

A “Valley” Looking for New Strategies South Eastern Sicily Facing New Competitive Challenges

The theoretical framework

The phenomena that characterise post industrial societies and the related spatial features have been analyzed by several points of view. Geographers and other social scientists have contributed to enriching the traditional perspective of spatial planners centred on the idea of physical space as a Euclidean geometrical support for human activities, derived from the Marxist and Taylorist traditions. In recent years, new visions have emerged that incorporate the awareness of the complexity and the role played by interactions of social actors in shaping physical space (Dematteis, 1995). By using these new conceptual tools planners are, more and more, looking at places as complex social constructs. Many sociologists, including Bauman (2003), Beck (1992), Harvey (1993) and Giddens (1994) have produced insightful descriptions of our post-industrial society. An aspect that comes out from several researches is the sense of bewilderment of individuals related to the new social structures.

Many scholars have pointed out the role played by cities as centres of economy (among the others Sassen 1991 and 1994, Castells 1989). An important aspect of the economic success of cities is played by an urban physical space characterised by high density, mixed use and, above all, diversity. New mixed-used urban landscapes, new intercultural interactions and an urban time-space animated and enlivened with a rich array of social and cultural activities are seen to be the answer to the problems of decay, alienation, polarization and the crisis in urban public space. (Amin and Graham 1997). In addition, these authors highlight the economic advantages of enhancing social cohesion.

Another vast field of researches and reflections is the environmental approach to territorial analysis and planning. Studies and researches have encompassed many aspects, particularly those related to the impact of development on the environment. The concept of sustainable tourism can be considered as one of the outcomes of the large debate that emerged, especially after the Brundtland report on the sustainability of development. This concept has been provided by several official declarations including The Hague Declaration on Tourism (Wto, 1989) and the Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (UN, 2002). These documents define the principles that should inspire the action of public and private institutions involved with tourism. The concept has been discussed and criticised by many that pointed out the inherent contradictions of the principle of sustainability with an industry that embraces a diversity of consumption practices, enterprise ownership and control activities (Hughes, 1998). Others have discussed the economic basics of sustainable tourism (Collins, 1999) or its relationship with community development (Joppe, 1996).

The impressive amount of knowledge produced on these issues has several links with reflections on the role of territorial heritage in a wide sense. The contribution of Alberto Magnaghi (2002) known as the “territorialist approach to development” proposes a comprehensive vision centred on physical space as the product of the long term interactions between communities and environment. In this perspective, community development requires investing in environmental, ‘territorial’ and cultural heritage with a wide social participation in building “pacts” for development. This would lead toward non-hierarchical exchanges within and between urban regions aimed at reaching a fair equilibrium between competitiveness and solidarity, openness and closure of local systems.

An interesting perspective related to spatial planning has been proposed recently by Peter Hall (2002) that synthesizes the main elements of conflict that emerge from the changing land use practices and planning approaches. In particular, he raises that question of the relationship between physical planning and creativity. Even a narrow approach to planning

as land use regulator must take into account this element by avoiding stopping the opportunities related to innovation in ways of managing land use.

Among the planning tools, there is an increasing attention toward the broad category of the strategic spatial plans that appears particularly adequate for dealing with the mentioned complexity. According to Healey (2004) the term strategic spatial planning can be referred to a “self conscious collective effort to re-imagine a city, urban region or wider territory and to translate the results into priority for area investment, conservation measures, strategic infrastructure investments and principles of land use regulations”.

This kind of plans can represent an adequate instrument for facing the main planning themes of the examined area.

The case study area: a brief description

The south-eastern part of Sicily presents a large variety of physical environments and human settlements in a domain rich in history and nature. In the 19th century this part of the region was called *Val di Noto* one of the three administrative subdivisions that existed since the Spanish domination, before the Italian National Unity of 1865. Nowadays, *Val di Noto* pertinent territory covers approximately three different provinces (Catania, Syracuse and Ragusa) even if this area does not correspond exactly with the old administrative subdivision. The present settlement system is marked by an increasing density of flows of people, goods and information. As a consequence, the area is assuming the features of a loosely coupled small size urban region that concentrates about 1.7 million inhabitants, 35% of the total population of the island, in about 28% of its total area (Tab. 1 and 2).

The geography of *Val di Noto* is marked by two main elements the massive presence of Mount *Etna*, the 3,300 meters volcano that represents the northern border of the district and the highlands of *Monti Iblei* in the southern tip of the island, with a maximum height of about 1,000 meters. In the middle, there is the *Piana di Catania* the largest plane of the island formed by the *Simeto* river. Historically, the plane has represented an obstacle to any development because it was marshy and plagued by malaria. A clear sign of this condition is represented by the absence of human settlements in the 19th century. In 1950s the reclamation of the plane was completed but the area is still marked by a minor concentration of residential settlements in comparison with the rest of the region (fig. 1).

Population and land use

Val di Noto has been characterised by the presence of differentiated domains from a historical, geographical, economical and demographical point of view.

The settlement system main features include:

- the metropolitan area of Catania along the slopes of Mount *Etna*, an area that is reaching relevant levels of settlement congestion,
- a system of medium sized cities and towns dispersed in the agricultural inland especially in the provinces of Syracuse and Ragusa.
- An impressive amount of old-style industrial estates (8,675 hectares are zoned for heavy industries in the three provinces) located mainly along the eastern coast where they are mixed with holiday houses.

The current settlement pattern is characterised by a clear primacy of the coastal areas, especially in the northern section of the district. From the northern border of the area to the small towns south of Syracuse along the coast there is an almost continuous sequence of residential and industrial settlements.

This feature is typical of the entire region where human settlements in recent times have concentrated along the sea shores. Tab. 3 shows how the population in Sicily is clearly concentrating along the coasts. Data analysed by using different criteria show that about 60% of the population is concentrated in one third of the island area with average densities from 65 to 119 %, higher than the regional average. Considering total areas comprised within municipal borders, the population density of *Val di Noto* does not appear higher than the rest of the region (upper half of tab. 3). This depends on the fact that these administrative subdivisions derives from the 19th century and do not reflect the actual settlement patterns.

This is confirmed by the calculation made by extracting data from the census tracts that intersect a 5 km buffer of the coastal line (lower half of tab. 3). This second calculation shows a density more than twice the regional average and 23% higher than the rest of coastal areas. Looking more in detail at the coastal section, the settlement pattern appears “thicker” in the metropolitan area of Catania that is concentrating not only a substantial share of the total population but also industrial and service activities. The other relevant element of the settlement pattern is the bipolar system of the two cities of Ragusa and Modica that is assuming a growing importance (Fig. 1).

Data on land use (Tab. 4) reveal that in *Val di Noto* the percentage of land developed for all uses excluding roads and railways, is higher (4.5%) than in the rest of the island (3.71 %). Looking at historical data it appears that the rate of development has increased substantially in the period 1975-1994. In any of the examined time lags, excluding the period 1955-1975, the south eastern provinces have “consumed” more land than the rest of the region.

A comparison between development rates and population growth show that a peculiar feature of Sicily is the weak relationship between these two elements (Tab. 5) This result is coherent with a general trend that characterises the entire country and especially southern regions (Astengo, Nucci, 1990) where there has been a constant overproduction in building industry due to several economic and regulatory factors. In southern regions it has been interpreted as an indicator of the social and economic marginality of the area (Caldo and Santalucia, 1977). But the data show also that within the island there are relevant differences. From 1950s to the mid 1994s *Val di Noto* has developed land at a rate twelve times higher than the population growth, the rest of the island ninety times, and the entire region thirty-three times. Even if comparisons with other regions are very difficult, these data show huge differences with more developed regions in western countries. For instance, in Massachusetts urbanised land grew only six times more than population in 50 years (The trust for public Land, 1999). The comparison is even more harsher with areas where there is an increasing concern about the negative consequences of sprawl like Santa Clara County in California where, between 1984 and 2002, population grew 22% while total acres of urbanized land grew only 7% (Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, 2004).

However, the datum of *Val di Noto* compared with the rest of the island demonstrates a relative greater efficiency in land use and this can be considered a positive starting point for devising future strategies.

Infrastructural endowment

By using the indicators produced by leading statistical and economic institutions, like *Istituto Tagliacarne* or *Svimez* (2003) it appears that the three provinces that constitute *Val di Noto* show a situation worse than the national average but with several positive elements. For instance the index referred to motorways scores 144 for the entire region, whereas the total for roads is only 76 (100 for EU 15) For railways, the index is 113 but only 20.6 if referred to double track lines.

In eastern Sicily values for infrastructural indices are even higher. The presence of the main airport of the Island in Catania, with 4.8 million passengers in 2003, and a relevant number of ports are the main assets of the infrastructural system. However, the evaluation based on indicators and ranks tends to underestimate qualitative issues. A finer appraisal is needed to understand the real problems of the infrastructural system and to assess properly the kind of improvement needed. For instance, infrastructural indices that consider the length of railway tracks, or the number of ports and airports at provincial level can be misleading about the real quality of services. The presence of a railway line becomes irrelevant if it takes from 1,5 to more than 2,00 hours for a 70 km journey or there is almost no integration with other public transports.

Future investments plans, in Sicily like in other southern Italian regions, proceed according to a piecemeal approach where elected local representatives exert pressure on higher government levels without a clear long term strategy (Cersosimo et Al., 2001). On the contrary, the invasive role of media in the political arena pushes toward choices that seem appropriate only if they are judged coherent with mainstream. A revealing example is the

rush toward the planning of new airports which include the “Mediterranean hub” to be built in the Plane of Catania, the preliminary plan for a new airport near Agrigento and the recent proposal to include a new airport in the local Master Plan of Syracuse. Besides these proposals the existing old military airport of Comiso in the province of Ragusa, which hosted *Cruise* missiles during the *Cold War* period, is going to be reconverted for civilian uses.

Natural and Cultural heritage

Tab. 6 and 7 show some quantitative data about archaeological, cultural and environmental heritage. The figures indicate that archaeology is the main asset of this part of the region even if the environmental heritage is also rather relevant (Fig. 2). These data include only major archaeological and environmental sites and areas already listed. In addition, there is a sort of “connective tissue” constituted by minor natural and cultural resources that characterise the landscape of inner areas. This system represents an additional value that is less known and often neglected. The extreme fragility of this minor heritage, due to development pressures and abandonment, poses relevant problems about its conservation and management.

This endowment of natural and cultural heritage has been recently confirmed by Unesco that inscribed, in year 2002, Eight Late Baroque Towns of *Val di Noto* in the World Heritage List, as “an outstanding testimony to the exuberant genius of late Baroque art and architecture”. Sicilian sites inscribed in the Unesco List are now four, with a ratio of about one site to 1.25 million people, more that two times the European average (Kammeier, 2004).

In addition, there are many other cultural resources in the region. They include agricultural products and the associated traditional cuisine as well as folklore, especially religious festivals. But quantitative data give a limited picture since they do not convey the uniqueness of the places. In particular, some inner areas possess a particular subtle charm that has been better described by artists, mainly writers.

Old New territorial policies in eastern Sicily

After the end of the traditional policies launched in 1950's for supporting economic development in Italian lagging regions, new territorial policies are emerging. In this paragraph some of these policies will be briefly examined in order to understand if they are moving toward a coherent and integrated scenario.

A plethora of new planning tools have been devised and implemented in recent years. Some of these are descending from European Union policies and funds like *Leader* or *Urban* other are national ones like Territorial pacts or *Prusst* (Programs of Urban Renewal and Sustainable Development). This new approach is a clear uturn in comparison with the traditional development policies implemented up to the early 1990s that were aimed mainly at building infrastructures and setting large plants of state-owned companies, according to the economic theories in fashion in these years. The main physical planning outcome of this season is the generation of plans for *Asi* (*Aree di Sviluppo Industriale* - Areas for Industrial Development), which are promoted by public agencies called *Consorzi per lo Sviluppo Industriale* (Consortiums for Industrial Development). These plans, still in use in the regional planning system, are the physical planning component of about 42 years of regional policy (1950-1992) toward disadvantaged areas in Southern regions. They have produced a considerable number of investments in infrastructures, mainly dedicated to manufacturing activities (Martinico, 2001).

After 1992, the old policies ceased and a new generation was launched. The majority of these new planning tools are claiming a new approach based on popular concepts of integrated economic development and sustainability. These are the basic elements that have to be part of any policy that aims for European Union funds. Many of these policies have effects on land use, and some of them require explicitly the definition of non-statutory forms of planning. There are policies that continue to fund single initiatives and others that require some forms of territorial coordination. The last group includes, in entire Sicily, 20 *Patti Territoriali* (Territorial Pacts), 25 *Patti Territoriali Agricoli* (Agricultural Territorial Pacts) 9 *Prusst* (Programs of Urban Renewal and Sustainable development), 27 *Pit Programmi*

Integrati Territoriali – (*Integrated territorial Programs*), 3 European Union *Urban Programmes*, 25 *Leader II* initiatives (Inu, 2003). Each program includes activities in several fields but with a clear prevalence of sectors like agriculture, food industry, tourism, cultural heritage management and urban renewal.

The main negative side of this new approach is the substantial lack of integration with other land use policies and ordinary planning. In spite of the attempts from the Planning Department of the Regional Government of coordinating these new programs with physical planning and landscape safeguard through non statutory planning guidelines (*Circolari Assessoriali* - Departmental Circulars), there are clear inconsistencies with other legal regulations.

The main example is represented by the derogatory norms on localisation of industrial activities in agriculture-zoned land. Under the pressure of the need of issuing quickly building permits in order to utilize European or National subsidies, there is a clear tendency toward a relaxation of zoning constraints in order to allow new developments in rural land. The result is a diffusion of industrial or commercial settlements in rural areas with high territorial costs and relevant impacts on landscape and environment.

In addition, many of these initiatives have funded a collection of existing projects or proposals from local governments or entrepreneurs that already operate in the area, without a clear strategic stance. For instance, there have been no proposals for facing the problem of large illegal settlements of holiday houses along the coasts that need extensive upgrading.

In urban areas some initiatives like *Urban Programs* were not able to use entirely their potentialities since they were inefficiently managed by local authorities.

A new strategy for Val di Noto: from quantity to quality

Regions are more and more confronting in a fierce competitive struggle. In this continuous process of change geography, in a broad sense, is not diminishing its importance. On the contrary, differences in social structure among localities are assuming an increasing role in favouring the development of a region. Physical features and settlement patterns that interact constantly with social structures may have a considerable role in favouring the overall development. In addition, the importance of qualitative and “non materialist” assets is growing in western countries, especially among the “new creative class” (Florida, 2002). A region endowed with a generous amount of cultural and natural resources can aspire to play a major role in this new social and economic setting.

However, the definition of any strategy aimed at competing with other localities contains a major risk that is to conform to what has been done by successful regions. This attitude does not take into account the complexity of territorial issues. In addition, it prevents the exploring of innovative solutions, by proposing the usual armoury of schemes that characterise urban regeneration projects. This does not mean that widely applied tools, like measures for attracting investments or urban renewal projects, have to be rejected. The point is to avoid an approach that is limited to the imitation of successful experiences. Future regeneration schemes have to be designed and implemented taking into account the specificities of the available physical and human resources. The presence of diverse economic circuits, formal and informal, as well as a density of different social actors and institutions, open up new opportunities for imaginative and heterodox initiatives (Amin and Graham, 1997) also involving the informal sectors.

A successful strategy requires not only the improvement of the above mentioned “competitive” elements but also other actions aimed at improving social cohesion. This is probably the field in which more creativity is needed in order to devise new ways for involving local communities in a development perspective, also with new forms of job creation (Beck, 2000). Therefore, by applying the wise principle that suggests that you should not put “all eggs in the same basket”, any strategy would search for an ingenious mixture of competitive and non-competitive actions.

In this perspective, defining strategic guidelines for an area of Southern Italy, the so-called *Mezzogiorno*, like *Val di Noto* appears a very complex task that have already challenged generations of scholars of many disciplines. The only limited ambition of this paper is to

enucleate, and briefly discuss, the main fields that can be addressed. In particular, the two following items appear to be key ones.

- The urban system that characterises this area has many unexploited potentialities that need a careful evaluation and targeted actions in order to include it the competitive arena, adopting a fresh attitude.
- The vast natural and cultural heritage, especially in inner parts of the examined district, has to become the central asset for combining safeguard and sustainable forms of tourism and utilization.

In addressing both these themes it can be useful to refer them to the principles of *Smart Growth*, the nationwide movement in USA that seeks to direct development in ways that preserve critical open space and natural resources. One of the strongest points of the ideas and experiences classified in this broad category is the careful attention at feasibility issues, i. e. a proper involvement of local actors and the role played by fiscal aspects. Examples of strategies based on this approach are present in many US states including Connecticut (watershed protection), Kansas (Metrogreen initiative aimed at building a greenways network), and Illinois (actions for acquiring land for recreational purposes).

As far as urban areas of *Val di Noto* are concerned, the main issue is to reverse the economic decline by pursuing development in new industries (like high tech productions and value added services) able to substitute the declining sectors, especially traditional smokestack industrial productions. The main challenge for reaching this objective is to offer an integrated set of assets able to attract foreign investors and to enhance the entrepreneurial capacity of local companies. Territorial policies can play a role in supporting this effort by ensuring a more equilibrate and efficient setting.

Highly skilled creative workers are the real asset of a place that wants to play any role in the competitive arena. In western countries most of the new jobs are now created in the “thoughtware” sector that include computer software, finance, education, medicine, telecommunications, engineering services, data base development, innovative forms of distribution or insurances new forms of hospital or waste management (Kotler et Al. 1993). Italy has already a disadvantage in terms of investments in activities, like education and research that can enhance this key component of the society. However, the case study area can play a role especially by pursuing further development of the sector around the main city of Catania.

The Catania Metro Area has already developed an initial concentration of high tech production and other value added activities but without a clearly defined support strategy that involve physical planning (Martinico, 2004). On the contrary, the infrastructural system is still not playing a supportive role in the development, even if it has already reached a level that is far beyond the minimum threshold needed for ensuring the carrying out of complex urban activities. As stated in the previous paragraph, a key issue is to improve the quality of infrastructures, especially transport ones, with targeted interventions. This is the only way for transforming this element in a real competitive asset. In addition, a further increase of quality in urban standards is needed. For instance, relevant potentialities can be harnessed by a qualitative enhancement of the suburban areas around the main city. An appropriate policy could be the selected delocalisation of value added activities from the congested downtown toward the sprawl that characterises the settlement pattern of the Metro Area.

Looking at the entire district, the other cities of Val di Noto can assume different specialised roles, like cultural and recreation in Syracuse or service activities related to food industry in Ragusa. This will reinforce the strategic role of downtowns but also attract new economic resources that can be used for improving infrastructures and services.

The second relevant issue is the safeguard and development of cultural and natural resources both on coastal and interior areas. This distinction is particularly important because of the greater development of coastal areas previously outlined. This condition poses major threats but also greater opportunities for territorial resources located in coastal

zones. On the contrary, the interior areas risk plunging into a downward spiral of abandonment - degradation that will affect also natural and cultural heritage.

This recalls immediately the theme of tourism industry. As it has been briefly outlined in a previous paragraph, there is a subtle and often ambiguous relationship between cultural heritage safeguard and tourism, especially in remote areas where the latter can be undoubtedly beneficial but also disruptive. Tourism destination development has been widely studied by specific literature with particular reference to the sustainability issue. For instance, tourism industry has been analysed defining elements like the distinction between mass and alternative tourism. Combining these categories with the level of regulation it emerges a detailed conceptualization of the complex relationships in terms of scenarios of tourism destinations and their possible evolution (Weaver, 2000).

The traditional approach of tourism development in Sicily has followed consolidated trends, that is investments in hotels and furnished flats preferably in coastal resorts, according to a model that has been defined as 3S “sun, sea, sand”. These localities can be considered according to the classification proposed by Weaver as *Unsustainable Mass Tourism* destinations. In these resorts, investments in infrastructures are aimed at satisfying an offer that faces the fierce competition from other countries of the Mediterranean area. But the idea of competing with other resorts on a cost basis is unsustainable, since a one-week holiday in a Sicilian destination costs almost 100% more than in Tunisia and 20% more than in a Greek island (Source: Enit – Italian Tourist Board). In addition, many Sicilian destinations are still offering low standards of services and have severe limitations in terms of landscape and environmental quality, including the presence of extensive illegal settlements of holiday houses.

On the contrary, an offer that aims at focussing specific targets in different periods of the year out of peak seasons can benefit from territorial resources. This implies the definition of new strategies aimed at attracting *Deliberate Alternative Tourism*, according to the classification proposed by Weaver, that is a highly regulated low intensity form of tourism. Several examples are already existent. One of the most known is Tuscany, the world-famous region appreciated for its extraordinary natural and cultural landscape, but other areas where able to pursue quite smart strategies in reversing their troubled conditions. A relevant example of the opportunities offered by tight regulations even when visitors exceed small numbers is the *Cinque Terre* National Park in Liguria. In this area a smart planning and management approach seems to be able to control the effects of an overwhelming increase in tourism flows (Besio, 2002).

Very limited efforts have been done in pursuing a real diversification of the Sicilian tourism destinations in spite of the great opportunities offered by the island resources. On the contrary, there are several attempts of imitating successful strategies that can be unsuitable for Sicily. For instance, there is a flowering of proposals of new golf courses, a choice that risks to clash with the principles of sustainability, given the climatic conditions and the chronic water scarcity of the region. Even worse is the rush of local administrations in attracting theme parks that already have had a moderate success in the region. The acme of this trend can be represented by the gothic proposal, made a few years ago and fortunately not implemented yet, of building a sort of “religious theme park” with gigantic plastic statues of the pope and saints near the Greek temple of Segesta in the western province of Trapani.

On the contrary, accepting an approach based on the principles of sustainable tourism, there are other features that deserve greater attention as main assets for pursuing new development. Some are quite intangible ones like the charm related to the remoteness of inner areas, the sense of “slowness” that emanates from rural places far from the coast or the suggestions linked to history, novels or religious festivals and traditions. Even movie locations can be exploited as tourist attractions since many places in the island have been the setting of films or TV fictions. Some others are more mundane like ethnic cuisine, high quality wines or delicatessen derived from a long lasting tradition rooted in the intricate combination of cultural influences that marks the history of the island. All these elements can be appreciated by selected groups of prospective “buyers” including stressed managers,

“slow food” amateurs, environmentalists, intellectuals or even snobs. An approach that takes into account new cultural values in post industrial society has been already proposed by several experts. Huges (1995) has pointed out the new “restorative” role that can be played by alternative tourist destinations in western countries. Since post industrial societies tend to underestimate the need to articulate private or personal affects, nature or community oriented tourism can fulfil some of these needs.

Some of these elements have already been valorised by entrepreneurs like wine producers that have invested in marketing activities based also on the premises of their vineyards that often include fascinating manors. There are other examples, like the growing offer of holiday accommodation on the farms or the initiative called *Parchi Letterari* (Literary Parks), promoted by a cultural association that supports various activities (small museums, conferences, trips etc.) in places that are related to the life and/or works of famous writers and poets all over Italy. The network includes seven localities in Sicily (source: www.parchiletterari.com). In addition, a recent initiative funded by the regional government is promoting wine routes. However, there is almost no integration among all these activities, in spite of their potentialities of stimulating synergies, and they are not properly considered for their relevant relationship with territorial aspects.

Building a greenways network

One of the possible elements that can be used as lever for combining safeguard and development could be the definition of an extended system of greenways. A greenway system can be defined as a network of land containing linear elements that are planned, designed and managed for multiple purposes including ecological, recreational, cultural or other proposals compatible with sustainable land use (Ahern, 1995).

Extensive experiences both in Europe and United States demonstrate that these strategies are not only beneficial for the environment but also able to generate new expenditures in tourism and travel. In addition, an extensive system of greenways can be particularly useful to protect watersheds, a resource that is traditionally badly managed in the region.

The aim of setting a greenways system includes the creation of a network of trails, open spaces and parklands. This planning strategy can be particularly beneficial in the examined case in both coastal and interior areas. In the first case, greenways can represent an opportunity for reconnecting and upgrading areas that have been wrecked, in many cases, by speculative property developments, improving the quality of tourism destinations. In the second case, they can be a central element both for the safeguard of environment and hydrogeology and for enhancing the actual low capacity of attracting and reorienting tourism and recreation. An extensive greenway system can be appreciated by the growing market niche of lovers of sport activities like trekking, hiking horse trekking, biking. A positive consequence of a renewed vitality of rural areas is also related to sustainable agriculture, especially traditional crops that can be revitalised by the presence of visitors.

The *Val di Noto* area appears to be particularly suitable to establish an extensive network of greenways that can be based on elements like river canyons, the so called *cave*, old existing linear infrastructures like abandoned rail corridors or historical roads network or aqueducts (Fig. 3 and 4). These elements, along with the dense network of peripheral rural roads, can assume the role of connectors among natural parks and reserves, archaeological areas and minor cultural resources that dots the *Val di Noto* countryside. An example already implemented but limited in its scale, is the natural Reserve of *Anapo* River where the dismissed railway is already used as a main trail along the valley that features impressive rupestrian necropolises.

The existing public properties along the rivers can represent a useful starting point for implementing this greenway system. In addition, the building of this kind of network can represent an opportunity for targeted linear forestation, with advantages both for recreational uses and wildlife populations. A greenway strategy can introduce some corrections to the above mentioned policies giving a clearer direction to the projects funded by the above mentioned national and European policies, by introducing priority criteria of acceptance for initiatives linked to the greenways network.

Toward a methodological framework

In a time span of almost one century, a never-ending theoretical debate has characterised the development of Italian southern regions, including Sicily. Recently, many studies have approached the issue proposing alternative directions toward a sustainable approach also with reference to the role of cultural heritage (Carta, 1999). A less explored field of interest is the one related to strategic planning and implementation issues.

A converging literature claims that a fresh approach is needed to cope with these complex issues. One useful tool can be *strategic place marketing* aimed at defining and diagnosing the conditions of the area (Kotler et al, 1993). This will allow the development of a vision of a long term solution based on a realistic assessment of the community's values, resources and opportunities and a consequent long term plan of action. But a parallel effort is needed to enhance a greater awareness of the opportunities and threats linked with land use issues in the communities at all levels. All territorial policies need to be integrated and synergic in order to reverse the current tendency that maintains a piecemeal and sectorial approach.

Therefore, the first problem to be handled is increasing the awareness on the need of a sustainable approach to physical planning and management of land. There is a clear dichotomy between a formal recognition of the need of following a sustainable direction and the planning reality. The above mentioned policy about industrial activities in agricultural zoned land is a clear example of the inconsistency between official claims and real practices. This is the most difficult task to be achieved since it requires a real engagement of the communities in pursuing a sustainable development.

A second useful component can be the revitalisation of a regional design approach that is the capacity of shaping the physical form of regions (Newmann, 2000). There have been limited attempts in Sicily toward this direction. Some of them have been only visionary schemes with limited impact outside the academic milieu (Doglio and Urbani, 1972). Physical planning at regional and provincial level has been extremely weak so far. There have been limited efforts to define the Regional Territorial Plan or the Landscape Protection Plan that have produced only analytical studies. In addition, out of nine provinces, only Ragusa has ended the approval of the Provincial Plan. The building of any comprehensive strategy has to include directions about the future of the physical space of communities and this implies the definition of a mandatory set of norms at supra-local level that must be shared and accepted at local level.

Finally, the involvement of different stakeholders requires a substantial improvement from the current level. Among the actors that have to change their attitude toward land use decisions, the following are central ones: institutions in charge with cultural and archaeological protection, forest management, tourism promotion, non profit organisations like conservation groups, cultural associations, organisations from private sectors, including farmers and entrepreneurs involved in tourism and recreation. The involvement of these actors cannot be limited at formal endorsement of memorandums of understandings or at the pursuance of control powers. A positive contribution is indispensable aimed at devising more effective strategies for reducing resistances to change in current land use practices, heavily affected by property fragmentation and cultural resistances toward cooperation.

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Administrative Provinces	Population (2001)	%	Area (sqkm)	%
Catania	1.054.778	21,23%	3.552	13,81%
Ragusa	295.264	5,94%	1.612	6,27%
Siracusa	396.167	7,97%	2.108	8,20%
Total “Val di Noto”*	1.746.209	35,14%	7.272	28,28%
Sicily	4.968.991	100,00%	25.713	100,00%

* The current subdivision does not correspond exactly with the historical one

Tab. 1 - Population and areas in *Val di Noto* (Data source: Istat Official Censes)

Population	Val di noto		Rest of Sicily		Sicily
1861	633.637	26,3%	1.772.782	73,7%	2.406.419
1951	1.362.400	30,4%	3.124.349	69,6%	4.486.749
1971	1.558.359	33,3%	3.122.356	66,7%	4.680.715
1991	1.727.412	34,8%	3.238.974	65,2%	4.966.386
2001	1.746.209	35,1%	3.222.782	64,9%	4.968.991

Tab 2 – Population dynamics in *Val di Noto* (Data source: Istat and Planning Regional Department)

Population in municipalities along the sea shore *						
	No of municipalities	Population (Census 2001)		Area (sqkm)		Density (Pop/Area)
Val di Noto coastal area	24	935.132	18,8%	2.991	11,6%	313
Rest of coastal area	91	2.026.335	40,8%	5.298	20,6%	382
Total costal area	115	2.961.467	59,6%	8.289	32,2%	357
Total Sicily	390	4.968.991	100%	25.713	100%	193
Population within 5 km from the sea shore **						
		Population (Census 1991)		Area (sqkm)		Density (Pop/Area)
Val di Noto coastal Area		844.484	17,0%	1.993	7,8%	424
Rest of coastal area		2.208.261	44,5%	6.401	24,9%	345
Total Costal Area		3.052.745	61,5%	8.394	32,6%	364
Total Sicily		4.966.386	100,0%	25.713	100,0%	193

* All municipalities washed by sea computed with their entire population and area within administrative borders
** Data obtained by summing area and population of Census tracts that intersect a 5 km buffer of the sea shore

Tab. 3 –Population In coastal areas (Data source: Istat Official Censes)

Urbanised areas (sqkm)	Val di Noto				Rest of Sicily				Total Sicily			
	In the period		Total from 1860		In the period		Total from 1860		In the period		Total from 1860	
before 1860	36,7	0,51%	36,7	0,51%	82,8	0,45%	82,8	0,45%	119,5	0,46%	119,5	0,46%
from 1860 to1955	39,3	0,54%	76,1	1,05%	65,4	0,35%	148,2	0,80%	104,7	0,41%	224,2	0,87%
from 1955 to 1975	51,4	0,71%	127,5	1,75%	140,8	0,76%	288,9	1,57%	192,2	0,75%	416,4	1,62%
from 1975 to 1994	199,9	2,75%	327,4	4,50%	394,8	2,14%	683,7	3,71%	594,7	2,31%	1.011,1	3,93%

Tab. 4 – Evolution of urbanized areas (Data source: Guidelines of Regional Landscape Plan)

	<i>Val di Noto</i>		Rest of Sicily		Total	
	Urbanised areas	Inhabitants	Urbanised areas	Inhabitants	Urbanised areas	Inhabitants
from 1860 to 1955 (1951)	107,09%	115,0%	79,03%	76,2%	87,66%	86,4%
from 1955 to 1975 (1971)	67,58%	14,4%	95,02%	-0,1%	85,71%	4,3%
from 1975 to 1994 (1991)	156,84%	10,8%	136,65%	3,7%	142,83%	6,1%
from 1955 to 1994	330,42%	26,8%	361,52%	3,7%	350,97%	10,7%

Areas computed from Pptr (Guidelines of landscape regional plan) Gis, in brackets Censes years

Tab. 5 - Comparison between variations in urbanised areas and inhabitants

	Archaeological Areas				Archaeological Sites*			Other sites**		
	No.		Area sq km	% of Area	No.		Density (No/sqkm)	No.		Density (No/sqkm)
Val di Noto	1025	56,4%	259,1	3,6%	1052	44,8%	0,145	1974	30,4%	0,271
Rest of Sicily	792	43,6%	274,8	1,5%	1296	55,2%	0,070	4521	69,6%	0,245
Total	1817	100,0%	533,8	2,1%	2348	100,0%	0,091	6495	100,0%	0,253

* All Listed archaeological sites (include archaeological areas)
** Includes castles towers, isolated churches, mansion houses, industrial archaeology etc.

Tab. 6 – Listed Cultural heritage (Data source: Guidelines of Regional Landscape Plan)

	Parks				Natural reserves				Total	
	No.	Area * (sqkm)		% of tot area	No.	Area (sqkm)		% of tot area	Area	% of tot area
Val di Noto	2	583	31,9%	8,02%	24	242	28,40%	3,33%	825	11,35%
Rest of Sicily	2	1244	68,1%	6,7%		611	71,6%	3,31%	1.855	10,06%
Total	4	1827	100%	7,1%	79	853	100%	3,32%	2.680	10,42%

* Does not include the fourth regional Park (Alcantara River) designated recently that includes an area previously listed as natural reserve

Tab. 7 – Listed Environmental heritage (Data source: Guidelines of Regional Landscape Plan)

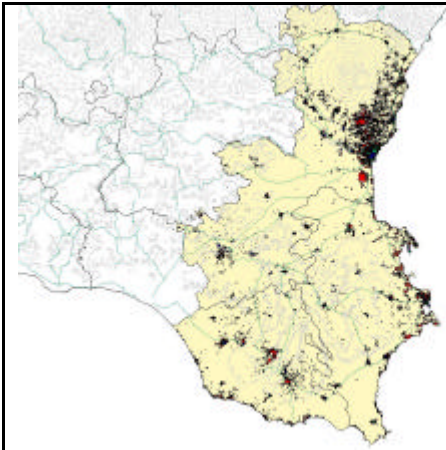


Fig. 1 Urban growth in *the Val di Noto*.

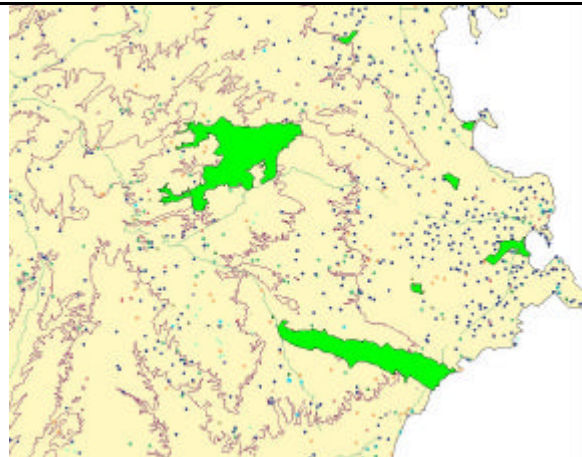


Fig. 2 Listed cultural and natural heritage (detail, dots represents isolated monuments and archaeological sites, green areas natural reserves)

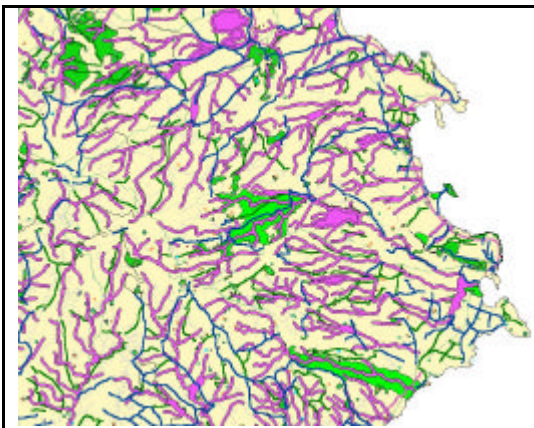


Fig. 3 The dense network of river valleys abandoned railways, paths and historical roads(detail)



Fig. 4 The natural reserve of *Cava Grande del Cassibile*