, face challenges relating not only to globalisation, but also to environmental and energy concerns, population aging and demographic shifts, technological transformation and innovation demands, and social inequality (Lambianca & Navaro 2019).

Economic decline and depopulation of rural areas started in the early '900 and increased after World War II, resulting from the excessive urban growth that characterised social dynamics in the twentieth century. The rate of emigration accelerated between 1950s and 1960s when inhabitants of isolated and mostly mountain villages searched for better economic opportunities and more comfortable lifestyle in urbanised areas. In this way, small, fortified hilltops and mountains villages, once considered protected and safe locations, were abandoned in favour of towns located in valleys and plains. Unfavourable location, ending of industrial or commercial activities, isolation, lack of employment opportunities, progressive aging of the local population, natural disasters, particularly earthquake and floods, are the major drivers of abandonment. Moreover, small, isolated towns are often excluded from modernity in terms of communication, viability, infrastructure and services (East 2016; Sloan 2018).

Recently, there have been increasing interest and attention for so-called ghost towns at the political and popular level and several projects gave rise to initiatives for their re-awakening. The cultural process leading to the re-evaluation of neglected towns and hamlets takes into consideration both tangible and intangible heritage values, which contribute in preserving the site identity and maintaining the collective memory of local communities (Ashworth et al., 2007). According to the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011: First Conference, 2019: Second Consultation), the tangible historic resources are represented by buildings, monuments, and urban settings, while the intangible heritage include history, culture, tradition, and all activities performed in the urban environment aimed at preserving the site identity. Tangible and intangible heritage constitute the cultural landscape representing the combined work of nature and humans (Zarnic et al 2017), thus, they are strictly linked to the built and natural environment, to the sense of place and local population memory. While tangible and intangible heritage include the entire capital of knowledge derived from human development, the word ‘memory’ represents the spatial, social and cultural constructions linked to the human knowledge (Hosagrahar et al. 2016). The town architecture, together with its complex of symbols, conserves the place identity, represents its historic development (Low & Altman 1992; Tuan 1977), and can be considered as the roots for keeping the site memory alive. Under this perspective, abandoned towns and hamlets can be considered no longer as places to be shunned, rather as resources, which can activate processes of regeneration and local development with positive impacts on local community and its economy, environment, and landscape (Di Figlia 2016). However, this theme is still poorly explored by academics, with the exception of few studies in architecture and anthropological sciences.

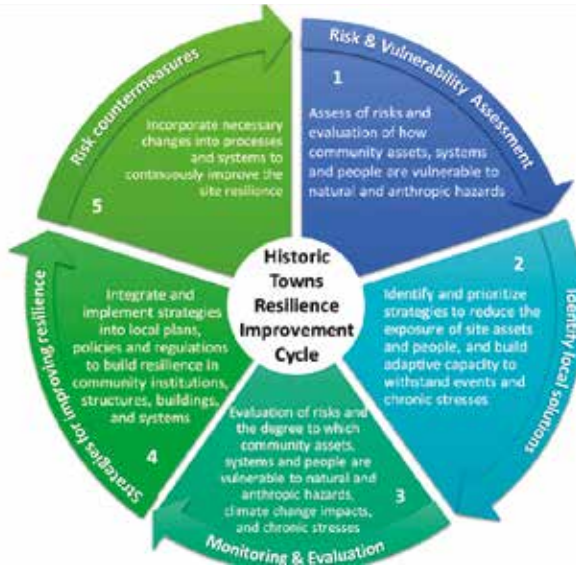
Toward novel approaches for regenerating and re-evaluating historic endangered towns

Here we consider a system of hamlets and small towns distributed in different European countries (Fig. 1), characterised by similarities in relation to history, environment and cultural identity (Tab. 1). These locations are experiencing the same demographic and economic stagnation and abandon phenomenon. Because of these shared features, they represent a case study for proposing a common model of re-evaluation based on cultural heritage and landscape preservation, environmental protection, and sustainable economic improvement for the local population.

We propose an integrated approach that can be applied to these realities and further extended to similar ones. The rationale is to search new opportunities for local population and to



Fig. 2
Flowchart of the
HTRIC.



attract immigrants through sustainable measure for a real re-awakening of these areas. At the meantime, such solution should take into consideration conservation and evaluation of cultural heritage and historical buildings.

In the last decade, abandoned villages gained new interest and the way they are now described and perceived let us consider them no longer as rubbish but as resources (Sloan 2018). In Italy several re-awakening projects have been proposed for abandoned villages, most of them indicating tourism as the preferred vehicle for bringing these sites back to life (Sloan 2018). However, the touristic solution does not represent the most environmental-friendly one, nor it warrants keeping and preserving the cultural identity and the sense of place (*genius loci*). Identity alone is not an incentive motivation for local population to remain. The poor quality of life, typical of marginal locations, is another driver of abandonment. People need a better quality of life in terms of road connections, good education and cultural opportunities, health services, sporting, recreational and aggregation places.

When tourism is considered as the solution for re-awakening marginal sites, improving quality of life is mainly addressed to new and temporary inhabitants, namely tourists, and does not try to solve problems of local populations. In this sense, re-awakening projects that are locally- and community-led are likely more successful than those led

by ‘outsiders’ in maintaining the link between past and present and considering semi abandoned villages as authentic places (East 2016; Sloan 2018).

Contemporary and globalised society tends to standardise landscape and sense of place, and to ignore or forget historic and cultural identity. This standardise way of perceiving both the spatial dimension and the landscape is defined by Augé (1995) as *supermodernity*, the consequence of which is the transformation of places in ‘non-places’. Non-places are transitory locations, where humans pass through as anonymous individuals but do not relate nor identify with in any intimate sense (typical example of non-places are airport terminals and shopping malls). According to Augé (1995), a non-place cannot be redefined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity. However, non-places will not supplant places; places and non-places continue to exist and represent opposite polarities: ‘the first are never completely erased, the second never totally complete’¹.

A vulnerable environment that deserves particular interest is that defined by Clément (2004) as ‘Third Landscape’, which includes those spaces between urban and peri-urban areas that are not yet occupied by human activities. As long as these environments are unutilized and left to natural landscape evolution, they can be considered as genetic reservoirs of species diversity (Clément, 2004). On the other hand, if exploited for human activities they will lose any memory of natural and historical identity.

Globalization has a deep impact on community development, town improvement and economic growth; meanwhile it presents several vulnerability aspects that hinder the system adaptation capacity to react to environmental changing and to control citizens’ health and safety. The recent COVID-19 pandemic experience clearly demonstrated a transnational system weakness. Urbanization provides economic, social and cultural opportunities that can enhance life quality; on the other hand, sudden changes in urban density and growth can weaken the sense of place (the specific *genius loci*), the integrity of the social fabric, the traditional character of urban areas, and the community identity.

Strategies for increasing resilience of historic endangered towns: a model

In the globalised society, historic centres included in urban areas may lose their social functions, traditional role and populations. A conscious and sustainable restoration approach, and a regeneration strategy carried out together with public administration, may weaken this process and mitigate its impact. Defining strategies for improving the town resilience will contribute to slow down the progressive decline of historical towns and activate regeneration

¹ Augé M. 1995. Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity (London, Verso), p. 79



Tab. 1
features of the
selected sites
and proposed
regeneration
activities/
initiatives.

process. The final goal is to reduce migration from small towns towards large cities, to maintain their cultural identity, and to support human communities in their need for balanced development, while enhancing values linked to their history, collective memory, and environment. Cultural heritage plays an important role in programming sustainable urban development. Hosagrahar et al. (2016) propose a new paradigm of sustainable city based on the concept of development in humanistic and ecological terms. According to this vision, conservation projects that include cultural urban landscape conservation and regeneration can contribute to increasing local productivity and to improving well-being of inhabitants (Nocca et al. 2018).

In recent years, the term 'urban resilience' has become an important issue that gave rise to a vast literature dealing with socio-ecological systems and urban sustainable management. According to Meerow et al. (2016), urban resilience is '*the ability of an urban system and all its constituent socio-ecological and socio-technical networks across temporal and spatial scales to maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems that limit current or future adaptive capacity*'. Under this perspective, resilience is a dynamic process aiming to reach a desirable state through multiple pathways such as persistence, transition, and transformation. This process should be community-led, thus negotiated among local population (stakeholders) and local authorities.

Here we propose a new approach for contrasting the impoverishing of historic towns, which takes into consideration the different evolution of plant and animal organisms. While the animal organism functions as a unique one, in which single organs are strictly interdependent on each other, plants are modular organisms, where each single part functions independently on the others. In this way, single parts of the plant individual can be removed without threatening the organism survival.

Plants are usually considered as immobile and passive organisms interacting with the surrounding environment for the unique scope to sequester CO₂ for their nutritional needs. However, it has been observed that plants display specific behaviour for manipulating their environment to fit their needs; moreover, plants are able to manipulate animals to realise their reproductive, defensive and surviving strategies (Baluška & Mancuso 2020). The regeneration strategy we propose tends to assimilate the functioning of small towns and hamlets to the plant organism, i.e. small communities independent on large and globalised societies and characterised by high resilience potential for contrasting unfavourable situations. Opposite to this model, globalisation represents centralised operative authorities that are responsible for the whole country, thus recalling the animal organism

| Country | Spain | Portugal | France | Italy |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name | Castaño de Robledo (Huelva) | Terena Parish (Alandroal) | Château de Germolles (Mellecey) | Castello di Riolunato (Modena) |
| Main past economy | Cultivation of sweet chestnut | Agro-forestry-pastoral system | The estate was devoted to agricultural activities: animal husbandry, wine production and various crops. Since the 1970s, the château has been open to visitors; in 2006, a SME was set up to focus mainly on tourist activities. Cattle breeding continues in the adjacent land. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, handicraft, forestry, animal farming, food processing (parmesan cheese); • SME and advanced tertiary sector |
| Main cause of abandon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline of agriculture; • Chestnut cultivation threatened by fungal disease; • Lack of economic promotion and planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process of deruralization of the areas; • Unsustainability of traditional economies; • Population aging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources; • Population aging; • Population decline; • Lack of attractiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population aging; • Lack of economic promotion and planning |
| Strengths for sustainable regeneration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site included within the Sierra de Aracena the National Park Picos de Aroche; • Woods of high value forest species; • Climatic conditions and rainwater richness suited for agriculture, livestock farming and organic farming; • Rich architectural heritage representing traditional building in mud, stone and lime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocation for sustainable tourism; • High landscape heritage value; • Network of rural homesteads and settlements of different chronologies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best preserved residence of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy (XIV-XV century); • Well preserved environment; • Since 1989 recognised as National Cultural Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site included in Frignano Regional Park (Regional Park of the Modenese Apennines); • Good road connection; • Cultural and historic heritage; • Landscape and natural environment; • Citizen involvement and association; • Esperanto legacy; • Freshwater resources |
| Proposed regeneration measures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of the road network and the connection with the surrounding territory; • Improvement of sustainable agriculture, livestock farming, forestry; • Improvement of Information and Communications Technology (ICT); • Realisation of cultural initiatives for promoting raw material and natural products (fairs, exhibitions, workshops, educational programs); • Valorisation and conservation of traditional building system and heritage through the creation of a professional school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration in the Regional Land Management Plan (PROT); • Urban centers of high heritage value; • Improvement of local employment because of proximity to marble extraction industry of Vila Viçosa and to Alqueva dam reservoir | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of novel economic systems (circular economy); • Higher level of inclusion of citizens to the social life; • Improvement of Information and Communications Technology (ICT); | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving cultural initiatives through the activities of the 'Scoltenna Academy'; • Improvement of Information and Communications Technology (ICT); • Realisation of cultural initiatives for promoting raw material and natural products (fairs, exhibitions, workshops, educational programs); |

regulated by a single operation centre. Considering plants as organisms that can actively interact with the environment to serve their needs could change our way to understand life and better cope with environmental changes (Baluška & Mancuso 2020) and our vision of centralised development strategies.

The Historic Towns Resilience Improvement Cycle (HTRIC), described in Fig. 2, presents a concise snapshot for understanding the process that local governments should undertake for building and improving long-term town resilience.

The cycle begins with encouraging local authorities to achieve early 'wins' by strengthening their internal systems to face and counteract any kind of emergency, from economic crisis to natural disasters (flood, earthquake, etc.). The following steps outline a planning process, emphasise the needs for conservation of architectural structures and management of urban settlement and consider the citizens' quality of life. The cycling path goes on with monitoring and evaluating critical events, identifying risks and defining alert threshold for activating reaction processes or actions. The final step represents the interactive logic of the HTRIC cycle, based on data-driven management and aimed to enhance the resilience to negative events that might occur.

Our model is based on a conscious and sustainable improvement of site resilience involving public administration and citizens by mitigating the impact of globalization process and re-discovering the cultural identity, history and traditions of urban areas, in other words, we propose to diffuse the 'vital resources of the towns' at different levels and contests. Cultural heritage plays a fundamental role for the sustainable development of towns on the verge of abandonment as it can stimulate local population to improve creative activities and to increase social inclusion and cohesion (Nocca & Fusco Girard 2018).

Abandoned, neglected or disused villages and towns require restoration of their integrity in every respect: historic, artistic, architectural, social and cultural. This regeneration strategy should follow sustainable procedures, which requires the detailed knowledge of building material, of monuments and urban vegetation, as well as their decay phenomena. An effective restoration program that warrants long-term conservation and durability requires linking together technical-scientific and humanistic knowledge, it is a complex task related to multidimensionality, heterogeneity and dynamism, which needs to reach the individual's perception and how it turns into a community perspective (Nocca & Fusco Girard 2018).

In order to realize a real regeneration, restoration should not be limited to building recovering and compliance, rather, it should aim at drawing a new cultural and social identity.

This target represents a challenge that should take into account architectural aspects linked to: accessibility, historical and artistic context, as well as economic sustainability including agri-food excellence and specific traits of the territory. The rationale of this strategy is to maintain a balance between historical and landscape features, to avoid isolation of towns, and to promote their employment not only as tourist destination but also as living centres.

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