

## THE ABANDONED VILLAGES AS A REGIONAL RESOURCE

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### Abstract

In recent years, we have witnessed the rediscovery of urban rural realities. Even if these realities may be of small dimensions, they are characterized by a deep-rooted local identity. In many regions, these realities have been exploited to promote actions and policies of local development. Within the same territory, urban, environmental and landscape resources have been identified that could preserve the uniqueness of these places and could counteract the pervasive effects of supra-local development. In this framework, the presence of abandoned villages can gain significant importance.

The uninhabited villages, given their general state of deterioration and abandonment, can be considered both as a discarded element of modern consumer society, which erroneously fails to recognize in them any practical use, as well as a regional asset, reinterpreted from a qualifying perspective which does not stop at observing the current state of decay but instead comes to recognize the value of the identity of such places. The abandoned village is a place of interest for its architecture, built in accordance with ancient tradition, for the dialectical relationship with nature that the construction has established over time, and for the rarefied context of the urban landscape that becomes an evocation of the past. The uninhabited villages reflect the essence of the bond that was dissolved between man and territory.

While the ghost villages have lost their “life function”, they are abandoned but not forgotten: their present is located in the past and they do not remember the future, thus they become places in the memory.

However, by attributing new meaning, these villages can acquire a new function, a new use *in* and *for* the territory. Recognizing in the abandoned village a resource identity foreshadows the possibility of tangible and intangible trigger actions for its recovery- actions which can nourish a local economic development in tourism with benefits for the entire territory in which they are located.

The proposal aims to investigate the phenomenon and the reality of ghost villages in order to understand the meaning and role to be given to each abandoned village, to define the areas of comparison between cases identified, and to identify possible models of revitalization.

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Finally, the work hopes to stand as a simple witness, because it is in the transmission of knowledge and the evocation of memory that abandoned villages can be brought back to life.

## **1 Introduction**

The land, in its current configuration, manifests itself as a definitive design, a fait accompli, composed of villages and open fields, cities and forests, roads and rivers, man-made and natural elements. Its true reality, however, is revealed only through an awareness that it is the end result of an extensive and diverse web of processes and occurrences, of natural events and historical dynamics, of an intricacy in continuous and progressive change. The complex history of a territory largely coincides with that of the whereabouts of man, or human settlements. Its population depends on a multifaceted interaction of causes of geographical and historical nature and, especially, a subtle and inseparable relationship between man and place. The formal and existential reason for the fabric of the settlement is inserted in an environmental and natural context; its shape is, therefore, a product in and of the earth. The synthesis of ongoing changes in the land can only be evinced as the city itself, a formal and concrete symbol of processes of urbanization perpetrated over time. The settlement, be it a city or village, represents the best opportunity to humanize the natural environment and in to insert the human heritage in a specific place; it delivers to the environment a cultural and externalized form of permanent, collective dynamics.

The city in its form, then, is inseparable from its content: its aesthetic value rests in his appearance, but it is the presence of the man which fills the form. There is an inseparability between the social and the aesthetic issue; physical space constitutes an experienced and historical reality, for this gives validity, value and affective quality to the construct and to architecture<sup>2</sup>. Cities are born from the social necessity to integrate across occupations and human experiences, which being multiple and complex, are organized on the basis of various processes and dynamics. These intertwine and compensate for one other, generating systems which are not absolute, but are imperfect and are therefore subject to change. The true wealth and power of a system, however, lies precisely in this inherent weakness and imperfection, since it is starting from such deficiencies that it is able to evolve. The city system is not rigid but is organically malleable and adaptable to continuously changing human needs<sup>3</sup>. If the city system is strong and well-structured, it confidently confronts various issues and develops in turn, but if the organization of an urban environment is weak and based on rigid dynamics of life, the moment it is subjected to new difficulties, it will fail to preserve its state of being: the equilibrium reached until that point will become

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<sup>2</sup> "It is evident and clear that a space acquires the majority, if not all of its meanings through the life that is carried out within it, that also shapes it" (Romano, 2001, p.15).

<sup>3</sup> This concept is explained by the thought of Lewis Mumford: "(...) many elements necessarily rejected by the individual systems are essential to developing the highest creative potential of life (...) from time to time, it is necessary to utilize different systems in order to do justice to the infinite needs and circumstances of life" (Mazzoleni, 2001, p.30).

unbalanced and will give way. This is the case for abandoned cities or villages, in which sudden and violent changes have led the inhabitants to move away permanently and to seek new places to live. The city without the human presence is rendered inevitably empty, stripped of its content, its existential reason; what remains is only a shell, a form without an idea, volume without substance; it is reduced to a pure and simple space, that is, ultimately, to only a sign / design in the territory.

The research proposal intends to present the reality of abandoned villages in their relationship to the land and in the context of the current times. If it is true that the uninhabited village has lost its *raison d'être* by being deprived of the human element, it may present itself with a new role. The uninhabited village transforms its role within the territory, just before, during, and after being abandoned, acquiring a new identity.

Might the reality of abandoned villages in Italy constitute a phenomenon in itself? What value is attributed to abandoned villages? Is it possible to imagine new scenarios or roles for abandoned villages?

## **2 The phenomenon of abandonment in Italy**

According to the most recent Italian census conducted in 2001<sup>4</sup> more than 72 percent of the 8,100 Italian municipalities have less than 5,000 inhabitants<sup>5</sup>. There are a total of 3,644 municipalities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. These municipalities, composed of small villages and hamlets, carry out a fundamental activity in presiding over the territory. Even if these municipalities are regarded as places of cultural value, they are found to have an uncertain future and can be included in that category defined as "difficult settlements"<sup>6</sup>. These small inland villages and hamlets, concentrated mostly in upland areas in what were once considered mostly strategic locations, are now completely overtaken by the new territorial assets along the coast and in the valleys. Today, they are characterized by a weak economy, low population density and devalued real estate, and are subject to the dynamics of economic impoverishment and a lack of services<sup>7</sup>.

In this historical and geographic context, we must analyze the modest reality of the abandoned villages from the beginning of the 1900's until modern times. The phenomenon of depopulation, or more generally of emigration, is a continuing reality. In proceeding forward, it can bring about a demographic increase or decrease of a localized territorial area, until the point in which the territory is completely

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<sup>4</sup> The census is conducted every ten years, and the most recent data was actually collected in 2011. However, these data have not yet been disclosed.

<sup>5</sup> With a 7% increase from the census of 1991

<sup>6</sup> *Italy and the difficult settlement*: a survey conducted by Legambiente in collaboration with Confcommercio in 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Data, statistics and percentages cited on this page were taken from surveys sponsored by the following associations: Piccola Grande Italy, Legambiente and *snapticcolicomuni* Confcommercio. They can be found at the following sites: [www.piccolagrandeitalia.it](http://www.piccolagrandeitalia.it), [www.piccolicentriuropei.com](http://www.piccolicentriuropei.com), [www.legambientepadova.it](http://www.legambientepadova.it), [www.confcommercio.it](http://www.confcommercio.it).

abandoned. It is worth highlighting, in fact, that the historical content of the recent past in Italy was profoundly marked by large migratory fluxes, both internal and external: both the internal migratory fluxes, limited to the regional or national territory and the external fluxes, bound towards foreign nations, impacted the density of inhabitants on the Italian territory.



Figure 1. Map of uninhabited villages in Italy

After a thorough investigation carried out with surveys, bibliographical research<sup>8</sup>, internet research, and the aid of information furnished by local experts in mail correspondence, 110 urban centers were identified which were evaluated as being in a state of abandonment. This means that these are urbanized places in which, at the current moment, neither the presence of current residents nor the conditions that constitute the customary form of living in a settlement in a permanent or continuous manner may be found<sup>9</sup>. The research was limited to places which were abandoned in the 20th and 21st century. The deepening of the issue has led, first and foremost, to the realization that the presence of abandoned villages in Italy can be considered a real phenomenon. Furthermore, it has led to an awareness of the issue's complexity and its characterization by both common elements and the peculiarities of individual cases .

Through the comparison of data collected, it was possible to obtain an overview of the phenomenon, which has been interpreted on the basis of the following items:

- geographic location, with reference to the region of origin (Figure 2);
- period of abandonment (Figure 3);
- reason for abandonment, categorized under natural causes (earthquake, landslide, flood) and unnatural causes (migration, construction of public works, war, declarations of unfitness) (Figure 3).

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<sup>8</sup> There are very few bibliographical sources available which are related to the topic.

<sup>9</sup> According to this definition, excluded from the survey were places which are occupied by even a single person and those in which even the subject of recovery work related to temporary events (such as festivals, cultural and commercial activities, etc.) are not found to be situations of a purely residential nature. Also, note that the 110 abandoned villages which are the subject of comparison and evaluation are the result of a selection from a larger series: the exclusion of some cases was decided, not based on the observation of the presence of permanent residents, but because of the difficulty in obtaining of verifiable information and research limits due to the vastness of the area under analysis. In light of this, it may be stated for justification that we note the presence of a greater number of uninhabited villages compared to that which is reported; the work presented, in fact, is part of a research path which is being updated and is evolving over time.

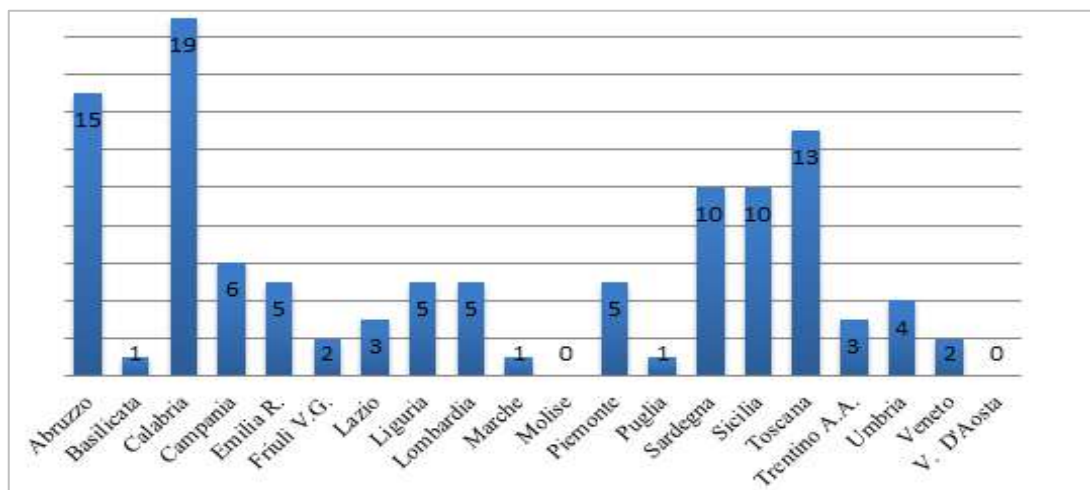


Figure 2. The graphic reports the number of abandoned villages in each region of Italy

From the data that emerges it is evident that, on the National territory, there are areas and regions which are most affected by the phenomenon of depopulation:

- *the Calabrian Aspromonte area;*
- mountain areas have been subject to intense emigration, which led to the abandonment of entire towns, among them, even geographically distinct and distant ones, including areas of *the Tuscan-Emilian Appenines* as well as *the upland areas of Liguria and Abruzzo;*
- the villages in the *Belice Valley;*
- *the agricultural villages of Sicily;*
- *the mining villages of Sardinia.*

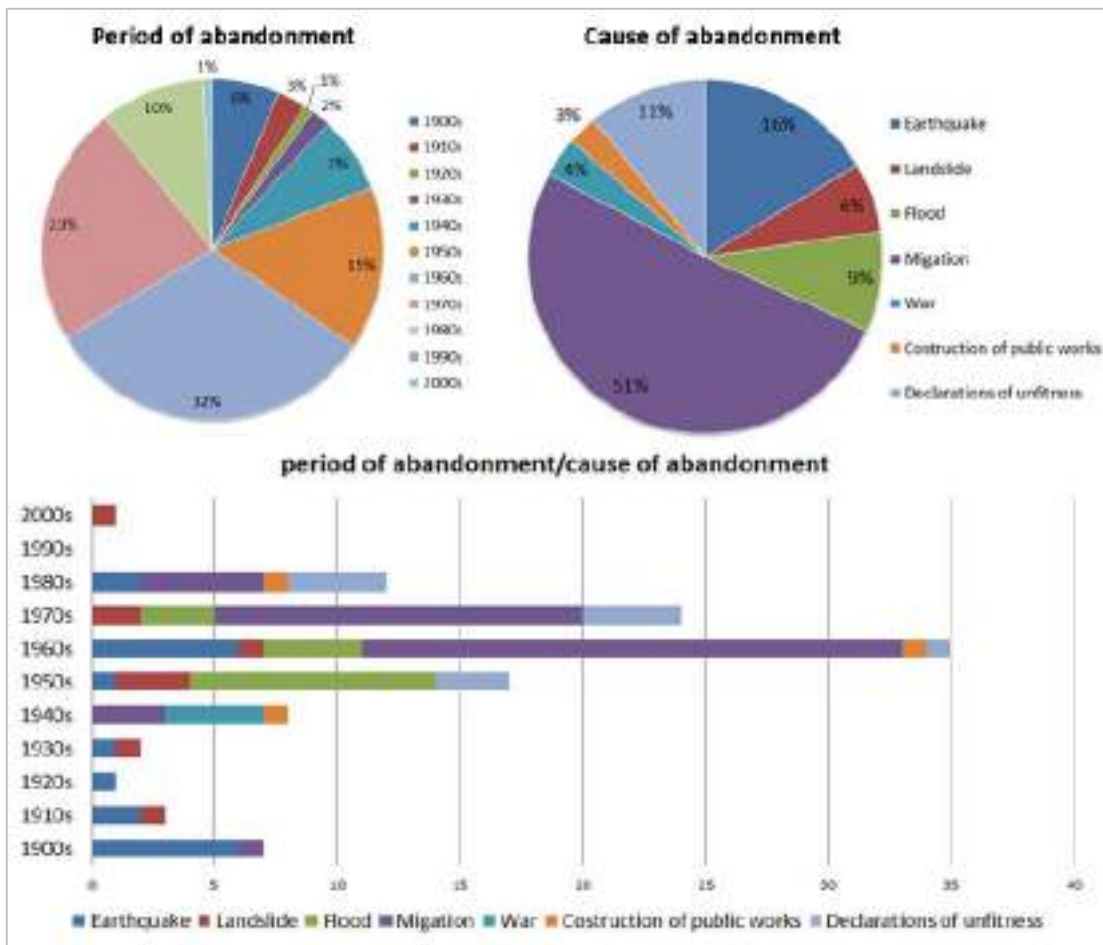


Figure 3. The diagrams show the rapport between period and cause of abandonment

The comparison of the period and the cause of abandonment reveals that the phenomenon peaked in the 1960s and the cause that has most conditioned abandonment in the majority of cases is related to the dynamics of migration. The supported hypothesis is that even in cases where abandonment is related to natural disaster events, significant importance must be attributed to social, economic and cultural factors that influenced the choice.

To understand the dynamics of this choice and the value attributed to the uninhabited village, we will examine two regions which were significantly affected by the phenomenon: the Aspromonte and the Belice Valley.

## 2.1 The abandoned villages in Aspromonte

Aspromonte is a mountainous area, located in the southern Calabria region. It is bordered on the east by the Ionian Sea, on the west by the Tyrrhenian Sea and the north by the river Petrace. At various points in history, the land of Aspromonte was considered an impenetrable one. However, it was also considered a land rich in

history and popular culture, being part of the Ionic area of Hellenic origin, a recognized area *grecanica*<sup>10</sup>. In Aspromonte, eight uninhabited towns were identified, whose abandonment is concentrated in the early and mid- 20th century. As reported in the table below (Table 1), the causes that led to the abandonment are directly related to natural disasters or catastrophic geological instability. In most cases, the evacuation of the town was followed by a phase of regional planning which, for governmental decisions and with the support of local authorities, led to the reconstruction of the village in a completely different location: the mountain village was rebuilt in the valley, or even along the coast, a great distance from the old village (in the case of Africo, the distance between the new and old village is 33 kilometers). It is clear that these choices were conceived by the inhabitants as an opportunity to radically change the status of living with the prospect of changing from one system linked to agriculture and away from the areas developed a system based on practices of more modern urban life. The link between population and the old town is still alive and is evinced during the feasts of the patron saint: during the religious procession, the statue of the patron saint is placed back in the church of the old village, which has become a pilgrimage destination.

As we report the case of Roghudi as an illustrating example, in which some of the social dynamics related to abandonment emerge more clearly, it should, indeed, be remembered that this action was planned by its citizens as an extreme and unavoidable choice, and that it was taken with conflicting feelings and conflicting inclinations.

<b>Town</b>	<b>Year ab.</b>	<b>Cause ab.</b>	<b>New Town</b>	<b>old/new town</b>
Africo Vecchio	1951	flood	Africo Nuovo	33,5 Km
Amendolea Vecchia	1953	flood	Amendolea	0,5 Km
Bianco Vecchio	1908	earthquake	Bianco	3 Km
Brancaleone Superiore	1950	declaratio unsafe	Brancaleone	5 Km
Casalinuovo d'Africo	1951	flood	Africo Nuovo	22 Km
Precacore	1908	earthquake	Ø	Ø
Roghudi Vecchio	1973	flood	Roghudi	38,5 Km
Zoparto	1908	earthquake	Ø	Ø

Table 1. Uninhabited villages in Aspromonte

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<sup>10</sup> A clear sign of this cultural tradition is the so-called "*grecanico*" or "*griko*" language, which is still being passed down as an oral tradition from one generation to another.



### 2.1.1 Roghudi

The name Roghudi is derived from either the word *rochùdi*, meaning cliff, or *rechodes/rexodes*, meaning spiny and rough<sup>11</sup>. Both toponomastic sources emphasize the inhospitality of the place. The village, in fact, is located on a steep spur of rock overlooking the *Fiumara Amendolea*<sup>12</sup>. Roghudi is an uninhabited village, and currently has crumbling houses, rough roads and tracks from the period before depopulation. The depopulation of the country, which occurred in the early 1970s, was caused by a disastrous flood, the latest in a long series of natural catastrophes. The community, by then exhausted, did not react to this additional hardship and somehow accepted an inevitable fate.

The territorial implications have greatly influenced the vicissitudes of the population which found itself confined in a narrow space; this condition led to an inevitable isolation, limited adequate urban sprawl and, consequently, a limited potential population growth. The layout of the area determined an organization of the urban fabric that developed organically, adapting to the mountain ridge<sup>13</sup>. In the eyes of its neighbors, the village appeared to be dogged by bad luck, so it earned the nickname "the unhappiest village in Italy, perhaps the world" (Teti, 2004, pg. 65). The life of the small community of roghudesi (according to the Census of 1911, they numbered 1488) depended on farming and livestock farm. It was in the 1940s that a process of migration began- to the coast of Calabria, or to distant lands- a process which was spurred by a feeling of aversion to a place where nature is revealed to be a step-mother.

The story of Roghudi ends in the early 1970s, when the waters of one of the innumerable floods dragged away with it the gardens, crops, the houses and more importantly, the community's sense of hope and attachment to the place. Roghudi was evacuated due to the flooding and landslides of October 1971 and December 1972- January 1973. Soon after, it was declared unfit for habitation by engineers, but by that time, the village was already empty. The issue of abandonment of Roghudi and villages like it which have met a similar fate is rooted in the history of these places: the flood was just the triggering cause, not the true or sole motivation. From various evidence shows that the decision to evacuate the village was not made without hesitation, and in an instant. Most of the inhabitants had no intention of leaving their homes, but a small minority, most unrelated to the territory, was inclined to leave. In this group, there was also the only dealer who provided the village with a weekly supply of goods and products of basic necessity. The removal

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<sup>11</sup> Rochùdi is a word from the Graecanica language while rechodes is a Latin word.

<sup>12</sup> The *fiumara* is a watercourse characteristic of southern regions like Calabria and Sicily. It is characterized as having a very large bed made of pebbles and by the fact that while over the winter, it is full and its waters run swiftly, in other periods of the year it is partially or totally dry. Fiumara Amendolea has a very wide river bed, with a width in some areas up to 5 kilometers.

<sup>13</sup> The difficulty of links and movement is documented by the nails fixed on the outer walls of many homes: some witnesses report in fact, that the children were tied at the waist with a rope, anchored to the nails so to avoid having them fall and roll down.

of this figure, so essential to the survival of the community, caused a domino effect: the other residents were convinced that the abandonment could not be the only choice to make. Within days, the village was depopulated. The catastrophic event in itself must therefore be included in a wider, local, long-term historical context: the "escape" was probably an hypothesis that lived the public imagination for some time and the flood was the pretext that gave a moral justification for taking such an action.

After the depopulation, a new village that was given the name Roghudi Nuovo was constructed near Melito Porto Salvo, nearly forty kilometers from the old village. Its construction was completed in 1988, but only a few roghudesi moved there; most emigrated to other cities. Even though it was much more comfortable, the new village lacked a true identity of its own. Perhaps the re-established village is the real ghost town, as it fails to transmit the residents the strong sense of attachment to place that was inherent in the old village<sup>14</sup>.

## **2.2 The abandoned villages in the Belice Valley**

The Belice Valley, located in the upland of western Sicily, is comprised of the district's portion of the river Belice, 76.5 km long. The area of the Belice Valley, inhabited since prehistoric times, is rich in archaeological sites, a testimony to the settlements of the Phoenicians and Greeks. The main economic resource of the plain has always been the agri-food sector and in particular the cultivation of olives. During the night, between 14 and 15 January 1968, an earthquake caused a real emergency in the valley, deeply upsetting the lives of thousands of people. It generated a radical change in the development and organization of many local communities and, as an inevitable consequence, the earthquake was followed by abandonment.

In the 20th century, the economic development of the valley was not comparable to that of the industrialized areas of Italy in the same period. The lack of growth can be attributed to various factors, such as long periods of cyclic drought, frequent floods of the river Belice, the scarcity of fertile soil, an inefficient road network, and lack of dams and infrastructure. Belice, therefore, was an area that was quite backward by comparison. The situation of distress and crisis was not so much due to issues related to the cultivation of the soil, but one of delays resulting from disorganization and the lack of industrial activity. The lack of job opportunities in the '50s and '60s led to an intense migration which drove the residents to move to other Italian regions. Shortly before the earthquake, however, due to the agrarian reform of the '50s, the territory of Belice was undergoing a phase of renewal and promising development. Plans included an intensive cultivation of the fields in which rows of vineyards were planted, along with other productive activities linked to the establishment of new roads. As the State's presence was fading, the fields were increasingly vulnerable to

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<sup>14</sup> "(...) it is basically a dormitory, a village with no identity, with nothing. On second thought, lately has actually improved a little: there is a little bit of greenery, some flower beds, but they made houses without balconies, all alike, without a reference point. There is no village square (...)" (Teti, 2004, pg.73).

illegal activities. The community, however, maintained close cultural and religious ties with the territory.

The earthquake of 1968 certainly laid bare in a dramatic way the state of underdevelopment in this part of Sicily: the dilapidated dwellings built on tufa, a population mostly made up by the so-called vulnerable groups (the elderly, women and children) etc.. The morning after the earthquake, there were two types of reactions among the residents: those who found their homes destroyed did not hesitate to leave the village, while those whose homes were only damaged wanted to stay on so that they could guard their property. Tent cities were set up to house some residents, while others were temporarily moved to private homes and in public buildings. To make matters worse, on January 20, Belice Valley was hit by torrential rains which resulted in a veritable exodus: twenty thousand people migrated to the continent, motivated by government incentives.

During the initial emergency, residents gathered in tents, but in the weeks that followed, they were housed in villages-slums, consisting of forty-six prefabricated structures<sup>15</sup>. After the first phase of emergency relief, a multifaceted process of reconstruction began which targeted not only the destroyed and damaged villages, but the entire territory and its economy. Now that more than forty years have passed, the flaws of this restoration attempt now seem obvious, from deficiencies in terms of the design, to problematic timelines for implementation, to the imbalance between the work that was actually completed and the funding allocated. 270 billion lire were allocated for the reconstruction and 57 billion for initial urgent necessities. In 1979, after eleven years had passed and about 900 billion lira had been spent on the project, 8,600 families were still living in shacks. In 2007, it was estimated that the total expenditure for the earthquake amounts to about 7 billion euro. The political management of this event has inevitably attracted many criticisms. However, there is no doubt that the reconstruction of Belice, with the building of homes, entire villages, urban infrastructure on a large and small scale, access to roads, has profoundly changed the characteristics and shape of the entire territory. The earthquake was interpreted by many as a positive opportunity for the development of a land that until then had remained anchored in the past. After the earthquake came proposals to industrialize the area in order to close the persistent gap of cultural, social and economic order which had persisted between those places and others who had instead taken the road of modernization. As a result, the community that had historically inhabited the territory of Belice for generations was traumatically catapulted into a new urban context, deprived of its fundamentally rural identity and assigned a new, artificial, modern one. The population thus moved from the old center to the slums and shantytowns in the new city, which was built in a different

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<sup>15</sup> Over the years, these centers, usually located between the damaged village and the new village under the construction, turned into real villages themselves, with lighting, underground cables, water and telephone.

location with urban connotations which differed significantly from those in the original center.

Over the course of the interventions which followed the earthquake in Belice Valley, urban centers were partially and sometimes entirely reconstructed: the villages of Gibellina Salaparuta and Poggioreale were completely abandoned and rebuilt from scratch. The process of abandonment and complete reconstruction of whole settlements reveals dynamic similarities in terms of implementation, in terms of the final result and in terms of the comparisons between the new and old settlements. In the case of reconstruction of the Belice Valley, given the extent and the severity of the case, all of the evidence presents a hyperbolic demonstration of this process.

The new settlements were located in flat areas, according to a criterion based on vicinity to the main network of regional connections or industrial centers, facilitating the construction work. In addition to location, the radical differences between the new and old models of the settlement resulted in a veritable collapse of the local historical narrative. The new urban contexts have redrawn suburban blueprints which were organized according to planners zoning criteria, i.e., the distinction of specific functional areas; clear separation between the constructed element and the countryside, the urban fabric characterized by a marked privilege of open spaces rather than closed ones, so the road becomes the primary element that draws the block, use of serially repeated housing units, formal and perceptual breakdown of the city into two opposing sides: the standard reproduction of the housing unit and the uniqueness of the structure and volume of public buildings. The old villages, in contrast, were characterized as having an organic urban fabric made of clusters situated on the disconnected terrain, low houses built with traditional methods and open spaces conducive to a convivial rapport among neighbors. Two totally different models, particularly indicative is the difference of the index of population density: an of average 3,000 inhabitants per hectare decreased to 350 in the new establishment.

<b>Town</b>	<b>Year ab.</b>	<b>Cause ab.</b>	<b>New Town</b>	<b>old/new town</b>
Gibellina Vecchia	1968	earthquake	Gibellina	18,5 Km
Poggioreale Vecchio	1968	earthquake	Poggioreale	0,5 Km
Salaparuta Vecchia	1968	earthquake	Salaparuta	5 Km

Table 2. Uninhabited villages in Belice Valley

### **3 The sense of abandoned places<sup>16</sup>**

At the heart of the phenomenon of the abandonment of a village, even if the decision originated from multiple motives and contingencies, one can note a situation of difficulty and profound discomfort in daily living. In the processes of depopulation,

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<sup>16</sup> The title of the paragraph intentionally recalls the name of Teti Vito's book "Il senso dei luoghi" (The sense of places).

is it significant to analyze, along with the specific natural disaster, what happened immediately before, and if a latent process of abandonment was already in place or not. It is also interesting to consider the period immediately after the event, i.e., the reaction the population of the village following the severe damage that was suffered.

With this, we can say that the exodus is largely endemic and it is not exclusively related to catastrophic events, but it is determined by the territory's weak economic, political, and cultural infrastructure. Sometimes the traumatic occurrence becomes a sort of moral justification for making the choice to leave their native land. Most often, a destructive occurrence does not determine the abandonment and relocation of a settlement, but dramatically accelerates a process which has already begun, even when this process has not yet been clearly manifested. Furthermore, with the construction of a new village come materialized plans for change, development and modernization whose elements would otherwise be difficult to construct. Prospettive su cui al momento della scelta sono state riposte molte aspettative e che ad oggi, però, non si sono rivelate tali e hanno evidenziato varie criticità soprattutto in considerazione della perdita d'identità. Outlooks were based on the many positive expectations that were placed at the moment of the choice. To date, however, they have not materialized and various problems have been highlighted, especially the loss of identity. The natural conflict between old and new village is intrinsic to their evolutionary dynamics: if the first is the result of a slow and constant human presence in the territory, the second is due to the frenzy generated by the immediate emergency situation. The image of a place is related to the time factor and the spatial and social processes of evolution. In these contexts, the most crucial aspect is not so much the inevitable dislocation of identity which occurred as a result of the disaster and abandonment, as much as the creation of a new identity, which must be tied to the paths of the memory in order to give the new village a sense of belonging. But this is not an easy journey as seen in the case of Gibellina: The new urban center, based on the model of the garden city, has been enriched by architecture and works of art created by people with great fame and international recognition in order to give the village a new identity<sup>17</sup>. However, even if many people consider this to be an attempt of significant interest, it not inspire within the citizens any real bond to the place<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1970s Gibellina became a center of architectural experimentation. We can thus see a series of works: Ludovico Quaroni's Chiesa Madre; the Palazzo Di Lorenzo by Francesco Venezia; Pietro Consagra's Il Mettine, a materialization of the concept of the città frontale; the Municipio by Alberto Samonà, Giuseppe Samonà and Vittorio Gregotti; the Casa del Farmacista and the Casa Pirrello by Franco Purini; the Sistema delle Piazze by Franco Purini and Laura Thermes. Additionally, Gibellina is currently the city with the world's highest ratio between number of works of art and number of inhabitants. In the center of town are: the Città di Thebes, Tris, and the Stella (which acts as a portal of entry to the city) by Pietro Consagra; La freccia indica l'ombra di una freccia by Emilio Isgrò; Senza Titolo by Mirko; Omaggio a Tommaso Campanella by Mimmo Rotella; Contrappunto e Sequenze by Fausto Melotti; the Torre civica by Alessandro Mendini; and the Montagna di sale by Mimmo Paladino. In addition, there is Burri's renowned *Cretto*, a work that covers much of the old town.

<sup>18</sup> For a deeper analysis of the case of Gibellina, see CRISTALLINI E., FABBRI M., GRECO A., *Gibellina. Per una società estetica*, Gangemi, Roma 2004; NICOLIN P., a cura di, *Dopo il terremoto. Belice 1980*:

The urban construct, no longer a place for residing and living, is deprived of its original meaning by the act of abandonment. However, it is through this occurrence that it earns in the same instant, through what Marc Augé defines as a *form of oblivion*, a new sense. The reality of an abandoned town is configured in a domain of knowledge pertaining to remembrance and the memory. The uninhabited village becomes both the material memory and the concrete impression of one's own past, a past that will deteriorate with the passage of time. In fact, if every place has its unique identity, and if the identity of a living space is represented by consciousness, common values, and behaviors resulting in a feeling of belonging to the given context, what identity can an abandoned village have, if it is not one inherent in the memory of those who lived there? This process corresponds to the creation of what in anthropology is defined as a *re-invention of tradition and identity*. The village, once abandoned, loses its fundamental *raison d'être*, namely, a place which documents human activities. Emptied of its primary meaning, it becomes a shell with no content and is deprived of the value function for which it was conceived. However, according to testimony and documents gathered, we can say with certainty that at the time a settlement loses its former meaning, it acquires a new one: the uninhabited village changes - just before, during and after abandonment – the image and the value that had been attributed to it until then, by undertaking a process of renewal and a shift in meaning. The deserted villages can be reinterpreted through new lenses, in which they earn:

*a sense of identity tied to the memory of the place:* every village is the result of a formal stratification of human processes, and the resulting urban transformation of historical events that have followed it over time. As an experienced space, emotional and affective meanings are projected on it. The result is a process that roots a community to its own place. This relationship persists even in abandoned villages, even if there is no longer a direct physical relationship between man and place. Indeed, membership of mind to the abandoned site becomes even more intense and stronger, as it takes on symbolic and nostalgic feelings that project toward the figurative interpretation, subject to myth-creation and emphases, of a past that now cannot return. The uninhabited village, firm and immutable over time, becomes the transposition of a material remembrance of its own history<sup>19</sup>;

*significance attached to a model of the life of the past:* ghost towns tell of a time not far away, still present in the collective memory. These places have not undergone

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*Laboratorio di progettazione*, Electa, Milano 1983; TRAINA M., *Valle del Belice: introduzione alla storia di dieci anni di terremoto*, Fiamma serafica, Palermo 1978.

<sup>19</sup> This is evident in re-established villages, in which the community perceives the new urban center as anonymous and not representative, but it feels linked to the old village, rich in history, tradition and memory.

any urban change or urban development since their abandonment, and so they remain motionless and unchanged over time. The settlements were not involved in the process of modernization, industrialization, massive urbanization, to which most Italian cities in the Twentieth century have been subject. These are places that reflect, in the residents' collective imagination, the life of the past, tied to a respect for nature and a less hectic pace of life. Symbolically, this model can be placed in contrast to the model of the modern city;

*the charm of the ruins*: the buildings and the road network of the abandoned village - left in neglect, to the passage of time and to oblivion- presents itself in an evident state of ruin and decay. The unusual atmosphere that is created in these places holds a kind of sacredness connected to time that stands still, to the typical evocative reminder of the ruins, to incompleteness, and to the transience of human activity.

Ultimately, uninhabited villages have lost their purpose for living. They are abandoned, but are not forgotten. Their present is found in the past and it does not remember the future. Therefore, they become places in the memory.

### **3.1 Scenarios of revitalization**

Aside from being a place of emotional and cultural interest, the abandoned village is also a practical resource in the area. The deserted towns have a traditional urban fabric which is typical of medieval centers- typical of the historical and "multilayered" city. In these urban complexes, organic building development is easily recognizable as is space is free of congestion induced by the urban expansion of the 1960s. The buildings themselves may be considered of historical and architectural interest, in that they remain unchanged from the original condition, according to local construction traditions. Another peculiar element that characterizes many of the deserted villages is their location in natural surroundings within a largely unspoiled landscape. The presence of a natural component becomes an added value for considering these places a territorial resource.

It is interesting to consider that most of the features which were once among the factors that led to the abandonment of these locations (e.g., isolation and remoteness from industrial centers, etc.) can now be assessed as qualifying elements for their recovery. This fact shows that, within a few years, there has been a change of mentality, a cultural evolution that has led to greater attention to environmental issues and the rediscovery of cultural traditions. It is precisely on this evolutionary process one that must base a cultural, and later, material plan for the revitalization of *ghost towns*. The revaluation may be undertaken through two pathways:

*cultural development*: establishing an objective interest in the individual abandoned village and organizing cultural initiatives at the site of the village, so as to involve - through a network of contacts and relationships - the possible actors in the local context who may be interested in this process . These may include local authorities,

associations and groups those members are directly or indirectly related to the abandoned village. Based on the available human resources in the area, a series of activities might be planned and carried out in uninhabited village. The village could be used as a backdrop and venue for theater, conferences, workshops, festivals, exhibitions, tours and tourist routes. All of this may be done to encourage more people to relate to and to rediscover the individual center that was abandoned, then triggering a series of social and cultural processes suitable for dissemination and awareness;

*administrative value*: defining, in administrative terms, the concept of "abandoned town" in the legislative municipal, provincial and regional level, particularly in those areas where the presence of uninhabited locations is greater, and then giving that entity a specific legal identity; by collecting the guidelines of interventions that enable protection and recovery plans of territorial and landscape planning; stimulating the attention of the Superintendent of Historic, Artistic and Landscape Heritage, so that the specific abandoned village can be subjected to its constraints, in order to grant it the status of a "*resource of public interest*."

It is only by recognizing an abandoned village's intrinsic value that revaluation projects may be planned or implemented. The possible recovery scenarios are briefly presented here, based on a survey of proposed or finished projects and of models consistent with the context of analysis. The types identified are divided into two categories:

- Recovery for tourism
- New anthropization

The recovery for tourism forsee the recovery of the abandoned site to enhance it as a tourist attraction by one the following means:

- Route tourism: the village is inserted in a network of trails for hiking, biking, trekking, etc;
- Park-museum: the newly accessible village is enhanced and preserved as a outdoor museum.
- Vacation homes and apartments, farmhouses, country-hotels: the village, restructured mainly by private initiatives, is used solely for accommodation / tourism;
- Popular hotels: the village, restructured through public / private sector initiatives has reclaimed following a hospitality project which foresees a widespread partnership among tourist/reception activities, craft activities, commercial activities and residential activities, where the tourist component is of paramount importance.

The first two of these practices enhance the urban characteristics of the urban artifact and its decaying appearance, making no significant changes or renovations to buildings that comprise the village. The image of the ruin and the atmosphere of decay are interpreted and highlighted as part of the tourist attraction, to be included



in broader convergence of regional tourism<sup>20</sup>.

The process of converting the abandoned village in a system of cottages, farmhouses, country-hotels and popular hotels provides, instead, a program of restructuring and reconsolidation of the entire residential complex, with the renovation of buildings, access roads and the surrounding landscape. The appearance of the place is then totally changed; and it loses both its aesthetic of decay and its previous designated use as housing. From a place for living and then, a place in ruins, the village then becomes a holiday resort. The recovery for tourism is a well-planned process, providing for the establishment of an architectural and commercial project, often involving both the public and private structures.

Finally, the revival of the abandoned village through means of new human activity is to be considered more rare, also because it involves its complex dynamics and difficult planning. In this case, the revitalization of the abandoned town involves a process of new human settlement by individuals or small groups of people, carried out independently, through self-management or through sharing with one another. The village does not undergo a conversion function, but it is re-used for its original intention, namely, as a place for living.

#### **4 Conclusions**

The uninhabited village, given its general condition of decay and neglect, may be regarded either as a reject of modern society, which - framed in a predominantly utilitarian and functionalist logic geared at instant profit - does not recognize it in any practical utility and forgets about it, or, as a territorial asset, reinterpreted in a qualifying perspective that does not stop to consider only the current state of decay, but takes awareness of the existential quality and identity value of that place. By assigning a new meaning, it can acquire a new function- a new use within the territory and for the territory.

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<sup>20</sup> It must be stressed, in reference to the scheme of the research, that even when the village is inserted in touristic routes or itineraries and thus valued for its new role and its presence in the territory, it does not lose its connotation as an *abandoned town*.

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