

# "Rural villages" as engines of sustainable growth of the territory

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## Abstract

This paper presents results on a project that involves the realization of a touristic-cultural route that virtually and physically connects the rural villages realized in the 1940s by the Italian totalitarian regime, following the policy of colonization of the latifundium in southern Italy. This project aims at introducing innovative social and environmental solutions, presenting some specific cultural goods (material and immaterial) as drivers for the sustainable growth of underdeveloped rural areas.

These rural villages constitute not only the evidence of an architectonic and technological age, but also what remains of the 20<sup>th</sup> century peasant civilization. The aim of the project is to go far beyond conservation, restoration, physical rehabilitation or re-use of such villages, and to demonstrate how cultural heritage is a powerful economic, social and environmental catalyst for regeneration, economic growth and economic improvement of people and places.

This project is a model of sustainable development that can be replicated, with appropriate contextualization, in other similar territorial environments in other parts of Italy as well as in European countries such as Portugal and Spain that have adopted between the 1930s and the 1960s the same agricultural policies.

Keywords: Rural villages, cultural heritage, rural tourism, sustainable development