



TIJT, Volume 33(1): 1–27
ISSN (print): 1974-2207
ISSN (online): 3034-9842
Received: 22.01.2024
Revised: 08.04.2024
Accepted: 06.06.2024
Published: 12.07.2024

Academic Research Paper

Return tourism and sustainable enhancement of deserted Italian villages: description, analysis, and evaluation of an existing project*

Guido Migliaccio

Department of Law, Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods (DEMM), University of Sannio, Benevento, Italy, guido.migliaccio@unisannio.it. [ORCID: 0000-0002-8882-7648](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8882-7648)

Sabrina Lucilla Barone

Faculty of Human, Education and Sport Sciences, Pegaso University, Naples, Italy, sabrinacucilla.barone@unipegaso.it. [ORCID: 0009-0009-4913-2649](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4913-2649)

Michelangelo Lurgi

Giroauto Travel tour Operator & Rete Destinazione Sud, Salerno, Italy, m.lurgi@giroauto.it. [ORCID: 0009-0004-2021-0600](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2021-0600)

Abstract: To outline and critically evaluate an existing project called: “Return to Italy 2023-2028”, already started with the title “2023: Year of Return Tourism. The Discovery of the Origins” desired and managed by the “Rete Destinazione Sud” (Destination South Network), as part of the various Italian initiatives typical of ‘Roots Tourism’. It focuses on the revaluation of the villages of Colliano and Collianello. After a broad theoretical framework referring to previous national and international studies, the article draws on the direct experience of one of the co-authors who implemented the project and is currently managing it. The authors’ presence at some of the numerous planned initiatives also facilitated a critical assessment of the results obtained and the expected perspectives. Working together in a network, Southern private enterprises have launched an initiative to revitalise economically depressed inland areas. This initiative holds significant social value because it follows the latest

*This article is the result of collaborative work between the authors. However, it should be noted that Guido Migliaccio designed and set up the article as well as edited the literature review. It is therefore possible to attribute the paragraphs 'Literature review and theoretical framework' and 'Methods' to him. Michelangelo Lurgi is the initiator of the project and the administrator of the business network that runs it. The paragraph “The 'Back to Italy 2023 -2028' project and its first year '2023: Year of Return Tourism. Discovering the Origins'” is therefore attributable to him. The paragraph 'Discussion, Conclusions and Future Implications' is attributed to Guido Migliaccio and Michelangelo Lurgi together. All other paragraphs are by Sabrina Lucilla Barone. This publication also stems from the fruitful debate that developed on the subject at various meetings and conferences mentioned in the article.

sustainability principles. We hope for the multiplication of initiatives similar to the positive ones that have already characterised Colliano and Collianello, giving back to the community ancient buildings and abandoned dwellings transformed into widespread accommodation facilities. This study enriches the scientific bibliography and proposes a praiseworthy concrete case of co-participation of private enterprises to enhance depressed marginal areas customarily taken care of by public authorities. This fosters a business culture that is more sensitive to social issues and concretises the hope of entrepreneurs' active participation in a geography of tourism spread throughout Italy, decongesting traditional itineraries that suffer from over-tourism.

Keywords: *Tourism of the roots; Sustainable tourism; Experiential Tourism; Net Destination South, Colliano, The Village of the Normans.*

JEL Codes: Z32, R11, L83.

1. Introduction

Several academic studies confirm that tourism is among the most profitable economic activities (Lee & Chang, 2008; León-Gómez et al., 2021). It is a continuous source of development for popular tourist destinations but also offers significant potential for promoting lesser-known and less-developed areas, such as ancient villages (Gabrieli & Musarò, 2023).

Since the 1980s-1990s, with an increased interest in recent years, there has been a growing tourism phenomenon known as 'return tourism' or 'root tourism' or even 'radical tourism' (Tirabassi, 2022 a & b; Tomczewska-Popowycz & Taras, 2022). This type of tourism has emerged as a niche alternative to more conventional tourist destinations, contributing to the debate among experts in the field and generating a growing scientific literature. Numerous recent studies have focused on this phenomenon, linking it closely to migration flows (Musarò & Piga Bruni, 2019) and the intrinsic motivations that drive people to travel: in particular, the desire to reconnect with cultural roots, exploring the place of origin of ancestors or immersing oneself in family traditions and history (Perri, 2020).

This type of tourism can significantly impact cultural heritage appreciation and exchange (Sanchini, 2010).

Analysis of roots tourism reveals two distinct perspectives: travellers seeking to reconnect with lost family who utilise conventional tourism services and those maintaining close family ties who engage in VFR (Visit Friends and Relatives) tourism. Both perspectives contribute significantly to promoting the area and its products in international markets (Tirabassi, 2022 a & b). While the former group contributes through the consumption of traditional tourist services, the latter plays a crucial role in conveying authentic and personal experiences, thus contributing to the positive reputation of the destination. In summary, both categories of root tourists represent an excellent resource for enhancing and promoting territory in the global tourism context (Ferrari & Nicotera, 2021; Gabrieli, 2014; Gabrieli & Musarò, 2023).

Not to be overlooked is the context of profound epochal changes, accentuated by the new needs that emerged after the COVID-19 pandemic, which emphasised the importance of enhancing the tourism offer through emotional and transformational approaches, as in the case of root tourism. This phenomenon has a variety of facets and addresses specific target markets, encouraging the learning of new ways of communication and the creation of customised tourism offers. The traveller considered an immediate added value, must feel at home and receive a warm welcome since Italy is considered a welcoming refuge capable

of generating inner harmony. This way, memory is made indelible and transmitted over time (Sinisi, 2021).

This article outlines an ongoing experience designed and managed by a network of businesses in southern Italy called ‘Rete destinazione sud’ (Destination South Network), which for years has had the mission of enhancing destinations generally excluded from the usual tourist flows (Migliaccio et al., 2018; Lurgi, 2019). Among its multifaceted and numerous initiatives, the network has launched a project initially named ‘2023: Year of Return Tourism’ (Rete destinazione sud, 2022), which, obviously started in 2023, will continue in the following years under the name ‘Return to Italy 2023-2028’.

The critical review of the current experience has first provided for the definition of ‘return tourism’, which, in the case under analysis, is mainly focused on the small ancient villages in the inland areas, particularly in the Campania region. These villages have suffered a demographic decline due to emigration and challenging economic conditions not compensated by traditional tourist flows. They, already places of copious emigration to economically more developed lands, have acquired, over the years, a particular interest on the part of the descendants of emigrants, who, through family narratives or direct contacts, express their intention to re-establish a link with their land of origin.

This article analyses a “Destination South Network” project in depth, following a comprehensive review of Italian and international scientific literature. The analysis focuses on the experience of the Municipality of Colliano and its hamlet of Collianello, which serves as a successful case study in the recovery, valorisation, and exploitation of long-abandoned resources.

In conclusion, the article makes a substantial contribution to the understanding and promoting sustainable approaches for the recovery and development of small communities, especially inland communities, by outlining promotion and development strategies that enhance the aspirations and emotional ties of descendants with their homeland. This helps form a solid theoretical basis to guide policies and actions to enhance and reactivate depressed areas, promoting a sustainable and inclusive perspective for their future. Regions with similar environmental conditions and a desire for sustainable socio-economic development can adopt this successful approach pioneered in Campania.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

For exhibition purposes only, it is possible to distinguish the main domestic works offered in Italian from those in English that are potentially accessible to a broader international audience of scholars. Together, these works paint a comprehensive picture of root tourism, offering a theoretical approach, empirical analyses and practical proposals for understanding this complex and constantly evolving phenomenon.

2.1. Return tourism in Italian literature

The ‘Italians in the World Report’ by the Migrantes Foundation (2014), already 20 years ago, provided an exciting overview of Italian emigration’s historical and contemporary context, contributing to understanding the current dynamics of departures from Italy. The study of the emigration of our compatriots is preparatory to the potential of returning to Italy for tourism purposes. This source, therefore, offers a complete and valuable picture that can still complement scholars’ analyses focused on root tourism (Romita & Perri, 2009). Of particular note in this volume is the contribution by Marina Gabrieli (2014), focusing on the case of ‘ItalianSide.com’.

A sociological approach characterised one of the first scientific contributions of the last decade by

Melotti, who in 2013 focused on the change in cultural tourism, highlighting the role of ‘slow tourism’ as a response to the processes of standardisation and globalisation. The desire of those engaged in root tourism to live authentic experiences and connect emotionally with their origins is a key motivator.

Later, Camilli’s (2015) paper proposes root tourism as a possible solution to revive the abandoned villages of Abruzzo.

Labitalia & Adnkronos provided the first, most significant, and growing evidence of the economic potential of return tourism in 2018. Insights have subsequently been taken up and updated more recently by Fioretti (2022), who, emphasising the importance of history, memory and identity, arrives at valuing root tourism at up to four billion euros, estimating a flow of six million travellers searching for their origins. The paper emphasises the value of this experience and fully justifies the project proposed by the “Destination South Network” recently started and subsequently described (Rete destinazione sud, 2022).

Roots tourism is, however, a complex phenomenon involving the temporary return to the places of origin of those who, or their relatives, have emigrated. Antonella Perri’s book (2020), produced by the Centre for Research and Studies on Tourism (CReST) of the University of Calabria, outlines a theoretical and conceptual reflection on this phenomenon. The author aims to provide elements of knowledge to frame this tourism from a qualitative and quantitative point of view.

More recently, Letizia Sinisi (2021) instead proposed ‘Rooting Experience Planning®’ as a methodology to enhance the root tourism offer. This innovative approach suggests a transformation of the tourism offer starting from the very concept of roots, aiming to create authentic and meaningful experiences for travellers.

In the same year (2021), Ferrari and Nicotera contributed to this exciting perspective by offering a broad overview of the academic literature and presenting results of qualitative and exploratory research conducted in Italy and Argentina. Their surveys, based on interviews and focus groups, highlight the socio-cultural impact of root tourism and explore the sustainability of the sector, with a focus on post-COVID changes.

Minervino’s article (2022) is even more recent, reiterating the importance of ‘Roots Tourism’ as an innovative form with considerable development potential. Multidisciplinary research and concrete initiatives in southern regions actively respond to this phenomenon, promoting socio-cultural sustainability and stimulating interest in local destinations and smaller centres.

The same year saw two essential writings by Tirabassi (2022 a & b), which, in describing the multifaceted aspects of the phenomenon, bring it up to date by comparing past experiences with new mobility.

The discovery of roots, and thus the desire to revisit places of origin, also passes through archives (Carretto, 2022), which, while being a new form of cultural tourism, solicit journeys rich in sentiment and nostalgia. Also fundamental are tourist guides (Tirri, 2022) that focus on villages that in the past were subject to depopulation due to emigration and that today, on the contrary, could be places of return and investment.

Advantageous could be the exceptional availability proposed by the PNRR (Comolli, 2022) to be allocated to projects of this kind aimed at the rediscovery of native villages. The fruitful 2022, with the PNRR, also generated the volume by Gabrieli et al., ‘Discovering Italians. Root journeys in Italy’, the outcome of a reflection that emerged within the Technical Coordination Table of Roots Tourism, set up in 2018 in collaboration with the associations Raiz Italiana and Asmef. The table of public and private entities aims to create a national tourism offer for root travellers. The “Destination South Network” also participates in the table. The study is a crucial tool for the development of the project ‘Tourism of Roots - an integrated

strategy for the recovery of the tourism sector in post covid-19 Italy', led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the framework of the NRP's investment for 'the attractiveness of villages'. This project proposes a wide range of worldwide tourism offers for Italian descendants and friends.

The latest and most recent report by Gabrieli & Musarò (2023) focuses on the Emilia-Romagna communities in Argentina and Brazil, highlighting the symbolic desire to return to the land of origin. The guidelines provided for host stakeholders offer a practical link between theory and possible implementations.

To complete this brief bibliographical review, it is necessary to cite works that exemplify the characteristics of abandoned villages with the potential for desirable revitalisation. Among the most important are the writings of Mocciola (2015), which outlines the "apparent silences" of ghost towns, and Morrello & Dallorso (2023), which points out the 15 most evocative Italian villages to visit at least once in a lifetime... The web page proposed by limitless-solutions.it (2023) is also handy.

Amongst these villages, Colliano and Collianello, described by the mountain community to which they belong (cmtanagroaltomediosele.it, no year), have a fascinating history (Grisi, no year) and are the subject of one of the initiatives of the Destinazione Sud Network project focused on in these notes, certainly deserve a particular focus.

2.2. Return tourism in international literature

Tomczewska-Popowycz & Taras (2022) provided a terminological and conceptual analysis of radical tourism. By reviewing 41 terms and proposing a two-dimensional model and map, they offer a system of differentiation and directions for the future use of terminology.

Radical tourism manifests itself in different ways among migrant communities of different nationalities.

In the case of the second generation of Greek migrants in Italy, radical tourism has a profound significance, strengthening cultural ties and identity. In 2018, Pelliccia examined migrants' attachment to their parents' country, frequency of travel to Greece, and self-perception during their stay using a mixed methods approach. It takes up some of the themes previously outlined in Perri (2016). However, radical tourism is not only about travel but can also contribute to sustainable destination development, as highlighted by the research conducted on root tourists in Calabria (Italy) by Ferrari et al. in 2022. The survey assesses the socio-cultural impact of radical tourism, filling a gap in the literature.

Addressing the theme of genealogical tourism, Michael & Mura (2023) present a documentary that explores tourism through ancestral roots and tourist consumption. Researchers analyse genealogical tourism as a vehicle for creating bonds and bridges of social capital, particularly in the Irish Famine (1845-1852), which challenged traditional concepts of homeland and family.

Tomczewska-Popowycz & Huang (2023) explore sentimental tourism in Central and Eastern Europe by analysing 400 Polish tourists. Comparing attitudes and behaviour by age and family roots, sentimental tourism, linked to lost territories, offers a new perspective on the relationship between tourists and heritage places, introducing a tourism segmentation based on different perceptions of the destination.

In Slovenia, root tourism takes on connotations that have been little explored despite the considerable Slovenian diaspora. Koderman (2012) bases his analysis on an empirical study of Slovenian-American and Slovenian-Australian ethnic communities, revealing a significant impact on identity as Slovenian descendants, sometimes turning travel into an emotional 'pilgrimage'.

Skipper & Davidson (2018), in the United States, challenged the conventional discourse on radical

tourism by investigating the experiences of individuals visiting sites associated with different types of current ‘slavery’. Through the case of the Behind the Big House Tour in Holly Springs, Mississippi, they highlight how radical tourism facilitates a sense of belonging and connection to the historical roots of African Americans.

Regarding the experience of the Australian South Sea Islander diaspora, we refer to the work of Cheer & Reeves (2013), who state that roots tourism offers personal relief and restitution. It contributes to broader sociopolitical advancement between the descendants of the colonised and present-day institutions.

The phenomenon of root tourism is also the subject of growing interest and study in Africa, as evidenced by the Black Travel Movement that has led to a ‘re-migration’ of the African diaspora to supposed African homelands (Dillette, 2021). In the context of Ghana, this study explores the experiences of African American travellers, revealing a form of ‘double consciousness’ and increased civic engagement for social justice. In Ghana, radical tourism takes on a unique significance for Africans in the diaspora, with Mensah (2015) identifying four key factors: the guest-guest relationship, authenticity, excitement and the appearance of slave castles. This study recommends specific interventions in the radical tourism product to improve guest-guest interactions.

Similar analyses, in different contexts, shift the focus to French Guiana, where Hmong communities experience an evolution from family and roots tourism to an experience of existential authenticity (Géraud, 2018). People increasingly seek to live according to their values, a shift that compels them to break free from cultural and historical constraints.

In sum, the theoretical framework of root tourism emerges as a complex and multidimensional field in which diaspora, cultural identity, authenticity, and socio-cultural sustainability play crucial roles. Different communities and geographical contexts present varying perspectives, which offer a broad spectrum of approaches and facets to explore in future research.

Enriching the literature can be achieved by critically analysing an ongoing project known as ‘Ritorno in Italia 2023-2028’, mainly focusing on Southern Italy. The project’s first year, labelled ‘2023, Year of Return Tourism,’ can be examined in depth to enhance the available literature further.

“Alla scoperta delle Origini” is desired and managed by the “Destination South Network”, the subject of the following discussion.

3. Methods

The described domestic and international literature originates from consulting libraries and databases. The primary information subsequently revised with a critical and proactive approach is also drawn from it. One of the authors, Michelangelo Lurgi, the sole administrator of the project’s network, describes the current project as its initiator.

The authors participated in some salient phases of its realisation and will follow its future developments. Therefore, the methodology analyses a generalisable case frequently used in economic studies for teaching and research (Biancone, 2017; Turrini, 2002). Each case is unique due to its close linkage to the context. However, common elements in similar situations can facilitate the development of an accurate exportable model.

After the critical literature review, the case method describes, analyses and evaluates a concrete experience, highlighting the main economic and social aspects. This project’s proven success in Campania encourages us to evaluate its replicability in other regions.

Using studies to analyse tourism is often characterised by effectively highlighting aspects that

may indicate broader trends.

There is ample literature on this concerning typical economic policy approaches and for managing companies in the sector as sustainable logic. The method also emphasises tourism choices or highlights typical features of particular places, including entire nations.

Worthy of note, for example, in the typically macroeconomic approach, is the contribution at the beginning of the millennium by Costa et al. (2001), who, in proposing typical features of the economic policy of tourism, made use of numerous Italian and foreign case studies. More recent, on the other hand, is the book by Rocca (2013), who used case methodology to describe the transition from proto-tourism to global tourism. As a particular case of resilience, tourism has also been the subject of studies on stock markets during the pandemic (Goel & Dash, 2023).

Business economics and business management studies have also frequently used the case method. So already, at the beginning of this millennium, Rispoli (2001) presented the then 'evolved' tourism products, and then Rolle (2005) although mainly focused on managing the small tourism enterprise.

The valuable management manual of typical companies in the sector (De Carlo, 2007) also reports numerous cases.

The analysis of a particular case concerning an attractive palace in a southern Spanish city designated as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was the leading element in the study of the social return on investment index (SROI), which is also helpful to assess the impacts of tourism on the local economy and society (Ariza-Montes et al., *In Press*).

In recent years, case studies have also featured the particularly topical issue of sustainability in the sector (Bizzarri & Querini, 2006; Salvatore & Santamato, 2012; Del Chiappa, 2018).

The analysis method proposed here can also be used for considerations related to particular types of tourism, such as, for example, third-age tourism (Amoretti & Varani, 2013) or cultural tourism, with particular reference, for example, to the cinema (Presutti, 2018).

This methodology has been a popular tool for critically assessing the choices made by specific locations, ranging from individual cities to entire countries.

Focusing above all on the Italian experiences to which this article refers, the cases of the cities of Spoleto-Viterbo, due to their typical connotation as cultural cities (Collettini, 2002), Venice (Fabbri et al., 2020) and East Naples concerning the issues arising from (over)tourism and innovation (De Falco, 2019) are worth mentioning. And then also Florence and its historical centre (Romano, 2018), and Rome, which, primarily because of the forthcoming Jubilee in 2025, could be affected by a new Grand Tour undoubtedly different from past experiences because of the recent pandemic and the rise of the 'digital society' (Granelli & Batosti, 2022). Of course, foreign cities have also been the subject of analysis; some examples are the cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the Arab Emirates (Bernardi, 2011).

The case method is also helpful for analysing areas that are larger or, conversely, smaller than the metropolitan cities mentioned. It has been used, for example, for the territorial promotion of Marche (Corinto et al., 2016) or the destination brand of New Zealand (De Marco, 2017). This method can enhance minor historical centres (Manzi, 2001) or villages (Dall'Ara & Morandi, 2010).

Again, the same method can be used for reflections on environmental governance and community tourism in southern Africa, considering the Zinave National Park in Mozambique (Belotti, 2020).

In conclusion, one can take complete comfort in choosing this methodology from the cited examples, which makes it possible to consider the exposition of a project involving numerous useful and productive Italian areas which are realistically exportable to similar situations.

4. Italy, small villages and return tourism

4.1 Defining approaches and context notes

Tourism, in its broadest sense, encompasses a wide range of activities and services involving the temporary transfer of people from one place of habitual residence to another location. Tourism is motivated by various reasons, which have led to the distinction of various types of tourism. These include, but are not limited to, nature, beach, lake, rural, sport, cultural, religious, food and wine tourism. Each of these types of tourism responds to the peculiarities of tourist locations.

Return tourism, tourism of the roots, and tourism of the origins, closely linked to migration, are among the various motivations for travel.

This type of tourism involves emigrants and their descendants returning to their lands of origin to visit families and places linked to their childhood (Grasso & Schilirò, 2021; Ferrari & Nicotera, 2021). The aim is to rediscover those territories' landscape and architectural and artistic beauty, getting closer to the roots of their own family and cultural history (De Marchi & Mingotto, 2016; Tirabassi, 2022 a & b).

Since 1861, some 30 million Italians have sought their fortune abroad, giving rise to a vast diaspora (Gargano, 2021). Cities like Padula in the province of Salerno saw a drastic decrease in population in the decade between the 19th and 20th centuries. In the years following the Unification of Italy, destinations were North and South America, Australia, Northern Europe, etc. (Mazza, 2021). Despite initial difficulties, Italian emigrants integrated and contributed to creating thriving communities, bringing memories that kept ties with their countries of origin alive.

Many Italians living abroad consider themselves an integral part of Italy, becoming spontaneous promoters of knowledge of their country of origin, generating significant incoming tourism flows, creating new opportunities for socio-economic and cultural growth, helping to open up new markets and drawing attention to often neglected tourist destinations. Moreover, this phenomenon has fostered a new currency circulation and economic revival in local areas hit by crisis and depopulation.

The yearning to reconnect with the core elements of one's identity has been termed a "search for spiritual DNA".

This impulse translates into a 'moral duty' to restore a historical identity to fellow Italians scattered around the world, estimated at between five and 80 million Italian descendants, according to the ENIT report. In response to this desire, initiatives have been launched to attract "root tourists" who want to explore the land of their ancestors.

Roots-oriented niche tourism in Italy (Antolini & Cesarini, 2021) is particularly relevant and benefits from the richness of its historical and cultural heritage, with no less than 55 UNESCO World Heritage sites. The intrinsic motivation of these travellers is a defining characteristic. The desire for self-discovery, a sense of belonging, and reconnecting with one's roots fuel this search.

This involves an exploration of the intimate sphere of feelings, driving them to seek out and meet distant relatives. Furthermore, as Santamato & Iaffaldano (2021) demonstrated, the discovery of 'new cousins' is one of the most significant aspirations and satisfactions of travelling (Vietti, 2012; Ruggieri, 2021).

This phenomenon has prompted many European countries and beyond to focus on genealogical tourism (Carone, 2021), developing travel packages, services, and targeted communication. Luigi Maria Vignali, Director General for Italians Abroad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, emphasised the importance of this sector in the context of the Roots Tourism Guides (Ministry

of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2019 & 2021).

Roots tourism is therefore configured as a tourism sector of considerable potential, still partially unexpressed, oriented towards the optimisation and enhancement of the assets and heritages, both tangible and intangible, involved and to be involved (Grasso & Schilirò, 2021). This type of tourism is multifactorial and experiential (Ferrari & Nicotera, 2021), stimulating resources and knowledge to welcome ‘root travellers actively’. According to recent estimates, about 6 million Italians return annually for 60 million overnight stays (Minervino, 2022).

Satisfied and fulfilled Italian tourists can become authentic promoters and ambassadors of the territories that preserve their family history, with a particular focus on small villages, often protagonists of root tourism. This phenomenon is at the heart of national tourism development policies, with numerous interventions and concrete actions by local and national institutions, private entities, tour operators and associations. These initiatives aim to enhance and revitalise Italian villages, especially those almost wholly abandoned, especially inland.

Initiatives in the south are being prioritised due to the more significant impact of past migrations and the stronger cultural ties with these migrant communities.

2023 has been designated as the ‘Year of Return Tourism’, promoted by the “Destination South Network”, which has also received the patronage of the State-Regions Conference, while 2024 is characterised as the ‘Year of Italian Roots’. The promotion of the cultural relationship with migrant communities is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation¹ through the involvement of Italian municipalities in the activities planned for 2024 as part of the PNRR Project ‘Tourism of the Roots - An Integrated Strategy for the Recovery of the Tourism Sector in Post-Covid-19’ Italy.

In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation invites municipalities to organise events and activities of interest to Italians abroad and Italian descendants from their territory. In addition, they can identify facilities suitable for reception and subjects willing to join the discount programme in favour of root tourists, focusing on the interest in also involving small municipalities with less than 5,000/6,000 inhabitants.

4.2 The small ancient villages, in particular

The valorisation of small ancient villages (329 of them, according to Bacilieri, 2022) is a priority of the Ministry of Culture and Cultural Heritage, which aims to redevelop them with significant financial investments to make them attractive again. The upgrading of small towns and rural areas is a process that not only contributes to the renovation and recovery of housing and infrastructure but also has significant implications on the investment front. In the context of return tourism, it frequently occurs that this form of tourism represents a potential source of investment in the countries of origin (Carone, 2021), with ‘return immigrants’ playing a pivotal role in such a process (Gabrieli & Musarò, 2023).

Enhancing these areas brings economic benefits and direct support to local suppliers of goods and services (Ruggieri, 2021). The new economic impetus is particularly valuable for local communities, which see employment increase due to the increased flow of tourists. Diversification of employment can directly affect the tourism sector, but it can also extend to other sectors, such as handicrafts, catering, and cultural services.

¹ <https://www.esteri.it/it/servizi-consolari-e-visti/italiani-all-estero/turismo-delle-radici/> (consulted on 11/01/2024).

This tourism development strategy, which responds to a medium-term perspective, helps to create a constant flow of visitors on a territorial scale, reducing dependence on the tourist seasons and promoting an even distribution of tourists throughout the year. Finally, the increase in employment and local economic opportunities underlines the importance of training new professional figures, including tour operators specialised in root travel, to adequately manage the specific needs of this type of tourism (Newland & Taylor, 2010).

Italian villages represent a cultural and historical heritage of great importance, characterised by the magnetism of their uniqueness, made up of evocative atmospheres and picturesque landscapes, often overlooked by tourists in favour of large cities. Smaller towns, often with well-preserved traditional architecture, offer an authentic experience and a journey through time.

Some key points regarding Italian villages include (Bacilieri, 2023):

- history and culture: Italian villages are often rich in history, with cobbled streets, ancient churches, castles and medieval towers. Each borgo can tell fascinating stories that reflect the country's rich cultural heritage;
- enchanting landscapes: many scenic locations boast boroughs nestled among hills, mountains, or countryside;
- the landscapes offer breathtaking views and are ideal for those seeking a quiet escape from urban life;
- Villages are havens for experiencing authentic local traditions, from handicrafts to religious festivals, which are often preserved and celebrated over the centuries;
- local cuisine: Italian villages frequently showcase their culinary heritage through dishes prepared using traditional recipes and locally sourced ingredients. Restaurants offer the opportunity to taste authentic regional delicacies;
- sustainable tourism: many Italian villages are adopting sustainable approaches to tourism to preserve the environment and ensure the conservation of natural and cultural resources;
- local events: villages often host local events, such as festivals, fairs and cultural events, which attract visitors and help keep the community alive;
- hospitality: Many village accommodation facilities offer warm and authentic hospitality, allowing visitors to immerse themselves fully in the local atmosphere.

Interest in Italian villages has grown from domestic and international tourists as more and more people seek authentic experiences and places that reflect the true essence of Italy. The preservation and promotion of villages are crucial to preserving Italy's rich heritage and ensuring that future generations can enjoy these cultural gems (Grasso & Schilirò, 2021). Unfortunately, in Italy, as in many other parts of the world, many abandoned villages (around 6,000) silently witness demographic changes, industrialisation, and population movements towards cities. These villages, often located in rural or mountainous areas, have been abandoned for various reasons, including economic decline, emigration to more urbanised areas, natural disasters or changes in living patterns, and stand as wonderful simulacra of the will to survive.

Contrary to appearances, abandoned places do not know death. They solidify in the dimension of the memory of those who inhabited them, becoming an indissoluble element of identity (Teti, 2004). They represent the country's backbone and are an opportunity for Italy to develop its tourism. Therefore, the real challenge is to give new life to small, depopulated villages, jewels of beauty and uniqueness, by offering experiences, rebuilding ties, and weaving the threads of history, identity and memory.

This is the framework for the project involving the villages of Colliano and Collianello described below, as part of the experience of the “Destination South Network” project called “Return to Italy 2023-2028 (Rete Destinazione Sud, 2022²).

5. The ‘Back to Italy 2023 -2028’ project and its first year ‘2023: Year of Return Tourism. Discovering the ‘Origins’

5.1. The promoter, organiser and manager

The ‘Destinazione Sud Network’ (a joint-stock company and innovative startup created for territorial development) conceived, organised, and managed the project under analysis. It operates through a network contract comprising tour operators, travel agencies, hoteliers, resorts, restaurateurs, transport companies, and consulting firms. The network contract facilitates collaboration among these entities to develop an integrated project for promoting, enhancing, and marketing specific tourist destinations (Migliaccio et al., 2018; Lurgi, 2019).

Several components organise this multifunctional network (www.retedestinazionesud.it):

- Network of Destinations. It fosters collaboration between territories in creating a shared strategic project for development by setting up tourist destinations with local operators.
- Network of Portals. It deals with the integrated promotion and enhancement of the products, enterprises, and territories of the destinations established and the creation of destination portals.
- Innovative Startup. The joint-stock company, with a share capital of EUR 565,000, was established to promote, enhance and market territories, companies and products nationally and internationally. The organisation fulfils its mission by conceiving and supporting major tourism projects and international initiatives. A standout example is the five-year project ‘Return to Italy 2023-2028’.
- Marketing Network. Responsible for activating e-commerce through a Destination Portal that makes territories, companies, and products immediately purchasable online.
- Network of Relations. It promotes links between all actors involved in the Destinations, including institutions, companies, opinion leaders, stakeholders, associations, consortia, research centres, foundations, and universities.

5.2 The ‘Origins’

The conception of a project aimed at fostering return tourism originated from the meetings and debates generated by the 2017 National FORUM entitled “Tourism and Destinations”, organised by the “Destination South Network”. The Forum aimed to stimulate the creation of ideas and projects for developing destinations and businesses operating in such contexts. Through three days of lively discussions, enriched by ten sessions and 96 speakers, new proposals and initiatives emerged, as well as the challenges faced by the southern regions. Despite highlighting difficulties, the Forum emphasised opportunities, directing attention towards a shared path for project development.

² From this exclusive source are drawn the subsequent contents with some modest reworkings.

Subsequently, the urgent need to collaborate and target fellow citizens living abroad became more evident during the dialogue and sharing with the various localities through the Focus Groups dedicated to forming the network's target destinations. This need, particularly felt in inland areas, inspired the conception of a more articulated project. Consequently, the network actively participated in initiatives centred on the themes of return tourism and root tourism, topics previously discussed by companies connected to the network since 1996, the year in which their collaboration with the NIAF (National Italian American Foundation) on return tourism to rediscover one's origins began.

In 2019, the network promoted a second national event in Milan, which focused on destination development issues, 'Destinazione Campania'. This event unfolded over four months, incorporating meetings and a 14-day initiative program. The program started with a conference officially launching the project: 'Il Turismo di Ritorno: Emigrare al Contrario' (Return Tourism: Emigrating in the opposite direction).

In 2020, during the Bit in Milan and the Itinerando Fair in Padua, the idea of sharing it with tour operators began to be shared. The pandemic stalled progress until 2021. That year, a National Promoting Committee was established to champion the initiative.

On 14 December 2021, during the hearing at the Commission for Industry, Commerce, Tourism of the Senate of the Italian Republic on the topic 'Problems of accessibility, liveability and redevelopment of villages', the network presented the initiative entitled '2023: Year of Return Tourism. Discovering the Origins' (Sorrentino et al., 2022). During the hearing, they emphasised the need to integrate a project on return tourism into the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) to promote internationally the villages and inland areas, which are the main places of origin of emigration.

Starting in December 2021, the project and the National Promoting Committee were formalised and presented to the public through national and international events. For the first time in Italy, a project on return tourism, initiated by private entities without public funding, was joined by 750 Italian municipalities. It has involved the Italian and European parliaments, extending to Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Brazil, with the participation of public and private entities from over 20 countries worldwide.

It is concluding a path started in 2017, aimed at establishing a national network between businesses and professionals (Destination Italy Network) to support and connect to the 'Return to Italy 2023-2028' project. In parallel, efforts are underway to set up a Participation Foundation in collaboration with public entities, starting with those joining the National Promoting Committee.

5.3 The Mission

The 'Ritorno in Italia 2023-2028' initiative targets Italians living abroad and the more than 70 million 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation compatriots living abroad.

The project actively seeks to:

- revitalise Italy's image to attract tourism and investment;
- foster exports;
- promote business meetings;
- establish lasting collaborations with Italians worldwide.

Return Tourism will constitute a strategic lever that, through the promotion of regional traditions,

excellences, villages and territories from which emigration originated, intends to capture the attention of our compatriots interested in the search for their roots and eager to deepen their knowledge of Italy.

The project “2023 Year of Return Tourism” integrates with the initiative already planned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, called “2024 Year of Roots Tourism”, through a synergy of themes and activities. This collaboration aims to consolidate the strategic approach further to explore and enhance Italians’ cultural and historical roots worldwide.

5.4 Objectives

The aim is to give life to an international expo of Italianness, an event spread throughout the peninsula, in which each region and municipality, in synergy with businesses, can present its cultural, productive, food and wine, and tourism excellence.

The rediscovery of the Italian identity and the pride in one’s origins are proposed as premises not only to encourage compatriots living abroad to return to Italy for tourism but also to stimulate them to invest, contributing to the revitalisation of entire areas of the country, thus creating work and employment opportunities, with the enhancement of the skills and talent of young Italians.

The planned events aim to unite the entire community of Italians scattered throughout the various countries of the world, promoting knowledge of the cities and, above all, the small villages where the emigration phenomenon originated, to transform an initially dramatic phenomenon into an opportunity for cultural and tourist promotion.

This participative and spontaneous event takes shape thanks to digital platforms, constituting itself as the sum of local initiatives. Its nature is intrinsically bottom-up, and the digital sphere acts as a catalyst for the convergence of local activities. The platform is a tool for promoting the country’s system, communicating through a national direction that co-ordinates the overall image, and defining a quality specification for events and activities to standardise communication.

5.5 The initial articulation and developments

The project envisages the realisation of events with different contents and objectives organised throughout Italy: companies and municipalities already involved in 2023 will support the initiatives. There will be various types of events: gastronomic, cultural, musical, tours, debates, exhibitions, business meetings, workshops, and economic missions.

A prerequisite for a project is training those who will operationally follow the activities in the various territories to ensure absolute homogeneity and professionalism in implementing the activities.

In November 2019, Milan hosted the presentation of the initiative’s general outline that took shape during the lockdown, becoming a project aimed at post-COVID relaunch and restart.

The project was planned to last 24 months from January 2022, with the official presentation of the promoter committee, until the conclusion of the activities in January 2024, and envisaged two phases: the first related to the presentation of the project, the creation of the partnership, the coordination of activities and the realisation of the events calendar; the second related to the realisation of the events planned for the period from March 2023 onwards.

The initial process started with the establishment of the National Promoting Committee and the drafting of the project. The latter was presented in preliminary form by the “Destination South Network” during a hearing in the Senate on 14 December 2021, at the invitation of the 10th Committee on

Industry, Trade and Tourism, focusing on the theme of villages and tourist development.

In the first phase, in summary, the following aspects were defined:

- formalisation of the national promotion committee;
- confirmation of partnerships and expansion of project membership;
- presentation of the committee and the project at a national press conference;
- establishment of a national coordination committee;
- activation of the scientific and technical committee;
- activation of the working groups in the territories;
- start of the training of those involved in the activities in the various regions;
- in cooperation with the regions, municipalities and territorial organisations already involved in the initiative, the project will organise and define events, festivals, workshops, economic missions, comparisons and debates.

The second part, which includes events in the various Italian regions, started in March 2023 and will end in the following years.

5.6 The programme

The ‘Return to Italy 2023-2028’ programme has already made significant progress, including:

- The organisation of more than 500 events throughout Italy, focusing on small towns and villages. The initiative’s promoting committee members actively collaborated to bring these events to life. The initiative’s promoting committee members surpassed expectations in the first year, successfully realising these events and generating significant media coverage.
- A necessary hearing at the X Commission for Industry, Trade and Tourism of the Senate of the Republic, during which representatives of the Destinazione Sud Network presented and discussed initiatives related to return tourism, highlighting operational strategies for promoting Italy’s villages and inland areas.
- A national conference was held, with the participation of institutional representatives, mayors, regional tourism councillors, deputies, senators, and members of the leading national associations. Despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic, the conference was followed by two presentations, one in Milan during the “Borsa Internazionale del Turismo Italiano” and the other in Naples during the Borsa Mediterranea del Turismo.
- Despite the complex event organisation, the project successfully rolled out across central and southern Italy, with frequent participation from regional councillors, mayors, businesses, and local associations.
- In 2023, the ‘Ambassadors of Italy’ award was launched during a special public event, specifically recognising Italians living abroad with ancestry from Campania and Calabria.
- The project organisers successfully brought the initiative to central and southern Italy, holding complex events enriched by the frequent participation of regional councillors, mayors, businesses, and local associations.

They also hope:

- further regional workshops to encourage meetings between Italian companies in the tourism, agri-food, craft, trade and industry sectors and foreign companies managed by our compatriots;
- meetings to present investment proposals on workable projects, highlighting the operational support of the public bodies present and linked to the projects mentioned above;
- professional and entrepreneurial exchange programmes, with the creation of job and training opportunities, to share knowledge and skills in cooperation with business networks, professional associations, trade associations and universities that are members of the committee;
- “peer-to-peer” exchange programmes between young Italians abroad who wish to come to Italy to get to know and work in the areas, villages, and lands from where their grandparents left, in collaboration with the associations present in the territories willing to support the initiative;
- an International Forum of young descendants of Italians for the exchange of knowledge and know-how.

The network activates valuable relationships with companies and institutions to support future initiatives.

5.7 Promotion

Organisers implemented strategic promotional activities to maximise the event’s visibility and participation. These activities included:

- The initiative actively participated in leading international trade fairs for tourism and agri-food sectors, collaborating with Enterprise Networks, Consortia, Associations, and ENIT to deliver presentations.
- Agreements with Italian Chambers of Commerce abroad. Agreements and synergies were established with the Italian Chambers of Commerce abroad, thus strengthening the event’s promotion in institutional venues.
- Presentations to Associations and Foundations of Italians Worldwide. The event was presented in detail to the associations and foundations representing Italians abroad to involve this important community actively.
- Presentations will be held in all Italian regions and participating municipalities. To ensure national coverage, presentations were organised in all Italian regions and participating municipalities to involve the public at the local level.
- The initiative actively strengthened relationships with existing international business networks to leverage synergies and maximise the event’s reach.
- Promotion through foreign media. The dissemination of the event was enhanced through the circuit of foreign television and radio stations interested in supporting and promoting the initiative, ensuring global media coverage.
- Contacts with the network of Honorary Consuls. Contacts and agreements were

established with the network of Honorary Consuls in Italy to extend the event's promotion to diplomatic and consular contexts.

- The initiative signed agreements with universities where Italians reside abroad. This collaboration secured targeted event promotion and participation through academic channels.

5.8 The Organisational Support Structure

The organisational structure of the initiative followed an articulated methodology, divided into several implementation phases. First, three working teams were activated to formulate the project, outline the programme of activities and co-ordinate the activities of the promoting committee. These teams played a crucial role in outlining the fundamental aspects of the initiative and coherently organising the activities.

A National Co-ordinating Committee was then established to oversee and manage the initiative nationally. This committee played a central role in ensuring the alignment and coherence of activities at the national level.

To ensure structured participation at the local level, the initiative simultaneously activated regional coordinators.

This phase was necessary to establish the basis for provincial collaborations and to enable individual local entities to join.

The initial list included a selection of companies, provincial associations, and local organisations that expressed interest. It was essential to structure the regional coordinations before proceeding with the local memberships.

The initiative established a technical-scientific committee to benefit from specialised knowledge and scientific input. The presence of this committee ensured an approach based on solid theoretical and scientific foundations.

Adhesion to the national promoting committee took place gradually, considering the need to structure the regional coordinators before proceeding with local accessions.

This strategy allowed for an organic and coordinated construction of the initiative on a national scale.

Subjects that have joined the national promoting committee since the beginning: networks of enterprises, consortia, networks, Associations of Italians in the world, foundations, HTI (Higher Technical Institutes) foundations, Regional Development Companies, National Associations, Regional Associations, municipalities, LAGs (Local Action Groups), mountain communities, parks, other subjects of regional and national relevance.

Negotiations are already underway for collaborations with several essential entities. Among the entities involved are ENIT, National Unioncamere, Regional Unioncamere, Assocamerestero, Simest, Sace, National Trade Associations, Regions, Ministries, National and International Organisations, ICE, CDP, Promos Italia, etc.

6. First results: the enhancement of the villages of Colliano and Collianello

Colliano, an enchanting municipality in the province of Salerno, lies at the foot of the majestic Mount Marzano (630 m a.s.l.), enjoying an evocative and panoramic position overlooking the Sele Valley. The Tanagro and Alto Medio Sele Mountain Community encompasses this locality, surrounded by abundant nature.

The territory of Colliano is characterised by meadows and parks, with protected areas such as on the Eremita and Marzano mountains, where beech and alder trees create an ideal habitat for kites, buzzards and wolves. You can also find delicious black truffles, an authentic gastronomic delight in this area. Colliano is a place of great beauty, with breathtaking landscapes and rich biodiversity, making it an ideal environment for nature lovers and hikers. The presence of protected oases and the growth of black truffles add a touch of authenticity and uniqueness to this picturesque location in the province of Salerno.

The village is an integral part of the Ancient Villages Valorisation Network and has realised several initiatives, culminating in the inauguration of ‘Il Borgo dei Normanni’. This event involved stakeholders, opinion leaders and representatives of regional, provincial, and local administrations, as well as the active participation of the local population. The main objective of the meeting was to explore the potential for growth, development and enhancement of inland areas through village tourism.

During the inauguration ceremony, 17 completely renovated flats were presented, ready to welcome tourists looking for an extended stay. The Borgo dei Normanni is under the management of the lead company of the ‘Ritorno in Italia 2023-2028’ project, Giroauto Travel, which is also the founding company of the Destinazione Sud network. This form of settled tourism allows visitors to participate in various educational, cultural and recreational activities.

The ‘Il Borgo dei Normanni’ brand uses the evocative Palazzo Borriello in Colliano, a recently renovated and inaugurated 16th-century historical residence, chosen as the main venue for these activities. The palace has already hosted important cultural events, contributing significantly to the promotion and enhancement of the area’s historical and cultural heritage, as well as to the consolidation of the brand’s commercial positioning.

Ignoring traditional tourist destinations and focusing on lesser-known and less developed areas opens the possibility of revitalising the tourist industry, reducing the economic growth gap and respecting the specific vocations of each location. This approach also involves neighbouring countries working together to meet the needs of authentic tourism, facilitated by a partnership agreement with “Rete Destinazione Sud” and “Giroauto Travel Srl”. This collaboration aims to bring together the public and private sectors to welcome tourists interested in settling in Colliano, including those who wish to return.

This is an extraordinary opportunity from a tourist point of view, and it also provides valuable support for many local entrepreneurial activities. Escaping the metropolitan chaos and hectic pace of urban realities, the village offers a slow and desired dimension where everything regains a human perspective. This reflects a growing awareness and aspiration towards a more balanced, sustainable lifestyle centred on individual well-being.

Adopting slower rhythms of life emphasises appreciating the quality of time devoted to meaningful activities. Such an approach fosters connection with others, promoting more profound and authentic relationships, contributing to a sense of community and belonging, and improving the overall quality of life (Melotti, 2013:53-54).

The increasing focus on local traditions, identity, and history and the interest in the sensorial and emotional aspects of experiences reflect the contemporary desire to rediscover ‘ancient roots’ or embrace ‘new identities’. The proposed project, which integrates tourism, history, taste, nature and well-being, aims to fascinate, interest, involve and reconstruct memory, creating a lasting link between past and future and uniting those who, by emigrating, have transformed their homeland into poetry, dreams and emotions, indissolubly linking those places also to the lives of those who have never known them, like scars on the skin, always ready to remind you who you are, what you are and where you come from (Gabrieli & Musarò, 2023).

Furthermore, creating the ‘Borgo dei Normanni’ brand aims to promote, nationally and across borders, a village conceived not as a single isolated municipality but as an integral part of a territorial tourism system. This system is not simply configured as a single administrative entity but rather as a complex destination, capable of offering a multiplicity of travel motivations, distinguished by the plurality of experiences sought by a new generation of tourists, oriented towards more authentic and significant cultural and territorial experiences.

The recent start of the project does not allow for official statistics on tourist movements and, therefore, quantifying the economic benefits deriving from its implementation.

The three months of implementing the planned initiatives saw substantial visitor influxes, particularly in the municipality of Colliano and its hamlet Collianello. Here, the approximately 50 newly inaugurated beds were frequently occupied. These results have undoubtedly had a positive effect, with a notable increase in visitors, even if the ‘return’ tourism flow has been modest. The renewed vibrancy of the village, with its positive buzz, is already generating interest. Early booking confirmations hint at a promising summer season, potentially enticing many emigrants to return home.

The project’s inauguration, the Borriello Palace and the renovated houses as a Diffused Hotel was attended by about 400 participants on the first day and about 300 on the second, including 85 mayors interested in verifying the feasibility and exportability of the initiative.

The Truffle Promotion Days, now in its 27th edition, counted an increase of around 500 people compared to previous editions: probably the most attended in history. Of course, the various entertainment initiatives and sales of the renowned local product were complemented by lunches and dinners in the Borriello palace for about 100 people, in addition to the other catering services spread throughout the area, which benefited from them.

The subsequent New Year’s Eve party with New Year’s Eve dinner and lunch on 1 January sold out all the local accommodation facilities, with an attendance of around 60 tourists.

The headquarters of the historical building was then the venue for three conferences, with an aperitif dinner and the presentation of books by the southern author Pino Aprile, who was applauded by the large audience in attendance, who could enjoy typical local buffets.

The same venue also hosted cooking courses for about 25 people and was held by a starred chef of national importance. There was also a graduation party with 70 participants, some of whom decided to stay overnight in the area.

The growth also helped these initiatives in the area’s reputation induced by the free guided tours of the local historical building, visited by around 800 people during the truffle events, including residents who had never had access.

These initiatives, of course, had beneficial effects on local employment, considering the activities of the tourist intermediaries who channelled the flow of arrivals and all those involved in providing accommodation and catering services.

7. Discussion, conclusions, and future implications

The importance of the Italian economy of the return tourist flows has led to this study, which, given the necessary and articulated theoretical framework, has focused on a praiseworthy project of the “Southern Destination Network” to encourage former emigrants to return to Italy. This has also enhanced the deserted villages in recent decades.

The project appeared immediately relevant, especially for the number of institutions and companies involved, a clear symptom of the interest generally directed towards this particular type of tourism. It appeared helpful in drawing scientific assessments also because these are initiatives promoted by private individuals who are located alongside the ministerial actions dedicated to this and who have already produced valuable guides targeted (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2019 & 2021) in addition to those already present in the national bibliography (Tirri, 2022), especially to encourage the revaluation of abandoned ancient villages (Mocciola, 2015; Morrello & Dallorso, 2023; limitless-solutions.it, 2023).

The focus on the southern areas and the positive experience of the villages of Colliano and Collianello make the intent to profoundly affect economies that are otherwise depressed even more appreciable because they are relatively distant from traditional tourist routes.

This project builds on a growing trend. Similar initiatives have successfully revitalised Italian regions like Abruzzo (Camilli, 2015), Calabria (Ferrari et al., 2022), and Emilia-Romagna (Gabrieli & Musarò, 2023). Furthermore, countries like Ireland (Michael & Mura, 2023), Poland (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Huang, 2023), Slovenia (Koderman, 2012), Australia (Cheer & Reeves, 2013), and even some regions in Africa (Mensah, 2015; Dillette, 2021) and the United States (Skipper & Davidson, 2018) have implemented similar programs to engage their diasporas.

These situations are profoundly different because the reasons for the expatriation have been different. Re-entry can take various forms, but all share a common thread: a yearning for the past and a desire to reconnect with the places that shaped one’s childhood or ancestral history.

Whether and how this project can achieve the ambitious objectives described can be assessed in subsequent years. Now, the available data are limited only to the described experiences of recently revitalised villages, with approximate but comforting final information.

The project and the experience described, in unison with the bibliography cited above, make it possible, in conclusion, to outline a development model for small villages also based on the logic of return tourism, preventing abandonment and its intuitable social and economic consequences. These proposals directly address specific, unavoidable needs.

To be successful, the location must offer a combination of tangible and intangible attractions. Tangible attractions should include captivating natural landscapes or historical gems like palaces awaiting restoration to their past glory. Local culinary specialities can be incorporated to enhance the area’s identity further. Furthermore, the region is home to a variety of agricultural products that are unique to the area, including truffles, dairy products, and thermal waters.

In Colliano, several tangible elements attracted visitors: the Borriello Palace, the production of a prized local truffle, and the breathtaking panoramas from the elevated hamlet of Collianello. On the other hand, intangible attractors include historical moments of national importance or even the homes of famous people. Colliano has benefited from being a Norman village with traces that are still visible and appreciable today.

It is then essential that the village be part of a broader destination of a network of actors who

firmly believe in the area's tourist development and, thus, the possibility of its economic and social recovery. It is appropriate for the destination not to focus only on a single village but to extend to a broader area and to favour the planning of tours connecting nearby attractions.

The actors in the destination's tourism development planning must also be the public authorities, especially the municipality's mayor, who wishes to relaunch his area by enhancing its beauty and believes in a tourism development programme that is too often mistakenly considered a mere utopia.

To effectively manage tourism initiatives, the mayor should collaborate with a team comprising a tourism councillor or a qualified municipal councillor, potentially including a local pro loco association. This team would handle day-to-day administration and contribute to developing the strategic plan.

Local public administrative authorities must necessarily link up with private entrepreneurs, hopefully, local or distant, who could benefit from increased tourist flows. The prospect of increased revenue and the emotional pull of contributing to a demonstrably thriving territory could incentivise artisans with their traditional crafts, agricultural businesses, and related agri-food industries in the surrounding area, as well as hospitality and catering establishments, to participate.

Furthermore, it is essential to valorise possible cultural and voluntary associations that may be present, which are undoubtedly fundamental for organising events that may enliven the previously restored structures.

It is also fundamental to use tourism development and promotion professionals (consultants, tour operators, travel agencies, etc.), who should be involved already in the initial planning phase because their experience would help to select concretely feasible hypotheses.

All the actors, therefore, should converge on common goals, constituting a stable territorial network to support the enhancement project (Grasso & Schilirò, 2021; Iaffaldano & Santamato, 2021). This network would also have a beneficial effect on the local population, favouring the overcoming of possible reluctance concerning a traditionalist culture that is little inclined to innovations, sometimes fearful of losing its traditional tranquillity with the influx of tourists (Iaffaldano & Santamato, 2021).

However, a necessary condition of a local tourism development model is the presence of various types of accommodation facilities. The presence of only bed and breakfasts is not desirable, considering the varied needs of potential tourists: the offer should also consider more comfortable accommodations (widespread hotels, hotels of various categories, etc.) if possible.

In recent weeks, similar experiments, referable to the project described, are being launched in the municipalities of Cleto and Caulonia, in Calabria, concrete evidence of the exportability of Colliano's experience. Similar initiatives should also be promoted and implemented in other areas of Italy where networked business associations are more widespread, and the territories are more prosperous and better served by infrastructures that favour the return of fellow citizens who have emigrated.

Such experiences are undoubtedly helpful to the public authorities that can intervene economically, supporting the private initiative that also pursues, above all, the common interests of the socio-economic development of marginal territories.

For companies involved, demonstrating dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit is crucial. This includes embracing social responsibility and sustainability practices, frequently emphasised but not consistently implemented effectively.

Conflict of interest

All authors declare no conflicts of interest in this paper.

References

- Amato, A. (2021). Lo “spazio” costituzionale delle regioni per regolare il “turismo delle radici”: un’analisi casistica; *Turistica*; 30(4):91-98.
- Amoretti, G. & Varani, N. (a cura di) (2013). *Viaggiare nella terza età: casi ed esperienze di turismo senior*; Carocci; Roma.
- Antolini, F. & Cesarini, S. (2021). Il Turismo delle radici in Italia. Origini, caratteristiche e opportunità per i territori; *Turistica*; 30(4):5-16.
- Ariza-Montes A., Sianes A., Fernández-Rodríguez V., López-Martín C., Ruíz-Lozano M. & Tirado-Valencia P. (*In Press*). Social Return on Investment (SROI) to Assess the Impacts of Tourism: A Case Study; *SAGE Open*, 11(1). DOI: [10.1177/2158244020988733](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020988733)
- Bacilieri, C. (2022). *I borghi più belli d’Italia – il fascino dell’Italia nascosta*; Società editrice romana; Roma.
- Belotti, S. (2020). *Governance ambientale e turismo di comunità in Africa australe: il parco nazionale di Zinave in Mozambico*; Aracne; Canterano.
- Bernardi, P. (2011). Per un turismo culturale negli Emirati Arabi Uniti: i casi di Dubai e di Abu Dhabi; *Turistica*; 20(4):75-118.
- Biancone, P. (2017). Introduzione al metodo dei casi. In Biancone, P. & Cisi, M. (Eds.). *Scoprire l’azienda. Casi di management*; Giappichelli; Torino, 1-8.
- Bizzarri, C. & Querini, G. (a cura di) (2006). *Economia del turismo sostenibile: analisi teorica e casi studio*; Angeli; Milano.
- Camilli, A. (2015). La sfida per far rinascere i paesi abbandonati dell’Abruzzo; [accessed: <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/annalisa-camilli/2015/09/19/paesi-abbandonati-abruzzo/>; consulted on 29/11/2023].
- Carone, M. (2021). Il Turismo di ritorno in Sicilia. Il “caso Sambuca” e l’esperienza dell’attrice italo-americana Lorraine Bracco; *Turistica*; 30(4):77-84. DOI: 10.3402/turis.00141
- Carretto, T. (2022). Gli archivi al centro di una nuova forma di turismo culturale: il viaggio delle radici; *Rivista elettronica di Diritto, Economia e Management*; (2):180-190. DOI: 10.3280/RED232180

Catalogo generale dei beni culturali, nucleo storico, collinare, difensivo, religioso, Colliano. Cogliano (denominazione storica) (XIII) COLLIANO, 1200 – 1200, dal sito <https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/ArchitecturalOrLandscapeHeritage/1500916442> (consultato il 17/11/2023)

Cheer J. & Reeves K. (2013). Roots tourism: Blackbirding and the south sea islander diaspora; *Tourism Analysis*; 18(3):245-257; DOI: 10.3727/1096747513426940

cmtanagroaltomediosele.it (Senza anno). Colliano. [accessed: <https://www.cmtanagroaltomediosele.it/index.php?action=index&p=260>; consulted on 10/1/2024].

Collettini, M. (2002). Cultura e turismo, due modelli a confronto: i casi Spoleto-Viterbo; *Turistica*; 11(4):65-80; DOI: 10.3402/turis.00114

Comolli, G. (2022). Turismo di ritorno, riscoperta dei borghi natii – Progetto dentro PNRR; [accessed: <https://newsfood.com/turismo-di-ritorno-riscoperta-dei-borghi-natii-progetto-dentro-pnrr/>; consulted on 12/11/2023].

Corinto, G.L., Nicosia, E., Rinaldi, C. (a cura di) (2016). *Turismo e promozione territoriale: casi di studio nelle Marche*; Patron; Bologna.

Costa, P., Manente, M. & Furlan, M.C. (a cura di) (2001). *Politica economica del turismo: lezioni, modelli di gestione e casi di studio italiani e stranieri*; Touring club italiano; Milano.

Dall'Ara, G. & Morandi, F. (2010). *Il turismo nei borghi: la normativa, il marketing e i casi di eccellenza*; Nuova giuridica; Matelica.

De Carlo, M. (a cura di) (2007). *Management delle aziende del turismo: letture, casi*; Tools; Milano.

De Falco, S. (2019). Una riflessione sulla dicotomia urbano-suburbano tra anacronismo e persistente attualità, in relazione ai determinanti (sovra)turismo e innovazione. I casi studio di Venezia e Napoli Est; *Rivista geografica italiana*; 126(3):81-115; DOI: 10.3280/RGIO2019383

De Marchi, D. & Mingotto, E. (2016). Turismo delle origini. Quadro preliminare delle potenzialità in Italia. In CNR-IRISS (a cura di). *XX Rapporto sul Turismo Italiano*; Mercury; Firenze.

De Marco, A. (2017). *Destination brand New Zealand: a social semiotic multimodal analysis*; Morlacchi; Perugia.

Del Chiappa, G. (2018). *La sostenibilità del turismo: prospettive di analisi e casi concreti*; Angeli; Milano.

- Dillette A. (2021). Roots tourism: a second wave of Double Consciousness for African Americans. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*; 29(2-3):41-426; DOI: 10.1080/09604000.2021.1917776
- Fabbri, G., Tattara, G. & Migliorini, F., (2020). *Venezia, il dossier UNESCO e una città allo sbando: città, turismo e laguna*; Libreria editrice Cafoscarina; Venezia.
- Ferrari S., Hernández-Maskivker G. & Nicotera T. (2022). Social-cultural sustainability of roots tourism in Calabria, Italy: A tourist perspective; *Journal of Vacation Marketing*; 28(1):117-132; DOI: 10.1080/13683568.2022.2087064
- Ferrari, S. & Nicotera, T. (2021). Il turismo delle radici come volano per la promozione dei prodotti tipici locali; *Turistica*; 30(4):17-26; DOI: 10.3402/turis.00140
- Ferrari, S. & Nicotera, T. (2021). *Primo rapporto sul turismo delle radici in Italia: dai flussi migratori ai flussi turistici: strategie di destination marketing per il 'richiamo' in patria delle comunità di italiani nel mondo*; Egea; Milano.
- Fioretti, M. (2022). Storia, memoria, identità: è il Turismo delle Radici che vale 4 miliardi e porta in Italia 6 milioni di viaggiatori alla scoperta delle proprie origini; [accessed: <https://www.orticalab.it/Storia-memoria-identita-e-il-Turismo>; consulted on 30/11/2023].
- Fondazione Migrantes (2014). *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2014*; Tau Editrice, Todi.
- Gabrieli, M. & Musarò, P. (2023). *Quando ti penso, vorrei tornare. Verso un turismo delle radici in Emilia-Romagna: memorie, immaginario, aspettative e desideri degli emigrati emiliano-romagnoli in Argentina e Brasile per un viaggio ospitale alla scoperta delle origini*. Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna; [accessed: https://amsacta.unibo.it/id/eprint/7247/1/Report_Turismo_Radici.pdf; consulted on 26/11/2023]. DOI: 10.6092/unibo/amsacta/7247
- Gabrieli, M. (2014). *Il turismo delle radici come risorsa di un territorio: il caso di 'ItalianSide.com'*; in Fondazione Migrantes. *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2014*; Tau Editrice, Todi, 317-324.
- Gabrieli, M., Giumelli, R., Licata, D. & Sommario, G. (2022). *Scoprirsi italiani. I viaggi delle radici in Italia*; Rubbettino; Soveria Mannelli.
- Gargano, R. (2021). Turismo delle radici, identità e attaccamento alla madrepatria: un'analisi esplorativa; *Turistica*; 30(4):39-56.
- Géraud M.-O. (2018). Hmong of French Guiana and Hmong of France: From family and roots tourism towards tourism experience of existential authenticity; *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology*; 6(2): 172-190; DOI: 10.1504/IJTA.2018.10018059

- Goel, G. & Dash, S.R. (2023). Household pandemic Internet search intensity and stock returns: A case of tourism industry resiliency; *IIMB Management Review*, 35(4):426-440. DOI: 10.1016/j.iimb.2023.03.004
- Granelli, A. & Batosti, R., (2022). *Roma e il nuovo Grand Tour: ripensare il turismo nell'era del digitale e della pandemia*; Sossella; Bologna.
- Grasso, F. & Schilirò, D. (2021). Per un turismo sostenibile: il Turismo di ritorno. Aspetti socioeconomici e politiche turistico-territoriali; *Turistica*; 30(4):27-38.
- Grisi, A. (senza anno). Breve storia di Colliano; [accessed: <https://prolococolliano.wordpress.com/storia/>; consulted on 17/11/2023].
- Iaffaldano, N. & Santamato V.R. (2021). Il turismo delle radici e l'esperienza di alcune associazioni dei pugliesi nel mondo; *Turistica*; 30(4):57-76.
- Koderman, M. (2012). Selected characteristics of roots tourism in Slovenia; *Tourism*, 60(4):385-396.
- Labitalia & Adnkronos (2018). Turismo di ritorno, un business per l'Italia; [accessed: <https://www.panorama.it/economia/turismo-di-ritorno-un-business-per-litalia>, consulted on 15/11/2023].
- Lee, C. C., & Chang, C. P. (2008). Tourism development and economic growth: A closer look at panels; *Tourism management*; 29(1):180-192. DOI: [10.1016/j.tourman.2007.02.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.02.013)
- León-Gómez, A., Ruiz-Palomo, D., Fernández-Gámez, M. A., & García-Revilla, M. R. (2021). Sustainable tourism development and economic growth: Bibliometric review and analysis; *Sustainability*, 13(4): 2270; DOI: 10.3390/su13042270
- limitless-solutions.it (2023). Scopri le meraviglie dei borghi italiani; [accessed: <https://limitless-solutions.it/territori-eventi/scopri-le-meraviglie-dei-borghi-italiani/>; consulted on 17/11/2023].
- Lurgi, M. (2003). *Mercati Esteri*; Nardini; Firenze.
- Lurgi, M. (2019). Il Mezzogiorno. Rete Destinazione Sud South Italy: un progetto strategico condiviso di sviluppo; *Turistica*, 28(1/2): 29-47.
- Manzi, E. (2001). Centri storici minori, luce, protezione del paesaggio e turismo (casi di studio nella penisola sorrentina); *Bollettino della Società geografica italiana*, 6(3):481-501.
- Mazza, D. (2021). Turismo delle radici e itinerari culturali negli antichi casali messinesi di Gesso e Castanea; *Turistica*; 30(4):85-90.
- Melotti, M. (2013). Oltre la crisi. Il turismo culturale tra riscoperta delle radici e lentezza rappresentata;

Critica sociologica, (185):51-66.

- Mensah, I. (2015). The roots tourism experience of diaspora Africans: A focus on the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles; *Journal of Heritage Tourism*; 10(3):213-232; DOI: 10.1080/1743873X.2014.997792
- Michael, I. & Mura P. (2023). An Gorta Mor (The Great Hunger): Passage to India' – Exploring genealogy and roots tourism through documentary filmmaking; *Tourist Studies*, 23(4):315-334; DOI: 10.1177/14687976231203749
- Migliaccio, G., Lurgi, M. & Aufiero, V.A. (2018). Business networks in Italian tourism. Case study: "Rete destinazione sud"; *International Journal of Leisure and Tourism Marketing*; 6(2):117-135; DOI: 10.1504/IJLTM.2018.097231
- Minervino, M.F. (2022). Il turismo delle radici una grande risorsa innovativa; [accessed: <https://www.maggiolicultura.it/il-turismo-delle-radici-una-grande-risorsa-innovativa/>; consulted on 17/11/2023].
- Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (2019). *Guida alle radici italiane. Un viaggio sulle tracce dei tuoi antenati*; Volume 1; Raiz italiana edizioni; Guagnano.
- Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (2021). *Guida alle radici italiane. Un viaggio sulle tracce dei tuoi antenati*; Volume 2; Raiz italiana edizioni, Guagnano.
- Mocciola, A. (2015). *Le belle addormentate. Nei silenzi apparenti delle città fantasma. Guida alla scoperta di 80 luoghi dimenticati*; Betelgeuse; Castel D'Azzano.
- Morrello, M. & Dallorso, E. (2023). 15 borghi italiani da visitare almeno una volta nella vita; [accessed: <https://www.ad-italia.it/gallery/universi-paralleli-10-borghi-italiani-scoprire-proteggere/>; consulted on 17/11/2023].
- Musarò, P. & Piga Bruni, E. (2019). Ripensare La mobilità. Oltre La Contrapposizione turismo/Migrazione»; *Scritture Migranti*, (13):I-XX; DOI: 10.6092/issn.2035-7141/12046
- Newland, K. & Taylor, C. (2010). *Heritage Tourism and Nostalgia Trade: A Diaspora Niche in the Development Landscape. Diasporar & Development Policy Project*; Migration Policy Institute; Washington.
- Pelliccia, A. (2018). In the family home: roots tourism among Greek second generation in Italy; *Current Issues in Tourism*; 21(18):2116-2131. DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2017.1402877
- Perri A. (2016). Residential roots tourism in Italy; in Roca, Z. (ed.). *Second Home Tourism in Europe Lifestyle Issues and Policy Responses*; Routledge; Abingdon; 53-68.

- Perri, A. (2020). *Il turismo delle radici*; Aracne; Roma.
- Presutti, M. (2018). *Analisi imprenditoriale ed economica dei festival del cinema: un modello interpretativo del turismo degli eventi culturali*; Aracne; Canterano.
- Rete Destinazione Sud (2022). *Anno del Turismo di Ritorno 2023. Alla Scoperta delle Origini. Progetto e Comitato Promotore Nazionale e Internazionale 2023*. [accessed: <https://www.ad-italia.it/gallery/universi-paralleli-10-borghi-italiani-scoprire-proteggere/>; consulted on 17/08/2023].
- Rispoli, M. (a cura di) (2001). *Prodotti turistici evoluti: casi ed esperienze in Italia*; Giappichelli; Torino.
- Rocca, G. (2013). *Dal prototurismo al turismo globale: momenti, percorsi di ricerca, casi di studio*; Giappichelli; Torino.
- Rolle, L. (2005). *Gestione della piccola impresa turistica: strumenti e casi per il successo*; Angeli; Milano.
- Romano, I.M. (2018). *Pressione turistica sul centro storico di Firenze-sito UNESCO: un modello per la valutazione dell'impatto percettivo*; Firenze University Press; Firenze.
- Romita T, Perri A (2009). Da emigrati a turisti. Turismo delle radici e recupero delle identità locali. In: (a cura di): Romita T. , Ercole E. , Nocifora E. , Palumbo M. , Pieroni O. , Ruzza C. , Savelli A, Atti del III Convegno Nazionale "Turismo Sostenibile: ieri, oggi, domani". p. 212-222, COSENZA:Pronovis, ISBN: 88-89317-06-X.
- Ruggieri, G. (2021). Destinazione turistica e networks interni ed esterni: il turismo relazionale; *Turistica*; 30(4):99-111.
- Salvatore, M. & Santamato V.R. (a cura di) (2012). *Esperienze e casi di turismo sostenibile*; Angeli; Milano.
- Sanchini, L. (2010). Visiting la Madre Patria: heritage pilgrimage among Montreal Italians; *Ethnologies*; (2):235-253; DOI: 10.7202/1006311ar
- Sinisi, L. (2021). *Rooting experience planning®. Turismo delle radici un'opportunità per ripartire*; Rooting; Roma.
- Skipper J. & Davidson S.R. (2018). The big house as home: Roots tourism and slavery in the USA; *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology*; 6(4):390-410.
- Sorrentino, G., Formica, M. & Lurgi, M. (2022). *2023 year of the return to Italy. discovering the origins: an international project based on tourism of the roots to relaunch Italy*; in: Book of

abstract of International Scientific-Practical Conference “*Economic growth in the conditions of globalisation*”; 16th edition: October 12-13; National Institute of Economic Research (NIER); Chisinau; Moldova: 83-83.

Teti, V. (2004). *Il senso dei luoghi. Memoria e storia dei paesi abbandonati*; Donzelli; Roma.

Tirabassi, M. (2022a). Le tante facce del turismo delle radici; *Altreitalie*; (65):5-14.

Tirabassi, M. (a cura di) (2022b). *Il «turismo delle radici» nel passato e nelle nuove mobilità*; Accademia university press; Centro Altreitalie; Torino.

Tirri, L.C. (2022). Scrittura del sé della diaspora italiana: preziose guide turistiche per il turismo delle radici; *Altreitalie*; (65):15-30.

Tomczewska-Popowycz N. & Taras V. (2022). The many names of “Roots tourism”: An integrative review of the terminology; *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*; (50):245-258; DOI: 10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.02.016

Tomczewska-Popowycz, N. & Huang, W.-J. (2023). Sentimental tourism to a lost land: age and roots diversification. *Tourism Review*; 78(4):1116-1132; DOI: 10.1108/TR-12-2021-0585

Turrini, A. (2002). Il caso come metodologia di ricerca in economia aziendale; *Azienda pubblica*, (25), 67-85.

Vietti, F. (2012). *Hotel Albania. Viaggi, migrazioni, turismo*; Carocci; Roma.

Turistica-Italian Journal of Tourism applies the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\) license](#) to everything we publish. Developed to facilitate Open Access, this license lets authors maximise the impact of their research by making it available for anyone, anywhere in the world to find, read and reuse. Under this license, authors agree to make articles legally available for reuse, without permission or fees, for virtually any purpose. Anyone may copy, distribute, or reuse these articles, as long as the author and original source are properly cited.