

Appendix 4: Isernia Province (Italy, NC4)

Organising partner:	UNICAL	Innovation Type
Practice:	Castel del Giudice: Municipality as an active agent of territorial marketing and economic initiative voicing community needs (Italy, IT5C)	
Practice context:	Isernia Province (NUTS 2)- Predominantly rural	
Confrontation context:	Malito, Cosenza Province (NUTS2), Intermediate	
Workshop location:	Malito	
Date:	November 24th and December 15th 2021	

Summary

The practice “Castel del Giudice: Municipality as an active agent of territorial marketing and economic initiative voicing community needs” located in the Province of Isernia (Nuts2 level-prevalent rural region) has been discussed in the context of Malito, a small municipality of Cosenza Province (Nuts 2 level- intermediate region). Depopulation and aging, problems on which the Castel del Giudice practice has worked by implementing initiatives to attract newcomers and stop youth emigration, are issues that the municipality of Malito must face.

This context was chosen for the confrontation as there are many geographical, social and economic similarities among them. Malito has a population (748 inhabitants in 2021) more than double of Castel del Giudice (314 inhabitants in 2021) and the confrontation is useful to understand if the critical factors of the promising practice could be inspiring for small municipalities under 1000 inhabitants.

Main results of the confrontation are that some factors of the model of Castel del Giudice are similar in the context of Malito and that some of the activities can be adapted and replicated. The context of the abandoned land and building is quite similar, and the valorization of local products (partially

initiated with some De.Co.¹⁰ labels) is a concrete opportunity. What emerged is that the citizens are not used to have a common vision and projects for their community, so the consultation organized by RURALIZATION offered a first step toward a process of collective planning which in Castel del Giudice relies on an informal mechanism due to the limited extension of the village. While initiatives undertaken so far on personal capacity have failed, the opportunity to have a collective design of the initiatives, based on local identity as De.Co., with an active role of the municipality has emerged. Also the reintroduction of ancient crafts and services with the support of national programs for immigrants and refugees emerged as a feasible way forward to attract newcomers in the village. The needs for training on the job and other forms of capacity building using different programs have been clearly affirmed. The municipality can play a central role in promoting a participative process which can activate youths and more generally the citizens and favor a collective project planning to enhance local resources and to have common perspective on the use of the local infrastructures such as the swimming pool, the gym and the theatre.

Context

The practice “Castel del Giudice: Municipality as an active agent of territorial marketing and economic initiative voicing community needs” located in the Province of Isernia (Nuts2 level) has been discussed in the context of Malito, a small municipality of Cosenza Province (Nuts 2 level).

Castel del Giudice and Malito are located in two provinces of the South of Italy. Cosenza province is located in Calabria (Nuts 3 level) – that is classified a less developed region by the Cohesion policy 2014-2020 criteria while Isernia is located in Molise (Nuts 3 level) – a transition region.

The main demographic indicators related to the median scenario 2020-2030 shows a similar structure of the population among the two provinces. Both suffer from an ageing trend even if Isernia, despite having a 3.1% higher percentage of the over 65 population in 2020 compared to Cosenza, in 2030 should have a less accelerated growth of this part of the population compared to Cosenza (Tab1.)

Tab.1. Main Demographic Indicators, 1st January 2020/2030, Median Scenario

Year	Province	Mean age of the population	Population aged 0-14 (%)	Population aged 15-64 (%)	Population aged 65 and more (%)
2020	Cosenza	45.5	12.5	64.9	22.6
2020	Isernia	47.5	11.1	63.2	25.7
2030	Cosenza	48.5	11	60.5	28.4

¹⁰ De.Co. is a municipal denomination attribute to those products considered in some way "typical" or historically linked to a place, and which have no other awards, such as PDO, PGI, TSG. It is not a European trademark, but it is a municipal recognition that is therefore attributed by the municipal administration. The De.Co brand was created following the Italian Law n. 142 of 8 June 1990, which gives the Municipalities the power to regulate the promotion of traditional agri-food activities

2030	Isernia	49.6	10.1	59.5	30.4
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Source: Geo demo.ISTAT (<https://demo.istat.it/previsionicomunali/download.php?lingua=eng#>)

The median scenario per 1,000 inhabitants referred to years 2020/2030 indicate a negative net migration rate in 2020 in both provinces; an improvement of the rate is foreseen in 2030 but it should become positive only in Isernia Province (1,4). The growth rate in 2020 is negative in both contexts but in Isernia it is even worse (minus 3.5 points compared to Cosenza), in 2030 it should remain negative, but the rate would be aligned in the two provinces. (Tab.2)

Tab.2. Vital and migration rates, years 2020/2030, median scenario, per 1,000 inhabitants

Year	Province	Birth rate	Death rate	Net migration rate	Growth rate
2020	Cosenza	7.1	11.5	-3.1	-7.5
2020	Isernia	6	14.4	-2.6	-11
2030	Cosenza	6.5	11.8	-0.8	-6.2
2030	Isernia	5.9	13.4	1.4	-6

Source: Our elaboration on data Geo demo. ISTAT

Castel del Giudice is a small mountain municipality 800 meters above sea level, the total area of the territory is 14,81km². The town is near the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise¹¹. The population counts in 2021, 314 inhabitants (149 female).

Malito is a small mountain municipality 728 meters above sea level, the total area of the territory is 16,92 km². The municipality is near the National Park of Sila. The population in 2021 counts 748 inhabitants (381 female).

The total resident population by age classes in the two municipalities indicate a population over 65 that is approximately 4 percentage points higher than the corresponding regional data (Nuts 2)(Tab.3).

¹¹ <http://www.parcoabruzzo.it/>

Tab.3. Castel del Giudice and Malito- main demographic indicators 2021

	Total Population	% Female on total population	% Population 0-14	% Population 15-64	% Population over 65
Castel del Giudice	314	47,45	10,83	58,60	30,57
Isernia Province (Nuts2)	81415	50,48	11,08	62,68	26,24
Malito	748	50,93	9,63	62,83	27,54
Cosenza Province (Nuts 2)	676119	51,18	12,63	64,09	23,28

Source: Our elaboration on <https://demo.istat.it/popres/index.php?anno=2021&lingua=eng>

Considering the last ten years, it can be highlighted that although the aging index is much higher in Castel del Giudice, this is decreasing (-59.1 percentage points between 2011 and 2021); on the contrary in Malito the ageing index, in the same years, increases (+54.5 percentage points). The same tendency is shown by the dependency ratio trend.

Tab.4. Castel del Giudice and Malito Ageing Index and Dependency ratio 2011-2021

Municipality	Years	Ageing Index (percentage values) on 1st January	Dependency ratio (percentage values) on 1st January
Castel del Giudice	2011	386,7	69,9
	2021	327,6	66,0
Malito	2011	224,7	48,7
	2021	279,2	58,3

Source: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/indici-demografici-struttura-popolazione/>

In 2018, the resident population income of Castel del Giudice was higher compared to that of Malito but they are both under the medium Italian level of more than 21.000 €. The Index of Social and Material Vulnerability¹², calculated by the Italian Statistical Office (ISTAT), that measures the

¹² The social and material vulnerability index (IVMS) is an indicator constructed through the synthesis of seven indicators referring to the dimensions of the phenomenon considered most relevant for the formation of a national ranking of municipalities. The selected indicators describe, with almost equal weight, the two dimensions of "material" and "social" vulnerability.

exposure of certain groups of the population to risk situations, understood as the uncertainty of their social and economic condition is aligned.

Tab.5. Castel del Giudice and Malito Income 2018 and Index of Social and Material Vulnerability (IVMS)

	Income 2018	IVMS
Castel del Giudice	16,543	102,29
Malito	13,335	102,00

Source: https://politichecoesione.governo.it/media/2792/20210923_comuni-svantaggiati_allegato-a.pdf

Depopulation and ageing, problems on which the Castel del Giudice practice has worked by implementing initiatives to attract newcomers and stop youth emigration, are issues that the municipality of Malito must face.

This context was chosen for the confrontation as there are many similarities among them, although the first is located in a prevalent rural region (Isernia) and the second one in an intermediate region (Cosenza). Malito has a population more than double of Castel del Giudice and the confrontation is useful to understand if the critical factors of the promising practice could be inspiring for small municipalities under 1000 inhabitants.

Results

Acceptance and interest in implementing the practice

The large and active participation of people from different age groups and with different roles (business owners, young people, local administrations officers and local politicians) indicates the strong interest of the Malito population and of the Municipality in a moment of consultation and participation that is a pre-condition and constitutive of the promising practice of Castel del Giudice. Many participants recognized these brainstorming and the focus group as the first opportunity for a collective discussion on the development of the town promoted by the Municipality. The actors were particularly interested in the itinerary that led the Castel del Giudice practice to be successful, identifying in the discussion the links that could be activated to systemize the resources already structurally present in the context of Malito. During the presentation of the practice as well as in the brainstorming sessions, various interventions by both the mayor and the participants underlined the similarities between the territory of Malito and that of Castel del Giudice.

Identified critical factors related to the implementation of the practice in the context

The practice of Castel del Giudice was presented according to the following critical factors that were relevant for the successful results.

a. Use of Abandoned land for agriculture

The context of Malito is quite similar to the one in Castel del Giudice for what concerns the fragmentation of the property of land and the abandonment of agricultural activities. Differently from Castel del Giudice, there are some typical local products such as oregano, honey and fava beans that were often mentioned during the brainstorming sessions, even if there was no attempt to install a business and a value chain around these typical products. The municipality supported a De.Co label for local honey and oregano, but no private investment was interested in developing a production and processing value chain for typical local products.

The only business idea that some entrepreneurs tried to put in place to use the abandoned land was a training camp for hunting dogs: indeed, it seems that local hunters usually are investing some thousands of euros to reach the areas in Poland and Croatia that are offering this service at competitive prices. This business proposal was not realized since the owners of the land refused to rent their land to others, due to the risk of permanently losing their ownership.

b. Recovery and use of abandoned buildings

While in Castel del Giudice the rehabilitation of abandoned buildings started with the abandoned municipal school and the stables outside the village, in Malito there are many buildings of historical value in the center of the village. The municipality activated a policy to attract newcomers making available three small flats for families willing to move and live in the village.

c. Migrants supports and Refugee and Asylum seekers National Programme

The international acknowledgement of the 'Riace model' as a good practice for Calabria resulted in the citizens of Malito considering immigrants as a resource for repopulation of the village. However, the reception of asylum seekers and refugees through participation in the National Programme SAI-Reception and Integration System needs preventive awareness-raising and communication work with local society.

d. Community Cooperatives

The community cooperative of Castel del Giudice offers a portfolio of services to the village, based on the needs and opportunities emerging from an informal mechanism of consultation. In the case of Malito, the brainstorming sessions were one of the first opportunity to have a collective discussion with the citizens.

e. Food Policy Pact

Due to abandonment of the land and of most of the agriculture activities, in Malito at the moment there is no discussion on how to build a public procurement scheme to support the development of a sustainable agriculture. The municipality registered local De.Co.s, but there is not discussion on a value chain strategy.

f. Pro-active role of the Municipality and fund-raising capacity:

So far, the proactive role of the municipality has been limited. The new mayor took office in 2018 and the new initiatives taken have been slowed down due to the pandemics. In the current context, the municipality has operated by trying to solve individual problems and listening to suggestions from individuals (such as the training camp for hunting dogs, finding housing for the foreign family with 3 children, or planting fruit trees instead of cypresses, etc.). No prospect of designing a collective development trajectory based on citizen consultation was considered. During this consultation, the mayor clearly expressed the willingness to dialogue with the citizens, to the extent that at the end of December 2022, the municipality organised a meeting with the citizens for the first time.

In recent years there has been an attempt to reactivate the existing infrastructure in the village: the municipality of Malito used to have about 15 staff to manage the municipal swimming pool, which has been idle for ten years and is currently understaffed in terms of quantity and quality and too energy-intensive. The municipality submitted a project to the region which envisaged a contemporary redevelopment of the swimming pool, relating to its social function linked to various rehabilitative functions, with an orthopedist and a physiatrist, also in view of a fairly large catchment area covering the Savuto valley. Unfortunately, the funds received were barely sufficient for a redevelopment of the pool facilities, despite the innovativeness of the project. The same applies to the sports pitch, which was put back into operation by a private individual and supported by the municipal' lighting in order to reduce the operative costs.

g. Economic activities jointly managed by local municipality, entrepreneurs and citizens

In Malito there are no public-private partnerships ongoing. There was an attempt to assign the management of the swimming pool to a company with the expertise but it didn't work out. The municipality tried to support the business idea of training camp for hunting dogs mediating with the owner of the land, but also in this case there was no positive result.

Key issues and barriers for implementing the innovative practice(s) in the context.

The slow depopulation stems from the lack of job opportunities, both related to the education undertaken and to the opportunities for a decent income from employment opportunities.

The absence of an economic environment capable of remunerating existing economic activities is one of the critical factors influencing any innovative initiative. The main factors are: lack of private initiatives and inability to activate cooperation.

Many young people expressed distrust in starting their own/collective economic businesses while older participants stressed that young people should overcome their skepticism and actively commit to achieve their goals.

For what concerns the:

a) Use of Abandoned land for agriculture:

The main obstacles to implement an innovative practice similar to Castel del Giudice are:

- Conservative mentality on using or renting land due the fear of permanently losing possession or ownership. This mentality is certainly more tempered in the new generations.
- Lack of infrastructures and processing facilities; for instance, an hare breeder was forced to use the processing facilities of another province of Calabria (Catanzaro) since there was no other option in the province of Cosenza.
- Presence of wild boars near farms, whose destructive work on crops tends to be an obstacle both for those who already work in rural activities and for those who intend to focus on agriculture. The temporary intervention of dedicated 'selectors' for culling outside the hunting season has not been conclusive.

b) Recovery and use of abandoned buildings:

In the case of Malito, the fragmentation of the properties and the difficulty in contacting the owners - often emigrated elsewhere – have made it difficult to activate urban regeneration activities. The high costs of urban regeneration are also a barrier to possible initiatives.

c) Migrants supports and Refugee and Asylum seekers National Programme:

No specific barrier has been identified for the integration of migrants in the social and economic activities of Malito.

d) Community Cooperatives:

Also with reference to the possibility of creating public-private partnerships or new forms of social shareholding such as community cooperatives, a cultural factor was identified as a barrier, i.e. the difficulty of networking that is perceived as rooted in the mentality of Southern Italy. In the experience of the participants, the forms of cooperation that have been set up in Malito have not succeeded in consolidating common paths due to differing practical motivations and stimuli (lack of time, lack of economic prospects) that define unequal commitment, contributions and strengths of individual investment in collective work.

e) Food Policy Pact

The obstacles inherent in the design of a food plan and the activation of a public intervention aimed at public procurement for local agri-food chains are essentially found in the procedures linked to food

safety (handling of the product in a suitable environment, certification, packaging, labelling, etc.) and agreement on food quality specifications supporting food procurement: all these procedures are costly and time-consuming. However, the actors agree on the possibility of exploring processes linked to local food cultures and crops. Starting from a registry of what already exists on which to build further coordination projects to enhance local typicalities.

f) Pro-active role of the Municipality and fund raising capacity:

A factor limiting the steps that the municipality is taking in the territory concerns the widespread perception that the public institution is considered as an employer and not instead a possible partner for joint action. There is the need for fundraising for small municipalities that have been progressively impoverished by the various national reforms, which do not allow them to manage the available real estate and in-house activities. In Malito, there is a low capacity in accessing public funds, since the actual administrative officers have limited skills in submitting project proposals.

g) Economic activities jointly managed by local municipality, entrepreneurs and citizens

Regarding the proactive role of the municipality in public-private partnerships, a number of obstacles are identified in the possible activities to be set up. Firstly, the idea that, while continuing to act as a catalyst, it is not the municipality that should take steps towards local entrepreneurs, but, on the contrary, that it is private entrepreneurs or the territory that should be active in asking for specific support, including information on calls for tenders. The actors, however, agree that the circulation of information and a practice of co-planning could push many actors towards a common action of valorization of the territory with favorable outcomes for the general interest of each and all.

Identified measures and actors that need to be involved to overcome the obstacles and succeed in the implementation of the practice.

Despite the mistrust shown in the dominant and widespread mentality of the population, even the most skeptical participants recognized that a possibility of collaboration and of implementing the activities promoted in Castel del Giudice would be possible if the municipality (or other public institutions) would be able to facilitate community dynamics.

Social innovation laboratories and territorial animation could be instruments that the Municipality can use to facilitate community activation. The actors that should primarily be involved are youths, the local LAG and more in general the citizens of Malito. These activities could also favor the establishment of a community cooperative.

To improve the administrative capacities of the employees of the municipality and to support the local politician in implementing innovative actions (such as promoting economic activities jointly managed by the local municipality, entrepreneurs and citizens or community cooperatives or even enhance the

fund raising capacities of the municipality for the recovery and re-use of public buildings) it would be useful a regional support through a creation of a center/office/digital platform where they could find easily information and support for implementing participative project planning.

To overcome the barrier of access to land it was suggested that the municipality could have a role of guarantor for the rental of land for organic cultivation.

The main obstacle, that is landowners' fear of losing their land through usucaption, could be also overcome creating an "*Associazione Fondiaria*". This is an association between owners of public or private land with the aim of grouping agricultural areas and forestry, abandoned or uncultivated, to allow an economically sustainable and productive use of them. It is not for profit and is governed by a Statute. Each member joins on a voluntary and free basis and retains ownership of the land, which could not be appropriated by usucaption. Usually an "*Associazione Fondiaria*" manages the properties conferred by its members; identifies the best technical and economic solutions for each land plot; lease the land to members of the association itself or to external parties who undertake to conduct them in compliance with good agricultural practices. This instrument has been already promoted in other Italian regions, for example in Piedmont where the regional law provides legal and financial support for the creation of this kind of association.

The idea of creating an "*Associazione Fondiaria*" in Malito requires for its implementation the involvement of at least the municipality and the landowners. The local LAG or the Calabria Region may also support with specific economic funds the activities of this kind of association.

The promotion of typical crops, such as a variety of fava beans that grows in the area, has been identified as a possible destination for the abandoned land, moreover social and educational farming was also mentioned as one opportunity that could be supported.

Apart from facilitating access to land, the role that the municipality could have in the recovery and re-use of important noble inhabited palaces and buildings in the center of the village has been recognized. The assignment of these restored buildings to local and migrants families and the use of them to favour certain practices such as the opening of crafts shops, or the reception of refugee and asylum seekers through the activation of a project within the national Programme named SAI- Reception and Integration System (<https://www.retesai.it/english/>) would be welcomed by the population.

The reopening of some important facilities such as the swimming pool, the gymnasium and the cinema, which are currently closed as they need to be restored, is a relevant point that has been raised in the discussion. The Municipality should find the funds to restore them and then the management could be entrusted to a local association/community cooperative.

Further innovative ideas to foster rural regeneration and development in the context.

Apart from the role of institutions, the opening of commercial activities (e.g.: pizzerias, pubs) to socialize and meet seem to be fundamental for local young people. Also the idea of renting e-bikes and enhancing nature areas through itineraries was enthusiastically received by the young people who participated.

Lessons learned and recommendations

The brainstorming sessions and the focus group indicated that all the critical factors (*Pro-active role of the Municipality and fund raising capacity, Economic activities jointly managed by local municipality, entrepreneurs and citizens ; Use of Abandoned land; Recovery and use of abandoned buildings; Community Cooperatives; Migrants supports and Refugee and Asylum seekers National Programme; Food Policy Pact*) of the practice may be theoretically implemented in the context of Malito and that these activities could either stop youths emigration or attract newcomers.

The first step however is the necessity to re-activate the community relationships. What has emerged is that actually there is, especially among youths, a lot of mistrust on the opportunities of becoming active actors of collective initiatives. The Municipality has a relevant role in this process.

A territorial animation is required, for example promoting public discussions, stimulating youths in realizing their dreams, informing on opportunities coming from multifunctional spread hospitality, eco-tourism).

Social innovation laboratories could also be an instrument that can favor youth activation as actually what seems to be lacking are youth aggregation centers where they can discuss, exchange ideas and ideate initiatives that can be implemented in the town.

In the meantime, so that the Municipality can become an activator of the innovation process, its employees also need support to strengthen their fundraising capacity and their project planning capacities. To favour a better knowledge on the opportunities of rural development a better circulation of the information - on funding available, on new instruments that could be locally promoted (for example favouring access to land; promoting a community cooperative), on administrative procedures that could be followed (for example promoting local circuits for the supply of the school canteen) – is also required.

The enhancement of local resources seems to be the starting point on which to build and develop this collective process. As in Castel del Giudice, the recovery and re-use of public/private buildings (Palazzo Santelli, swimming pool, gymnasium and cinema/theatre) and the recovery of traditional crops such as oregano and fava beans are proposals that emerged in the focus group.

An information desk to support youths for accessing public funds, solving bureaucratic issues and informing on farming opportunities connected to multifunctional farming has also been mentioned as a useful instrument that should be created.

The practice is founded first of all on a wide participative process that involves citizens; the municipality has a proactive role in this process and in all the initiatives implemented in Castel del Giudice. This seems to be possible only in small municipalities. The confrontation shows that this kind of participative process could theoretically be implemented in a town of more than 700 inhabitants.

Another point that should be considered is that in Castel del Giudice the mayor has specific competencies in fundraising and project planning, thanks to his work as a business consultant. It is

relevant that small municipalities should have support on these issues. The easily access to information on new instruments and support on the bureaucratic procedures (as for example, *associazioni fondiarie*, administrative procedures to activate school organic canteen supplied by local products, community cooperatives) is fundamental as most of the employees of this small municipalities don't have the competencies and the capabilities to support the local politicians in implementing these innovative initiatives. A dedicated regional office, or digital platform, or local development agency could be very helpful to overcome these problems. For this the youths, LAG, Municipality, local entrepreneurs/local farmers need to be involved.

Further consequences for the context

In order to better define a way forward it would be crucial that the Municipality promotes a participative process to activate youths and more generally the citizens and favor a collective project planning to enhance local resources.

Further innovative ideas to foster the presence in rural areas of newcomers; new entrants into farming and successors.

The support to artisan professions (e.g. blacksmith, tailors) through training courses aimed at both young people and migrants have been mentioned.

The re-activation of services in the town, as for example the re-use of sport (gymnasium, swimming pool) and cultural (theatre/cinema) facilities or the creation of a nursery, could also contribute to create an environment that can attract newcomers.

The Municipality has just received national funds to restore public buildings and made them available for opening business activities, for granting the startup of commercial, craft and agricultural activities and for economic contributions (5,000.00 euro per beneficiary) in favour of newcomers for the purchase and renovation costs of properties to be used as the principal residence. This national policy (Marginal Municipalities Fund) would be an opportunity for small municipalities affected by depopulation and with a low-income level of the resident population to attract newcomers and new entrants into agriculture.

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