

# Green and artistic routes for slow tourism in the Caserta province

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## Abstract

Paper aims to highlight the relevance of greenways - ecologic trails for non-motorised vehicles - and “know-paths” – historical itineraries supplementing the attention to the environmental values with the attention to artistic sights - in the process of promotion of slow tourism. Paper focuses on the analysis of study cases of cultural paths connecting little urban centres in the Caserta province, in Italy. Sites of a high environmental, architectural and artistic quality have been considered as attractive poles in a network of touristic routes able to promote respect for nature and, at the same time, knowledge of cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** *Greenway, know-path, Caserta, cultural heritage, slow tourism.*

## 1. Introduction

According to the European project EuroVelo, in recent years the greenway design has been promoted and projects of regeneration of paths for sustainable mobility have been launched [1].

European countries have shared important experiences, especially as regards the intense, mutual exchange of cycling tourists and the renewed interest in nature, with significant economic results for national territories in terms of increasing tourism and employment [2].

The concept of greenway comes from the activity of the landscaper Frederick Law Olmsted and his proposal to design interconnected green areas in urban and extra-urban areas, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Olmsted converted English green belts into pedestrian paths which had also recreational functions [3].

The greenways were used as tools of urban design for the first time by Edmund Bacon, in the late 1950s, in Philadelphia [4]. Finally, in 1987 the greenway was officially described by the President's Commission on American Outdoors as “a living network...to provide people with access to open spaces close to where they live, and to link together the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape...threading through cities and countrysides like a giant circulation system” and, furthermore, “a strip of unveloped land”, “a scenic road”, “a wildlife corridor”.

In Italy, in 1998 the Associazione Italiana Greenway (Italian Greenway Association) [5] was founded and the Federazione Italiana Amici della Bicicletta (Italian Federation of Bicycle Friends) [6], in collaboration with the Italian Department of Transport, launched the census of national cycle-routes. Recently, slow tourism has been more and more widespread in the country and several tourist areas have promoted “green policies” able to ensure the sustainable development of the territories [7].

## 2. From nature to culture

In the last years, the common idea of greenways as ecological corridors have highlighted the importance of environmental values and often shifted the attention away from the relevance of historical analysis of the artistic and architectural characteristics of sites [8]. Given that, on one hand, the greenway design has become one of the fastest growing and most productive sectors in economic balance of European countries and, on the other hand, the recovery of historical identity of disrupted or degraded sites has developed a network of protected areas able to attract large numbers of tourists, it therefore has appeared necessary to rethink a new methodological approach to connect nature and historical itineraries for the promotion of the cultural heritage of sites.

In Italy some research projects have promoted the design of green routes also able to introduce visitors to the artistic heritage of the hinterland and launch correlated cultural activities and services. The historical analysis of the sights located along green paths has offered interesting proposals for a network of routes so that they are not merely “green ways” – equipped nature trails, away from motorized vehicles traffic – but rather “know-paths”.

## 3. Study cases

Recently, the Casertano area [9], in the southern Italy, has been involved by projects of greenways, which, connecting little historical settlements, characterized by a high environmental and artistic quality, have been of strategic

importance to channel flows of cycle-tourists from all over Italy. The design of ecological paths has focused on the importance of natural environment but also on local cultural heritage. Incisive proposals for green and historical comfortable cycle-pedestrian routes have led to offer cycle-tourists more attractive itineraries.

### 3.1 The *Ciclovia del Volturno*

Opened in 2011, the *Ciclovia del Volturno* (Fig. 1), the first 144-km long cycle-pedestrian path equipped with road sign in the central/southern Italy, goes from Rocchetta al Volturno to Capua [10].

It offers a nature itinerary along the Volturno river, passing through valleys, plains, little country roads in the Molise and Campania regions and including three important parks (National Park of Abruzzo, Molise and Lazio; Regional Park of Roccamonfina and Foce del Garigliano; Regional Park of the Matese). But this greenway, connecting 28 urban centres, makes it possible to have also alternative itineraries able to direct people’s attention toward the knowledge of historical settlements, which often lies pure in protected zones of great interest and are characterized by artistic buildings, facilities and infrastructure (Fig. 2).

Currently, within limits linked to length of the route and organization of correlated bicycle-friendly services, the greenway of the Volturno river is the most complete cycle-path in the south of Italy which can be considered also as a know-path between local artistic sights.



Fig. 2 The *Ciclovia del Volturno*, step to Colli al Volturno.

Start of the *Ciclovia* is the settlement of Rocchetta al Volturno, one of the most important pilgrimage destination of the Molise region. At the base of the Mainarde mounts and on the edge of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise tourists can visit the San Vincenzo al Volturno Abbey, founded in 703 and known for its 9<sup>th</sup> century frescos in the San Lorenzo crypt.

Countryside roads coming down the river introduce to little historical centres of the region and their cultural sights: Cerro al Volturno, with the 15<sup>th</sup> century Pandone Castle; Fornelli, with the steel Red Bridge; Vairano Patenora with the Badia della Ferrara, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian abbey.

The greenway continues to the province of Caserta. In this territory cycle-tourists can visit some of the most important ancient and rural settlements of the Campania region, as Alife, Gioia Sannitica, Ruviano, Castel Campagnano, Caiazzo, Piana di Monteverna, Castel di Sasso, Pontelatone and Bellona. The Annibal Bridge introduce to the village of Sant’Angelo in Formis, known for its Benedictine basilica of San Michele Arcangelo, and finally to Capua, where the *Ciclovia* stops. In ancient times equipped with a river port, Capua is one of the most important urban centre of the ancient Italy.

### 3.2 A rural path in Marcianise

In 2016 a local Association, member of the FIAB (Italian Federation of Bicycle Friends), launched a proposal for a 8-km long cycle path to be designed in the countryside of Marcianise [11]. Mission is to face the degradation of the agricultural land - due to abandonment of the farmland, illegal waste spill, new industrial sites and infrastructure -, and promote the recovery of rural traditions thanks to a system of slow mobility. The project considers a nature route which connects existent rural roads, the same ones agricultural workers walked in ancient times (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1 Itinerary of the *Ciclovia del Volturno*.



Fig. 3 The countryside of Marcianise.

The most innovative aspect of the project consists in the fact that designers have to collaborate with local inhabitants to organize rural path's economic and cultural activities and services. This is because specific goal is the promotion of an "endogenous" slow tourism able to introduce local people to respect of nature and historical traditions.

### 3.3 A know-path in the Upper Casertano area

The Upper Casertano area is located mostly inland of the province of Caserta. It includes 48 municipalities and borders with the province of Benevento and with the Lazio region. Characterized by a very strong historical identity, this area has been involved by considerable investments in tourism and enogastronomic sectors in the recent years, which have promoted also a process of cultural growth.

The morphological structure of the area has precluded the degradation and contamination of the sites. Most of the municipalities are small mountain towns (less than 5,000 inhabitants), whose main sources of income are still agriculture and pastoralism. The heritage of rural tradition is closely linked to local culture and its expressions. The preservation of the environmental conditions and the presence of two Regional Parks (The Matese Park and The Roccamonfina Foce del Garigliano Park), WWF Nature Reserves, several Special Protection Areas, many Sites of Community Importance, woods, rivers and lakes are an opportunity to design greenways in this area, still called "the garden of the province of Caserta", and promote slow tourism.

Furthermore, the Upper Casertano is a land of fortified villages, ancient convents, Samnite settlements, Roman towns and medieval castles. Ancient centres and towns enclosed within centuries-old walls and reinforced with towers and bastions have survived intact to our days. It is often possible to trace architectural styles of different historical eras in settlements as Rocca d'Evandro, whose

castle, perched on a mountain, was refuge of the monks of Montecassino fleeing from the invasion of the Kingdom of Naples by Charles V; Pietravairano, inhabited by the Samnites and the Romans; Vairano Patenora; Sant'Angelo d'Alife; Raviscanina; Piedimonte Matese and Alife, beautifully framed by the Matese mountains; Gioia Sannitica and Potito Sannitico, which retain traces of the Michaelic cult in their rock caves, as well as the remains of Roman settlements.

In particular, the area between Teano and Gioia Sannitica includes the main pilgrimage destinations since the Low Middle Ages. The oldest and most fascinating building and places of worship are attractive poles of a 101-km long "themed" know-path to be covered by bicycle. This know-path, considered as ecological/cultural route, goes beyond traditional concept of greenway and offers a new model of sustainable mobility.

Steps of the itinerary are the historical settlements of Teano, where cycle-tourist can visit the Cathedral, the Churches of Santa Maria de Intus, S. Pietro in Aquariis and Santa Maria de Foris, the Monastery of San Benedetto and the Basilica of San Paride ad Fontem (Fig. 4); Caianello Vecchio and Aorivola, with their Churches of San Michele Arcangelo and Santo Stefano Protomartire and the Cave of the Saints Donato and Isidoro; Sant'Angelo d'Alife and its cultural heritage including the Cave of Saint Michael, the Castle of Rupecanina and the Church of Santa Lucia a Castello; Alife, with the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta and the Churches of Madonna delle Grazie and San Giovanni (also known as Mausoleum of the Acilii Glabrioni); Piedimonte Matese and its Churches of San Domenico, San Biagio and San Giovanni Battista, the Mount Muto and the Sanctuary of Santa Maria Occorrevoile; San Potito Sannitico, with the Churches of Santa Caterina and San Potito. Gioia Sannitica is the final destination of the path. Here cycle tourists are hosted by a cultural heritage which includes the Cave of San Michele Arcangelo (Fig. 5), the Churches of San Salvatore and Madonna della Libera and the Sanctuary of Madonna del Bagno.





Fig. 4 Teano, Basilica of San Paride ad Fontem.



Fig. 5 Gioia Sannitica, Cave of San Michele Arcangelo.

### 3. Conclusions

In the last years, investments in projects for sustainable mobility have got significant economic results in terms of increasing tourism and cultural activities in Italy. In the province of Caserta, in particular, the presence of little-known artistic settlements, historic building and infrastructure, degraded rural lands and their location in green areas, close to urban centres, have made this cultural and environmental heritage an important economic resource. Research projects, still in progress, have launched protocols to be used to define green paths intelligently integrated into a larger network of artistic itineraries, in order to make touristic routes practical for daily cycling. The combined use of ecological and historical approach to the design of touristic paths has given people a unique chance to enjoy nature areas and learn about the history of the heritage of sites. At the same time the touristic industry has had the possibility to offer a new cultural product with great potential for social, economic and employment development.

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