

Chapter 7

The “Parco dei Tratturi della Puglia”: *A Historical-Cultural Heritage between Migrations and Landscape*

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Introduction

The ecological and cultural importance of the rete tratturale in Puglia

The interaction between man and the environment has given rise, over the centuries, to multiple forms of landscape that are the result of a delicate and constant balance between human needs and natural dynamics. A significant example of this interaction is the *rete tratturale* (tracturale network) of Puglia, a road system that has its roots in the ancient practice of *transumanza* (transhumance). *Transumanza*, which has profoundly characterized the economy and culture of local communities for centuries, has contributed to creating a unique and unrepeatable agro-pastoral landscape, in which natural elements blend harmoniously with anthropic ones, giving rise to a landscape configuration that is as peculiar as it is functional.

The *rete tratturale* of Puglia is distinguished not only by the natural characteristics that compose it, such as *ampi pascoli* (large pastures), *boschi* (woods), *garighe* (garrigues) and *macchia mediterranea* (mediterranean scrub), but also by the presence of traditional structures made by man, such as *muretti a secco* (dry stone walls) and *jazzi* (dry stone fences for sheep), used to shelter livestock during long seasonal movements. This semi-natural landscape reflects a dynamic balance, maintained over time thanks to pastoral activity, which has prevented shrub recolonization phenomena and has favored the conservation of open habitats of great ecological value. Grazing activity, particularly that linked to sheep farming, has proven to be fundamental for the creation and maintenance of a variety of microhabitats that favor the presence of specialized plant and animal species in transitional environments between more wooded areas and open grasslands. The biodiversity that characterizes these environments is the result of a sustainable balance between man and nature, which has allowed the survival of numerous ecosystems with high biological richness.

Throughout history, the *rete tratturale* has played a fundamental role not only from an economic and social point of view but also as a crucial element for the ecological connection between different areas of the territory. The *tratturi* (sheep tracks) can be considered true ecological corridors, which allow the continuity of natural habitats and favor the mobility of wild fauna. In the context of increasing fragmentation of natural habitats, mainly due to the expansion of urbanized areas and the intensification of agricultural practices, the *tratturi* represents one of the last links between fragmented ecosystems, allowing animal species to move freely between areas of great ecological value. This aspect takes on particular importance in areas with a strong anthropic impact, where the *tratturi* can become the only connection routes between otherwise isolated habitats, allowing not only the movement of migratory species but also the dispersion of seeds of native plants that are essential for the maintenance of plant diversity.

In addition to their ecological value, the *tratturi* represent a cultural heritage of immense value. These historical routes are the result of centuries of interaction between man and the environment and embody traditions, knowledge, and practices that have marked the life of the pastoral communities of Puglia. Their protection, therefore, is not only concerned with environmental protection but is also linked to the conservation of a historical legacy that tells the identity and cultural evolution of the Puglia region. The *tratturi* are not only transit routes but true witnesses of *transumanza*, an activity that has had a profound impact on the social, economic, and cultural organization of local populations. In a world that is rapidly changing, the protection and enhancement of these historical routes also represent a strategy to strengthen the connection between past and future generations, keeping alive an indissoluble bond with the territory.

In the current context, characterized by accelerated anthropization and profound changes in agricultural practices and the rural landscape, the recovery and enhancement of the Apulian *rete tratturale* are becoming increasingly important. These historical routes not only contribute to the conservation of unique landscapes but can also become strategic tools to

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promote sustainable development models, which respect historical memory and promote the recovery of ancient traditions. The redevelopment of the *rete tratturale*, with its dual ecological and cultural function, can stimulate the creation of new tourist routes that combine nature and culture and represent an opportunity for local communities to relaunch the rural economy through sustainable tourism. In this way, the *tratturi* can become key elements not only for the conservation of biodiversity and the rural landscape but also to promote a territorial regeneration that puts the relationship between man and nature at the center. Their valorization, therefore, is not only a question of ecological protection but also an opportunity to promote tourism, culture, and the history of the territory, contributing to the creation of a development model that is truly sustainable and capable of preserving the historical memory of local communities.

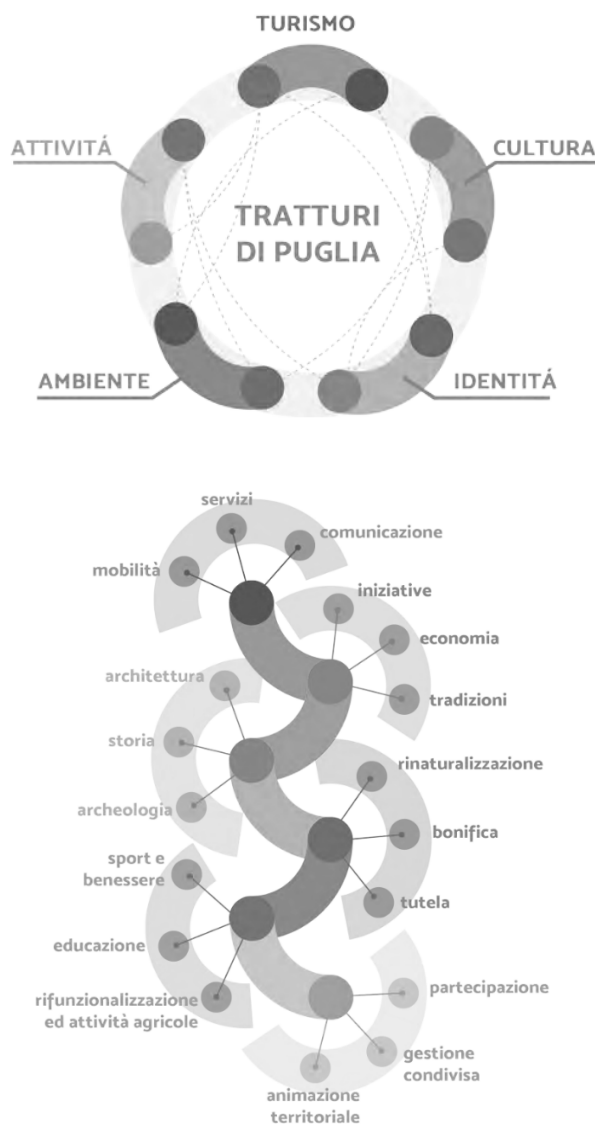


Figure 1. Structure of the Study (Developed by *Documento Regionale di Valorizzazione dei Tratturi di Puglia*).

Statement of the problem and gap

The historical evolution of the *rete tratturale* in Puglia has undergone profound and significant changes over the centuries, transforming its function and perception within the territory. Originally conceived as a fundamental infrastructural system to support *transumanza*, this network has played a crucial role in connecting the different mountain and plain areas, allowing the seasonal movement of livestock. However, over time, due to the change in pastoral and agricultural practices, the function of the *tratturi* has been progressively scaled down and, in many cases, abandoned. The progressive decline of traditional *transumanza* has caused a reduction of the vast areas dedicated to grazing, which were once essential for the sustenance of pastoral communities. This has resulted in the gradual isolation and fragmentation of the *rete tratturale*, compromising its ecological continuity and reducing its functionality as a natural corridor for local fauna.

If once the *tratturi* were fundamental as communication routes for *transumanza*, today they mostly represent elements of a residual landscape, often not recognized for their ecological and historical value. This change has generated a significant gap in land management, which has manifested itself in a loss of traditional maintenance practices and a progressive loss of identity of the *paesaggio tratturale* (tractural landscape). The lack of an adequate conservation strategy could lead to the deterioration of these ecological corridors, which are fundamental not only for local biodiversity but also for the conservation of the historical and cultural landscape that characterizes them. If not addressed promptly, the risk of further degradation of the *rete tratturale* could compromise the ability of these routes to perform crucial ecological functions, such as maintaining biodiversity and resistance to the effects of climate change.

At the same time, we are witnessing a progressive erosion of traditional knowledge related to the management of pastures and agricultural practices related to *transumanza*. Pastoral communities, which for centuries have maintained a delicate balance between man and the environment, are facing an evident decline, which involves the loss of skills and agricultural practices related to the care and enhancement of the territory. The progressive abandonment of traditional landscape management techniques, combined with the spread of intensive agricultural practices, further threatens the conservation of the *rete tratturale*, compromising the possibility of functional recovery of the *tratturi* and their ability to generate ecological, economic, and cultural benefits.

This scenario raises a crucial and urgent question: how to ensure the conservation of the Apulian *rete tratturale* while respecting its historical, cultural, and environmental value? The lack of an integrated protection and enhancement strategy represents a significant gap that risks irreparably compromising the future of these historical routes, as well as the possibility of preserving the identity and rural landscape of Puglia. If timely intervention is not done, the risk is that the *tratturi*, one of the most representative elements of the history and culture of Puglia, may progressively disappear, with a negative impact not only on the cultural heritage but also on biodiversity and the rural landscape. Addressing this gap means promoting an integrated recovery and management strategy that considers the ecological, historical, and social dimensions of the *tratturi*. This strategy could be the key to ensuring the survival of one of the most significant elements of the natural and cultural heritage of the region, also offering new opportunities for local communities through the enhancement of the territory and the promotion of sustainable agricultural and pastoral practices.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The main objective of this study is to analyze in depth the fundamental role that the Apulian *rete tratturale* plays in the conservation of biodiversity and the ecological connection of the territory. In particular, it intends to identify and propose effective strategies for the protection and enhancement of these historical routes, which are of great importance from both an ecological and cultural point of view. The basic hypothesis on which this research is based is that a targeted intervention for the recovery and management of the *rete tratturale* can have a significant and positive impact in improving ecological connectivity, contributing to the preservation of the historical landscape and the development of management models that are both sustainable and respectful of local traditions.

A further objective of the research is to explore and enhance the potential of the *rete tratturale* as a cultural and socio-economic resource. In this context, it is planned to examine the possibilities of integrating the *tratturi* with sustainable tourism through the creation of ecological tourist itineraries, but also with traditional agro-pastoral practices that are historically linked to these routes. The recovery of the *tratturi* could encourage the creation of hiking and cycling routes, stimulating the development of tourist activities focused on ecotourism, which allows visitors to discover the history, culture, and natural beauty of these territories. This process could not only favor the growth of tourism but also promote an enhancement of local traditions, strengthening the link between communities and their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the redevelopment of the *rete tratturale* could represent a significant opportunity for rural communities, helping to generate new forms of income linked to the sustainable management of the territory. Such redevelopment, if well planned, could stimulate the local economy, creating new employment opportunities and supporting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the tourism, sustainable agriculture, and services sectors. Enhancement policies could, therefore, act as a driving force for a new economic development model that can combine economic growth with the protection of natural and cultural heritage.

Finally, the research aims to identify and propose innovative strategies that can make the *rete tratturale* an integral part of territorial planning policies, ensuring its resilience in the long term. A central aspect will be achieving a balance between environmental conservation, necessary to protect biodiversity and preserve historical landscapes, and the socio-economic development of rural areas crossed by *tratturi*. In this framework, management policies will have to be developed in such a way as to support not only environmental protection but also the economic growth of local communities, avoiding depopulation phenomena and ensuring balanced and sustainable development. In this way, it will be possible to contribute to the creation of an integrated management model that fully enhances the *patrimonio tratturale* (tracturale heritage), making it a key element for the sustainable development of Puglia.

Materials and Methods: Valorization of the *Tratturi* of Puglia

The present work aims to analyze the criteria and guidelines necessary for the protection and valorization of the *rete tratturale* of Puglia to protect the natural, historical, and cultural values of these historical routes while promoting compatible economic activities, such as sustainable tourism, culture, and recreational activities. The valorization of these itineraries has as its ultimate goal the improvement of the quality of life of local communities, within the *Parco dei Tratturi*. The guidelines developed for the valorization of the *tratturi* consider the territorial specificities, with particular attention to the ecological, historical, archaeological, and cultural characteristics of each section of the *rete dei tratturi*, to ensure a respectful and targeted intervention.

The *rete tratturale* that crosses Southern Italy, with particular emphasis on Puglia, represents a strategic resource for the development of the territories crossed. The enhancement of this network focuses on key aspects such as the ecological function of the *tratturi*, their integration into the regional road network, the promotion of sustainable tourism practices, and the enhancement of the historical memory linked to *transumanza*, which has been one of the most significant traditions of the region for centuries. Another fundamental aspect concerns the inclusion of state-owned properties in sustainable agricultural practice projects to promote the economic development of rural areas without compromising the environment and natural resources. The planned interventions are divided into physical and intangible actions to improve the perception, accessibility, and usability of the *rete tratturale* and the surrounding areas. Furthermore, the aim is to promote knowledge of the *tratturi* and their historical, cultural, and environmental values through awareness-raising and education projects. The guidelines for the enhancement of the *tratturi* are divided into various thematic areas, each of which responds to specific needs and objectives to create a cohesive and sustainable network of interventions. In particular, the main areas of intervention concern mobility, vegetation and ecology, cultural identity, multifunctionality of the areas, and signage, as detailed below.

Guidelines for the enhancement of *tratturi*:

The interventions outlined in the guidelines are divided into different thematic areas that respond to specific needs and objectives, aimed at ensuring a balanced and sustainable enhancement of *tratturi*. In particular, the main areas of intervention concern the following aspects:

1. Mobility
 - Study of tourist potential: An in-depth analysis of *percorsi tratturali* (tracturale routes), considering their landscape attractiveness, ease of access, and safety. The length of the routes and the possibility of creating multi-stage itineraries that can attract tourists and visitors, offering different experiences, will be considered.
 - Adaptation of existing roads: Design of solutions for soft mobility along the *rete tratturale*, avoiding the construction of new infrastructures, such as cycle paths, which could alter the natural landscape. The idea is to preserve the environment and optimize existing infrastructures.
 - Multimodal accessibility: Creation of connections with train stations, bus stops, and other mobility facilities to ensure universal accessibility and usability of the *aree tratturali* (tracturale areas) by all types of users, including people with disabilities.
2. Vegetation and Ecology
 - Protection of historical landscapes: Renaturalization and redevelopment interventions of degraded areas, with the creation of ecological networks that connect areas of naturalistic interest and improve biodiversity along the *tratturi*.
 - Identification of sustainable agricultural practices: Promotion of crops that respect the environment through the choice of symbolic and ecological plant species closely linked to the *paesaggio tratturale* and the agricultural tradition of the region.
 - Improvement of environmental quality: Strengthening of vegetation along the *tratturi*, improving the landscape, and creating a more favorable environment for use on foot or by bicycle, promoting eco-friendly tourism.
3. Cultural Identity
 - Recovery of historical elements: Protection and enhancement of the identifying elements of the *paesaggio tratturale*, such as *cippi lapidei* (stone markers), *jazzi* (dry stone fences for sheep), *chiesette* (small churches) and *fontane* (fountains), which testify to the historicity of *transumanza* and the life of shepherds along these routes.
 - Creation of cultural spaces: Transformation of existing structures into spaces dedicated to the memory of *transumanza* and the history of *tratturi*, where visitors can deepen their knowledge of the historical and cultural heritage linked to the tradition of pastoralism.
4. Equipped Areas and Multifunctionality

- Creation of rest areas: Creation of equipped areas along the *rete tratturale*, near points of landscape or historical interest, which encourage visitors to rest and stop, improving the tourist experience and ensuring comfortable and safe use.
 - Recovery of existing structures: Reuse of public or private buildings for compatible economic activities, such as *masserie* (farms) and *aziende agricole* (agricultural businesses), to stimulate territorial development and integration with the landscape, promoting the creation of local businesses linked to agricultural production and tourism promotion.
5. Signage and Recognisability
- Unified visual identity: Creation of clear and unified signage for all the *tratturi* in Puglia, which allows visitors to easily orient themselves along the routes, using interactive devices such as QR codes to facilitate the digital use of historical and cultural content, improving access to information and the overall experience.
 - Wayfinding and accessibility: Installation of signage to ensure the continuity of the route, inform visitors about points of interest, and raise awareness among motorists about the presence of the *tratturi* so that they can respect the traffic and contribute to everyone's safety.

To develop a valorization strategy for the Apulian *rete tratturale*, this study will use a multidisciplinary approach, which will include the collection and analysis of historical, ecological, and socio-economic data. In-depth studies will be conducted on the geography and history of the main Apulian *tratturi*, with particular attention to the *Regio Tratturo Pescasseroli-Candela*, an emblematic example of a *percorso tratturale* that crosses several areas of great ecological and cultural value.

In particular, the analysis of the *Tratturo Pescasseroli-Candela* will focus on the study of its ecological characteristics, its history, and its role in the Apulian landscape. The opportunities for recovery and valorization of this stretch will be explored, with particular attention to the tourist potential and the possibilities for environmental recovery. Furthermore, the actions envisaged by the *Piano Operativo Integrato del PTCP di Foggia* (Integrated Operational Plan of the PTCP of Foggia) will be taken into consideration, which plan aims to promote the recovery and enhancement of the *Tratturo Pescasseroli-Candela* as part of an integrated territorial development project that considers the ecological, historical, cultural, and socio-economic needs of the territory.

Discussion: The future of the Apulian *tratturi*

The enhancement of the Apulian *rete tratturale* represents a significant and complex challenge, which involves the difficult task of finding a balance between the conservation of the ecological, cultural, and landscape aspects of the *tratturi* and the socio-economic development of rural areas. The *tratturi* are not simple transit routes but authentic witnesses of the history, culture, and traditions of the region. Their preservation is crucial not only to protect the historical heritage but also to guarantee the biodiversity and health of the surrounding environment, which is strongly linked to the management and use of these ancient routes.

A key element for the success of a project to enhance the *tratturi* is the active involvement of local communities, farmers, and breeders, who have traditionally lived and worked along these routes. Only with their direct participation will it be possible to guarantee sustainable management that allows agricultural and pastoral activities to continue without compromising the ecological integrity of the territory. It is essential that agricultural and pastoral traditions, which have been part of the daily life of Apulian communities for centuries, can be maintained over time, promoting environmentally friendly and sustainable agricultural practices to preserve the unique characteristics of these places. In this context, the enhancement of the *tratturi* cannot be limited to their recovery as simple tourist routes. It must be an integral part of a territorial development project that includes the creation of broader tourist itineraries capable of connecting the *tratturi* to other cultural, historical, and natural routes present in Puglia. The construction of a network of itineraries that connects these routes would strengthen the visibility and attractiveness of the *tratturi*, contributing to the economic revival of rural areas. This development should also stimulate slow and sustainable tourism, which enhances the territory and traditions without altering its identity and ecological fragility. This process must be planned in such a way as not to damage the landscape and local biodiversity but rather promote their protection, while at the same time allowing a conscious and respectful use of natural and cultural resources. However, the creation of a tourist network that includes the *tratturi* must be approached with great attention to sustainability. The pressure of tourism, if not managed carefully, could lead to a deterioration of the landscape, the loss of biodiversity, and the risk of damaging the most sensitive areas of the territory. A balanced approach to the enhancement of the *tratturi* therefore requires integrating ecological conservation with development needs, creating solutions that allow the enjoyment of the *patrimonio tratturale* without compromising its historical and natural value. In conclusion, the protection and enhancement of the Apulian *tratturi* are essential not only for the conservation of the historical and cultural memory of the region but also to

promote a territorial development model that is sustainable and respectful of the environment. The *rete tratturale* is a heritage that must be carefully cared for, integrating tradition with innovation, and must be seen as an opportunity to generate a positive and lasting impact on local communities. The enhancement of the *tratturi*, if managed correctly, can represent a key to the future of the rural areas of Puglia, promoting a new economic development that respects the regional identity, biodiversity, and landscape.

Conclusion

The *rete tratturale*, with its inestimable historical and landscape value, represents a fundamental resource for local communities, which can exploit an ancient tradition as a driver of development and sustainable growth. The proposed guidelines, which constitute a reference framework for the design and implementation of interventions, are essential to guide actions and ensure their effectiveness. An approach that, in addition to considering the environmental and historical aspects, places particular emphasis on sustainability and inclusiveness, ensuring that the benefits deriving from the enhancement of *tratturi* can be distributed equally among all the subjects involved, including the inhabitants and economic actors of rural areas.

In this context, the synergy between soft mobility, environmental redevelopment, and cultural enhancement emerges as an integrated and innovative strategy, capable of promoting the conscious use of the *patrimonio tratturale*. This approach not only promotes a responsible recovery of these resources but also stimulates tourist growth that respects the environment and local culture. The active involvement of local communities, farmers, breeders, and tourism operators is crucial since the enhancement of these routes requires a network of collaborations that recognizes the importance of a balanced, responsible, and long-lasting territorial development model. In this vision, the *patrimonio tratturale* becomes a factor of social cohesion and renewal, not only on an economic level but also on a cultural level, thanks to its ability to stimulate a sense of belonging and pride among local populations. The protection and enhancement of the *rete tratturale* of Puglia are of fundamental importance, not only for the preservation of biodiversity and characteristic landscapes but also for the maintenance of the cultural identity of a region that has been intrinsically linked to these traditions for centuries. The interventions proposed in this study, through integrated and sustainable management of the *rete tratturale*, represent a strategic resource for the socio-economic revitalization of rural areas of Puglia. The proposals aim to promote the creation of new economic opportunities without compromising the ecological integrity of the territory, ensuring a balance between the needs of development and the protection of natural and cultural heritage.

The redevelopment of the *rete tratturale*, combined with the creation of sustainable tourist itineraries and the promotion of environmentally friendly agricultural practices, can give rise to a renewed relationship between man and nature, with positive effects on the quality of life of local communities. This territorial development model, focused on sustainability, can strengthen the resilience of local ecosystems, countering the loss of biodiversity, and promoting the adoption of responsible and conscious behavior by new generations. The creation of tourist itineraries, together with awareness-raising and environmental education initiatives, will promote not only knowledge and enhancement of the *patrimonio tratturale* but also respect for the environment and for the traditions that have always distinguished this extraordinary landscape.

Ultimately, the enhancement of the Apulian *rete tratturale* does not only represent an economic opportunity for the region but also an important step towards building a future in which the protection of natural and cultural heritage goes hand in hand with a sustainable and inclusive development model, capable of responding to the challenges of the present and the future. The recovery and redevelopment actions of the *tratturi* are, therefore, the foundation of a development vision that not only respects historical memory and local traditions but at the same time promotes innovation, collaboration, and collective commitment to a better future.

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Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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