CITY STREET⁵

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INCISIONS OVERLAPS AND RHYTHMS

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Università IUAV di Venezia, Italy

Reconnecting rural heritage in Cerro al Volturno: strategies for inner areas

Giovangiuseppe Vannelli
Department of Architecture (DiARC) - University of Naples "Federico II"
giovangiuseppe.vannelli@unina.it

Angela D'Agostino
Department of Architecture (DiARC) - University of Naples "Federico II"
angdagos@unina.it

Melina Di Tuoro
Department of Architecture (DiARC) - University of Naples "Federico II"
me.dituoro@studenti.unina.it

Abstract

This paper is rooted in a research focusing on the territories of the Italian Inner Areas which, according to the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), consists of fragile landscapes laying distant from the main centres offering essential welfare services. It's 60% of the Italian territory where a quarter of the national population is living. Among the four inner areas in Molise Region, the one with the highest ratio of SNAI-areas to the whole regional area, "Mainarde" inner area partially intersects the National Park perimeter and it hosts a dense network of paths meaningful to the slow tourism. Cerro al Volturno is one of the 13 municipalities within the Mainarde area. The small village dominates the surrounding landscape with the Pandone Castle. The wide municipal area includes 12 hamlets where, on the one hand, the typical features of the rural settlements seems to be almost totally preserved and, on the other hand, a severe depopulation process is going on. Among other vernacular architectures, the pagliare punctuate the surrounding landscape. "The straw route" is a strategic design proposal aimed at defining an itinerary reconnecting the pagliare spread throughout the landscape in Cerro al Volturno by reinventing the centre-countryside relationship, defining new gathering spaces and promoting new forms of rural urbanity.

Keywords

Inner areas, abandoned heritage, pagliare, trails, rural

Inner routes in Molise: a marginal region of Italy

This paper is the outcome of a "research by design" carried out by this research group at the Department of Architecture at the University of Naples "Federico II" focused on the fragile territories of Italian Inner Areas. The authors have variously developed the aforementioned issue in different contexts analysing, in particular, the inner areas of Campania, Basilicata and Molise regions. This paper focuses on the Molise region where it is detectable a wide heritage made of ancient roads that innervates the entire region in the face of a modern infrastructural system that only tangentially concerns the region. This makes Molise one of the Italian regions in which it is paid particular attention to the theme of paths and the enhancement of the landscape.

The Inner Areas account for 60% of the Italian territory and a quarter of the national population is living there. In Italy, in 2012, the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) was promoted by the Agency for Territorial Cohesion as part of the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreement with the European Union. The SNAI represents an innovative national policy for the development and the territorial cohesion which aims to contrast marginalization and depopulation: typical phenomena of Italian inner areas.

The expression Inner Area refers to those fragile landscapes that lie distant from the "main centers" offering essential welfare services (education, health and mobility) although they are rich in important environmental and cultural resources and highly diversified as a result of natural processes of anthropization.

SNAI has selected seventy-two project areas equivalent to 16.7% of the national territory, on which to intervene by investing in promotion and protection of the territory and local communities' wealth, enhancing their natural and cultural resources, creating new employment circuits and opportunities. Among the seventy-two SNAI areas, extending along the entire Italian peninsula intersecting the territories of all twenty Italian regions, four project areas are located within the Molise region (Matese, Fortore, Alto-Medio Sannio, Mainarde) which is the Italian region with the highest ratio of SNAI-areas to the whole regional area (52%) (ISTAT, 2011) (Fig.01).

The marginality of the Molise region stands out even more clearly
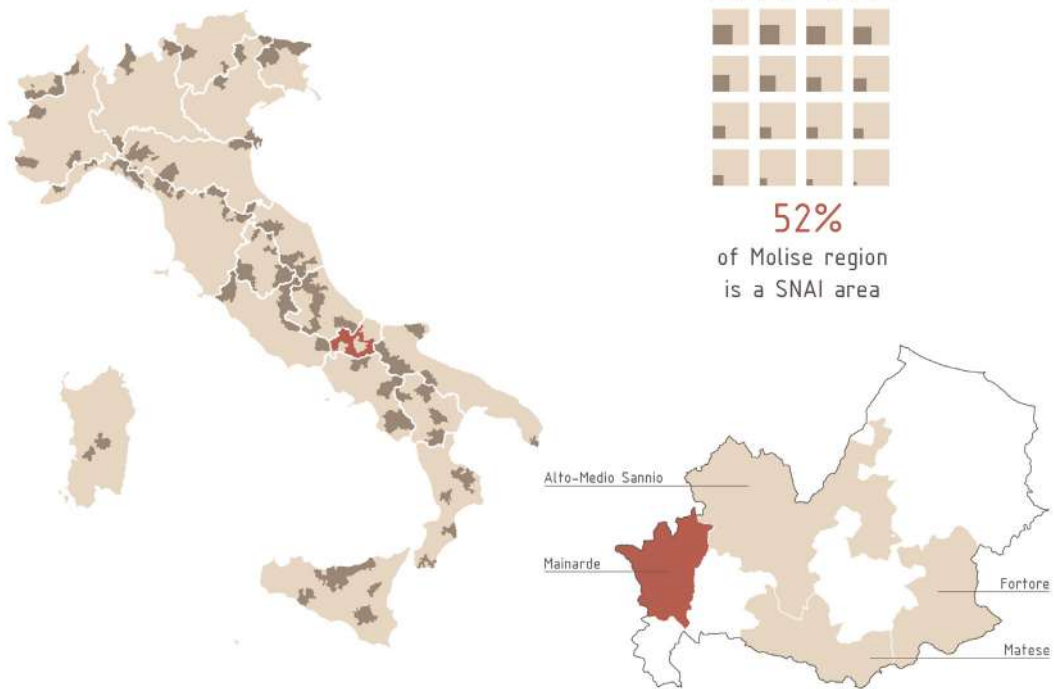
Fig.1 – The seventy-two SNAI areas in Italy and the four inner areas in Molise region – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

from the analysis of the infrastructural systems that serve the territory: Molise and Basilicata are the only Italian regions that do not have their own airport; the only motorway runs along the Adriatic coast while the railway network connects the four "poles" identified by the SNAI: Termoli, Campobasso, Isernia and Venafro. The remaining part of the region can only be reached through state roads or secondary roads (Fig.02).

It is emblematic of how the main infrastructural system has developed following the hinterland–coast directionality: connecting the poles to the coastal system. However, historically, connections were guaranteed by another type of route that crossed the region from East to West following the main direction of the Italian boot. These historical paths, crossing the territory transversely and connecting numerous inner localities through a dense network of paths, are called *tratturi* – the main ones – and *tratturelli* – the secondary ones. This network was crossed by shepherds and their herds during the periods of transhumance.

Even if most of these customs have been lost, in 2019 UNESCO included the ancient rite of transhumance in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the same direction, people are increasingly interested in slow tourism being motivated by a desire for rediscovering their roots and exploring the landscape in depth.

A similar initiative has been promoted by the national company of the State Railways. It has launched a campaign for the recovery and the enhancement of historical railway routes; the Italian Transiberiana is a historical train that crosses the Abruzzo region and arrives in Molise giving passengers the chance to take a journey through time, aboard vintage trains, along paths surrounded by nature and beautiful villages. This route known as the Parks Railway, connecting the city of Sulmona to the city of Isernia, crosses the wooden area of Upper Molise featured by mountains, valleys, trails and hamlets that are guardians of history, art and ancient traditions.

Mainarde Inner Area: links and features of an uncharted landscape

Among the four Molisian inner areas, the Mainarde Area is the one with the highest percentage of forest surface (65%). It is partly
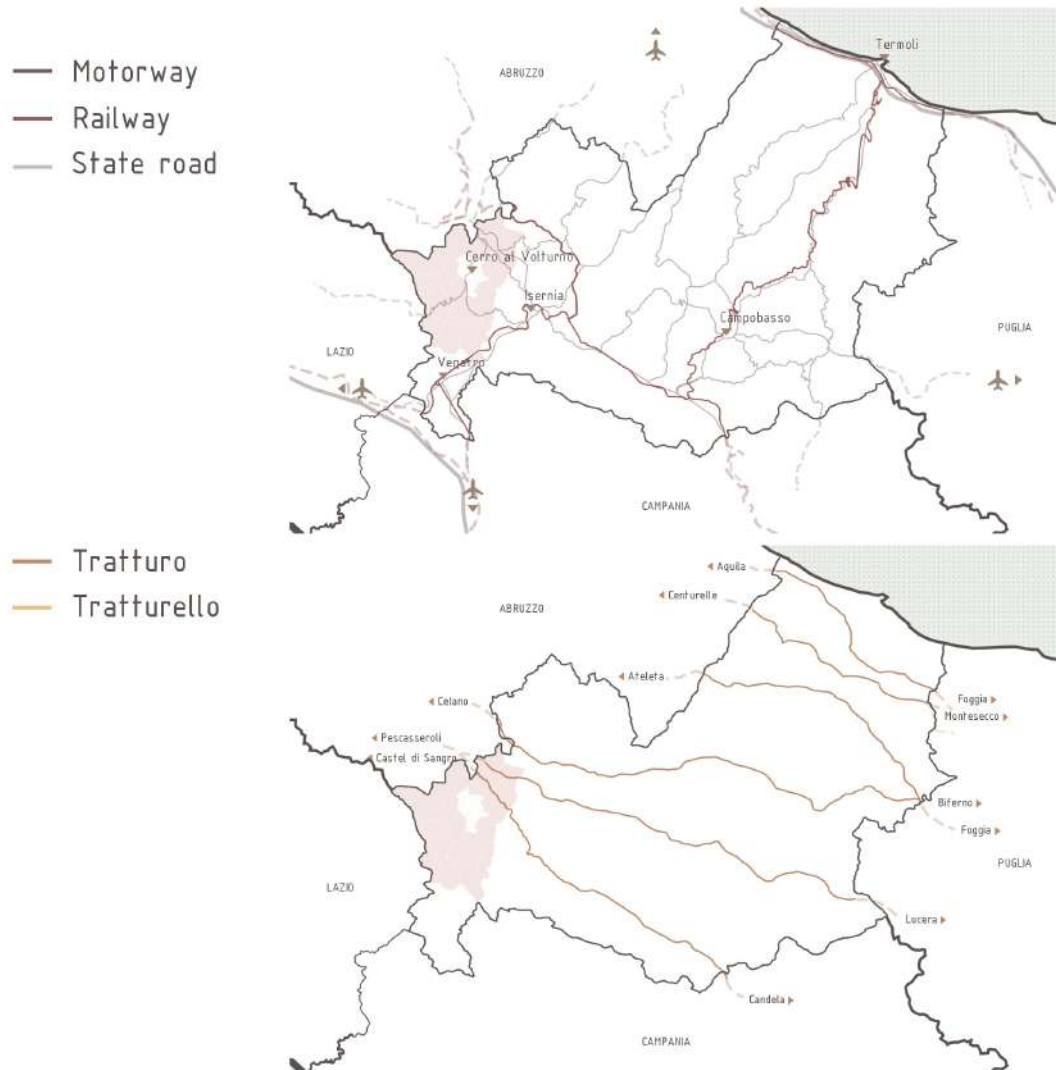
Fig.2 – Molisian systems: the network of infrastructures and tratturi – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

occupied by the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (PNALM) and it hosts a dense network of paths enlivened by hikers who feed the slow tourism. The PNALM is a protected area of over fifty thousand hectares whose borders extend into the territory of the three adjacent regions. The Park Authority that manages it has the main task of raising awareness among local populations in order that the development of their living conditions is based on conservation, enhancement and rational management of natural and cultural resources held within the protected area. For this reason, the Park Authority protects and promotes traditional and quality activities linked to the material culture of the area. At the same time, the Molise region promotes slow tourism, for instance, through the creation of a system of itineraries that can be traveled by foot or by bike, known as "Paths of Molise". It is a network of low or medium difficulty trails lying in the Molisian inner areas and intercepting natural oases, historic villages and architectural works of great interest.

The Mainarde Area is made up of thirteen municipalities among which Castel San Vincenzo stands out as the "leading village" of the SNAI Area. Thanks to the presence of the Lake of Castel San Vincenzo, the abbey and the archaeological site, the aforementioned municipality is a pole of attraction which can represent a driving force for the relaunch of the entire Inner Area (Fig.03).

The Mainarde Area is characterized by the presence of many mountain chains including the Mainarde one, from which the Inner Area takes its name. Its municipalities, small hamlets often built on heights, preserve a historical, artistic and naturalistic heritage of considerable value: castles, watchtowers, museums, archaeological sites, hermitages, waterfalls, oases and parks constitute the nodes of a network of main places of interest that generates connections and marks travel and permanence times.

Although the previously described network is made of valuable cornerstones, it does not seem to be widespread enough to connect the entire territory of the Mainarde Area.

This other space – the one far from the "centers of attraction" – is mirroring the fragmentation of the area, a feature that characterizes the urbanization process of the Molisian territory.

From the study of historical maps it emerges that the Molise region

Castle, fortress
Museum, archeological site
Hermitage, cathedral
Waterfall, lake
Park, oasis

High   Low
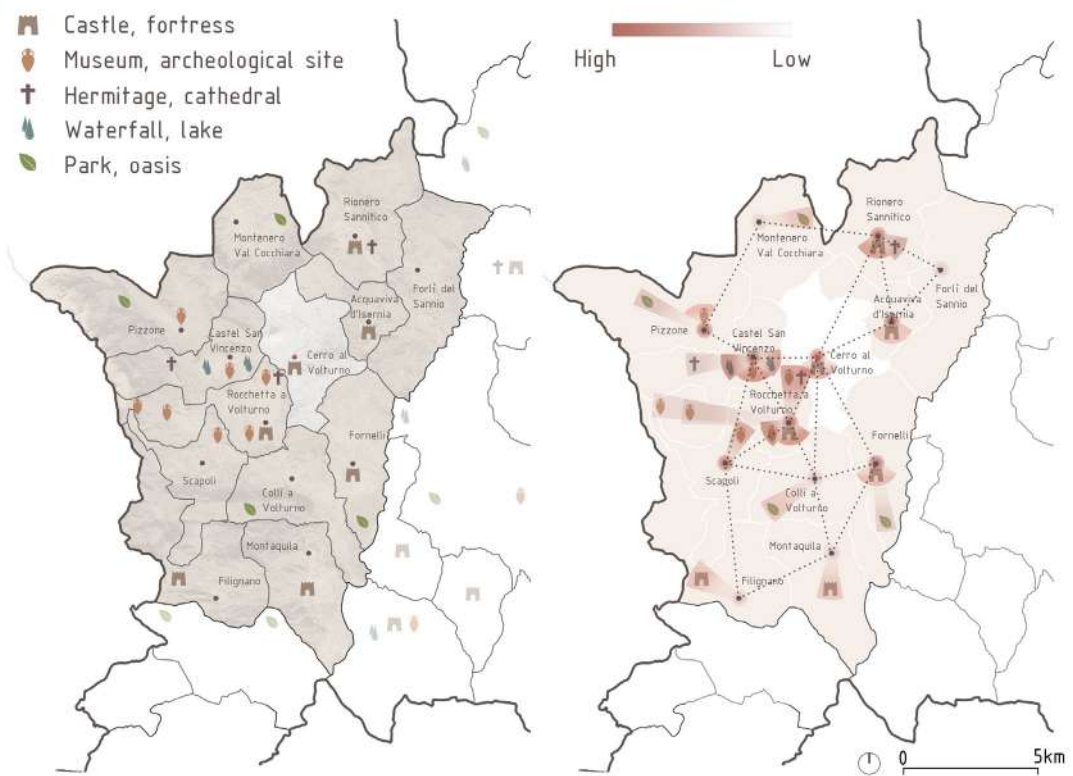
Fig.3 – Main places, connections and permanence times in the Mainarde Inner Area – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

has always appeared as a territory dotted with small and disconnected centers whose unique link between them was the road (Fig.04). The road is an ever changing infrastructural device depending on the geographical variable. It weaves a narrative structure holding together plot and subplots of a single story made up of major and minor heritages constituting the uncharted landscape.

"Looking at this other space which has been invisible for a long time can represent an opportunity to reverse the gaze, a possibility to rearticulate and redesign the existing [...] an opportunity to re-centralize the margin."[1]

Cerro al Volturno: the fragmentation as a value for preserving the widespread rural heritage of pagliare

Cerro al Volturno is a small village within the Mainarde Area and it is recognisable for the Pandone Castle, its landmark overlooking the valley. The surrounding landscape is characterized by the presence of oaks (*Quercus Cerris*) and the Volturno river: naturalistic elements from which the municipality takes its name.

In relation to the Mainarde Area, Cerro al Volturno is located in a strategic position: it is a crossroads of streets of varying capacity that connect it with the neighboring municipalities. Major mobility flows are guaranteed by the SS652 state road. Although it is one of the most important roads linking the Adriatic coast and the Tyrrhenian coast, the SS652 road – going through Cerro al Volturno – splits in two parts the municipality.

The wide territory of Cerro al Volturno includes twelve hamlets. Unlike the historical center which has seen its urban fabric and its infrastructural connections evolve over the years, the hamlets have preserved the typical features of rural settlements and are experiencing a severe depopulation caused by factors of urban attraction and rural expulsion. This preservation, enabled by the rooted territorial fragmentation caused by the furrow of the Volturno river, has assured

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1   Antonio De Rossi, "Introduzione. L'inversione dello sguardo. Per una nuova rappresentazione del paese Italia," in *Riabitare l'Italia: Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste*, ed. Antonio De Rossi (Roma: Donzelli, 2018), 4-5.
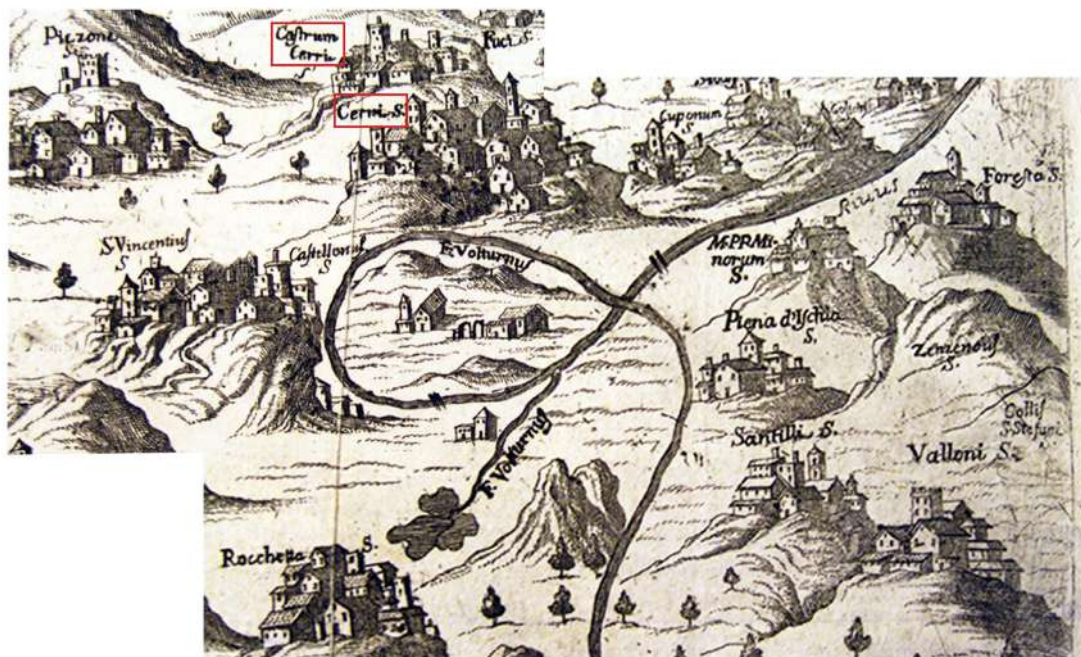
Fig.4 –Ad Historiam Abbatiae Cas-sinensis Accessiones – Author: M. Guglielmelli, 1734

the continuity of a rural heritage witnessing the history of the communities inhabiting those places. As depicted in the historical maps of Cerro al Volturno, the "consolidated historic center" – the main social and cultural hub – is well distinguished from the twelve hamlets defined as "rural villages" (Fig.05).

In these contexts, it is possible to identify different types of vernacular architectures created with multiple structural solutions and often located close to paths used by shepherds who sought shelter to rest with their flocks. Specifically, the rural villages of Cerro al Volturno are characterized by the presence of *pagliare*: a typical rural architecture that is strongly rooted in the morphology of the ground and then that contributes to structure the surrounding landscape. Most of the *pagliare* are built on two levels having differentiated entrances to the top floor and to the lower floor, the latter reserved for livestock. The ground level was generally used as a temporary shelter for animals and as a place for processing products and foodstuffs. Instead, the second level was intended to accommodate the farmer and his family and not seldom it was also used as a forage storage acting as thermal insulation for the animals at the level below. The internal connection was made by a ladder placed against the wooden slab (Fig.06).

The choice of the building site for these rural architectures is particularly interesting: they were usually located on the slope of the agricultural land having the best exposure to the sun and the best protection from prevailing winds. The ground where *pagliare* are usually standing has a difference in height of about three metres. These rural architectures are featured by a dry stone construction – employed for the retaining walls and for those shaping the edge on the road front – and by a wooden structure bearing a pitched roof covered with straw bundles.

In recent years, the original covering has been replaced almost always by metal sheets because of heavy snowfall damaging them.

The stone walls of the basement, extending beyond the perimeter of the *pagliara*, often delimit an enclosed outdoor area for livestock (*mandra*). In some cases, these structures continue even defining entire sections of the road and then creating a continuity between the architecture and the infrastructure. "Roads have not always been roads; originally they were ways for a slow appropriation of a territory; ancient

Fig.5 – The twelve hamlets – rural nu-
clei – in the territory of Cerro al Vol-
turno – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

inhabitants have patiently traced the networks of possession generating places in which to remain and from which to develop new plots."[2]

Itineraries and projects for the hamlets of Cerro al Volturno: Cerreta and Valloni-Rossi as case study

The case study of Cerro al Volturno emblematically exemplifies how the streets can be interpreted as traces capable of telling about themselves and giving back the memory of the city.

Central-southern Italy is marked by traces that have survived many territorial transformations: these traces related to past movements are as deep as ancient. The *tratturi* (from the Latin *trahĕre* meaning to drag, to pull) are ancient paths, they are highways of the past generated by the rhythm of the step of both men and animals who used to undertake veritable migrations. Their design was determined by a sequence of seasonal movements along precise and repeated routes alternating with moments of pause in which they stopped close to water sources and shelters.

The pace of the road marks the time for reading the territory and feeling in profound connection with the landscape. The slowness of the movements enables both the study of the geography and the internalization of reference points. These are fundamental actions in the development of both the innate sense of direction and the awareness of one to be in relation with time, space, and itself.

Over the years, the demand for faster and more efficient mobility infrastructures has led to the search for new routes and roads. The car has become the means of transport par excellence with the consequent creation of new highways affecting the surrounding landscape. While it is true that highways reduce distances by greatly optimizing travel times, it is also true that this type of mobility infrastructure cuts out a large portion of territory and population. In addition, the growing impoverishment of the landscape knowledge of the younger generations is fuelled by their predilection to increasingly fleeting crossings, lacking in direct contacts with the territory.

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2   Enrico Alfonso Corti, "La città e le sue tracce. Memoria, identità, progetto," in *La traccia e la memoria*, ed. Luigi Stendardo (Napoli: Istituto italiano per gli studi filosofici, 2009), 58.
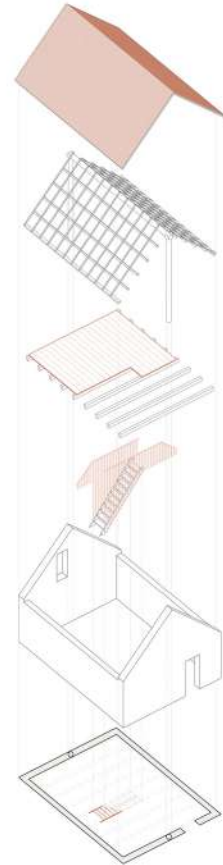
Fig.6 – The pagliara: a typical rural architecture of Cerro al Volturno – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

Demonstrating the centrality and urgency of the above, one of the main proposals within the strategy of the Mainarde Inner Area aims at improving the livability of the area and increasing its attractiveness by working towards the creation of a cycle route: known as the "Mainarde Bike". The strategy promotes inner connections between the municipalities of the area through the use of pedal assisted bicycles. Furthermore, an active inclusion policy is promoted in order to give back a more alive, united, supportive and participatory area, for instance, by introducing services capable of connecting the territory internally and towards larger centers. The "Mainarde Bike" links all the thirteen municipalities within the Inner Area through four different rings entirely consisting of reactivated existing path networks (Fig.07).

The infrastructural system that gave shape to the landscape, the tangible and intangible heritage – particularly the widespread and rural one – and the current political strategies referable to the SNAI are the three elements taken into consideration through a multiscalar approach necessary in order to recognize the potential of the Mainarde Inner Area. This is the basis of the methodological process structured to propose – for the case study of Cerro al Volturno – a project here intended as a research tool and for the enhancement of inner areas.

The methodology was structured in a never really linear sequence of phases: first of all, investigations about the main territorial features were carried out before mapping and cataloging widespread elements. Then, a verification phase was carried out focusing on the relationship between widespread rural architectures and historical routes: this led to the definition of the design strategy.

In the first phase, the starting point was the direct observation of the municipalities within the Mainarde Inner Area: during a series of exploring surveys of the area, it was possible to collect photographs, videos and interviews with local people as well as materials and data provided by the Municipal Administration. This learning process has revealed the potential and critical issues in the area. Furthermore, field studies have highlighted the fragmented nature of the territory, not just socially but also geographically and infrastructurally speaking. The territory has been analyzed in its anthropic and natural characteristics in order to understand its quality and consistency, although an updated study of urban transformations has been complicated because

of the lack of cartographic sources.

Molise, in fact, turns out to be a region very little digitized and at the same time almost unknown to Italians themselves, to the point of being popularly recognized as "the region that does not exist". This condition made the iconographic study even more useful. Within this research, iconographies represented a meaningful tool to learn about the landscape of Molise and the peasant civilization. In particular, within the work of the xylographer Romeo Musa, the *pagliare* are detectable standing as a permanent presence subordinated to the multiple contexts depicted.

In consideration of what emerged from direct observation and listening to local actors and due to the cartographic lack, it was needed to define a new map of the widespread elements of the territory. On the digital transposition of old cadastral sheets has been overlaid a network of punctual elements such as water springs, wash houses and *pagliare* previously mapped during the surveys. The research related to these punctual elements of the territory was followed by the study of the linear elements of connection between the municipalities of the Mainarde Inner Area.

Studying the length of the trails that connect Cerro al Volturno to the municipalities of Castel San Vincenzo, Rionero Sannitico and Fornelli according to the type of journey (vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian), it arises clearly that by preferring the paths system the distances are shortened in terms of mileage as compared to the driveways. The analysis of these data has led to the definition of three strategic axes that connect Cerro al Volturno to the three adjacent municipalities through a trails network (Fig.07). This not only reduces the distances but also, by crossing the different hamlets, it makes possible to enhance these paths that connect nature, community and punctual elements sprawled in these territories generally excluded from the main mass itineraries.

By understanding geographical features and properties of these three axes and, at the same time, by overlapping the network of punctual elements on the shape of the landscape – made up of both natural and infrastructural systems – two design sites of interest have been pointed out in Cerreta and Valloni- Rossi.

These two hamlets, located on opposite sides of the centre village – Cerreta to the north and Valloni-Rossi to the south – are distinguished

From: **Cerro al Volturno**

To: Acquaviva d'Isernia
       🚗   🚲   🚶
       7,5 km   7,5 km   7,5 km

To: **Castel San Vincenzo**
       🚗   🚲   🚶
       7,4 km   6,1 km   5,2 km

To: Colli a Volturno
       🚗   🚲   🚶
       8,4 km   8,4 km   8,6 km

To: **Fornelli**
       🚗   🚲   🚶
       9,9 km   9,4 km   8,7 km

To: **Rionero Sannitico**
       🚗   🚲   🚶
       11,5 km   10,5 km   10,6 km

To: Rocchetta a Volturno
       🚗   🚲   🚶
       5,8 km   5,8 km   5,7 km

- - - - carriageable
- - - - bicycle
- - - - pedestrian

1st ring – 21,54 km
2nd ring – 52,59 km
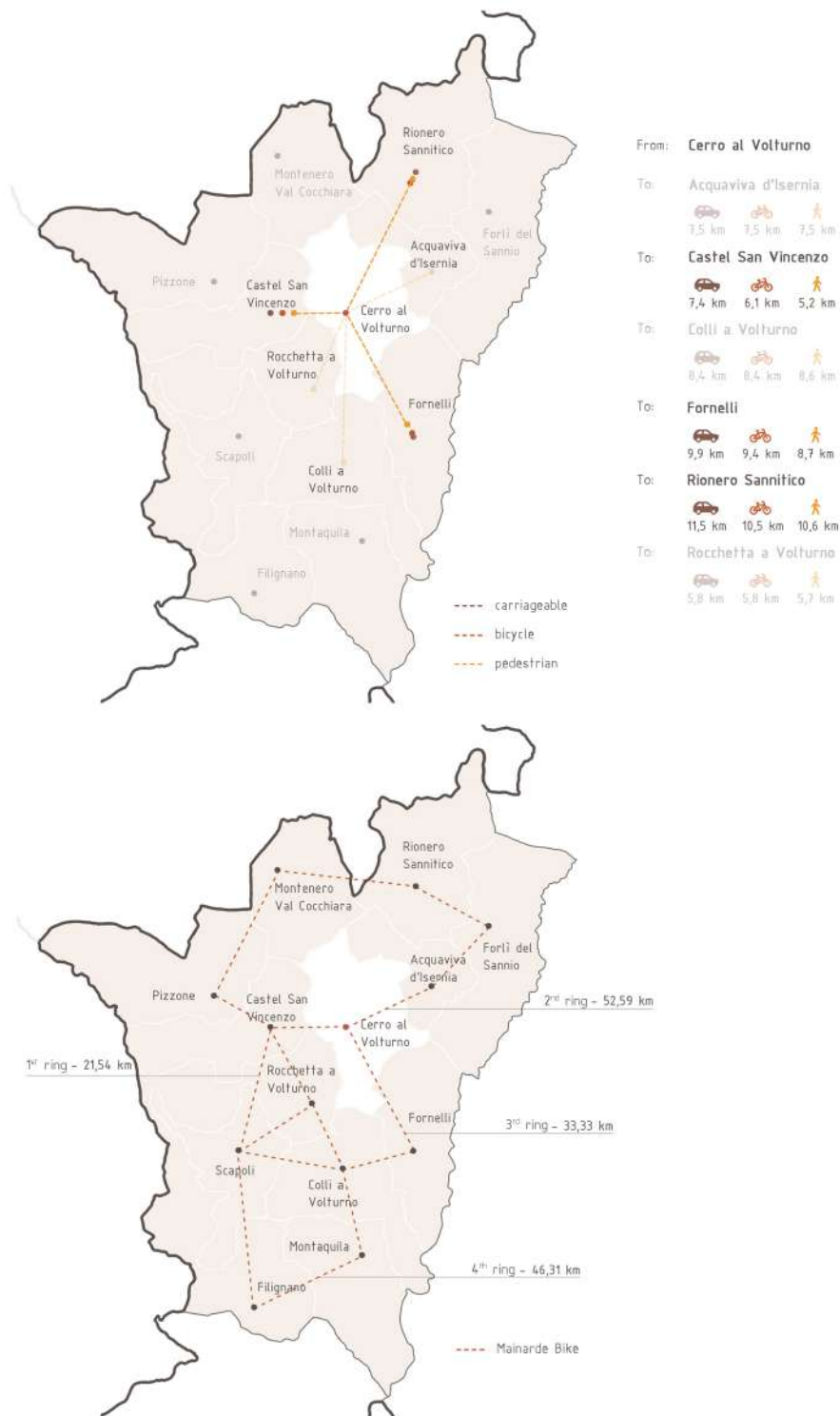3rd ring – 33,33 km
4th ring – 46,31 km

- - - - Mainarde Bike

Fig.7 – Strategies and research for inner connections: Mainarde Bike and project axes – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

Rionero Sannitico

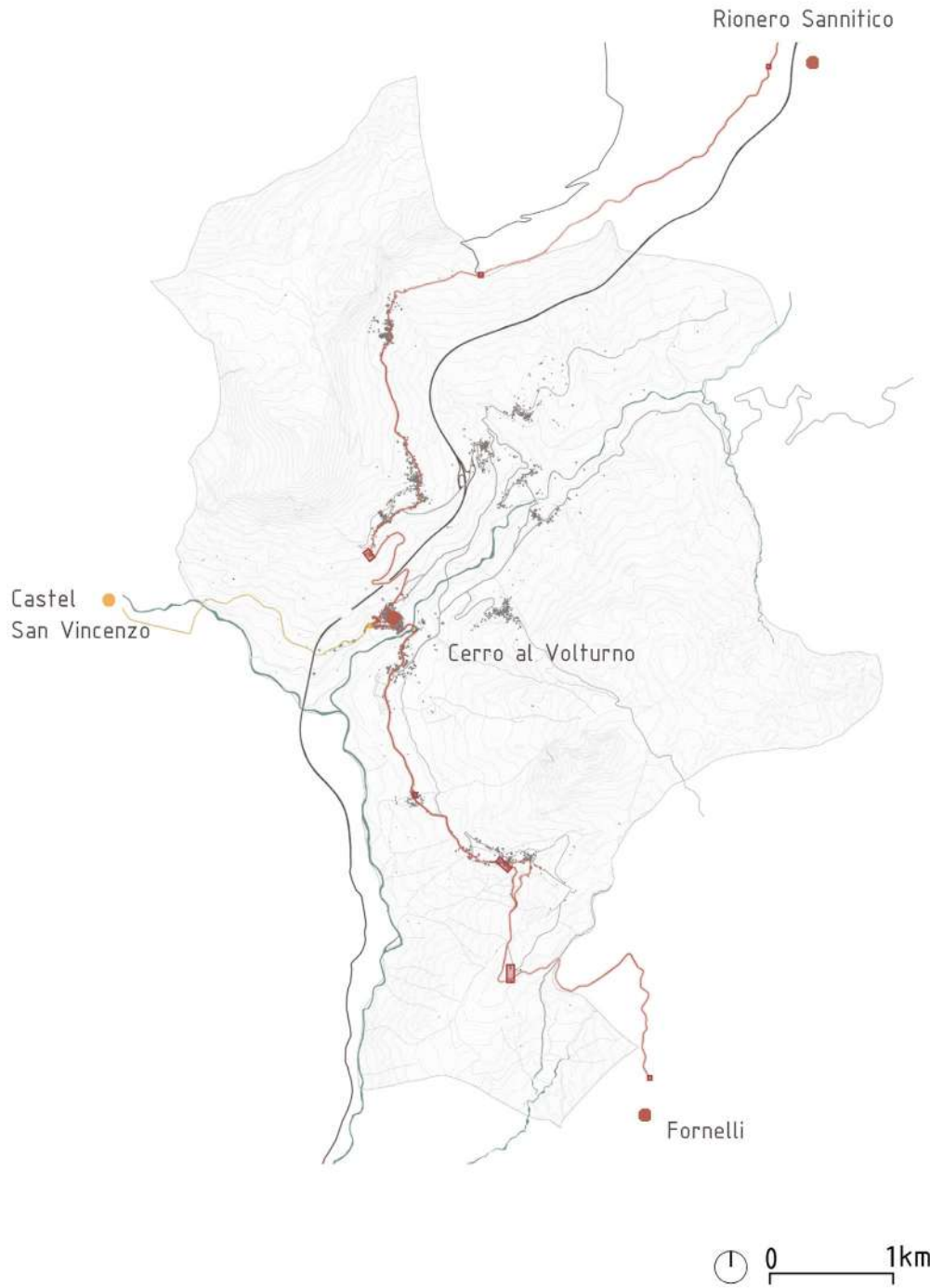Castel
San Vincenzo

Cerro al Volturno

Fornelli

0   1km

Fig.8 – The straw route: an itinerary to
reconnect the pagliare spread through-
out the landscape – Source: Melina Di
Tuoro 2021

by their vocations but both consist in the extreme points of the proposed strategic path. As a result, this proposal traverses lengthways the entire municipal area, connecting even those hamlets that were most affected by the isolation caused by the construction of the SS652 state road (Fig.08).

Cerreta is a hamlet that intercepts the paths leading to the "Pantano della Zittola" protected area and is located in a predominantly wooded area featured by the presence in the immediate proximity of a natural water source. The rural settlement of *pagliare* in Cerreta is quite close to the village and overlooks the valley below, opening up to the magnificent view of the Pandone castle. Furthermore, the proximity to the exit of the SS652 state road makes the hamlet of Cerreta a potential crossroads for tourist flows. Thus, the area has been redesigned starting with the restoration of existing rural architectures reconfigured as tourist accommodations and put back into the system through the creation of an architecture provided with services and dining areas (Fig.09). By evoking the characteristic architecture–infrastructure relationship observed in the pre-existing *pagliare*, the design proposal in Cerreta is located below the level of the road, extending the street's morphology and expanding its vocation: from a place of transit it also becomes a place of rest.

Moving forward, between Cerreta and Valloni-Rossi, the route intercepts other hamlets interspersed with *pagliare* and stone wash houses located at the edge of the road. The natural landscape undergoes a change: the presence of oaks gives way to olive plantations and the road, often being the limit of agricultural land, integrates itself with the terracing systems made with dry stone masonry. As a matter of fact, the production of olive oil is central to the economy of Cerro al Volturno; the southern side of the municipal area, deeply linked to agricultural productivity, is home to the agricultural company "Oro Minerva" which, in addition to promoting the raw material, protecting the environment and enhancing the territory, is also involved in social agriculture policies.

Valloni-Rossi belongs to this system. Within the hamlet an unfinished public space can be found: an elliptical-shaped square rises on the position of a valley that is tangent to the road. Starting from the palimpsest described, the project connects different heights structur-

Fig.9 – A new tourist area: services and dining area among the pagliare in Cerreta – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

ing the public space on two main levels through the proposal of a new market area which includes shops useful for the production and processing of local products (Fig.10). The road becomes a device for reconfiguring the landscape as proposed a little further south where, starting from the road project, a public space is structured on several levels which, following the hill, reconnect the widespread inherited rural heritage.

Therefore, "the straw route" is a strategic design proposal aimed at defining an itinerary reconnecting the *pagliare* spread throughout the landscape in Cerro al Volturno by reinventing the centre-countryside relationship, by defining new gathering spaces and by promoting new forms of rural urbanity. The road changes its intrinsic value: it's not only a device that connects places but a place in itself.[3] By crossing spaces and memories, "the straw route" leads to the discovery of "rural areas rich in traditions and agri-food, artisanal and tourist resources, deposits of history and civic virtues stratified over time and not yet completely extinguished."[4]

The straw route: a replicable strategy for the development of rural areas

This proposal, which emerged from the previously explained research by design process, holds and puts into practice what is indicated in the Rural Development Program (PSR 2014-2020) of the Molise region. The themes taken into account range from the generational change in molisian agriculture to the creation of new businesses in the molisian rural areas; from the enhancement of the usability of rural territories to the restoration of small-scale architectural elements and the recovery of *tratturi*.

The boost of rural areas through the promotion of tourism development and the strengthening of other territorial resources such as agriculture or the material culture of places is also at the heart of the

3   Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes. Camminare come pratica estetica* (Bologna: Enaudi, 2006).
4   Rossano Pazzagli, "Un Paese scivolato a valle. Il patrimonio territoriale delle aree interne italiane tra deriva e rinascita," in *Aree interne. Per una rinascita dei territori rurali e montani*, ed. Rossano Pazzagli, Marco Marchetti, Stefano Panunzi (Catanzaro: Rubettino, 2017), 21.
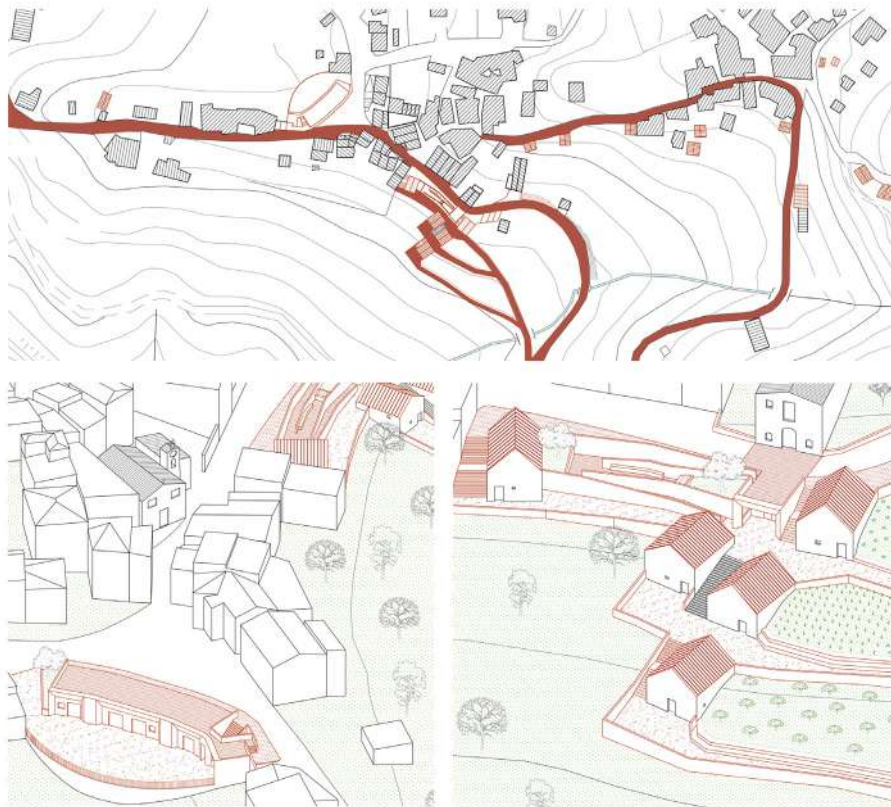
Fig.10 – A new market area: production and processing spaces between the terracing systems in Valloni-Rossi – Source: Melina Di Tuoro 2021

National Strategic Tourism Plan PST 2017-2022 and of other international strategies such as the ONU 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which within the Goal 08, Target 8.9 states "by 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products."[5]

The project proposal "the straw route" contrasts the marginalization of inner areas and the consequent loss of the social dignity of the countryside[6] with a potentially replicable strategy of valorisation of heritages and landscapes that starts from the roots.

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5   "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development," United Nations, accessed April 18, 2022, www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

6   Pazzagli, "Un Paese scivolato a valle. Il patrimonio territoriale delle aree interne italiane tra deriva e rinascita," 18.
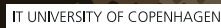
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