

Cultural practices and territorial cohesion of the Ionian hinterland

Besar Zifla, Gjergj Ruci

Polytechnic University of Tirana, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism

Keywords

Rural Regeneration, Cultural heritage, Territorial planning

In the wake of rapid coastal urbanization in the Mediterranean, rural hinterlands often face a paradox of demographic decline versus untapped potential. This paper investigates the “100 Villages” project in Albania—a strategic cooperation plan between national agencies and academic institutions — focusing on the village of Mursi and its neighboring. Situated as the cultural backbone to the high-density tourism of Saranda, these villages offer a unique case study in “Architecture of the Fitting” across XS to M scales.

The research argues that sustainable territorial cohesion is not achieved through standardized infrastructure alone, but through the preservation of “immaterial wealth”— the ancient habits of hospitality, multi-linguistic identities (Albanian and Greek), and the “magnetic force” of ancestral land. By analyzing the rural fabric through the lens of both vernacular preservation and modern economic synergy the study demonstrates how local forms of organization, act as anchors for resilience.

Using observations from the field and territorial planning strategies, the paper proposes a model where the architect acts as a facilitator between top-down state visions and bottom-up local realities. It concludes that the “fitting” of new architectural interventions—such as the restoration of stone masonry and the re-paving of traditional cobblestones—must respect the “thousand-year history” of the territory to successfully transform a rustic network into a sustainable economic landscape.”