Chapter 8
Rehabilitation and Reuse of Rural Farms in a Region of Inner Sicily

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ABSTRACT

The rural landscape of inner Sicily has peculiar characteristics, deeply different from the ones of coastal Sicily, marked by the presence of citrus orchards, vineyards, and greenhouses. Inner Sicily was traditionally dominated by cereal latifundia. With low level cities (the main ones are all concentrated along the coasts), in the past a central role in the agrarian economy of this inland region was played by rural farms, called "masserie". In the second half of the 20th century, the national agrarian reform opened the doors to profound changes. The inland areas were suddenly abandoned, while many coastal centres reported a significant population growth. The rural farms of inner Sicily were abandoned and bound to decay. In the last years, some of these "masserie" have been restored. They are of course an important resource that has to be exploited to generate richness. The chapter presents the experience of the territory of Aidone, rich in farms and resources.

THE INTERNAL AREAS BETWEEN DEPOPULATION AND REORGANIZATION

The intense process of industrialization that affected Italy after World War II was implemented in a "widespread" and "polarized" manner. Widespread, because it covered a large part of the territory, including the urban systems of small and medium-sized, polarized, because it concentrated only in some territorial systems, determining an economic growth with different intensities.

In the late eighties of the twentieth century, with the industrial system now mature, in fact, the Italian territory presented a polycentric organization, composed on the one hand of an urban territorial system with large, medium and small centres and, on the other, a territorial system formed by small towns, villages, mountain settlements and inland areas, characterized by a strong demographic contraction and economic recession.

The convergence / divergence, connected to the industrial take-off, has, in fact, determined a different degree of development between the North and the South of the Country and further differences also within each region or macro-region. The public debate has therefore focused the greatest attention on macro-regional convergence / divergence, relegating to the local or regional area the problem of imbalances within the same area (MUVAL, 2014, p. 14).

Imbalances, which in internal areas have led to a process of deantropization and unused territorial capital; this condition was experienced until the "local development" model presented the problem of the internal areas with the relative territorial specificities, the potential and above all the possible policies to be implemented to bridge the gap with the most dynamic areas.

Attention has been paid to the following aspects: the unused territorial capital; to hydrogeological instability, loss of biodiversity, degradation of landscapes and social unease related to the lack of basic services: education, health, mobility, virtual connectivity (internet access). Deficiencies attributable also to the low population density of these territories and to the organizational difficulty.

Not always, however, "internal area" is synonymous with area in difficulty, in fact in some of these territories good policies and good practices have resulted in a population that has remained stable or even, in some cases, has grown. Municipalities, in fact, have cooperated for the production of essential services and the environmental or cultural resources at their disposal have been protected and valued, in order to contribute to growth and cohesion processes.

The idea of carrying out a project for the revitalization of these areas was promoted in 2012 by the then Minister for Territorial Cohesion, Fabrizio Barca, who defined the internal areas as "the vast and majority part of the non-flat, strongly polycentric national territory, with widespread decline of cultivated surface and often affected by particular demographic decline or aging" (Barca, 2015, pp. 29-30; IFEL, 2015, p. 11)

The National Strategy for Inland Areas (SNAI) was therefore implemented with the launch of the new programming cycle for EU funds available for the 2014-2020 period with the aim of experimenting with shared solutions in these territorial areas, through the public-private partnership and with actions aimed at strengthening services and economic development (Lucatelli, 2016).

The document that opened the public debate in view of the definition of the Partnership Agreement for Italy, "Methods and objectives for an effective use of EU funds" of December 2012 recognized in the internal areas, a strategic option on which the country had to base the new seven-year planning period, with the awareness that there can be no economic development without social inclusion.

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