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Cultural Landscape and cultural routes: infrastructure role and indigenous knowledge for a sustainable development of inland areas

Daniele Campolo^{a,*}, Giuseppe Bombino^b, Tiziana Meduri^a

^a P.A.U. Department, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Salita Melissari snc, 89124 Reggio Calabria, ITALY

^b Dipartimento di Agraria, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Salita Melissari snc, 89124 Reggio Calabria, ITALY

Abstract

Cultural Routes and Cultural Landscapes have now been assumed as key elements in the panorama of cultural tourism, because they can combine, in one place, various aspects desired by tourists: contact with nature, identity and intangible heritage, knowledge and local production, etc. This paper analyses a territory in the province of Reggio Calabria that fulfills the cultural route and cultural landscape criteria: it has inside a big abandoned infrastructure, which could become a driving force for sustainable development of inland areas.

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1. Introduction

There is no future in a place without enhancement of the past. In recent decades this was the main theme of all restoration works, cultural heritage nowadays has an economic and strategic importance to be used for local development.

The development of an area should start from local resources and Calabria has an architectural, environment and cultural heritage of inestimable value: it consists of typical old towns perched high in the mountains, camouflaged

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39-320-1923413.

E-mail address: daniele.campolo@unirc.it

by the landscape, in close contact with the rivers.

These territories, now in a degraded state and very often abandoned, should be understood not only as a place to “use” but as an opportunity for discovering, understanding and researching about cultural identity. On the one hand they can enable us to recover the memory of the past, and on the other hand to build new visible perspectives, “drawn” from the territory.

Heritage should be conceived as a resource from which to promote economic and social development of an area. This allows to start a process of recovery and upgrading work-oriented “re-use” of the existing goods, respecting the semantic value of the sites (Calabrò F., Della Spina L., 2014 a).

2. Definition of Cultural Landscape and Cultural Routes

Specifically in relation to huge, tangible and intangible, heritage, in recent years many development projects, especially in the inland areas, started with recognition of the Cultural Landscape and from the identification of Cultural Routes.

Cultural landscapes, as defined by the World Heritage Committee, are produced by long-term interactions between humans and nature in indigenous societies (UNESCO, 2015). In addition, Cultural Landscapes result from consecutive reorganizations of the land by indigenous peoples in order to better adapt the land's uses and spatial structures to meet the changing of society demands. They have been recognized as multifunctional landscapes that provide a multitude of services that benefit people: provisioning goods and products, regulating and supporting local resources, improving cultural services, etc. As a result, cultural landscapes have been highlighted for their importance in rebuilding a society that is in better harmony with nature.

Therefore, cultural landscapes were added to the UNESCO world heritage site system in 1992, with the following definition: Cultural landscapes are cultural properties and represent the “combined works of nature and man. They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.” (UNESCO, 2015)

Over the years, together with deepening the concept of cultural landscape, when the Pilgrim's Route to Santiago de Compostela was added in 1987 to the “Cultural Routes of Europe and in Cartagena in 1993 to the World Heritage list, UNESCO announced its intention of bringing together experts to discuss the question of “cultural routes” in more depth.

Cultural Routes “represent interactive, dynamic, and evolving processes of human intercultural links that reflect the rich diversity of the contributions of different peoples to cultural heritage” (CIIC, 2008). The cultural routes demonstrate, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of different countries and cultures contribute to a shared and living cultural heritage.

The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee of Cultural Routes (CIIC) by the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS in Quebec (Canada), October 4, 2008, has ratified the ICOMOS Charter of Cultural Routes. “This concept introduces a model for a new ethics of conservation that considers these values as a common heritage that goes beyond national borders, and which requires joint efforts” (Calabrò F. et al., 2015).

“The innovation introduced by the concept of “Cultural Routes” reveals the heritage content of a specific phenomenon of human mobility and exchange that developed via communication routes that facilitated their flow and which were used or deliberately served a concrete and peculiar purpose” (CIIC, 2008).

Recently, the disappearance of cultural landscapes or negative changes in these landscapes worldwide, has become a concern among scientific and social researchers: these problems have arisen from driving forces such as land abandonment, tourism development, agricultural intensification, afforestation and urbanization. They have focused on safeguarding and managing agricultural landscapes created by local peoples, and mention the importance of indigenous (ecological) knowledge in maintaining specific outstanding landscapes.

In fact, the indigenous or local people who have produced and maintained their cultural heritage, related to these landscapes and all their knowledge systems results from centuries of local adaptation of the environment or from agricultural practices to meet their needs and to manage resources in particular about their management of water, forest, and soil resources. In other words, indigenous (ecological) knowledge represents the survival of proven adaptive management systems that can be used for the protection of endangered (agri-)cultural landscapes (Calabrò F., Della Spina L., 2014 b).

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