

TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN MARGINAL AREAS: LEARNING FROM AN INTEGRATED PROJECT FOR LANDSCAPE REGENERATION AND PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN SALENTO (1134)

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Abstract. The paper discusses premises, development and contents of an integrated initiative for landscape regeneration and place-based development promoted by the Apulia Region, Italy. It took place in the rural area of Southern Salento, in the southmost part of the region, which not only suffers from deep marginality - so to be included among the targeted areas of the SNAI policy - but has recently been hit by the so-called Olive Quick Decline Syndrome, an environmental disaster connected to the *Xylella* epidemic, which has turned that area into a ghostlike place. The integrated initiative proved to have interesting potential for filling in some gaps in the effectiveness of existing public policies in the area because of its capacity to mobilize, support and offer long-term perspectives to vibrant bottom-up processes and collaborative practices promoting sustainable rural economies. The analysis of this experience may thus give interesting suggestions for future public policies supporting place-based development in marginal territories.

Keywords. place-based development; multi-level and multi-actor processes; marginal territories; landscape; integrated projects for territorial governance.

1. Introduction

Marginalization of cities and regions is the result of multiple processes and asymmetric relations that overexploit some territories or neglect them in favour of others. It is a complex process that has been exacerbated in recent decades by the development of new global hierarchies of cities and regions (Sassen, 1994; Castells, 1989), as the concentration of major economic processes within core areas has been strictly connected to the peripheralization and marginalization of vast territories and large communities. As a result, a multiplicity of formerly important areas across the territory or within cities have lost their functions, giving rise to a new geography of centrality and marginality. In such processes, the role of extractive local elites, fostering overexploitation of the territory for their own benefit, becomes increasingly evident (Servillo et al., 2012), entailing high social costs (Wilkinson, Pickett 2009; Stiglitz, 2013).

A crucial question, therefore, arises. How to foster the development of those areas in such a way that deeper sources of marginalization are contrasted and local potential nurtured?

Within the European Union, cohesion policy is entrusted with the task of reducing regional economic and social disparities between EU states and regions. This objective has been on the policy agenda of the European Community since the early 1970s, but it came into full effect in 1989 (Brunazzo, 2016). Since this date, it has gone through five consecutive periods of multi-year programs or funding, undertaking a series of changes in strategies and management. In this paper, it is worth highlighting two aspects: the first concerns the recent reform of the European cohesion policy, and the second the impact of such a policy on Italian initiatives for marginal areas.

The European cohesion policy has been reformed in the 2014-2020 programming cycle. The objectives of competitiveness, sustainability and social inclusion have been better focused, with a strong emphasis on institution-building. The crucial relevance of the territorial dimension, as opposed to the conventional sectoral and spatially blind policy approach, to counter the marginalisation of peripheral areas, has been relaunched through the assumption of a 'place-based' policy approach to local development. According to Barca (2009), a place-based policy is 'a long-term strategy aimed at tackling persistent underutilisation of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and multilevel governance' (Barca, 2009, p. vii).

The place-based approach is essentially founded on two key premises. The first is the importance of the spatial context – in its entanglements of social, cultural, and institutional characteristics – for being, at the same time, the result of, and an agent of, social inequalities (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 2010). The second is the importance of knowledge as a key resource for development – whose knowledge counts and how? – because of its capacity to perpetuate or contrast social exclusion exerted by extractive elites and institutions (Servillo et al., 2016). The inability of local elites to act is a factor that inhibits the growth potential of regions or perpetuates social exclusion: the purpose of a development policy is to promote new knowledge and ideas through the interaction between local groups and external elites involved in policy making (Barca et al., 2012, p. 139). Drawing from an institutional framework, the place-based approach thus calls for the promotion of deep interactions between local and external knowledge, as well as between endogenous and exogenous actors, in the design and implementation of public policies (Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2012).

With respect to place-based interventions implementation, three key elements were deemed necessary to ensure the alignment of incentives with the behaviour of all partners involved: first, 'conditionalities', which are binding agreements that govern the

principles which underpin the relationships between the different partners; second, a clear ex ante definition of the aims and intended outcomes in terms of well-being and socioeconomic progress of the interventions and appropriate outcome indicators; third, a space for public debate by all local actors open to dissent and alternative views, and coordination and collaboration between different governance and institutional levels (Barca et al., 2012, p. 148).

As for Italian national policies for marginal areas, for long time these have been largely focusing on solving the long-standing problem of socioeconomic disparities between Northern and Southern (Mezzogiorno) regions. In the 2000s, regionalisation and the increase in the European Union's role in development policies have to some extent weakened national policies aimed at reducing North-South gap. The Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) became the primary programming instrument of the European Cohesion Policy for Objective 1 and Objective 2 regions until the 2000-2006 programming cycle, Convergence/Competitiveness regions in 2007-2013, and Less-developed/Transition/More-developed regions in 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. The national policy level has thus tended to give way to proposals for development plans and projects largely entrusted to local players, not always being placed within a coherent planning framework at a larger scale. Moreover, funding mechanisms based on a competitive basis have favoured the strongest and most capable local authorities, with the consequent downsizing of the redistributive action in support to disadvantaged areas (Martinelli, 2022).

In a context where the public debate has long focused on the convergence/divergence of macro-regional growth trajectories, and especially on North-South divide, the unequal economic development between central and peripheral areas, that is between mountains and lowlands, coasts and hinterlands, metropolitan agglomerations and depopulated villages, remained in the shadows and were addressed as a local or regional issue.

These disparities assumed national prominence with the establishment of the National Strategy for Inner Areas (henceforth SNAI) starting with the 2014-2020 programming cycle. The strategy strongly relied on the multi-level and multi-actor dimensions of the place-based approach to support local development in specific marginal territories (Barca et al., 2014). An in-depth screening process that began in 2015, following the signing of the Partnership Agreement between the European Commission, the Italian national government (through the Inner Areas Technical Committee) and the regions, in 2017 led to the selection of 72 SNAI 'project areas' (see Figure 1). These, altogether, cover 17.0 percent of Italy's territory and 3.4 percent of its population, and account for 60 percent and 22 percent of Italian inner areas, respectively. Each area includes an average of 15 municipalities and a population of 29,400 (Lucatelli, Tantillo, 2018).

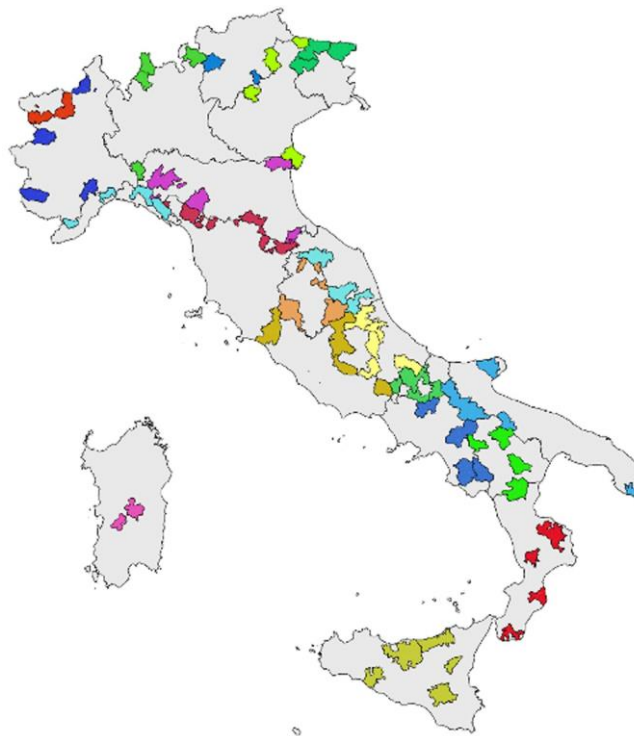


Figure 1. Selected SNAI 'project areas'

Source: Agenzia per la coesione territoriale. SNAI. <https://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/>

The SNAI's main innovations can be identified in: the simultaneous consideration, in financial, strategic planning and implementation terms, of interventions for development and citizenship rights (education, health and mobility); the role assigned to municipal associations, both in the definition of the development strategy and in the management of essential services for the future; the focus on a few project areas in each region as opposed to the (usual) scattershot distribution of funds or the tender-based approach favouring the strongest territories (Lucatelli, Tantillo, 2018; Barca et al., 2014). Finally, a key innovation is in the open method adopted, which implies that the resources must be planned during a co-design process, and must be linked to the indication of expected results to be achieved (Carrosio, 2016).

Nevertheless, the actual capacity of this policy to promote innovative ideas, to reduce persistent social exclusion and to enhance territorial capital is critically questioned by some authors (De Leo, Altamore, 2023). Other authors identifies as a weakness their limited extension, which will inevitably lead to modest results with respect to the

structural gap addressed (Cotella, Vitale Brovarone, 2020). Further concerns regard the relationship with the institutional elites constituting the engrained local power: engaging in dialogue with them runs the risk of reproducing and giving legitimacy to opaque well-established practices, while conflicting runs the risk of breaking the fragile institutional local structures without being able to rebuild them (Servillo et al., 2016). In any case, their involvement in project processes reinforces the already existing tendency to develop projects that duplicate pre-existing initiatives (Lucatelli, 2016).

In this paper, we discuss the above issues by drawing on a research experience aimed at developing an area-based 'integrated project' for landscape regeneration and local development in a rural area known as southern Salento, which was promoted by the Apulia Region, Italy, in 2019. That area adds to the typical features of a peripheral context – which justified its inclusion among the SNAI target areas – those of the so-called Olive Quick Decline Syndrome (OQDS), an environmental disaster connected to the Xylella epidemic (Martelli et al., 2016), which has recently transformed a huge part of its traditional landscape of olive groves into a ghostlike place, thus worsening land abandonment and marginality.

The regional initiative drew on the conception of landscape as constituted through the tangible and intangible practices that shape a place, emphasized by the European Landscape Convention (Déjeant-Pons, 2006; Prieur, 2006) and on previous integrated landscape projects developed in the Salento area within the Territorial Landscape Plan (TLP) of the Apulia region (Barbanente, Grassini, 2022). This initiative was able to mobilize, support and offer long-term perspectives, within a multi-level governance tool (Albrechts et al., 2020), to vibrant bottom-up processes and collaborative practices revolving around the promotion of sustainable rural economies. These had been mostly developed in the shadow of mainstream practices but proved to be crucial for the identification of innovative local development paths as well as for dealing with context-specific obstacles for innovation and change.

The paper is structured as follows. In the following section key features and challenges of the Southern Salento area are analysed together with existing policies for local development. In sections 3, the place-based integrated initiative promoted by the Apulia Region for landscape regeneration and local development in Southern Salento is analysed. A critical discussion of that experience and concluding remarks are then placed in the last section, where some lessons learned are derived for future public policies aiming to improve the effectiveness of place-based initiatives in marginal territories (Servillo et al., 2016).

2. The Southern Salento Area: current challenges and policies for local development

The Southern Salento area is located within the Lecce province, in the Southern part of

the Apulia region. It is composed by 14 small municipalities, as indicated in Figure 2, with a decreasing and ageing population (the total population was 69,951 in 2011 and 64,875 in 2020).

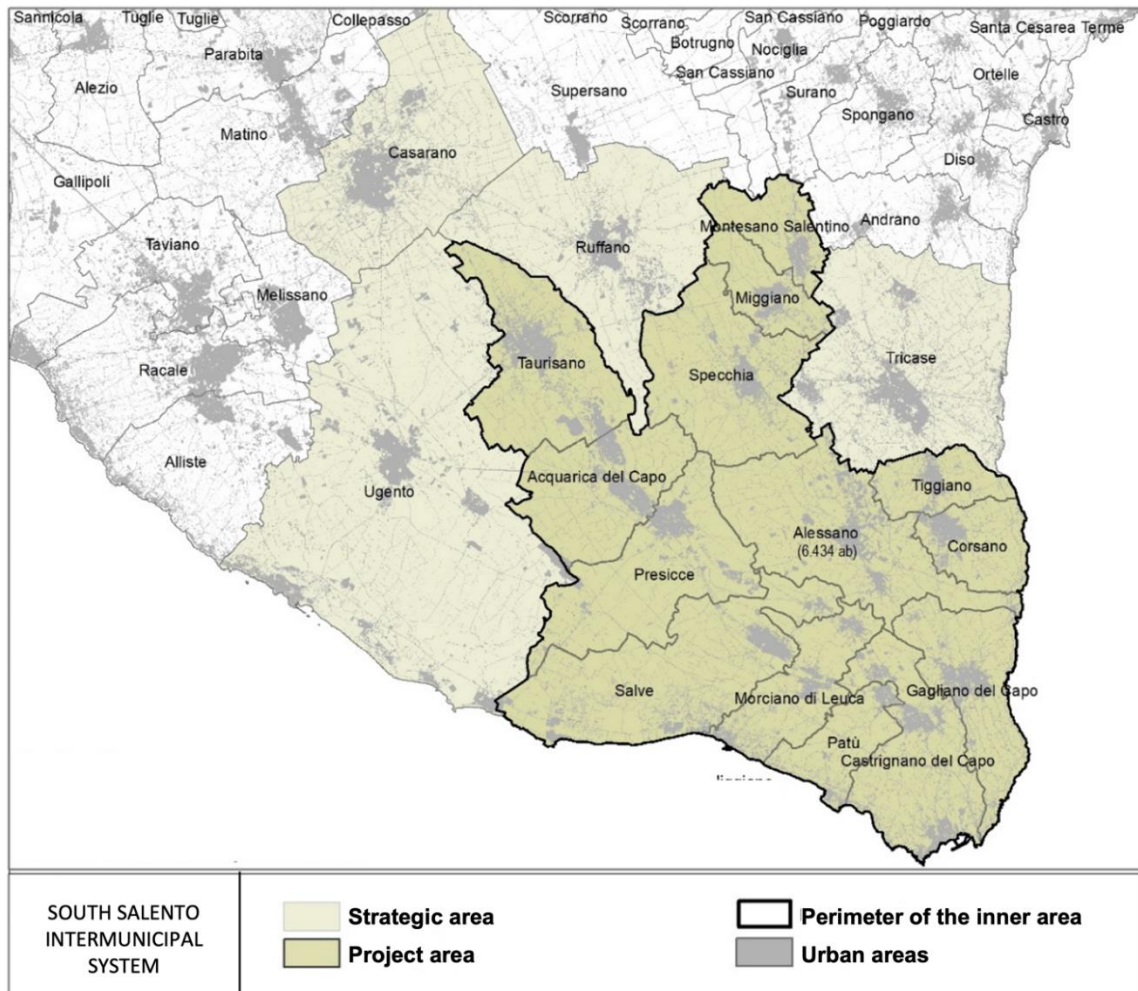


Figure 2. Southern Salento area, with the identification of the SNAI Project area and Strategy area

Source: Adapted from the National Strategy for Inner Areas and new institutional arrangements of inter-municipal solutions. South Salento Inner Area analysis, Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Agency for Territorial Cohesion, April 2019.

It is a rural area, with the old town centres placed in the inner part of the territory, far from the traditionally swampy coastal areas where settlements with second houses and touristic enclaves have been built only recently. Olive groves constitute the predominant agricultural cultivation in the area. They rapidly substituted pre-existing vegetation since the second half of the XVIII century (Bevilacqua, 1996), then becoming the main identity

feature of the area. Olive groves are mostly grown in a large and dense mesh or on hilly terraces and include several centennial trees. The intricate network of rural roads and the widespread presence of stone constructions – including dry-stone walls, small rural churches and traditional rural constructions (pagghiare) used as shelters by farmers after work or during summer – reveals the strong attendance of the countryside by local people.

Almost all families living in Southern Salento own at least a small plot of land with olive orchards or are linked by close family ties with owners. This is also reflected in the high land fragmentation of the area – the average size of agricultural plots with olive orchards is here only 1.27 hectares, against a provincial average of 2.2, a regional one of 4.7 and a national one of almost 8. As a result, in Southern Salento olive tree cultivation is mainly practiced for self-consumption and/or as a supplement to main non-agricultural income of families. Over time, this has contributed to strengthen the relationship between local communities and the countryside, where the small ‘olive gardens’ were meant as extensions of individual houses. ‘Olive gardeners’ thus acted for centuries as ‘landscape caretakers’, although they are now ageing, and their capacity to take care of olive orchards is decreasing.

This situation became dramatic with the spread of the infectious disease known as Olive Quick Decline Syndrome (OQDS), whose main cause has been attributed to *Xylella fastidiosa* subsp. *pauca*, a quarantine plant pathogen (Ali et al., 2021). Trees affected by this phytopathology undergo a rapid process of leaf scorching, scattered desiccation of twigs and branches and subsequent mortality (Saponari et al., 2019) as shown in Figure 3; they thus become source of infection through insect-vectors (Martelli et al., 2016).



Figure 3. Areas with seriously damaged olive orchards

Source: Research Report, November 2022.

Since the two predominant olive cultivars of the area – Ogliarola salentina and Cellina di Nardò – are susceptible to this pathogen (Saponari et al., 2019), a huge part of the traditional landscape of olive groves of Southern Salento has been rapidly transformed into a ghostlike place. Figure 4 shows the progression of the infection from Gallipoli towards the northern part of Salento, involving a total of approximately 54,000 hectares of large olive orchards¹ till 2017, of which around 40,000 in the province of Lecce alone (Scholten et al., 2019).

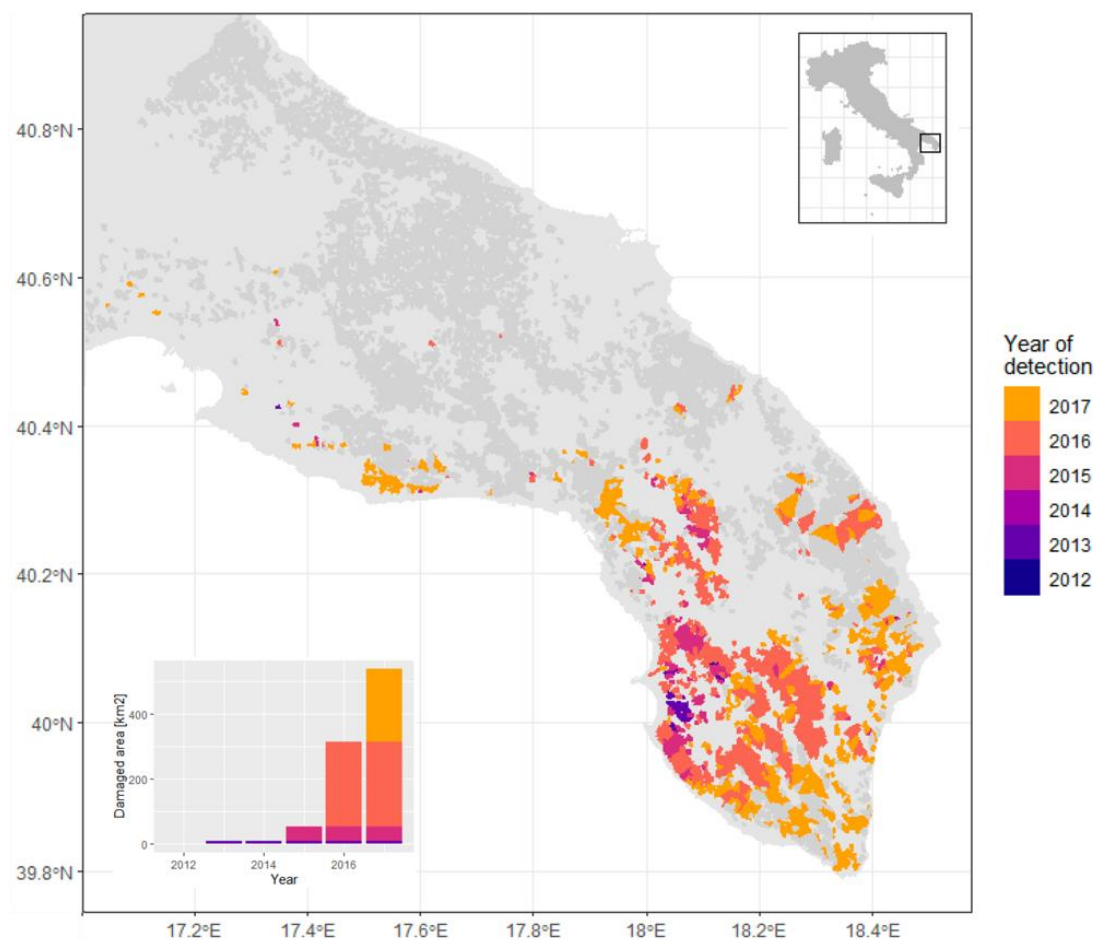


Figure 4. Large olive orchards seriously damaged by Xylella

Source: Adapted from Scholten et al., 2019.

This situation is strengthening territorial grabbing pressures from different sources: new green economies connected to photovoltaic installations on the ground, whose presence

¹ Large olive orchards are those encompassing at least 2 MODIS pixel (250m resolution), i.e. covering at least 12.5 hectares.

in the province of Lecce is already terrific²; the building sector, interested in new touristic settlements in rural areas to balance building restrictions along coastal ones; larger farmers aiming to substitute traditional olive orchards with more profitable – although less sustainable in a drought prone area like Salento – intensive agriculture.

In this context, several public policies have been developed in the last decade to address the manifold causes of marginality of Southern Salento and to support territorial recovery and local development. Some of them were specifically aimed to contrast the Xylella outbreak, first, and then to support the improvement of the productive potential of affected areas. While the first ones were mainly devoted to contrast the pathogen through its eradication³ and included measures like uprooting of trees (not only infected ones), chemical applications for vector control, prohibition of planting susceptible species and of transporting plants from infected areas, the second ones were developed after the infected area expanded and the complete eradication of the Xylella pathogen started being considered unfeasible (Ali et al., 2021). Figure 5 represents the derived classification of the region in ‘infected areas’, ‘containment areas’ and ‘buffer zone’, whose boundaries are continuously redefined according to monitoring reports.

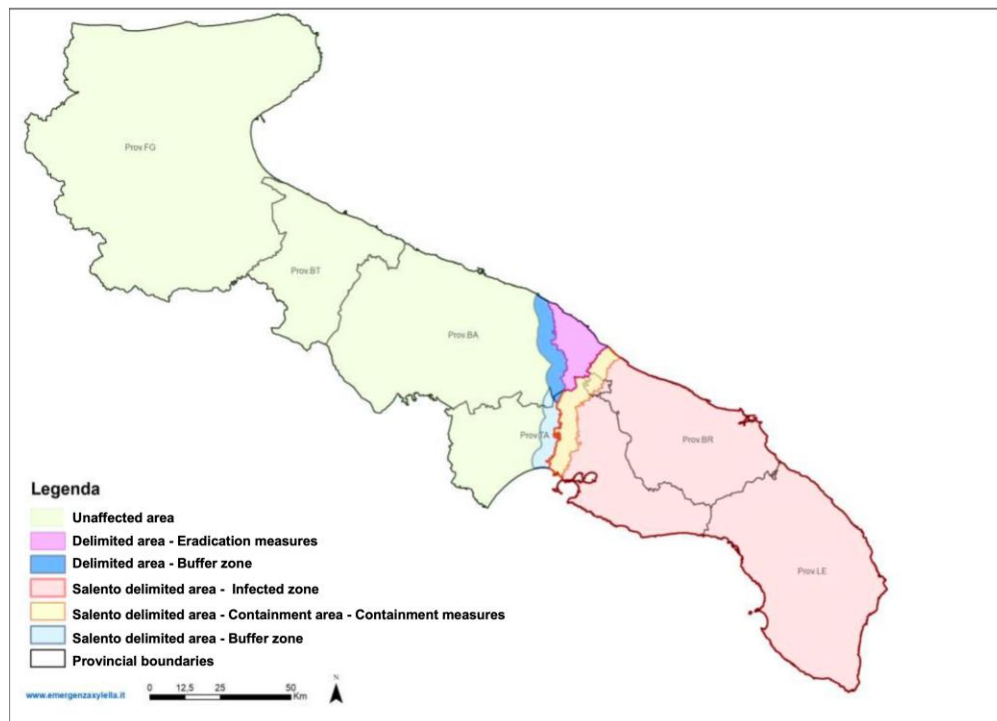


Figure 5. Identification of ‘infected areas’, ‘containment areas’ and ‘buffer zones’ within

² The Lecce province alone is responsible for 3,7% of the total national solar energy production (GSE, 2023).

³ This was done in accordance with the Commission Implementing Decisions 2014/87/EU and 2015/789/EU, with the final aim to prevent the spread of the pathogen within the region and to other areas of the European Union.

Apulia

Source: Deliberation of the Regional Executive No. 1866 dated 27/12/2022.

Public policies were thus specifically developed to restore the productive potential of the affected areas and to support the olive farming sector. These encompass, at the National level, the National Solidarity Fund established by the Decree-Law No. 15/2015 and, above all, the 'Extraordinary Plan for the olive regeneration of Apulia' passed for the period 2020-2021, which could count on as much as 300 Million Euro, 250 of which for the recovery of the productivity potential (see the Ministerial Decree No. 2484 dated 6/3/2020). At the regional level, public interventions are mainly connected to specific measures of the Regional Rural Development Plan (RDP) for the period 2014-2020.

In relation to these policies, two key issues should be noted. First, while a wide number of species have been allowed, since 2018⁴, to be replanted within infected areas, only resistant olive varieties (in the meanwhile identified in Leccino and Favolosa FS-17) are de facto replanted in landscape protected areas, as these are the only species excluded from the landscape authorization procedure. This has led, in practice, to diversified action strategies within infected areas, with a push towards the recovery of traditional landscapes within landscape protected areas and a support to agricultural diversification in the others. This has furthermore posed an unbalanced burden on the weakest section of farmers, i.e. the many old 'garden farmers' taking care of small plots of olive groves, as the costs and efforts connected to strict conservation measures often proved to be unfeasible for them, thus resulting in increased land abandonment and landscape degradation.

Second, financial contributions for the recovery of the agricultural productive potential are basically targeting large farmers; thus non-entrepreneurial landowners growing olive orchards for self-consumption and/or as a supplement for their main non-agricultural income are excluded from the bulk of them⁵. Those financial instruments have thus been unable to support landscape management practices – either aimed at the rehabilitation of traditional landscapes or at the transition to new landscapes – in the largest part of Southern Salento. With the result that the small 'garden farmers', which used to play a pivotal role for landscape caretaking and cultural identity development in Southern Salento, now constitute the weakest part in the complex process of regeneration and

⁴ This possibility was granted by the Executive Decision of the Chief of Phytosanitary Observatory of the Apulia Region No. 274 dated 4/5/2018, which followed the Commission Implementing Regulation 2017/2352/EU.

⁵ According to estimates elaborated by the AISS and Regione Puglia (2019), approximately 80% of the olive orchards do not comply with the eligibility requirements imposed by the RDP of the Apulia Region 2014-2020. As far as the Extraordinary Plan is concerned, the bulk of funding for the restoration of the production potential of affected olive orchards is exclusively or primarily for SMEs meeting very restrictive criteria (see Ministerial Decree No. 6703 from 23/6/2020).

rural development of the area. As they manage almost 80% of the olive orchards' extension, the inability of public policies to support their needs may have catastrophic consequences in terms of land abandonment and landscape degradation.

The SNAI Action Plan for the Southern Salento Inner Area (Area Interna Sud Salento, henceforth AISS) partly acknowledges this mismatch, although it mainly considered it for its dramatic impacts on the degradation of landscape values, which in turn reduces the competitiveness of rural tourism in the area. In fact, the place-based strategy identified for the AISS aims at contrasting their decline by strengthening multi-functional and identity-based rural development as a means to increase tourism, in connection to the seaside attractions. Moreover, as this strategy fails to engage local actors in an inclusive co-production process, it is not able to increase territorial capabilities, meant as empowering practices strengthening the capacity of territories to act together (Sen, 1999; Dissart, 2012; De Leo, Altamore, 2023). Despite this reveals a narrow conception of the cultural and identity-based value of landscapes, the SNAI Action Plan for the AISS has nevertheless the merit to have highlighted the need for landscape regeneration independently from agricultural production, as well as the key role played for that by small 'olive gardeners'.

3. Premises, development and contents of the Integrated Project for landscape regeneration

The idea of promoting an Integrated Project for the regeneration of the landscape affected by Xylella in Southern Salento originated from the interaction between the AISS, with a leading role of its 'technical referee', the Apulia Region and university research groups. The Integrated Landscape Projects are policy instruments included in the governance tools of the TLP to promote and support local planning in integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-actor forms, i.e. requiring the integration of different disciplinary fields and the coordination of public and private actors belonging to different decision-making and operational spheres.

Some of the innovative contents of the TLP make it suitable to face with the major problems of degradation of landscapes affected by Xylella. The ultimate goal of the TLP is to reconnect inhabitants and producers of the Apulia region in the protection and enhancement of the territory's values as foundations for an alternative development that finds its self-generative capacity and durability in the reproductive rules of local resources (Magnaghi, 2005, p. 69). The TLP outlines desirable futures that are not predefined but should emerge in practice from the fulfilment of the goals, projects and guidelines that constitute its Strategic Scenario. Thus, it opens up the possibility to cope with the deep uncertainties connected to the spread of the Xylella pathogen, and with the value conflict underlying a plurality of legitimate but mutually incommensurable

perspectives. In particular, Integrated Landscape Projects aim to activate and broaden the spaces for citizens' active mobilisation in the production and reproduction of their living environments (Magnaghi, 2011).

The Integrated Project for the regeneration of the AISS was inspired by a conception of landscape as consisting of the tangible and intangible practices that shape a place not only in its remarkable sites but also in ordinary and blighted areas, as highlighted by the European Landscape Convention (Déjeant-Pons, 2006). The main objective was to steer public and private actors towards defining a shared strategy for environment-oriented landscape regeneration consistent with the identity of places and the objectives set out by the TLP. The Project would also identify good practices that could provide guidelines for the design and implementation of 'pilot landscape regeneration public actions'.

In the drafting of the Integrated Project, the Bari Technical University research team, since the early stages, involved the local association LUA⁶, which had been active in the drafting of experimental Integrated Landscape Projects in the Salento area during the TLP elaboration process. In particular, they promoted the so-called 'Paduli agricultural park', which acted as a source of inspiration for one of the five TLP Regional Territorial Projects: the 'City-Countryside Pact' aimed at improving the quality of life in both urban and rural areas through the regeneration of degraded landscapes, through processes of enhancement or rehabilitation, depending on the level of landscape conservation. The Paduli park is actually one of the 14 'multifunctional agricultural parks' for the regeneration of the countryside identified by the TLP (Barbanente, Grassini, 2022).

The design and implementation of the Integrated Project for the AISS comprises six phases (see Figure 6). Three phases actively involved local actors: municipalities, farmers, small landowners, and a number of associations and non-governmental organisations. In these phases bottom-up processes and collaborative practices promoting sustainable rural economies based on agro-biodiversity were identified and given voice. Such practices had often been promoted to fill the gap due to the ineffectiveness of traditional top-down policies, notably the Common Agricultural Policy, in addressing the problems of Southern Salento's agriculture, exacerbated by the Xylella epidemic. In some cases, these took the form of insurgent and even antagonistic practices towards the measures decided by the European Commission, and thus were usually ignored or opposed by government authorities at different levels.

⁶ LUA stems for Laboratorio Urbano Aperto (Open Urban Laboratory).

Phases	Preliminary consultation of institutions	Exploring opportunities for regeneration	Context investigation	Turning perspectives into actions	Action implementation / management	Process monitoring / management
Activities	Signing agreement Interaction with institutional representatives Drafting plan of activities	Damage analysis Analysis of needs and aspirations Definition of general objectives	Landscape analysis Analysis of rules in force Analysis of actors Policy analysis Future perspectives	Definition of objectives and strategies Identification of guidelines and recommendations	Implementation of actions Landscape management Maintenance monitoring	Monitoring and evaluation of interventions
Actors involved	Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Apulia Region, University of Bari, Foggia and Salento, Polytechnic University of Bari	Local experts, municipalities, farmers, landowners, associations and non-governmental organisations	Domain experts	Local experts, municipalities, farmers, landowners, associations and non-governmental organisations	State, region, municipalities, farmers, landowners, third sector organisations	Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Apulia Region, University of Bari, Foggia and Salento, Polytechnic University of Bari
Tools	Organisational technical meetings Technical boards	Technical meetings Operational forums Open Space Technology (OST) Interviews	Technical analyses Diachronic analyses Scenario building Technical documents drawn up by experts	Technical and operational meetings Open Space Technology (OST)	Plans, programmes, regulations at various governmental levels Bottom-up initiatives	Follow-up meetings of the working groups and coordination committees Evaluations of the interventions being implemented

Figure 6. Phases of development of the Integrated Project in Southern Salento

Source: Adapted from the Research Report, November 2022.

The approach adopted in drafting the Integrated Project included the organisation of a workshop for the identification of desired and warning scenarios for local landscape development, which took place in February 2022 in Tiggiano (LE). The Open Space Technology (OST) methodology (Owen, 2008) was used because of its capacity to support co-design of solutions when issues at stake are highly relevant for participants and involve a great deal of complexity, when people have different points of view and a real passion for the debated topic, and when there is a genuine urgency for the discussion (Owen, 2008; Vacik et al., 2014), as it was the case in Tiggiano. In total 47 people participated, either individually or as representatives of community-based organizations and local NGOs. The exploratory scenarios incorporate an explicit analysis of the deep uncertainty that affects post-Xylella landscapes in the area and offer plausible accounts of future events tied to current choices (Barbanente, Khakee, 2004; Avin et al., 2020). The three scenarios, respectively defined as baseline, desirable and warning, are summarised as a whole in Table 1, while Figure 7 depicts such scenarios in relation to the different rural landscapes identified by the TLP in the Southern Salento: deep countryside / inhabited countryside, peri-urban rural areas, multifunctional agricultural parks.

Table 1. Summary of the three scenarios

Baseline scenario	Desirable scenario	Warning scenario
Continuing the present trend with steady uprooting and limited replanting of olive orchards, increased take-up of agricultural land for non-agricultural uses (ground-mounted photovoltaics, etc.), progressive abandonment of fields and removal of communities from their rural roots.	Recovery of Xylella affected plots through olive orchards, also in combination with other Mediterranean cultivations and forestry (permaculture, agro-forestation and food forests' development), reduction in abandonment of fields and removal of communities from their rural roots, with an increase in biodiversity and an improvement in rural attractiveness for inhabitants and tourists.	Increased take-up of agricultural land for non-agricultural uses (ground-mounted photovoltaics, etc.), greater disturbance of the ecosystem with a sharp reduction in the biodiversity of flora and fauna and impairment of water resources, growth in the abandonment of fields with the removal of communities from their rural roots, and reduced attractiveness for tourism.

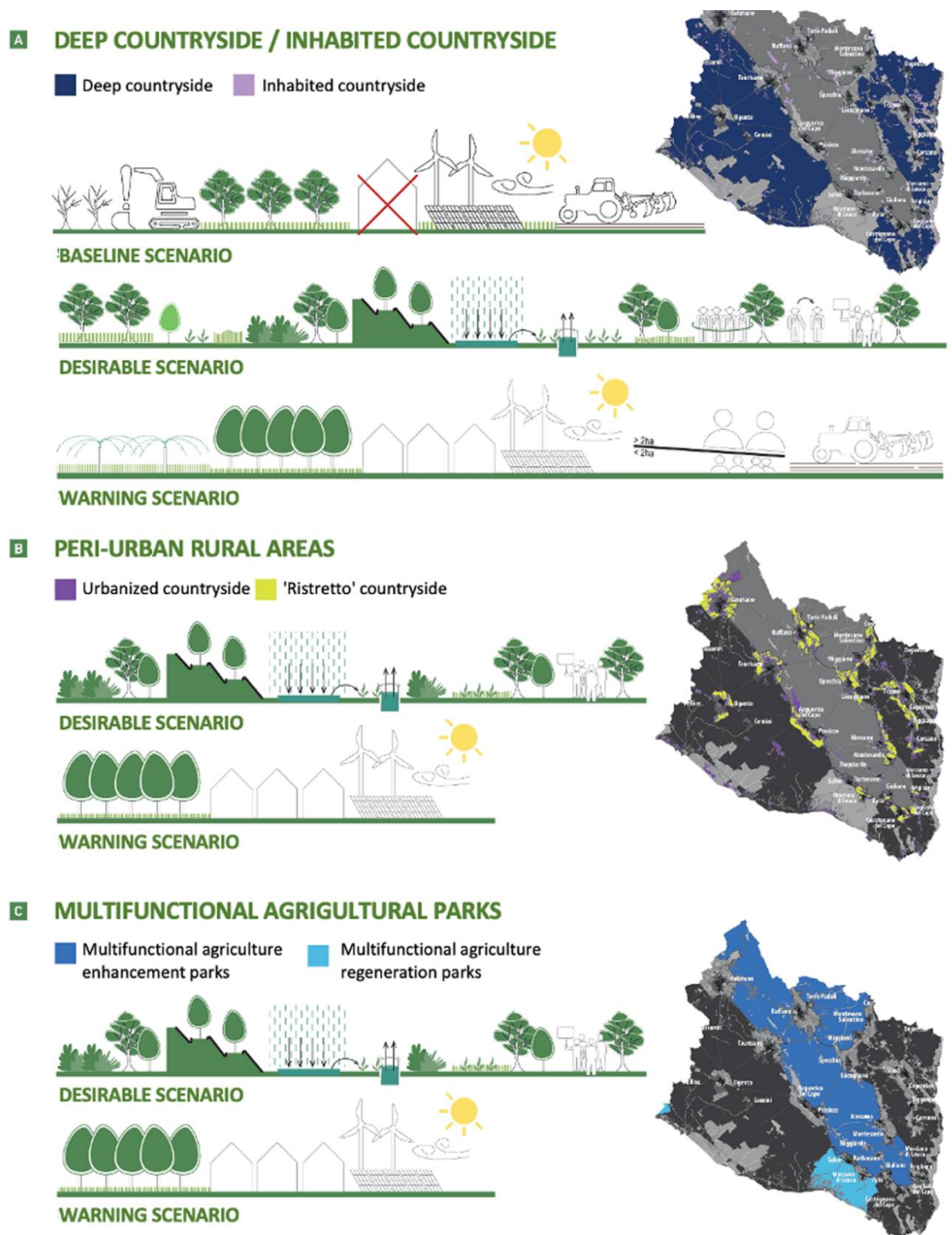



Figure 7. Representation of baseline, desirable and warning scenarios in the three rural landscapes identified by the TLP in the Southern Salento: deep countryside / inhabited countryside, peri-urban rural areas, multifunctional agricultural parks

Source: Research Report, November 2022.

During the OST workshop (see Figure 8), participants, divided into four groups based on the preliminary exploration of the main issues of concerns, outlined eight strategic actions, each aimed at overcoming a critical issue. The strategies, in turn, were broken down into 56 detailed proposals for action (see Figure 9).



GENERAL ISSUE	CRITICALITY RECORDED IN REPORTS	LIST OF PROPOSALS RECORDED IN REPORTS
3. Land fragmentation as an opportunity for a new vision of the role of rural actors	Land fragmentation and land abandonment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public aid for small landowners to encourage self-production. Ensure biodiversity of production not linked to heterodirected production. Giving value to fractionalization as an element of emancipation. 2. Encourage and incentivize land consolidation for sustainable agroforestry projects. Encourage public acquisition of land in protected areas. 3. Extending the agri-environmental measures of the RDP (10.1.4, 10.1.5, 8.1.8.2, 8.4, 5.1.a, 4.4.a, 1.1, 1.2 and 2) also to landowners not organized in entrepreneurial form but engaged in actions of care and regeneration of agricultural land. Drafting a funding measure for the establishment of land associations (simple landowners and ETS) 4. Policies to support the establishment of Land Associations of small landowners. Land Associations are formed among public or private landowners or holders of other real or personal rights of use, in order to group together farmland or wooded areas, currently being managed, uncultivated or abandoned, or to enable their economically sustainable and productive use.
4. Fire risk between monitoring, cooperation and training	Land degradation and fire risk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing monitoring and resources for interventions and planning. 2.a. Increasing fire personnel, improving skills, establishing a civic body of land sentinels and equipping an app for geolocated fire reporting. b. Involving ETS to enrol in the national civil protection registry for funded monitoring and prevention activities. c. Checking by superordinate bodies of the obligation of municipalities to include the fire prevention plan in the municipal emergency plan. d. Involving citizens and associations in the drafting of fire prevention plans. e. Extending the fire cadastre to agricultural land f. Establishing a permanent monitoring table between prefecture and municipalities. g. Mandatory annual updating of the fire cadastre.

Figure 8. Phases of the OST workshop and extract from the interpretive matrix of results
Source: OST Report 'The landscape that I am, that I would like'.

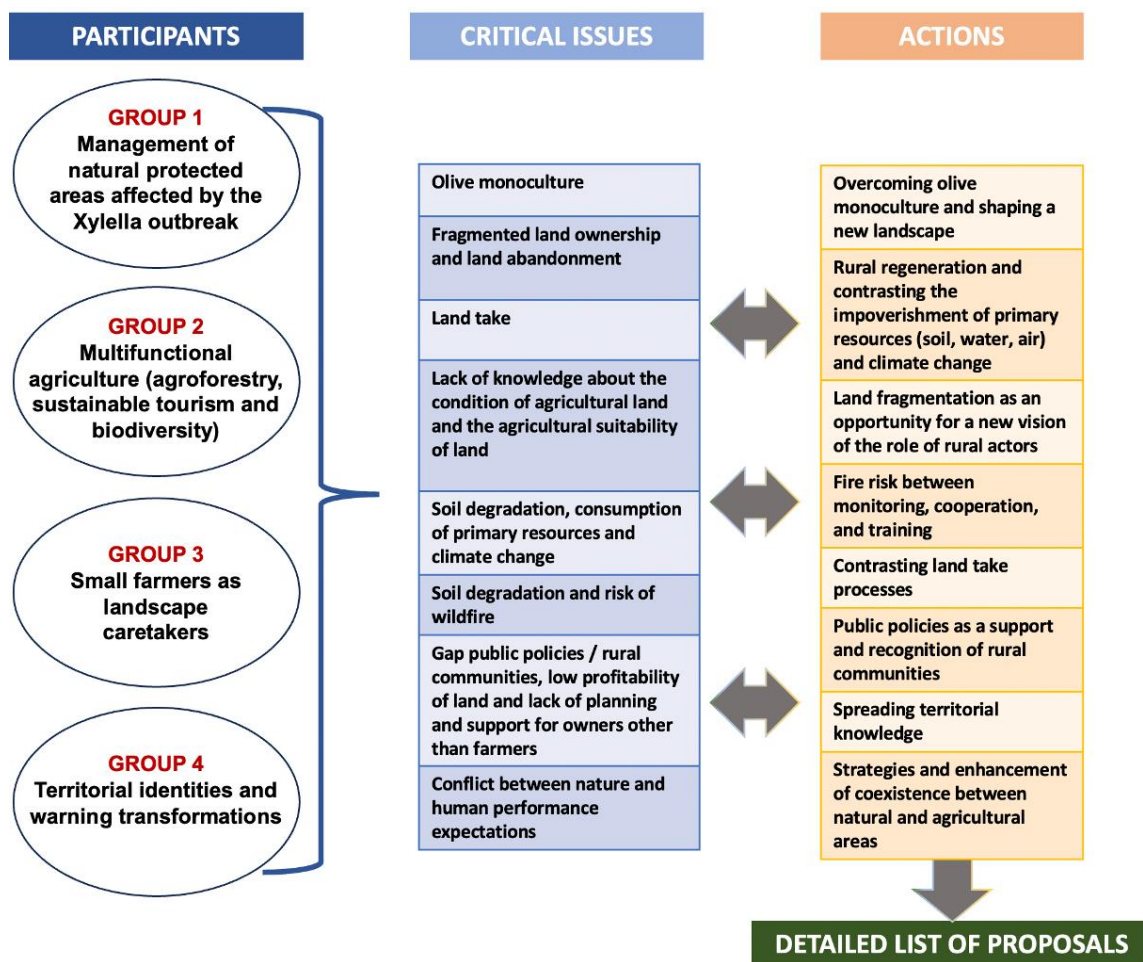


Figure 9. Overview of the essential parts of the OST meeting

Among the most critical issues, the fragmentation of land ownership being held by non-entrepreneurial actors emerged as crucial. Such fragmentation could become an empowering factor if public policies to support small landowners are promoted to encourage self-production and diversification as opposed to heterodirected production. The establishment of land associations among small landowners could encourage land reassembly through incentives for sustainable agroforestry projects, public acquisition of land in protected areas, and the extension of the agri-environmental measures under the Regional RDP to non-entrepreneurial landowners engaged in the care and regeneration of farmland.

The three scenarios and the OST's outcomes represent the knowledge base that informs the definition of the Integrated Project guidelines and recommendations. These are summarised and illustrated in 29 sheets (see an example in Figure 10), which identify, in

appropriate locations, specific objectives and strategic lines to be pursued, with respect to those identified by the TLP as well as to action topics (water and soil, environment, cultural heritage, urban-rural interface) and to the rural landscape typology (inland landscape, small hills of Serre Salentine or coastal landscape) to which the strategy refers. Each sheet also identifies the policy instruments that can be leveraged to achieve those objectives, and the actors to whom responsibility can be given for turning strategic lines into actions. Finally, examples of virtuous experiences and initiatives that may be helpful for the implementation of the strategy are presented.

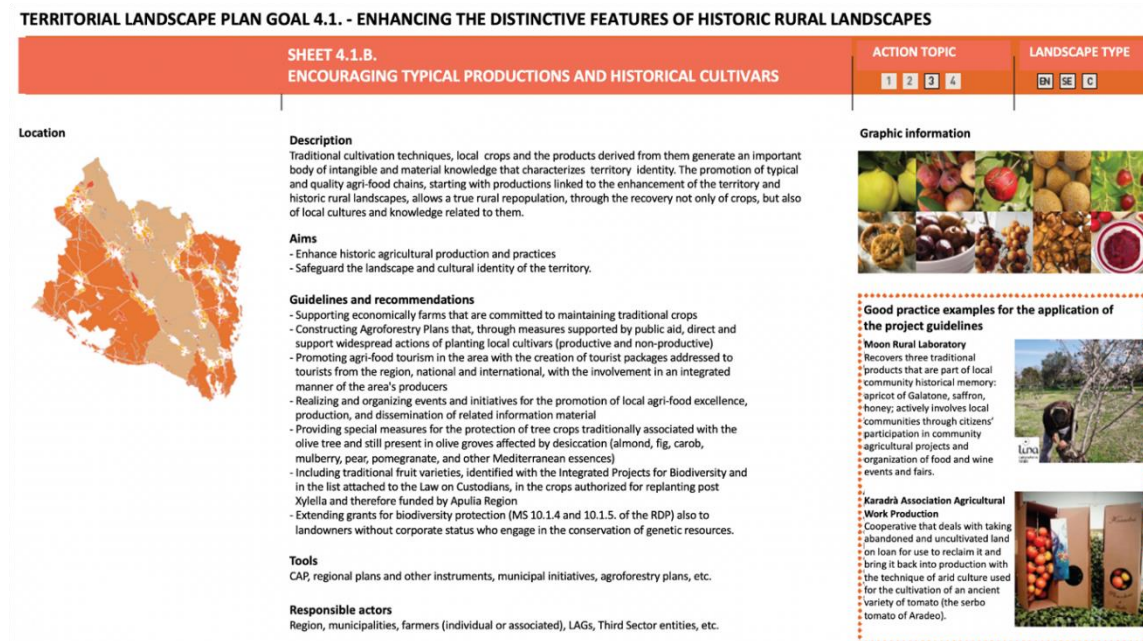


Figure 10. One of the sheets constituting the Integrated Project guidelines and recommendations

Source: Research Report, November 2022.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This paper has analysed a place-based integrated project developed in a marginal area in the southern part of Apulia, where the typical features of a peripheral context are aggravated by the spread of the Olive Quick Decline Syndrome (OQDS) connected to the Xylella epidemic. Because of this, at the time the integrated initiative started, the area was already targeted by several public policies for territorial recovery and local development mostly relying on a place-based approach, which nevertheless were showing several limitations. What differentiates the Integrated project from pre-existing policies and what makes its approach innovative and its results promising?

One innovative feature of the Integrated Project is the use of landscape as triggering point for the development of the place-based strategy. That was meant not only in its heritage dimension, as a driver for regeneration strategies based on the territorial identity and the 'uniqueness of place' (Oppido et al., 2019), but also in its dimension as a commons (Castiglioni et al., 2015; Gerber, Hess, 2017; Gattarulo, 2018) and in the 'commoning practices' producing it (Linebaugh, 2008; Bresnihan, 2016). This dimension is particularly relevant when applied to the landscape (Grassini, 2023), as it allows to focus on the generative potential of landscape for the active engagement of local communities in its production and reproduction (Magnaghi, 2012).

Through the intertwining of these two dimensions of the landscape, the Integrated Project in Southern Salento could thus overcome some of the main drawbacks of existing policies, namely: the dilemma between conservation strategies and the desire for new landscapes; the conception of the landscape as a static resource to be exploited within development strategies; the disempowering role given to local communities linked to a static interpretation of their identity; the inability to counteract enduring forms of spatial injustice connected to extractive elites and institutions.

Another innovative feature of the Integrated Project is the approach employed for multi-actor and multi-governance involvement in the co-design of its strategy, which differed from the place-based approach adopted in the cohesion policy (Barca et al., 2012) for the following reasons: i) instead of predefining clearly the aims and intended outcomes of the strategy, it adopted an exploratory scenario approach; ii) rather than merely promoting a public debate open to dissent and alternative viewpoints, it focussed on and gave voice to ongoing bottom-up collaborative practices experimenting with new sustainable rural economies; iii) rather than emphasising the coordination and collaboration between all the different governance and institutional levels, it involved key local actors who were deemed most capable of stimulating innovative actions and had been mainly excluded by existing public policies for local development.

In this way, the Integrated Project moved away from mere consultation-based forms of participation and governance to open up and broaden the space for citizens' active mobilisation in the development of a counter-narrative to the dominant interpretation of the marginalization drivers of Southern Salento and of possible solution spaces. The Integrated Project thus succeeded in tapping into, and strengthening, vibrant bottom-up processes and collaborative practices for new sustainable rural economies, which had started mushrooming in Salento before the Xylella outbreak. These were aimed to contrast the growing destruction of the territory, made by extractive local elites and external big players, as well as the increasing abandonment of the area, as shown in the case of the Paduli park (Barbanente, Grassini, 2022). These practices highlighted alternative development patterns rooted in a deep 'place consciousness' and in citizens'

active mobilisation in the production and reproduction of their territory-landscape (Magnaghi, 2011). After being ignored or opposed by public policies, these have become examples of 'good practices' and virtuous initiatives in the regeneration strategy of the Integrated Project; this furthermore strengthened the capacity of local communities to act together (Sen, 1999; Dissart, 2012; De Leo, Altamore, 2023).

The potential for change underlying the Integrated Project is also expressed by some pilot public interventions for landscape regeneration in Southern Salento that have been inspired by its guidelines. In May 2023, the Apulia Region approved a disciplinary scheme for the allocation of 400,000 Euro for the development and implementation of experimental projects for the recovery of Xylella affected areas in Southern Salento, including the possibility to fund small landowners.

Moreover, the executive project of one pilot action included in the strategy for the AISS, namely the 'Pioneer Land' project for the recovery of some Xylella affected public area, was deeply transformed thanks to the involvement, as designer of the executive strategy of this project, of the same association, LUA, which has played a key role in the grassroots initiatives promoted in Salento in the last twenty years and has organized the OST workshop in Tiggiano for the Integrated Project. As a result, while the interventions originally included in the SNAI Action Plan were basically aimed at the improvement of the landscape quality to increase tourism potential, with local communities being a mere recipient of communication and sensibilization activities, they now pursue three specific objectives in line with the strategy set in the Integrated Project: the experimentation of polycyclic agroforestry techniques as a means to increase biodiversity and resilience; ii) the support of new bio-economies revolving around agricultural wastes; iii) the support to a local food policy rooted on the use of local agricultural products for the preparation of meals in public canteens. This underline the generative role of local communities both in their active contribution to project objectives and in the identification of the operational actions meant as scaling-up of grassroots experiments included in the Integrated Project guidelines.

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