

ENGLISH VERSION

**10TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN”**

CISTERNINO 23-25 OCTOBER 2026

Paolo Grassi Municipal Theatre, Piazza dei Navigatori, 21

In These RARE LANDS...

*Planning the social regeneration of villages
to support employment and inclusion.*

*“...the days of blossoming
will return
to this village...”*

(Umberto Saba, Il Borgo - 1905)

Themes of the 10th Edition

- 1. In These RARE LANDS.** The Mediterranean basin holds a vast reservoir of the most precious resources of our time, capable of regenerating themselves and revitalising us. They are not mineral resources, but rather expressions of human and cultural chemistry: our villages.
- 2. INNER AREAS, PLACES OF INNER VALUE.** 90% of municipalities, 60% of the territory and 23% of the population: this is the picture of Italy's inner areas. They are at the very heart of national identity, which is why we describe them as places of inner value.
- 3. COMPLEMENTARY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.** The State is called upon to give substance to the citizenship rights of marginalised territories. Their inhabitants are called upon to keep alive their capacity to generate humanity and solidarity, safeguard their communities and promote sustainability.
- 4. THE CHEMISTRY OF STAYING.** Those who remain form the molecular structure of their communities, the strong bonds that hold them together.
- 5. THE ALCHEMY OF RETURNING.** Those who return (or arrive) bring transformative energy, a remarkable force capable of rebuilding hope.
- 6. THE CENTRAL ROLE OF ASSOCIATIONS.** For over 20 years, I Borghi più belli d'Italia has given a voice to those who share a vision of renewal and preservation, supportive communities, social interaction and inclusion, cooperation and international collaboration. Its mission is to combat depopulation and promote employment through the exchange of principles and values shared by the International Federation Les Plus Beaux Villages de la Terre.
- 7. REGENERATION LABORATORIES.** Today, these associations seek to encourage people to stay and return by collaborating with universities, foundations and research institutions. The A.I. + C.I. formula (“from Artificial Intelligence to Community Intelligence”) aims to create centres of human connection and regeneration for those born in these places, those who return and those who discover these “rare lands”.

Conference Programme

FRIDAY, 23 OCTOBER

4:00 - 5:00 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS' REGISTRATION AND WELCOME

5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

FIRST PLENARY SESSION - Current Situation and Future Prospects: Inner Areas, Community Identity and Local Development

5:00 - 5:30 p.m.

OPENING CEREMONY

Official opening performance by the “Vitino Zizzi” Wind Orchestra of Cisternino.

Institutional greetings:

- Lorenzo PERRINI, *Mayor of Cisternino*
- Fiorello PRIMI, *President of I Borghi più Belli d'Italia and Vice-President of Les Plus Beaux Villages de la Terre*
- H.E. Dr Quido APREA, *Prefect of Brindisi*
- Antonio MATARRELLI, *President of the Council of the Apulia Region*
- Donato PENTASSUGLIA, *Regional Councillor for Health, Apulia Region*
- Fiorenza PASCAZIO, *President of ANCI Puglia and Mayor of Bitetto*
- Loredana FICARELLI, *Former Deputy Rector of the Polytechnic University of Bari*
- Antonio Maria VASILE, *President of Aeroporti di Puglia S.p.A.*
- Biagio DI TERLIZZI, *Director of CIHEAM, International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies*
- Antonio CONVERTINI, *President of Banca di Credito Cooperativo Locorotondo*
- Rosa PALOMBA, *Coordinator of I Borghi più belli della Puglia*

Moderator: Ornella GALASSO, *Community Engagement Manager, GAL Valle d'Itria*

5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

Focus 1: VILLAGES AND MARGINALISED AREAS: WHAT FUTURE? Citizenship Rights, Cohesion Policies and European Funding

Panel discussion:

- Giulio DE RITA, *Sociologist and Researcher at Censis - Welfare and Local Development Department*
- Antonio DECARO, *President of the Apulia Region*
- Fiorello PRIMI, *President of I Borghi più Belli d'Italia and Vice-President of Les Plus Beaux Villages de la Terre*

- Raffaele FITTO, *Executive Vice-President of the European Commission and European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, with responsibility for regional policy, regional development and cities*

Moderator: Giuseppe SIMONE, Vice-President of I Borghi più Belli d'Italia

SATURDAY, 24 OCTOBER

SECOND SESSION - Connections: Social Culture and the Territory

Institutional greetings:

- Francesco PAOLICELLI, *Regional Councilor for Agriculture, Apulia Region*
- Georgia TRAMACERE, *Member of the European Parliament and Member of the Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean*

9:30 - 11:15 a.m.

Focus 2: “RESTANZA AND TORNANZA”... STAYING, RETURNING AND OTHER FORMS OF HOPE

Roots, Returns and New Arrivals: The Evolution of Communities

Interview with Flavio ALBANO and Antonio PROTA, creators of the project “La Tornanza” - Returns and New Connections Oriented Towards the Future.

Conducted by Lucrezia DI BARI and Valeria BACCARO, creators of the “Erranti” podcast.

Speakers:

- Maria Rita COSTANZA, *CEO of Everywhere and Technical Director of the Master's Programme “Deep & Digital Tourism Management for Social Innovation and the Revival of Villages”*
- Pasquale VENERITO, *Senior Researcher at the Basile Caramia Centre for Agricultural Research, Experimentation and Training, Locorotondo*

Presentation of projects developed by students of the Fondazione ITST Academy Master's Programme: BORGO VIVO 4.0 - Where Time Follows a Different Rhythm
presented by Loretta Cifarelli and Arcangela Solazzo

CoCoDi - Where History Meets the Future of Work,
presented by Arcangela Solazzo and Christian Lorusso

Moderator: Amato MERCURI, *Head of the Scientific Committee of I Borghi più belli d'Italia*

11:15 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Focus 3: RETHINKING THE VILLAGES OF APULIA

Territorial, Urban and Socio-Economic Strategies for Regeneration and Sustainable Development

Speakers:

- Rosa PALOMBA, *Coordinator of I Borghi più belli della Puglia*
- Stefano FRANCO, *Università Mercatorum*
- Maria Jennifer GRISORIO, *Regional Agency for Technology, Technology Transfer and Innovation*
- Stefano CIURNIELLO, *Engineer and Mobility and Transport Expert*
- Antonio Messeni PETRUZZELLI, *Polytechnic University of Bari*
- Mariangela TURCHIARULO, *Polytechnic University of Bari*

1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

LUNCH BREAK

THIRD SESSION - Towards Regeneration: Governance Models and Good Practices

2:30 - 4:15 p.m.

Focus 4: RARE LANDS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: COMPARING MODELS

Comparative International Solutions from the Mare Nostrum to Foster Regeneration

Speakers:

- Agron HAXHIMALI, *Director of the Association of Albanian Municipalities - Albania*
- Helena KOSMINA, *Municipality of Komen (Štanjel) - Slovenia*
- Urban GRMEK MASIČ, *Regional Development Agency of Kras and Brkini - Slovenia*
- Anto BRTAN, *Municipality of Jajce, Agency Director - Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- Dženan DAUTOVIĆ, *Municipality of Travnik, Director of the Homeland Museum - Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- Anteo MILOS, *Mayor of Novigrad - Croatia*
- Corinne POZZESCO, *Project Officer, Municipality of Novigrad - Croatia*
- Igor ORLIĆ, *Mayor of Vodnjan-Dignano - Croatia*
- Nensi GIACHIN MARSETIČ, *Councillor for Culture and Social Activities, Municipality of Vodnjan-Dignano - Croatia*
- Tomislav PAHOVIĆ, *Mayor of Motovun (Montona)*
- David MATKOVIĆ, *Director of the Tourist Board, Municipality of Motovun (Montona)*
- Rafael SFEIR, *President of the Byblos Festival - Lebanon*
- Nazih EL KHOURY, *Mayor of Emhej - Lebanon*
- Imad FARHAT, *Al Shouf Cedar Nature Reserve - Lebanon*
- Hamidreza YAZDANI, *Municipality of Urla - Türkiye*

- Balcan SELCUK, *Municipality of Urla - Türkiye*

Moderators: Monica GILLOCCHI and Paolo DE CESARE

4:15 - 6:00 p.m.

Focus 5: DESIGNING THE PAST TO PRESERVE THE FUTURE

Establishing Regeneration Laboratories in Villages: Good Practices in the Civil, Environmental and Cultural Economy, Towards New Professions in Historic Villages

Speakers:

- Marco BUSSONE, *President of UNCEM (National Union of Mountain Municipalities, Communities and Authorities)*
- Antonino LASPINA, *President of UNPLI (National Union of Italian Pro Loco Associations)*
- Alberto MATTEI, *President of the Italian Digital Nomads Association*
- Giuseppe MAGGI, *Technical Director of Fondazione ITS Academy AgriPuglia, "Education and Training to Attract New Generations"*

Moderator: Antonio LUNA, *Scientific Committee of I Borghi più belli d'Italia*

Introductory contributions:

- Roberta DE SANCTIS, *Mayor of Orvino (RI)*
- Paolo Gelsone/Simone EMMA, *Mayor of Candelo/Head of the Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development Department, Municipality of Candelo (BL)*

6:00 - 6:20 p.m.

CLOSING REMARKS

"How Far Has the Night Progressed...?"

- Lorenzo PERRINI, *Mayor of Cisternino*
- Fiorello PRIMI, *President of I Borghi più Belli d'Italia and Vice-President of Les Plus Beaux Villages de la Terre*
- Donato BACCARO, *President of the Cisternino Municipal Council*
- Loredana FICARELLI, *Former Deputy Rector of the Polytechnic University of Bari*

SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER

Morning

Guided visits to Cisternino and Locorotondo, both members of the I Borghi più belli d'Italia network.