

Forum Novum at Mile X of Via Traiana (Italy)

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Abstract

The project we are presenting starts from the strong point represented by the Via Appia, registered in the UNESCO WHL. The construction of the via Appia network was started in 321 BC and completed in 109 AD, when Emperor Trajan built via Traiana from Benevento to Brindisi. At mile X of the Via Traiana stood the town of Forum Novum, a place of historical stratification, that profoundly influenced the surrounding territory, giving rise to the medieval settlement system and determining the layout of the landscape. It represents the lighthouse area from which to restart and around which to plan and structure regeneration engine interventions. The strategy of the project starts from the territorial potential, where the pivotal element from which the whole project unravels is the Forum Novum site; the whole project is based on the potential of the territory and the Forum Novum site is where it unravels. The strategic vision of the territorial regeneration program constitutes an integration between the UNESCO site “Via Appia. Regina Viarum” and interventions on historic centers, to improve infrastructures and upgrade old public buildings, which will become a central part of the ‘Borghi’ project, hosting its activities. The idea is to make permanent the workshop activities on topography, study and reconstruction of the landscape and archaeological research, with Universities and Schools, making this territory an incubator of spin-offs on “cultural heritage supply chain.” Our aim is to generate opportunities, triggering a virtuous circle supported by public and private stakeholders. It will involve the Municipalities with a view to the rediscovery, conservation, enhancement and promotion of the pedagogy of the territory and its cultural, landscape and environmental values. Scientific research fits into local communities in an integrated way, triggering the need for tourist residentiality and the birth of businesses in the sector of culture.

Keywords: regeneration; archeology; identity; development

1. Introduction

The funding provided by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRP), Mission 1: Digitisation, Innovation, Competitiveness and Culture, Component 3: Culture 4.0, Measure 2: 'Regeneration of small cultural sites, cultural, religious and rural heritage, Investment 2.1: 'Attractiveness of Historic Villages', financed by the European Union Next Generation EU,

represent an opportunity to revive and revitalise small municipalities that represent the identity of our country as well as eloquent containers of art, literature, architecture and culture. Intervention strategies for the archaeological area of the Forum Novum and the linear section of the Via Traiana in the municipalities of Paduli and Sant'Arcangelo Trimonte are described below, with the aim of promoting economic, social and cultural development.

2. The territorial context

The territories of Paduli and Sant'Arcangelo have taken on their current configuration, both in terms of settlement and rural landscape, as a result of their location between Benevento and the communications to the east. These routes, although they have been marked by their specific characteristics and functions in terms of land management and territorial domination over the millennia, have remained essentially unchanged. The "Via" between Beneventum and Brundisium, which in the 2nd century A.D. became the Via Traiana and was an integral part of the "Appia-Traiana" road system, followed ancient walks, with the probable presence of a Via Minucia, a circumstance confirmed by the site of the Forum Novum, X mile from Traiana, which as a *novum* (new) suggests the pre-existence of a *vetus* (ancient).

The route of the Via Traiana became the Via Sacra Langobardorum during the Lombard domination of southern Italy and their need to reach their "national sanctuary" at Monte Sant'Angelo. It is probable that in this period the settlement of Forum Novum coincided with one of the 12 Norman baronies (1041), more precisely "Santarcangelum", giving life to the castles of Paduli and Montemalo (now Sant'Arcangelo Trimonte), as well as the nearby Apice, Buonalbergo, Ariano Irpino, Montecalvo Irpino. The consular road, which preserves the most important bridges of the imperial age, continued its function as a pilgrimage and trade route towards the Gargano and Apulia in the following centuries.

It was along this line that the Benevento-Foggia railway line, completed in 1870, and the SS 90 and 90bis (State Roads) were built, following the Miscano and Cervaro valleys to cross the Apennine ridge. Today these *viae* are followed by the official route of the Via Francigena in the Benevento-Buonalbergo section.



Fig. 1 – Map of the area, Via Appia Traiana (Image from Google Earth)

This area (Fig. 1), which has played a central role in the historical development of central and southern Italy, has become marginalised and has undergone major processes of depopulation and social desertification, with serious repercussions on the hydrogeological structure of the territory, following the abandonment of agriculture and the lack of management of the natural infrastructure network. Furthermore, depopulation has led to the abandonment of inhabited urban areas, with an impoverishment of the value of real estate, mainly due to the lack of maintenance of the same and to acts of vandalism and plundering of decorative elements resulting from the lack of control. The high environmental value of these places remains unchanged, for which they still retain their inherent potential for development, both in terms of permanent housing and tourism. At the same time, there are numerous cultural emergencies that have been layered over time: archaeological sites, monumental emergencies, ancient centres, rural landscapes and environmental assets.

3. Aims and objectives

3.1 Knowledge

Improving the level of knowledge of the assets present in the territory is the primary condition for their exploitation and promotion with a view to the economic and social development of the territory.

Knowledge creates opportunities for development, and knowledge must be invested by local communities and the scientific community in the form of cultural, scientific and technological awareness and competence.

Increasing the attractiveness of the territory, its cultural and artistic enrichment, the increase in the range of services, can slow down depopulation and desertification.

3.2. Project objectives

The main objectives of the project are:

1. To increase the level of knowledge of the assets present in the territory, making them opportunities for training with participatory processes that see the presence of university research centres, secondary schools, territorial educational schools.
2. To promote interaction between the territory and local communities, with different forms of tourism: cultural and artistic, environmental and naturalistic, slow and sustainable, already practised.
3. To combat depopulation and social desertification by creating employment opportunities, by identifying the reasons for the attractiveness of the territory that can encourage the arrival of people from outside.
4. To preserve the real estate heritage and the rural environment through the reuse of existing buildings and the agricultural management of the land. This objective is closely linked to the previous one, as it is the inverse of depopulation and social desertification.
5. Introducing incentives for innovation and culture as a precondition for the creation of businesses, both in terms of the management of new forms of tourism (slow, experiential, cultural) and those linked to the knowledge, protection and valorisation of cultural, landscape and heritage assets.



Fig. 2 – Paduli, view of the historic centre (Luigi Salierno, 2023).

4. Methodology

4.1. The strategic vision

Forum Novum is the point of greatest strategic strength that brings together and unites the two territories and the two communities.

The strategic vision of the integrated intervention programme is linked to the main cultural and landscape asset of the territory, the Appia Traianea - declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site within the same "Appia, Regina Viarum" site - with the two main elements that characterise it in this territory: The Forum Novum and the Ponte Latrone, with the stretch of land that joins these two areas of emergency, where there are numerous traces of in-situ paving, as well as a well-preserved rural landscape with views over the Miscano valley and the Fortore, watershed between Campania and Apulia, of particular environmental interest.

The strategy also includes interventions in the historic centres of the municipalities involved, with the aim of improving infrastructure and rehabilitating renovated public buildings without defined functions, spaces that will become an integral and functional part of the "Borghi" (villages) project.

4.2. The Driving Idea

The driving idea is the resumption of an activity related to the study and reconstruction of the ancient landscape and archaeological research in the area already experimented in 2021 in collaboration with Unisalento, within which the Laboratory of Ancient Topography and Photogrammetry (LabTAF) is active, operating through digital and advanced technologies.

The idea is to make the presence of the laboratory permanent, both for undergraduate and postgraduate archaeology students and as an incubator for technological spin-offs operating in the "cultural heritage supply chain".

This "beacon" project aims to generate a series of opportunities in various sectors, creating a virtuous circle driven by public and private stakeholders, developing an integrated territorial project involving the ancient villages of Paduli and Sant'Arcangelo and the rural areas, with the aim of preserving, enhancing and promoting cultural, landscape and environmental values.

Another driving force is contemporary art inserted into the rural landscape, starting with the *Chiesetta* in Contrada Torre, a work by the internationally renowned artist Mimmo Paladino, and involving other renowned artists in a journey where land art and street art can add value and become an element of further attraction and characterisation of the territory itself.

4.3. Lines of intervention

The lines of action to be implemented in order to achieve the objectives are as follows:

1. The Forum Novum site, a place of millenary historical stratification, must be re-evaluated not only as an archaeological testimony, through research, studies and historical reconstructions, making it accessible and usable, but also as an awareness of opportunities and growth of local communities through involvement and participatory training.

It is only through this multifaceted approach that the Forum Novum can become a nexus of "lighthouse interventions" with the aim of promoting territorial and social knowledge, protection and enhancement.

2. The symbolic places of the historical centres, in particular the "palaces", will be transformed into educational, didactic and innovative centres; the old urban fabric will be restored for residential purposes, while unique places, such as the caves in the tuff, will host temporary and permanent art installations.

3. The historical-cultural itineraries, indicative of a territorial vocation for "passage" and hospitality, will become contemporary interpreters of this millenary predisposition.
4. Art and culture, as a way of interpreting the territory through "special people" who will leave their mark, will become another reason for the territory's attractiveness.



Fig. 3 – *Forum Novum*, archaeology students (Salierno, 2024)

5. Discussion

The analysis carried out clearly shows the effectiveness of the training activities within the strategic line outlined. This effectiveness is translated into concrete actions on the ground through two separate projects:

- Appia goes to school
- Training at university level

Appia Goes to School is an intervention foreseen in the management plan of the UNESCO site, which provides for the creation, in the medium term, of a network of partnerships between secondary schools for the development of projects for the knowledge and valorisation of the system of cultural assets linked to the Via Appia.

In particular, a number of secondary schools in Benevento, Roma and Brindisi have already embarked on the building up a network among schools; one of the projects in about analogic photography, entitled "Ashby and Gardner +111", in which they took their students back to the very places where the two archaeologists and

photographers from the British School in Rome took their photographs in 1913, in an extensive photographic reportage along the consular roads of Appia and Traiana.

The project allowed the young people to physically walk and travel along the route they were learning about, and the photographs, taken today with analogue cameras and in formats similar to those of the early 20th century, offered multiple educational insights: from observing the landscape and its transformations to learning about photographic techniques and the history of photography; from studying monuments and archaeological areas to musealisation through the use of ICT.

The project "L'Appia va a scuola" (The Appian Way goes to school) will also, during the school year 2024-2025 and hopefully in the following years, find a convergence and further development with the "Progetto Borghi" (Village Project) implemented by the Municipalities of Paduli and Sant'Arcangelo Trimonte, thanks to an intervention included in this integrated programme on the educational pathways to be created and implemented in spaces suitable for learning.

As far as university training is concerned, the network of universities working on the Appian Way UNESCO site and the Via Traiana project of the University of Salento have already come together in the integrated intervention programme "Forum Novum: the origins of the districts", thanks to an agreement signed between the Municipality of Paduli, the leader of the "Borghi Project" and the Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Salento/Unisalento. This collaboration has made it possible to set up a 'field school' for archaeology students from various Italian and foreign universities on the site of the Forum Novum and along the section of the Via Traiana that crosses these areas, as well as to collaborate and provide scientific support for various projects included in the Integrated Programme.

To this end, the 'Archaeological Research, Teaching and Training Laboratories' are currently being built in the historical centre of Paduli (again as part of the 'Forum Novum: L'origine dei Borghi' project), with an adjoining guesthouse. The aim of this facility is to support archaeological research and training in archaeology by equipping these rooms with tools for the initial study and cataloguing of artefacts found during archaeological surveys and excavations, computer tools for the topographical study of the territory, and rooms for teaching and research.



Fig. 3 – *Forum Novum, first excavations* (Salierno, 2024)

These spaces can be made available to any university or research centre that requests them for research purposes, with the obligation to publish and share the results of such research.

In the longer term, the main expected result is the creation of a linear archaeological park of the Via Traiana, which could extend at least from Benevento to Aequum Tuticum, coinciding with “Component 19” of the UNESCO site “Via Appia. Regina Viarum”. An itinerary of cultural and landscape value, where the presence of explanatory panels and a wifi system, through which the multimedia itinerary could be transmitted, would be flanked by a naturalistic and environmental context equipped for tourism and a stay of comfort and quality.

6. Outcomes

The results of this stage are expressed in terms of expectations.

An increase in the employment rate, with particular emphasis on women and young people. To take advantage of the opportunities offered by cultural and natural emergencies in order to reinforce the trend that has been developing for some years now, which sees cultural, adventure and slow tourism as the main asset on which to base the development policies of these territories. There are two strong points on which activities can be based: the inclusion of the Appia, regina viarum site in the UNESCO World Heritage List and the inclusion of the southern Via Francigena as an independent part of the Via Francigena Cultural Route from Canterbury to Leuca. The second element in particular has already led to a significant increase in the number of “passages” of pilgrims, both individuals and organised groups, travelling along the Benevento-Buonalbergo section and crossing the territories of Paduli and Sant’Arcangelo. In 2021, the Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Salento organised a “field” training experience for the acquisition of CFUs for 24 archaeology students from different universities, using the Forum Novum site as a laboratory. The Municipalities agreed with the University of Salento to make the activity stable by providing accommodation, training and laboratory facilities. In fact, this implies the creation of employment opportunities. In addition, an incubator for companies specialising in the application of innovative technologies applied to the BBCC is planned, in agreement with UniSalento and other universities, which could counteract the brain drain and local professionalism.

Counteracting the demographic exodus; The main reasons for the demographic exodus and social desertification are related to the lack of services (young families), the lack of job opportunities (university emigration becomes permanent) and the lack of advanced technological infrastructure (lack of teleworking jobs). A fibre optic data network is being built throughout the area. This infrastructure already

had a positive impact during the pandemic, when several young people, including those working abroad, were able to "return home" while continuing to work. The planned interventions are intended to create conditions for staying in the area, not only for short-term tourism, but also for medium- and long-term residence. Short-term tourism will determine the need for tourist service activities and may affect the increase of jobs in the sector (services, agrotourism and agriculture); medium and long-term stays will be determined by the activities of artistic residencies, where artists will be invited/attracted by the possibilities of expression, the beauty of the places, the quality and the cost of living. Finally, employment opportunities, especially for young people with a high professional profile, determined by the creation of an incubator/showcase of digital technologies applied to cultural heritage, favoured by the IT infrastructure now available and with the financial support of business incentives (the "Avviso Borghi" business incentive and measures by Invitalia, Cultura Crea or Italia Economia Sociale), will give young families the opportunity to settle permanently in these villages and work from there all over the world.

Increasing cultural participation; The focus of the whole project on the main cultural features of the area, the Via Traiana, the rural landscape and villages, the Via Francigena, together with the search for the interaction of these elements with artistic events, aims overall at increasing cultural participation. This participation will be addressed at several levels. Already in 2014, projects aimed at developing audiences through the organisation of cultural events/low impact tourism were organised by various associations in the area, grouped together in a committee. These were mainly aimed at the local population, which always participated in large numbers and with great interest, in order to make them aware of the cultural richness and diversity of their territory and, through knowledge, to contribute to its protection, enhancement and promotion. Another

"strand" is that of schools, with some experiences already implemented with local primary and secondary schools, which will take a stable form with educational paths supported by intangible infrastructures created with the scientific support of UniSalento. In addition, the creation of artistic itineraries and residences to enrich and diversify the cultural offer related to slow tourism will pursue the objective of increasing the cultural participation of a very wide and diversified public, coming at least from a national and European territorial area. Finally, the focus will be on attracting specialists, thanks to the creation of a permanent laboratory in collaboration with the University of Salento, whose facilities may also be made available to other Italian and foreign universities, following a trend that has been underway for some years, due to the presence of important archaeological and monumental sites that are almost completely unknown.

Increase in tourist flows. Today there is a growing demand for "walking" among Italians and foreigners alike, and the Via Francigena from Rome to Leuca has a great potential that is almost completely untapped. However, this is short-term or very short-term tourism. Hikers spend only a few hours in a single area and even less time on the cultural attractions of the place. However, this type of tourism has a great potential for communication (word of mouth, social networks) and for returning as a "settled" tourist.

The aim of the project, to be implemented mainly through communication and events, is to use this potential to diversify it into medium and long-term tourism, transforming it into experiential and cultural tourism. It will also make it possible to exchange experiences with other areas. This is the direction taken by the measures relating to the network of Micaelian itineraries, which offers numerous opportunities at regional, national and international level.

Finally, there is the very important sector of anthropological-cultural interest linked to the

origins of one's ancestors. This is generally tourism aimed at 2nd, 3rd or 4th generation emigrants, usually from abroad.

7. Conclusions

The landscape surrounding archaeological heritage is changing. Archaeological sites are no longer seen as mines from which material can be extracted to create great museum exhibitions in large urban centres, and the archaeological find is no longer seen as a static entity whose value lies in its physicality, uniqueness and compliance with collecting principles.

This idea, inherited from art history, has had disastrous consequences: archaeological assets have been expropriated from their places of origin, with the result that archaeological areas scattered throughout the country have been abandoned, effectively depriving them of their economic, tourist and cultural potential. Modern archaeology reverses this trend and aims not only to discover treasures of recognised artistic value, but also to become a scientific method of contextual analysis.

In essence, archaeology no longer seeks only objects, but above all information that helps to reconstruct the historical and environmental context of the sites studied. Having underestimated the economic potential of archaeological sites in recent decades, we now have the opportunity to launch experimental initiatives and processes, open to a variety of collaborating subjects, in order to open up avenues of cultural and social entrepreneurship spread throughout the community, which becomes an actor and guarantees integration and coordination between the subjects involved.

Promoting archaeological parks as a means of activating social and economic cooperation networks means identifying growth pathways that are geared towards economic development while improving environmental sustainability, but above all it means abandoning the idea that cultural resources should be taken away from

those who have experienced them and handed over to the management of managers who are only experts in profit, in order to leave space, action and emotional experience to those who, in various ways, feel a conscious part of this piece of territory and time. These are ways of developing archaeological areas as a lever for social innovation, based on the roots of identity and therefore capable of generating value and well-being for the community.

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