

## Article

# Sustainable Promotion of Traditional Rural Buildings as Built Heritage Attractions: A Heritage Interpretation Methodology Applied in South Italy

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**Abstract:** The study describes the methodology implemented to include a rural cultural heritage attraction within an existing tourist route, i.e., the Sicilian Roads of Wine (“*Strade del vino*”). The aim was to promote a traditional rural building (TRB) as a tourist attraction and diversify rural tourism offerings. By promoting TRB and wine and food, the rural tourism sector offers a significant opportunity to achieve sustainable socio-economic development in rural areas, rural diversification, and landscape preservation. The inclusion of the TRB within the visitor route is based on a detailed heritage analysis approach as an operative process which could enable the comprehension and collective use of the cultural sites. The valorization of a traditional rural building with wine cellars and oil mills, located within the Chiaramonte Gulfi (RG) boundary, will be described. The objective is to make an architectural heritage building made with local materials and following the traditional Sicilian building techniques accessible to tourists. Special attention is paid to restore the building by respecting its identity and relevant building regulations and focusing on a complete, sustainable approach regarding social, environmental, and economic factors.

**Keywords:** cultural tourism; traditional rural buildings (TRBs); sustainable rural tourism; wine itinerary; sustainable rural development



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## 1. Introduction

The relevance of rural areas and their suitability and landscape are strongly affected by land desertion and soil depletion that are direct consequences of the abandonment of agricultural areas and the migration of human activities to urban centers.

This process causes deep modifications and impacts on both landscapes and biosystems. In the future, this phenomenon will affect an increasing number of territories throughout the world [1].

In contrast, the preservation and the valorization of traditional rural landscapes, in accordance with the European Landscape Convention (2000), the EU Habitats Directive, and Agenda 2000, are acquiring more relevance due to the evidence of their importance in relation to natural, social and historical aspects [2].

Sustainable rural development implies a redefinition of rural resources and contributes to an increase in employment opportunities in the agricultural sector, to the construction of a relationships between urban and agricultural society, and to land preservation [2], according to the three pillars of sustainable development (i.e., social, economic, and environmental pillars) [3]. Janoušková, S. (2016), Giovannoni et al., (2013), and Han, H. (2021) explored theories concerning sustainable development (SD). These theories study SD by identifying its main dimensions and linking relationships between governance structures, business models, management, measurement, and reporting systems. The common aim is to implement integrated sustainable development [4–6]. Harrington, L.M.B. (2016) explores theories and concepts related to sustainability and the rural context. Several of these theories connect humans with their environment and are based on the need for planning,

decision-making, policy development, and they are mindful of the complexity of systems in order to maximize sustainability [7].

The Brundtland Commission Report (1987) [8] proposed the most cited theory of SD. This theory defines SD as a growing concept that must satisfy the necessities of the present generation and the needs of future generations.

SD could ensure a proper balance among society, economy, and the environment without compromising the regenerative capacity of the earth to support the life of ecosystems [9,10].

SD is achieved if economic growth preserves resources and the environment while also supporting the health of society. That means the quality of life of future generations should be the same or greater than that of the current generation. The most often used approach to sustainability is the Z-squared theory, which is based on the proper management of natural resources by minimizing environmental impact [11].

Various studies recognized culture as a fourth pillar to achieve sustainability [9,12]. Culture is considered a complementary factor to sustainable development that incorporates the other three pillars mentioned above. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions defined the relationship between culture and sustainable development in 2001 and 2005, respectively [13,14]. Culture should be integrated into the three fundamental pillars of sustainable development because it plays a socially-binding and facilitating role concerning economic, societal, and environmental challenges.

In this context, sustainable rural development, and its strong connections with the conservation of biodiversity, agricultural activities, and rural heritage buildings are of relevant importance. The abandonment of traditional agricultural activities is strictly correlated to the abandonment of vernacular farm buildings [15,16]. Several studies focused on the correlation among cultural rural tourism and sustainability by assessing its potentiality and impacts on sustainable rural development [17,18]. Cultural rural tourism (CRT) supports both short-term and long-term economic development for rural communities. CRT sustainable development is based on human and natural resources, social relationships, and traditional heritage and lifestyles. The combination of cultural and rural offerings could improve the integration and diversification of tourism opportunities by realizing new competitive destinations. Cultural tourists are looking for new tourism products, but they are also essentially looking for unique experiences and authenticity.

Relationships among tourism, rural areas, and widespread cultural heritage requires territories and their local actors to clarify their local tourism potential and related processes that make rural areas suitable sites to implement sustainable improvement [19].

The development of sustainable rural tourism could improve the quality of the natural habitat and environmental protection. Sustainability is related to society, the economy, the environment, and institutions, and it joins the needs of tourists and host regions by protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future [20]. Sustainable cultural rural tourism increases job opportunities, restores rural economies and infrastructures, and raises peoples' awareness regarding natural and cultural enhancements [21,22]. Moreover, from a socio-cultural point of view that goes beyond environmental protection, rural tourism could be responsible for the repopulation of rural areas and the preservation of their cultural identity [23]. Garau (2015) analyzed the topic of sustainability applied to rural tourism within the province of Marmilla, which is located in Sardinia's Island in Italy [24]. A strategic methodology that balanced tourism development and contemporary needs to avoid damaging the landscape was developed. The aim was to increase the dissemination of cultural resources in the context of marginal rural areas. Villanueva-Álvaro et al. [17] studied the integration of the environment in rural tourism management by using a model of partial least squares (PLS). They stated that to achieve the environmental sustainability of rural tourism, accommodation is necessary to consider the significance of planning in the business management of establishments. With an aim to promote rural cultural heritage

and contemporary diversifying of tourist offerings, Leanza et al. described a methodology to implement a planning strategy to develop a rural tourist itinerary [25].

As stated in the literature, it is widely known that a cultural tourist site must be able to influence tourists who visit it to extend their stay in neighboring areas by improving the site's "interpretation" [26,27]. Actions aimed at improving public consciousness about a specific cultural site by increasing its perception are known as "interpretation activities". This series of activities is suitable to stimulate the visitor mind by promoting the development or consolidation of positive feelings. Interpretation is a mental process that stimulates the minds of visitors and encourages them to enjoy themselves and develop a positive approach to cultural heritage sites, including their protection, integrity, and authenticity [28]. Therefore, tourist accommodation can stimulate positive reactions and a positive state of mind that could encourage visitors to come back to a specific geographic area. In agricultural areas, cultural heritage sites that evoke emotions and positive feelings are well represented by traditional rural buildings (TRBs) converted to create new accommodations, food services, and agricultural activities available to tourists. Several international organizations, e.g., ECOVAST and ICOMOS and international scientific communities, discuss the topic of the recovery and reuse of built vernacular heritage.

Among farm buildings, some are of relevance due to their fine architecture and the materials adopted for their construction. These farm buildings are designed with specific architecture and techniques that link to the surrounding context and the farmer's needs [29]. Traditional rural buildings (TRBs) have economic, socio-cultural, and historical characteristics related to the time they were erected. In fact, they were built by using local materials and construction techniques embed in the regional context where they are placed. TRBs are anthropic elements that could increase the qualities of rural areas. Their valorization through conservation and recovery actions preserves the identity of local areas and improves sustainable development in territorial areas. In this context, rural architecture could represent an important economic advantage due to its potential as a tourist attraction [30]. TRBs could become tourist destinations by providing hospitality, hosting museums, or constituting themselves as open-air museums.

Traditional rural buildings, such as "*palmenti*", cellars, and oil mills can enable the creation of museums related to the production cycle of oil and wine. Enogastronomy tourism is a model of sustainable tourism. Wine and food tourism offers a new way to experience a holiday through the preservation and enhancement of agriculture and wine growing territories. Cuerva et al. described a prototypical example of restoration applied to a wine cellar in Spain that was oriented toward cultural tourism [31]. The architectural features of the agro-industrial space were described, and new use was suggested. However, by considering a holistic sustainable approach, particular attention must be paid to the restoration of these buildings by respecting their distinctiveness and the aesthetic attraction of their ancient cellars and to avoiding conflicts with planning and building regulations. Wine and food tourism sectors avoid concentrations of tourists that flow only in a few periods of the year, e.g., in the summer, because they favor equal tourism distribution during the whole year by increasing sustainability of the whole tourism sector.

By tasting wine, typical products, and local dishes, tourists can become aware of locations by being involved in local product processing. In this framework, the Sicily Region created the Wine Roads "*Strade del vino*" law of 27 July 1999, n. 268, which indicates vineyards and cellars as useful for reception and hospitality activities from a sustainable point of view. In 2019, the Italian Ministry of Agricultural Policies issued "Guidelines and directions regarding the requirements and minimum quality standards for exercise of wine tourism", Decree n. 2779. This decree recognizes wine tourism as a cultural and economic phenomenon [32].

The existing wine roads in Sicily are listed below:

1. *Moscato of Noto and Syracuse Wine Road*
2. *Alcamo DOC Wine Road*
3. *Cerasuolo di Vittoria from Baroque to Liberty Wine Road*
4. *Etna Wine Road*
5. *Province of Messina Wine Road*
6. *Marsala Terre d'Occidente Wine Road*
7. *Nissen'Castels Wine Road*
8. *Erice DOC Wine Road*
9. *Terre Sicane Wine Road*
10. *Val di Mazara Wine Road*
11. *Val di Noto Wine Road*
12. *Malvasia di Lipari Wine Road*
13. *Valle dei Templi Wine Road*

In Sicily, the Designations of Origin about wines includes a single controlled and guaranteed denomination of origin (DOCG), which is Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG, within the territorial area belonging to the province of Ragusa, produced with the Frappato grape, and it also include 23 controlled denominations of origin (DOC) and 7 typical geographical indications (IGT). Sicily's climate is favorable for wine and food tourism. The varied selection of typical Sicilian dishes is strongly connected to the territory and its various breeding and cultivation products.

The following categories are used to indicate local agronomic products: traditional products, products of protected geographical indication (IGP), and products of protected nomination (DOP). With an aim to improve the position of the green wine market and to achieve sustainable development, Bellia et al. assessed critical factors of success related to Sicilian winegrowing and wine-producing firms' market-orientation [33].

Sustainable rural development is a principal scope of Wine Roads Law. Its sites and typical products are certified based on regional laws and established with the aim of promoting local wine products and the culture of wine and the gastronomy of Sicily by providing information and products themselves for tasting or for sale.

The overall objective of the present study is to develop a methodology to assess a traditional rural building (TRB) as a potential heritage site attraction within a pre-existing itinerary, i.e., Cerasuolo di Vittoria from Baroque to Liberty Wine Road.

The methodology included a TRB as a theme of an existing itinerary. This is the novelty of the present study because several studies within sustainable tourism literature basically focus on tourist itineraries based on historic city-buildings and only a few have included traditional buildings located in rural areas.

This study refers to a TRB located in the territory of Chiaramonte Gulfi (RG), within the Fegotto estate, as an example of an industrial village and guide fossil for the knowledge of technical-scientific culture between 1800 and 1900. This TRB complex is of considerable architectural relevance as it is rich in architectural details and includes building components made with local materials according to the Sicilian traditional building techniques. The creation of wine cellars with tasting zones within traditional rural buildings is not always possible, and one of the most frequent issues is the inaccessibility of the buildings and where they are located. This work proposes a methodology to evaluate their suitability. Some buildings are frequently abandoned, and their state of preservation does not guarantee the safety of tourists [34].

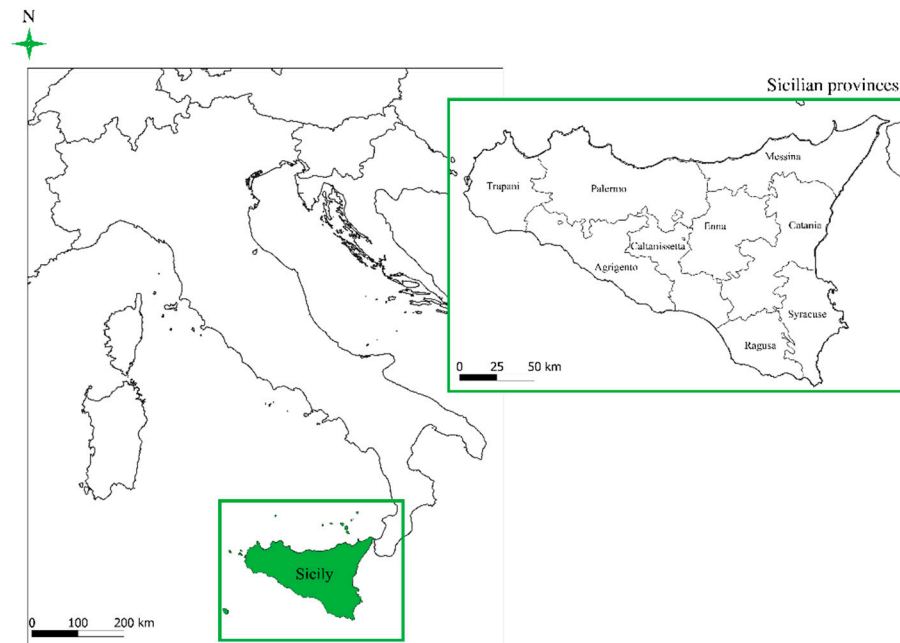
The method applied in this work should encourage the dispersion of visitors, and subsequently, the creation of economic profits in areas that, despite having considerable environmental and cultural significance, do not have tourist services (e.g., rural viability, transportation, and accommodation) for suitable, sustainable tourism development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. The Selected Heritage Site: The Fegotto Complex

The case study building was chosen because it is included in an area with a relevant number of TRBs that are sometimes unutilized. TRBs require preservation because of the cultural and historical heritage they represent. Moreover, their valorization could promote more sustainable tourism by implementing a seasonal adjustment in tourism as tourism is currently developed around the coastal area and concentrated in the summer season. An increased influx of tourists is recorded in July, August, and September compared to other months of the year. Therefore, it is mostly centered on accommodation in resorts located along the coast.

The Fegotto building complex was built within the homonymous feud. It extends over 2500 hectares and is in the territory of Chiaramonte Gulfi in the province of Ragusa (Figure 1). It is in a strategic position to control all the traffic between the Hyblean area and the area of Catania. Fegotto farms were completely active and produced a huge amount of wheat, tobacco, carob, almond, vine, and oil until the 1950s.



**Figure 1.** Italy, Sicily, and the province of Ragusa.

The Fegotto complex is a large farm that is an expression of Sicilians' latifundism, and it originated between the 17th and 18th centuries. It took its final exterior look during the second half of the eighteenth century and the second half of the nineteenth century. The building renovation occurred between 1873 and 1878. It defined the volumes and spaces (including an expansion of the main house building, the construction of the central beam, and the park) and gave the Fegotto estate great architectural value and charm [35]. The monumental owner's house stands in a dominant position, and it is often used as a location for major film productions as well as successful television series. The Fegotto complex includes a church, an imposing wine cellar, a large oil mill, a farmer's house, and a school (which was active until 1975). The Fegotto complex has nineteen buildings and three courtyards, including one major and two rural ones. The rectangular main courtyard represents the center of the complex in the east-west direction, and its floor is made from local Comiso stone. This area overlooks the manor house "Villa Fegotto" (Figure 2) on three floors covering 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, and there is a church in front of it with a neoclassical facade. The owner's house has various architectural components, such as gutters, doors, and windows frames that are similar to urban architecture features.



**Figure 2.** Villa Fegotto.

There are buildings around the central farmyard at one elevation where the farm workers lived (i.e., the *massalori* and the *annalori*), and they include stables, barns, granaries, a bakery, and a storage area. There is a large portal east of the main house which gives access to the court of olive trees. It is covered with limestone and is characterized by five large secular olive trees located in the center (Figure 3). It is surrounded by stables, carpentry, barns, granaries, and a bakery. Of relevance are the cellar and wine press *palmento*. These are totally preserved and complete with all their equipment, such as barrels and furnishings. The cellar, located at a level lower than the main road, is one of the largest and most innovative Sicilian cellars due to its planimetric dimensions, its articulation of the volumes, and its functional organization. The internal space is sub divided in a three-nave layout that is bordered by rectangular limestone pillars complete with base and capitals. Access to the cellar is through the millstone (*palmento*) by a staircase in finely sculpted hard limestone. Inside the millstone, the agricultural machines are extraordinarily preserved and still placed in their original environments.



**Figure 3.** Court of olive trees.

There are rooms close to the cellar that were used as shelters for livestock, and there is the access to the rural courtyard through these rooms. This third courtyard, partially covered by limestone stones, served as an exercise area for the animals. It is surrounded by shelters for cattle, the shepherd's house, the fodder deposit, and the pigsty. The millstone, oriented orthogonally to the cellar, was specifically designed for winemaking and to meet the needs of a large production. The main axis of the internal viability of the building complex is constituted by a road in an east-west direction. This main road cuts through the estate and crosses the main courtyard, i.e., the *baglio*, where the main house overlooks. There is a park design on the northern part of the building complex in accordance with the rules of a nineteenth-century romantic garden, with direct access by public road (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Access to the park.

## 2.2. Province of Ragusa: Tourist Accommodations and Tourist Flows Analyses

During 2020 and 2021, the tourism sector was affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several restrictions on international tourism produced a decrease in foreign tourism flows. On the contrary, local tourism was not affected by the pandemic as it registered an increase, especially in 2020. In 2021, tourist arrivals and stays within the Province of Ragusa were 198,707 and 688,388, respectively.

Data evaluation demonstrates a strong prevalence of domestic tourism (or visitors who are residents of Italy). Only 18% of tourist arrivals and 19% of tourist stays were foreign tourists.

Among Italians, including stays and arrivals, Sicilians represented the main visitors to the province, followed by tourists from Lombardy, Latium, and Campania. Among the foreign tourists, French tourists represented the highest number of visitors, followed by those coming from Germany, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Poland, and Australia. Arrivals of tourists are concentrated during the summer season, i.e., July, August, and September, and they mainly concentrate on accommodation along the seacoast.

During the considered time interval of 2021, tourist accommodation facilities offered a number of beds that amounted to 11,944 for hotels and 9819 for other type of accommodation (data from the Sicilian Department of Tourism, Sport and Entertainment) [36].

## 2.3. Methodology

In this study, a seven-phase method was developed to evaluate a TRB suitability as a tourist attraction by its inclusion within an existing touristic itinerary with the aim to improve the sustainable management of the landscape. To achieve a sustainable re-use of TRBs, an improvement in common consciousness of the fundamental cultural values of TRBs is required, particularly among local communities and tourists. The development of programs aimed to divulgate TRBs' cultural values by involving people could develop a sense of attention for such buildings by constituting the basis for their preservation. The analysis of the profile site's average visitor supplies essential information to conduct a 'focused' [37] evaluation of the heritage site's strengths, weakness, potential opportunities, and possible threats coming from exterior aspects (Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats [SWOT analysis]). The results of this analysis are an important aid to choose the most appropriate interpretative elements of TRB by linking it with neighboring areas. By developing a heritage interpretation plan, the methodology focused on visitors' experiences and generate catalysts for tourism growth by balancing the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and local communities [38].

Leanza et al. proposed a heritage interpretation-based itinerary (HII) realized by pursuing a method that would have visitors discover rural areas by visiting traditional rural buildings (TRBs) at stopping points placed in the itinerary.

In this study, the proposed methodology was developed by focusing on TRB evaluation and its inclusion within an already existing cultural touristic itinerary.

The methodology proposed is below described:

1. Evaluation of the visitor profile
2. Analysis of the interpretative elements of TRBs as potential tourist attractions
3. Evaluation of the accessibility of the TRBs from main and secondary roads and their visibility (i.e., 'visible' and 'not visible')
4. Evaluation of the state of conservation of the TRBs.
5. Objectives definition
6. Definition of the actions required to achieve the objectives
7. Restoration process of TRBs with a holistic sustainable approach in accordance with their identity and by using local material that fulfills landscape preservation

The first phase of the method was based on the definition of the average visitor profile. A bilingual (Italian English) questionnaire was distributed to tourists in 40 accommodations across the province, including hotels, bed and breakfasts, and other types of accommodations. Telephone surveys were also conducted with tourism providers. This research was conducted during the month of August 2022, from 1 August to 30 August, during the summer season. The respondents' answers may have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was divided as follows.

Section 1 focused on the tourists' profiles, i.e., their sex, age, place of origin, nationality, and profession. Section 2 addressed the length of the visit, the sources used by the tourists to gather information about the territory, and the reason they visited Sicily and the province of Ragusa. Section 3 concerned the tourists' expectations and their impressions related to the information offered by the provided brochures and guides. Section 4 was about the visitors' recommendations regarding how to increase their knowledge of their stays in Sicily. Section 5 assembled general information about the visitors' stays, i.e., whether it was for work or not, the kind of adopted transportation, and aspects of the neighboring area they intended to explore. Section 6 included general comments concerning the subjects included in the questionnaire.

The second stage of the method focused on the analysis of interpretative elements of the heritage site which were developed based on the results of the profile of the average site visitor. Some consideration should be made regarding the role of the heritage site as a possible attraction to increase tourism, if it is linked to other TRBs present in the neighboring area through its interpretative elements (e.g., its construction techniques, materials, environmental qualities, history, and socio-economic context), and if the TRB is suitable as a museum or a visitor center and or for tourist accommodation. The information collected about the TRB regarding its potential conversion for tourism purposes must also consider the main tourist attractions in the surrounding area.

Tourism routes could provide several opportunities for non-traditional tourism products and service suppliers. Routes implementation creates a possibility to diffuse income from tourism to more marginalized areas [39]. For this reason, the third phase of this study was based on verifying the accessibility of the TRB. In this phase, it is useful to acquire information about the existing infrastructure, e.g., railways, highways, and main and secondary roads around TRBs, and assessing their environmental impacts and favoring the least impactful option. This study used the Geographical Information System (GIS) model.

The fourth phase included determining the state of conservation of the TRB by using a deep analysis of the state of TRB. In this phase, the state of the conservation of the TRB is evaluated by considering the architecture, the main building components, the building typologies, and the materials used for its construction.

The fifth phase of the method was based on the objective's definition, such as the realization of a tourist accommodation, a rural and/or *en plein air* museum, taste, and sales areas for local products.

The sixth phase of this methodology included the definition of the actions necessary to acquire the relevant objectives, including the choice of all the suitable technology and materials.



Starting with studying the state of the building features, the last phase of the methodology was based on a sustainable restore (SR) of a TRB. The concept of sustainability in TRB restoration is founded on a sustainable functional valorization of TRBs by maintaining their original indoor functional distribution, features, building techniques, and materials. Moreover, the planning of economic, cultural, and social activities could encourage a multifunctional use of TRBs by increasing their integration with the physical and cultural environment. SR draws on traditional building techniques and the use of renewable resources and ecofriendly materials to improve environmental sustainability in accordance with the Circular Economy Action Plan [40].

Figure 5 shows the flow chart of the proposed methodology.

### FLOW - CHART METHODOLOGY

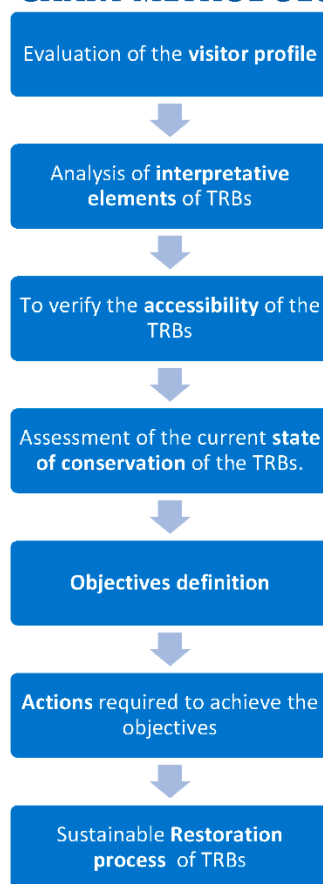


Figure 5. Flow chart of the methodology proposed in this study.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Assessment of the Visitor Profile

This section describes the results acquired from the questionnaires. The results were influenced by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Limitations on global tourism affected the tourism sector, particularly tourist sites dependent on foreign tourists. In contrast, most rural regions are characterized by domestic tourism, and they registered growth, especially in 2020 and 2021. Through this analysis, the heritage interpretation element defined in the following section could be ‘visitor oriented’ to satisfy visitors and meet their needs. Results from the first two sections of the survey show that the majority of guests were aged from 42 to 60 years of age (54.6%). Most of the tourists were Italian (84.7%), and many were Sicilian (44.2%).

The data collected also show that the visitors generally had a good cultural educational level. Almost 46% of the tourist surveyed were freelance professionals, e.g., engineers, architects, lawyers, teachers, and professors, while 26% were employees. Data obtained

from other parts of the questionnaire show the inadequate use of tour guides and the insufficient availability of brochures concerning information about the territory which underlined the brief duration of the visitors' stays. Several of the visitors (46%) stayed no longer than three days.

This data highlights that it is necessary to increase the availability of tour guides and brochures. Further analyses of the last sections of the questionnaire show that a considerable number of visitors would like to know more about the history of the most important tourist site in the Ragusa Province.

Rural architecture (32.0%) and eno gastronomy (42.7%) are the provincial aspects that greatly motivated visitors' interests. Data related to visitors' interests in rural architecture is important since it can be associated with visitors' concerns regarding TRB architectural details (47%). The results show that several visitors could be classified as 'heritage tourists' since they were middle aged, interested in history, belong to middle class, and were on holiday [41]. For this reason, the selection of a TRB's interpretative elements should consider those elements that confer authenticity to the building. Furthermore, the data highlight that cars are the most used means of transport as a major portion of tourists, corresponding to 94%, used private transportation to travel from one tourist site to another within the Ragusa province and within the entire Sicily region. The large use of private transportation is due to the lack and inadequacy of public transport.

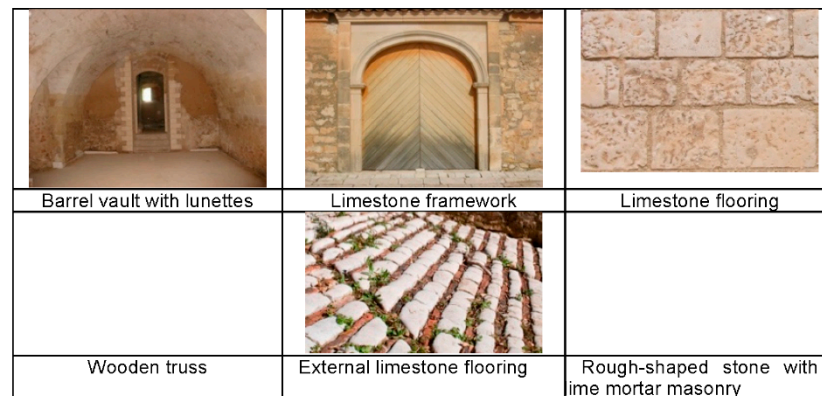
### 3.2. Analysis of Interpretative Elements

The second phase of the methodology evaluated the suitability of the TRB to become a tourist site based on the analysis of its interpretive elements that can suggest positive emotions to visitors. As stated before, this phase was developed based on the results of TRBs' features and the SWOT analysis.

In this study, the construction procedures and the adopted building materials represented the only considered interpretative elements.

A deep recognition of the techniques and materials used for the construction of the Fegotto complex was present thanks to its tables, sections, maps, and floor plans supplied by the by the Technical Bureau of the Municipality of Ragusa. Missing information was addressed using photographic and metric surveys and inspections.

If visitors have the opportunity to understand these interpretive elements, they could be inspired to learn additional information about the specific details of the local community concerning, for instance, how the building construction used local resources, such as natural materials like wood, marble, asphaltic stone, or limestone. Information acquired through the study of architectural details joined the building to the social and cultural aspects of surrounding rural life. In fact, as stated in the literature, each architectural heritage represents a language of cultural expression exhibiting the tradition and attitudes of the socio-cultural system in which it is included [42–44]. Despite its peculiar architectural typology (e.g., its roof vault and floor) and its numerous architectural components, its materials and building techniques are similar to its neighboring TRBs (Figures 6 and 7).



**Figure 6.** Example of the materials and building techniques used for Fegotto and TRBs in the surrounding area.



**Figure 7.** Examples of the interpretative elements of the Fegotto Complex; a, main access gate; b and c, access gates to Palmeto.

The most relevant interpretative elements detected were:

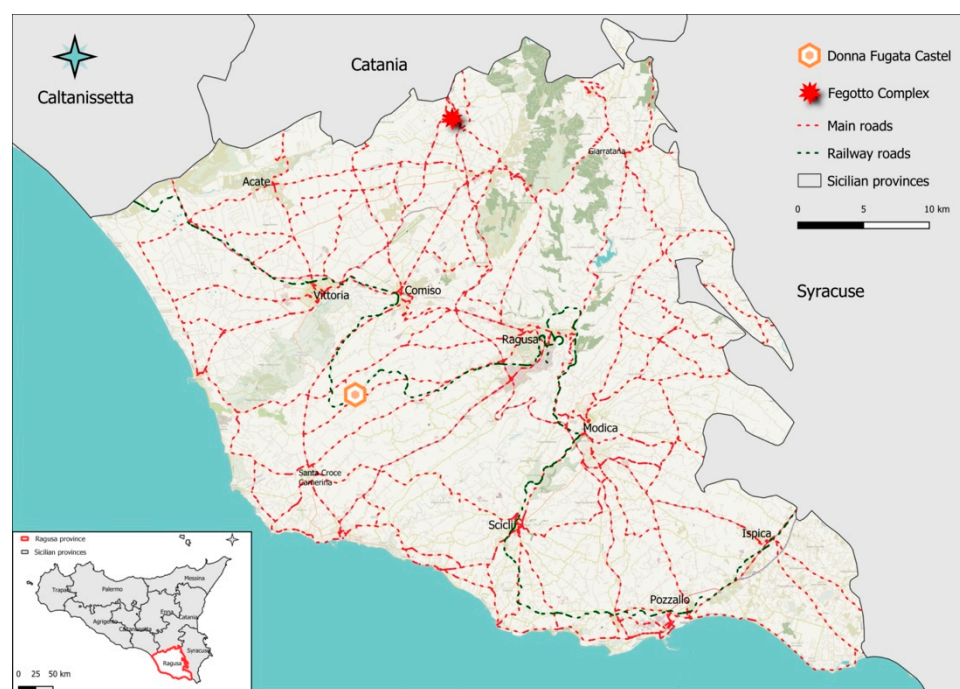
- Masonry
- Limestone plaster
- Stone finishes
- Vaults
- Frames
- Floor system
- Roof system
- Rainwater collection and disposal system

### 3.3. Accessibility

Fegotto is within the municipal boundaries of Chiaramonte Gulfi in the province of Ragusa. Chiaramonte Gulfi is not connected by railway, which is less impactful on the environment, as this connection was ended in 1949; therefore, cars are the only used means of transport. The only existing infrastructure around the Fegotto complex are the main roads SS 514 and SP 6. Currently, in the area close to the Fegotto complex, there are no public transportation lines that connect it to the most important nearby sites, e.g., the Comiso Airport and Ragusa or seaside villages. There is a short distance between Fegotto

and the Comiso Airport (12 km) and from the Catania International Airport (80 km). The towns of Val di Noto (a World Heritage Site), Ragusa, Scicli, Modica, and Noto are also a brief distance away. Additionally, the Chiaramonte lies Caltagirone, which is famous for its pottery, is about 30 km away. Fegotto is 100 km away from Syracuse and is 150 km away from Agrigento and its Greek archaeological site. With the aim of studying the viability of the Fegotto complex, a Geographic Information System (GIS) model was implemented. The software used was Quantum GIS (version 3.1), which is an open source commercial package.

Figure 8 shows the main roads and railways in the Province of Ragusa and the most important towns, e.g., Ragusa, Vittoria, Comiso, and Scicli. The locations of the Fegotto complex and Donnafugata Castle are also included. Donnafugata Castle is an important tourist site with architectural elements like those of Fegotto.



**Figure 8.** Main roads in the Province of Ragusa, railways, and the locations of the Fegotto site and Donnafugata Castle.

To increase sustainable tourism in Fegotto's neighboring areas, the complex should increase public transportation to make the complex accessible from other tourist sites. In fact, the existing deficiency of public transportation is a weakness that prevents the inclusion of Fegotto in a touristic itinerary. As stated in another study, tourists disregard destination that are difficult to visit [45].

For this reason, local policies must increase actions addressed to improve public transportation.

### 3.4. State of Conservation

Building recovery was based on a careful preliminary analysis to provide a real and actual state of the building by also considering its limits and its potential. The survey constitutes the reference framework for the interpretation of the existing data, from which all the types of options that guide the choice of the most appropriate intervention arise (Figure 9a,b).

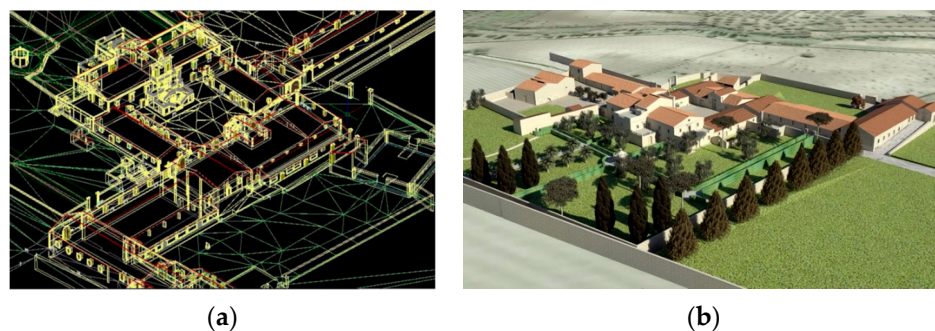


Figure 9. (a) 3d model and (b) an image of the Fegotto complex.

Table 1 reports the results obtained from the state of art analysis.

Table 1. Principals' damages detected on the analyzed buildings.

Buildings	Damage	Cause/Agent
Cellars	perimetral walls	rising humidity
Millstone ( <i>palmento</i> )	perimetral walls	rising humidity
Dairy building	perimetral walls flooring system	rising dampness
School	perimetral walls flooring system damaged	descending humidity infiltration of water from the damaged roof system, direct exposure to the sun, and atmospheric agents
Farmworkers' houses	perimetral walls	rising humidity

### 3.5. Objectives Definition and Actions Required

This study proposed the reuse of the cellar, the *palmento*, the school, the barn, and the dairy building, without compromising their original character, to allow tasting and sale activities of high-quality brand wines to promote wine making in eastern Sicily, with an aim to include the Fegotto complex in one of the Sicilian Roads' wine itineraries. Listed below are the objectives foreseen in this study:

- Preparation and storage of local products in the old dairy buildings
- Indoor tasting and sales in a portion of the millstone (*palmento*)
- An outdoor tasting area under the "pinnata"
- A wine museum in a portion of the millstone (*palmento*)
- An area for didactic activities in the old school
- Tourist accommodation in the farmers' houses in the Fegotto estate

Area for the preparation and storage of local products

Rooms dedicated to the preparation and storage of products necessary for wine tasting were foreseen in the old dairy building.

Areas for tasting and sales

The tasting room was foreseen in a portion of the millstone (*palmento*), close to the dairy building, and designed with 48 seats.

Access to this area could be both through the main entrance of the millstone and through a door on the side of the rural courtyard that leads to the fermentation vats.

Outdoor tasting area

An additional outdoor area for wine tasting was designed in a space under the "pinnata", i.e., an open air space covered by a shed, with a surface area of 131 m<sup>2</sup>. It could be used in spring and summer and could include about 20 seats.

Wine Museum

A wine museum was foreseen in the remaining part of the millstone (Figure 10). It was left in its current condition due to its excellent state of conservation. This museum

would show the materials and traditional construction techniques to produce oil and wine in the Fegotto building complex.



**Figure 10.** The indoor state of the millstone.

In fact, in addition to wine tasting, tourists could visit the area where the wine was produced following the traditional process.

#### Area for didactic activities

This section describes the main restoration actions to convert the old school for didactic activities. Firstly, a projection room would be suitable for viewing documentaries that show farm work carried out in Fegotto, such as harvesting and wine and cheese production, or it could host conferences. Next to this room could be the point information offices for visitors, washrooms, and offices for wine companies to organize tasting events. It was also foreseen as a storage area.

#### Rooms for tourist' accommodation

The existing farmworkers' houses (Figure 11) could be restored to include tourist accommodation.



**Figure 11.** Ancient farmworkers' houses.

The main house and the courtyard were not included among the objectives of this work because they are used by the owner. However, they could be included in a planned site tour in agreement with the owner. Table 2 summarizes the main actions required to achieve the objectives.

**Table 2.** Main actions scheduled.

Function	Area Useful for the Purpose	Restoration Actions Required
Preparation and storage of local products	old dairy buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– remaking of the flooring system</li> <li>– work on the perimeter walls to prevent rising dampness</li> <li>– washrooms for staff and visitors</li> </ul>
Tasting and sales	millstone ( <i>palmento</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– perimetral walls</li> <li>– opening of two new windows to create ventilation</li> <li>– replacing of the existing earthen flooring system</li> </ul>
Outdoor tasting area	outdoor area under the “ <i>pinnata</i> ”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– new external flooring by using self-locking bricks</li> </ul>
Wine Museum	millstone ( <i>palmento</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– work on the perimeter walls to prevent rising dampness</li> </ul>
Didactic activities	ancient school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– renovation of existing plaster</li> <li>– cleaning of the flooring system</li> <li>– recovery of existing frames to improve thermal performance</li> </ul>
Tourists’ accommodations	farmworkers’ houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– work on the perimeter walls to prevent rising dampness</li> <li>– new washrooms for each housing unit</li> <li>– recovery of existing frames to improve thermal performance</li> <li>– solar panel installation to improve energy efficiency</li> </ul>

### 3.6. Sustainable Restoration Criteria

The whole restoration plan and the valorization of the rural complex followed the typological and construction connotations of the existing buildings strictly in accordance with the local materials used for the construction of the premises and in accordance with the concept of sustainable restoration. The reutilization of buildings for new purposes was made by not altering their original features with different materials and techniques. The new functional distribution was foreseen to promote the integration of the Fegotto estate with the social, cultural, and economic environment to improve sustainable tourism development. The first parameter considered to assess the suitability for restoration was based on the initial analysis of the volume and dimensions of the group of buildings in relation to the proposed new use.

The design was founded on inalterable elements, e.g., materials, building systems, aggregative systems of the buildings, and specific regulatory and dimensional features related to the various intended uses. Law regulations regarding minimum heights and health and hygiene requirements were followed (Health Department 27/2/2008 published in GURS n. 13 of 21/3/2008, as amended by Decree 6/11/2009 published in GURS 27/11/2009, and the Ministerial Decree of 5 July 1975).

The sustainability of the restoration process was also based on the use of natural recyclable materials, e.g., wood, earthen building components, and earth plaster, which are healthy for the production process and for application. They are also locally available and have a low energy consumption and a small impact on the environment. Furthermore, renewable energy resources, e.g., solar panels to produce hot water and electricity, were foreseen in the tourists’ accommodations. We considered the passive climate performance of the buildings in our study. The thick perimeter walls, thanks to their high mass, regulate the indoor climate, i.e., the temperature and the humidity. Thermal performance was also

improved due to the replacement of windows and of existing plaster with earth plaster. Earth plaster has a high thermal inertia, heats up and cools very slowly, accumulates heat in the winter, and helps maintain a cool temperature in the summer.

#### 4. Discussion

Landscape sustainability is strongly compromised by the abandonment of old rural buildings and their environment, which also causes damage to cultural and ethno-anthropological heritage. The development of sustainable rural tourism, the creation and maintenance of local employment, the creation of resources for economic and social infrastructure, and the preservation of cultural heritage could combat this phenomenon. The key aim of this work was to provide a decisive method to assess TRB suitability as a sustainable tourist attraction by its inclusion in an existing itinerary to improve cultural tourism. This study is useful as a guide for rural development regarding the case study area and in general. The methodology was applied to a case study building, i.e., the Fegotto estate, located in the province of Ragusa.

The second phase of the method focused on the possibility of the Fegotto complex to provide interpretive elements (e.g., construction techniques, socio-economic context, history, and environmental peculiarity) that represent a relationship between it and other TRBs.

Interpretative elements could be catalyst elements for tourism by creating positive feelings in tourists and improving their sense of belonging and protection of that place. These elements were evaluated (Figure 5). This work considers Fegotto's building materials and construction techniques and other interpretative elements. Its interpretive elements have to be accessible to visitors; therefore, an Italian-English didactic graphic panel could be positioned at the entrance of the complex. The assessment of the average tourist profile in the Province of Ragusa was significant in the selection of the elements of interpretation. Visitors were mainly local tourists who came from other Sicilian Provinces, and they preferred accommodation in the seaside area. Furthermore, they demonstrated curiosity about rural architecture and eno gastronomy. The interpretive elements chosen in this paper represent potential links between the complex and other TRBs. Other subjects of interpretation could be, for instance, geographical, economic, historic, socio-cultural, and environmental features.

However, the purpose was to induce interest and visitors' emotional connections with the meanings and the significance of the TRB.

By considering its architectural details, it is evident that there is a connection between the Fegotto complex and other TRBs in nearby areas and numerous social aspects of rural life.

The Donnafugata Castle is also located in the rural area of Ragusa, and it is only 30 km away from Fegotto. It is a heritage site of considerable historical and architectural relevance. Donnafugata Castle constitutes a significant reason for tourism development because of its peculiar architecture, because it is as a location that hosts several cultural and social events, and because it is well connected with the coastal area, which is the area where tourist flows are concentrated. The Castle was originally a fortified farmhouse which is an architectural typology that is different than the Fegotto complex. Despite this, the two heritage buildings were made with the same building techniques and materials, and both present similar architectural elements.

The possibility to connect these two heritage buildings within the same tourist flow could represent a great opportunity for the growth of sustainable rural tourism.

The other phases of the methodology, i.e., accessibility, the individuation of objectives, the state of conservation, the actions required to achieve the objectives, and Sustainable Restoration Design have been carried out.

To minimize the impact of transportation, local authorities could improve public transportation by providing electrical minibuses that transport groups of tourists and tourist guides and link the complex to its neighboring areas.



Moreover, in the future, the daily needs of residents and tourists' requests must be evaluated to address the problem of rural public transportation.

Generally, the preservation of local rural architecture has been damaged by the increasing disregard of traditional economic activities. Nevertheless, numerous TRBs located in the neighboring areas of Fegotto still have a place in agricultural production. The valorization of the Fegotto complex could represent an advantage for these rural areas and their buildings since they could be considered places to live or just to visit.

Furthermore, the proposed objectives were to reuse the cellar, the *palmento*, the school, the barn, and the dairy building, without compromising their original character, to enable tasting and sale activities of high-quality brand wines. The aim was to include Fegotto complex within one of the Sicilian Roads of Wine tourist routes. Starting with preliminary knowledge of the state of conservation of the buildings, the actions necessary to achieve the initial proposal were determined. The restoration project for the new intended uses of the rural buildings was in total accordance with the concept of sustainable restoration as it followed the typological and construction connotations of the existing buildings.

The consideration of the extrinsic factors of the territorial context of Fegotto helped highlight the significant presence of wineries potentially interested in promoting the wine they produce and the large presence of tourists in the area who could taste the local wines at the Fegotto estate. This study analyzed data supplied by ISTAT (2010), the number of wineries that deal with the production of DOC and/or DOCG wines, and other wineries potentially interested in promoting their products at the Fegotto. It found the following numbers of wineries: 479 in the province of Enna (of which 15 produce DOC wine), 1158 in the province of Ragusa (of which 78 produce DOC wine), and 666 in the province of Syracuse (of which 111 produce DOC wine). We considered the average number of kilometers which visitors are able to travel in a day (about 180/200 km), so these wineries were selected by including ones within a maximum distance of 100 km [25].

Areas close to the Fegotto estate have several tourist attractions, e.g., the Ruins of Kamarina, several natural attractions, and the baroque architecture in cities located in South-Eastern Sicily that are included in the World Heritage List according to UNESCO (e.g., Militello Val di Catania, Caltagirone, Catania, Palazzolo Acreide, Ragusa Ibla of Scicli Modica, and Noto). Their building style is the late baroque style, but contemporary examples of innovation and modern urban design could be found. These cities represent a considerable commune achievement of a significant standard from an architectural point of view. Moreover, there are two natural regional reserves close the study area: the *Riserva Naturale Speciale Biologica "Macchia Foresta del Fiume Irminio"* near the city of Marina di Ragusa and the *Riserva Naturale Orientata "Pino d'Aleppo"* near the city of Vittoria.

Additionally, the Province of Ragusa, on the fertile promontory of the Ippari and Oanis rivers (now called Rifriscolaro), has the ruins of a city founded by the Syracusans at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. (598–597 B.C.).

Kamarina was built to manage the southward expansion of the town of Gela and to create a connection to the African route. Additionally, among the most interesting museums in Sicily, there is the Regional Archaeological Museum of Kamarina. This museum is important due its rich collection and its position since it is placed within the archaeological area of the ancient city of Kamarina, which is 35 km from Ragusa.

The synthetic description of the Fegotto complex (Section 2.1) highlights its similarity to other examples of agricultural–industrial villages, and above all to Crespi d'Adda, which was accepted in the list of UNESCO Heritage Sites in 1995 [46]. Exactly like the village of Crespi d'Adda, the Fegotto building complex is still in its original location and in an excellent state of conservation, and it contains a considerable amount of evidence of agricultural technologies used between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It could therefore be proposed as an example with deep knowledge of the scientific–technological culture of that historical period.

## 5. Conclusions

In this work, a methodology was described that evaluated a traditional rural building complex as a potential destination in an existing cultural touristic itinerary, that is, the Sicilian Roads of Wine. This methodology was applied to a case study of the Fegotto building complex located in the territory of Chiaramonte Gulfi in the province of Ragusa, Sicily. The valorization of a heritage building for cultural tourist purposes via its recovery and conversion as a cultural product of high importance could improve rural landscapes sustainability. Rural landscape sustainability means increased and balanced utilization of resources, reduced effects on the environment, and the protection of ecosystem varieties. Food and oenological tourism are a mode of cultural tourism. Enogastronomic tourism is a different type of vacation as it helps conserve and develop territories dedicated to agriculture and vineyard cultivation. Recently, the culture and tourism sectors regarding wine tourism are growing. The most important aspect concerning the effect of cultural tourism is related to improving the quality of life of the local population by improving their conditions of life and minimizing the negative externalities of rural development.

Cultural tourism represents a proper tool for converting productive landscapes based on intensive agricultural production into a post-productive countryside based on sustainable area consumption. It is a value-added activity for industry with economic and especially non-economic importance within the cultural range. This cultural benefit could support the economic life of rural regions. Moreover, this type of tourism avoids the concentration of tourist flows during the summer season and allows their equal distribution all year.

The results obtained in this study supported the initial hypothesis. The developed methodology could be improved regarding assessing the environmental and economic costs related to TRBs' reuse by considering further aspects, i.e., life cycle costing (LCC), life cycle assessment (LCA), and the design of building information modelling (BIM) to produce outlines for monitoring the maintenance of reused TRBs.

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