

Article

Rural Slow Routes as Connectors of Local Communities for the Promotion of Place Identity

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Abstract: European, national, and regional policies have promoted slow routes in recent decades. This paper aims to define a multi-scale method to use these routes to promote the identities of rural places. The method develops (i) a GIS-based network analysis to define the boundaries of the service area of the route and then (ii) a participatory strategy to promote its rural identity. Furthermore, this paper studies the quality criteria for slow European routes (iii) to define quality criteria specifically for rural slow routes and to connect the case study to the broader European network. The results show that the European certification standard of EuroVelo is a valid document to evaluate the quality of slow routes in rural contexts. The case study is a slow route along the Trasimeno lake (Italy), 61 km long, called the Trasimeno ring. The service area of the route has a surface of 325 km² and is defined as the surface that can be reached with detours from the route not exceeding 5 km along rural roads with low traffic (max 2000 v/d) and gentle slopes (maximum gradient of 15% and a cumulative elevation change for every kilometer of the road lower than 50 m). The participatory process was developed for one municipality (15.35% of the service area) with 326 km of rural streets and 35 activities linked to agriculture. In total, 80% of the rural stakeholders participated in building an online collaborative map to promote the area. The results show that rural stakeholders evaluate collaborative maps as an effective strategy for encouraging tourists and inhabitants to discover, use and respect rural place identities.

Keywords: rural landscape; green infrastructures; greenways; cycle routes; EuroVelo; European certification quality standards; service area analysis; network analysis; slow tourism; collaborative maps



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1. Introduction

In recent decades, International and European policies have promoted slow mobility in rural and urban contexts. The United Conference on the Environment and Development [1], the Charter of European Cities and Towns towards Sustainability [2], the EU Framework Directive on ambient air quality [3], and the European Spatial Development Perspective [4] have developed the first considerations in this regard. This paper uses the term *slow route* to group all the paths dedicated to slow mobility.

Over the years, many European Associations have been created to promote different kinds of slow routes, help their construction, and promote the cooperation between countries [5–7]. In this regard, the first Association was the European Greenways Association [5]. In particular, the term “greenway” was coined to highlight the link between slow routes and natural surroundings in urban and rural contexts. Successively, Tom Turner [8] has systematized the significance of the term greenway, used in the Lille Declaration [9]. In this Declaration, greenways are described as “Communication routes reserved exclusively for non-motorized journeys, developed in an integrated manner which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area”. After the Madrid Declaration [10], the European Greenways Association was created in 1998 in Namur (Belgium) [5]. Then, the European Ramblers Association [7] and the EuroVelo project [6], dedicated to walking

(E-path) and cycling (EuroVelo) paths, respectively, were established. Since their foundation, these associations have collaborated with European, national, and local bodies to promote and preserve slow routes.

1.1. European Quality Criteria for Slow Routes

The European Greenway network [5], E-paths [11], and EuroVelo [12] are composed of groups of walking [5,11] and cycling [5,12] itineraries connecting European countries. Their mission is to increase and promote sustainable tourism and slow mobility.

To join its network, the European Greenways Association [5] asks for a route with high landscape value and suitable physical characteristics for users of all abilities (width, gradient, and surface condition) without defining a specific non-motorized mode of transportation. The European Ramblers Association is dedicated to walking paths. To date, this association is working to define E-path quality Certificates for long-distance, day walk, and region [13]. Both these associations forbid sections in mixed-traffic with motorized vehicles.

EuroVelo is an association dedicated to cycling paths (traffic-free or mixed-traffic), and it is the only association that currently has a European Certification Standard for quality criteria dedicated to long-distance routes (at least 300 km long) [14]. To obtain this certification, every cycle route must satisfy specific criteria for infrastructures, services, and promotion, grouped into “essential”, “important”, and “additional” classes [14]. These groups help to differentiate the certification on the grounds of the various experiences and capacities of the users (Table 1):

- Regular. These are paths for users with experience in everyday cycling that must respect “essential” criteria along the entire route.
- Occasional. These are paths for users with an average physical condition who must respect “important” criteria for at least 70% of the route.
- Demanding. These are paths for families and occasional cyclists, evaluated using “additional” criteria.

Table 1. European quality criteria for a daily section of EuroVelo routes. The percentages are referred the total length of the route.

Type of Path	Regular	Occasional	Demanding
Type of users	experience in everyday cycling	basic expertise in cycling and average physical condition	all types of users (e.g., families)
Criteria must be respected in this % of the route	100	70	variable
List of criteria	Essential criteria	Important criteria	Additional criteria
Continuity	100%	eventual stairs with gentle inclines	100%
Route components	max 50% high traffic	max 50% moderate traffic; 0% high traffic; none dangerous crossing	max 50% low traffic; 0% moderate traffic; none dangerous crossing
Surface and width	100% asphalted or paved; max 1% cobblestone or unimproved;	min 50% high-quality asphalt	100% high-quality asphalt; width allowing traffic of bicycles in both directions
Gradients	max 1000 m of cumulative elevation	max 500 m of cumulative elevation	max 60 m any km of cumulative elevation
Attractiveness	min one significant cultural or natural attraction	min one attraction; max 25% surrounded by a compromised landscape	max 50% monotonous surrounding; no social-safety challenges
Signing	signed in line with EuroVelo guidelines	signs for all main junctions; signs visible by night with standard bicycle lighting	confirmation signs and direction signs at least every 5 km and 15 km, respectively

Table 1. Cont.

Type of Path	Regular	Occasional	Demanding
Public transport	at least every 150 km, a stop of public transport carrying bikes with at least two reliable services a day	at least every 75 km, a stop of public transport carrying bikes with at least six reliable services a day	same criteria of “important path”, adding that it is possible to reserve a space for a bike in advance
Accommodation	at least one low-budget accommodation	at least one low-budget accommodation different from camping	at least one accommodation certified as cyclist-friendly
Food, drink, and rest areas	at least one food and drinking area	no criteria	food, drink, and rest areas at least every 15 km
Bike services	at least one bike repair workshop or a self-service station	at least one bike repair workshop or helpline	at least one bike repair workshop and one pedelec charging station
Bookable offers	at least one cycling holiday offer website providing a detailed map, signing, accommodation, public transport connections, and overview information about the whole EuroVelo route	no criteria	no criteria
Web communication	at least one guidebook or detailed printed map	websites providing interactive maps, points of interest, accommodation, integration of public transport timetables, and the download of GPS tracks	the route can be found on at least one smartphone application widely used by cycle tourists
Print communication	no criteria	no criteria	no criteria
Information along the route		at least one information board or centre	no criteria

After the demand for the certification, certified inspectors will analyze the entire path and award a numeric score during the survey [14]. The score will then be used to monitor the route development over the years. For the analysis of each path, EuroVelo refers to a “Daily section” as a unit of data collection corresponding to a section of the route that is cyclable in one day for the target group. Sections are typically between 15 and 90 km long and are subdivided into “minor sections”. A “minor section” represents a unit of data collection corresponding to a part of the route with uniform characteristics regarding traffic speed and volume, path surface and width, and landscape attractivity. Minor sections are typically between 200 m and 5 km long. The validity of the certificate is five years.

Regarding potential users, greenways can be safely used by people of all ages and physical conditions [15], while E-paths and EuroVelo cycle routes have different difficulty levels [13,14].

1.2. Rural Slow Route (RSR)

Besides routes belonging to one of the official European networks, European countries have prevalently slow routes built and managed locally. Generally, scholars classify slow routes mainly based on the context in which they are located [8]. Liang et al. [16] highlight that slow urban routes have daily use (citizens use the route to go to work or school without public transport and private cars). In contrast, rural ones have occasional use (families or individuals use the route during a relax-day or vacation.) In an urban context, they often represent sustainable paths of daily transport that are usable with non-motorized vehicles [16]. At the same time, in a rural area, there are no stringent rules about the mode of transportation. Indeed, Denstadli and Jacobsen [17] define an RSR as a scenic route for drivers who prefer to appreciate the traversed landscape rather than a speedy arrival at the final destination, even if most scholars define RSR as routes designed for non-motorized vehicles [18–20]. In European rural areas, numerous projects that have funded through the Common Agricultural Policy concern the recovery of abandoned and pre-existing routes for pedestrians, cyclists, users facing mobility challenges, and horse riders to promote slow mobility [21,22]. Generally, the Common Agricultural Policy focuses on enhancing slow mobility to improve rural areas’ economic, social, and environmental aspects, linking

nature, landscape, and human recreational activities [18]. Therefore, many RSRs have been differentiated over the years by geographical and tourist demand, travel destination, means of transportation, and accommodation type [23]. Research on RSRs mainly focuses on their planning criteria [22,24] and the benefits provided for rural activities [19], ecological stability [20,25], quality of the environment [26], and social cohesion [27].

The paper defines an RSR as a rural route expressly designed for non-motorized uses that can present mixed-traffic sections. The potential users can be inhabitants (for commuting and local leisure) and tourists.

RSR to Valorize the Rural Place Identity

Scholars agree that RSRs are roads that cross high-value landscapes [17,28] and connect cultural heritage sites [29], natural resources [26], and rural activities [19]. Some scholars also affirm that RSRs contribute to building a shared place identity [29,30]. Rural place identity refers to individuals' sense of connection and attachment to the rural places where they live, work, and partake in social activities [31–33]. This identity can be shaped by various factors that originate from the combination of features that a community recognizes in the location it inhabits, including the natural environment, cultural traditions, and community history [34,35]. It can also be influenced by the economic and social conditions of the area, as well as the experiences of individuals and groups within it [36,37]. Rural place identity is strongly linked to agricultural products [38] and local food [39], and methods for its enhancement require the active involvement of local rural stakeholders, such as farmers, processing companies, and food sellers [30]. To promote a community-led local development strategy, the primary tool of the Common Agricultural Policy is the LEADER Program [40]. This program has financed many transformations in rural areas, including RSRs. The main innovation of the LEADER Program is the territorial approach of being “by and for” local rural communities, which is a factor in their empowerment and a means by which to design and implement strategies and actions in rural areas from a bottom-up perspective [41]. Despite this European strategy to enhance participation in rural areas, a systematic literature review on participatory experiences with European farmers shows that rural stakeholders mainly collaborate in providing information, monitoring, and evaluating the transformations [42]. There is a lack of methods for their active involvement in the definition of shared strategies for rural areas' development and valorization.

Generally, the research regarding rural place identity valorization using RSRs aims to develop strategies for improving slow tourism in areas surrounding the paths [43]. Slow tourism in rural areas does not displace their own economic and cultural activities, but stimulates and supports them [44]. Indeed, local traditions, residents' habits, lifestyles, and local gastronomy have been identified as the main factors in the diversification of destinations, as they influence their preferences [45]. For these reasons, the collaboration between local people and tourists should be the frame of reference for promoting slow tourism [46]. Instead, there is a gap in participatory methods to involve rural communities in defining a shared strategy for promoting rural areas.

Furthermore, starting from an RSR, methods to define the geographic boundaries of the surrounding area that would benefit from its implementation are lacking. To attempt to fill this research gap, D'Uva and Rolando [28] develop a method to design minor connections between slow routes and a mobility network through the multimodal interchange between fast and slow routes to reach inner areas, considerably expanding the reachable locations. Manthiu et al. [47] define the served areas as those reachable within 3.75 km by the RSR using existing roads. Pinna e Saiu [15] and Tang et al. [24] define served areas as those reachable by an RSR, designing a dense network of them. There is still a need for spatial and participatory methods to evaluate the extent of the influence of RSRs, i.e., the vaster areas that could benefit from their implementation.

1.3. The Case Study of the RSR “Trasimeno Ring”

The studied RSR is the Trasimeno ring, a circular route that winds along the shores of lake Trasimeno (Umbria region, Italy). The Trasimeno lake is one of the biggest lakes in Italy (Figure 1). It has an area of 128 km², and its volume fluctuates significantly according to rainfall levels and the seasonal demands from the small towns and farms near the shore (average depth 4–5 m; max. depth 6 m). The lake has three islands: Polvese, Maggiore, and Minore. The ZPS “Lago Trasimeno” (IT5210070) was instituted in 2000 and interests 146 km², 85% of which is occupied by the lake. Its biodiversity evidences seven species of amphibians (about 53.85% of the total Umbrian Region) and nine species of reptiles (47.37% of the total in the region) [48].

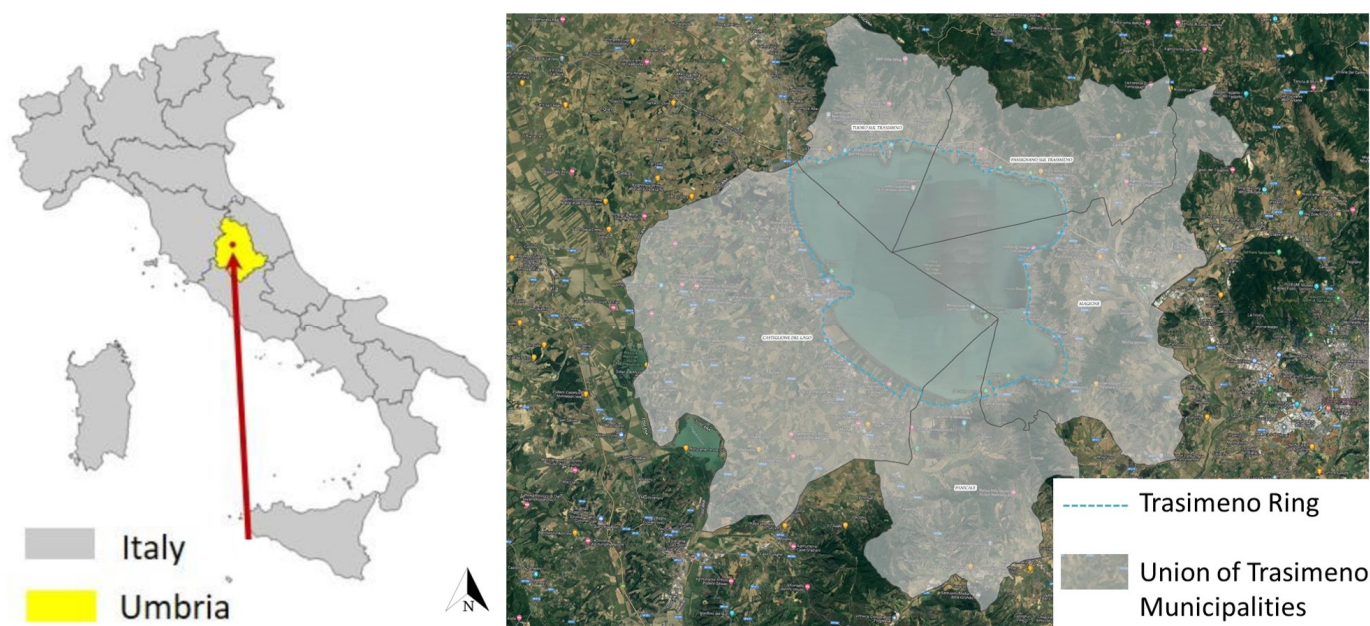


Figure 1. Study area.

The lake belongs to the Municipalities of Castiglione del Lago, Tuoro sul Trasimeno, Passignano sul Trasimeno, Magione, and Panicale (Province of Perugia). These five municipalities have signed an agreement forming the “Union of Trasimeno Municipalities [49]”. The lake is one of the most important regional touristic attractions, thanks to its water and its landscape, and it is rich in traditional crops (vegetables and legumes, e.g., the “Fagiolina del Trasimeno”), typical trees (cypress, olive tree, vine), shores covered by plentiful vegetation (marsh reed), historic settlements, and many castles (e.g., Castello di Montegualandro, Tuoro Sul Trasimeno, Palazzo Ducale, Castiglione del Lago, Rocca del Leone, Castiglione del Lago). Regarding RSRs, overall, the Umbria Region has a network of around 2500 km, mainly consisting of mixed-traffic [50]. One of these routes is the Trasimeno ring, designed in 1999 and currently walkable and cyclable for the entire length (61 km).

1.4. Aims of the Paper

This paper aims to develop a multi-scale method to valorize the ability of RSRs to promote rural place identities. Section 1.2 shows that scholars agree that RSRs promote resources and rural identity along their paths and surroundings. Still, there is a lack of spatial methods that are able to define up to which distance the rural surroundings benefit from the building of an RSR (the paper calls this area of influence of an RSR the service area). Furthermore, Section 1.2 shows the lack of active involvement of rural communities in processes to promote their rural identity. In detail, this paper aims to develop (i) a GIS network analysis with participatory criteria to answer the following question: up to what distance from an RSR do the present resources benefit from its existence? Then, (ii) to

implement a collaborative map involving rural stakeholders in decisions to promote its place identity.

Furthermore, in the literature, quality criteria for slow routes are differentiated by walking and cyclable paths (Section 1.1), and there is a lack of quality criteria based on the geographical context. For this reason, the paper also aims (iii) to define quality standards for RSRs and to highlight a suitable existing European network to connect the study case to a broader context.

2. Materials and Methods

Figure 2 sketches the main steps of the multi-scale approach. First, the method evaluates the current state of the studied RSR (level 1); then, it develops a GIS-based service area analysis that highlights which areas could be easily reached from the ring (aim (i), level 2). Third, the method develops a participatory process with rural stakeholders of the service area to promote their rural identity (aim (ii), level 2). Finally, the method compares the case study's characteristics with those of European networks for identifying quality criteria dedicated to RSR, and the optimal European network for connecting the studied route (aim (iii), level 3).

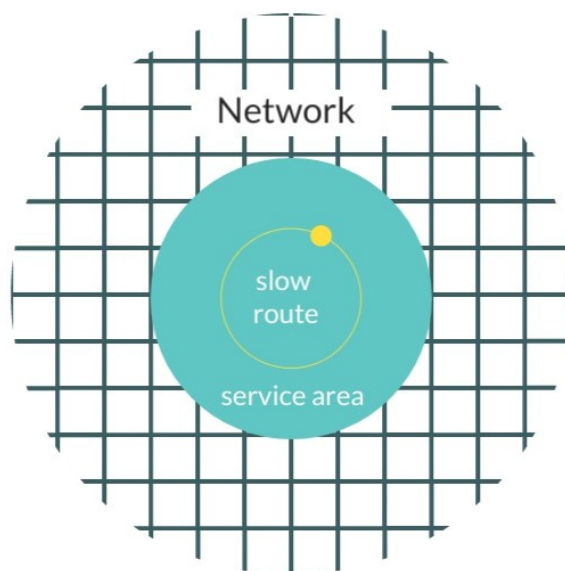


Figure 2. Graph of the multi-scale approach of the method. Level 1—slow route; level 2—service area; level 3—network of slow routes.

The first step of the research involves a small group of local stakeholders on fieldwork to assess the current state of the RSR. We engaged a local citizen association (called Parte Civile APS) and students at the University of Perugia attending the “Landscape Analysis and Planning” course. For this first step, the participants were ten citizens, experts in the study area, and ten students, experts in tracking software and GIS analysis, working in pairs. The free software used for tracking is called Gaia GPS [51]. The entire route was divided into sections distributed among participants. Each team traveled their section on bikes or foot and subdivided it into minor sections with homogeneous widths, gradients, levels of traffic, levels of shading, types, and surface conditions, performing a visual assessment based on the classes of Table 2. Furthermore, participants added a waypoint to every critical point (e.g., crossings, abandoned buildings, dangers), signage, service (food, drink, rest areas, public gardens, accommodation, bike services, stop of public transport, public drinking water, public lighting), and attraction (traditional craft activities, farms, elements of ecological value, historic buildings, sport, and entertainment). Then, Gaia GPS data were collected and analyzed in a Qgis environment (linear density and distribution), and the results were shared online using Google MyMaps (Appendix A, first and second map).

Table 2. Questionnaire to evaluate the RSR's conditions.

	FID of the Minor Section	Length (m):	Width (m):
Gradient	flat the cumulative elevation change (gain plus loss) is easy to overcome (any 1 km of the route does not exceed 10 m) [0–1%]	little gradient the cumulative elevation of any 1 km of the route does not exceed 50 m [1–5%]	sloping the cumulative elevation of any 1 km of the routes does not exceed 150 m [5–15%]
Traffic category	traffic-free section reserved exclusively for non-motorized journeys	very low traffic speed limit of 50 km/h or lower, and no more than 500 vehicles/day	low traffic speed limit of 70 km/h or lower, and no more than 2000 vehicles/day
Surface	good the surface is smooth and solid enough to be easy to walk and cycle on	acceptable the surface is suitable for use by cyclists and pedestrians, even if it is unimproved with rare potholes and depressions	bad the surface is very bumpy and has several points that are difficult to ride with a touring bike
Type of surface (material): description			
Shading	full sun section without shaded areas	part shade sunny route with sparse elements of vegetation and/or artificial shading	full shade very shady section thanks to tree lines or continuous buildings

The second step of the method calculated the area of influence of the RSR (called service area.) First, we organized a workshop with 20 people from a local cycle association called “CorrisullaChiugina ASD” [52] to define user-tailored criteria for designing the service area of the Trasimeno ring. Participants confirmed that they were willing to discover a new characteristic place close to the main cycle path, biking for a maximum distance of 5 km along rural roads with very low (max 500 vehicles/day) or low traffic (max 2000 vehicles/day), a maximum gradient of 15%, and a cumulative elevation change of no more than 50 m every kilometer. For the study area, we acquired the road graph of OpenStreetMap, the Digital Terrain Model of the National Geoportal, the traffic layer of Google Maps, and local information about the traffic of Perugia Province [53]. Using these data, we selected roads corresponding to the criteria. Then, we performed a service area analysis (tool of Qgis “service area from layer”) to find the region that was reachable using these roads.

The next step implemented a collaborative map to promote this service area. To achieve this goal, we developed a participatory process in the service area section belonging to the municipality of Magione. In this area, there are 326 km of rural streets. We organized fieldwork to identify all the agriculture-related activities and select those interested in promoting a visit by the users of the Trasimeno ring. Then, we invited them to participate in three workshops to build a collaborative map. In total, 80% of the contacted rural stakeholders participated (28 participants). In the first workshop, the method used differentiated questionnaires based on the type of rural activity (e.g., farm, farmhouse, processing company, seller, rural museum, and educational space) and based on the service or activity offered to visitors (e.g., environmental education, sale, workshop, rustic accommodation, restaurant) to classify rural attractions. In the next workshop, we merged previous results in a social layer in Google My Maps, where the participants described and presented their activities, history, and products. Then, during the last workshop, we taught participants an easy tools for using, updating, and sharing the collaborative map.

Finally, the method compared the quality criteria of the existing European paths crossing central Italy with the current conditions of the case study to suggest the optimal network to connect our RSR and the quality criteria suitable for RSR.

3. Results

3.1. The Trasimeno Ring for Promoting Rural Place Identity

Table 3 resumes the characteristics of the route components of the Trasimeno ring, and Figure 3 reports some of them as examples (Appendix A reports links for all results). There are 142 services and 92 attractions along the ring, as shown in Figure 4. The resulting service area has a surface of 325 km², and rural roads have a maximum speed limit of 70 km/h. These roads are classified mainly as very low traffic (1–500 units/day for 61%), then low traffic (500–2000 units/day for 36%), and the remaining part as moderate traffic (2000–4000 units/day for 3%). The first map of Appendix A reports the whole service area of the Trasimeno ring, and the third map is the part of the service area within the municipality of Magione where we developed the participatory process (surface of 49.9 km², length of the section of Trasimeno ring 16.6 km).

Table 3. Evaluation of the route components of the Trasimeno ring.

	Trasimeno ring		length (Km)	61	width (m)	0.5–5	Total
Gradient (%)	flat	83	little gradient	7	sloping	0	100
Traffic category (%)	traffic-free	73	very low traffic	20	moderate traffic	7	100
Surface (%)	good	58	acceptable	35	bad	8	100
	asphalted	42	beaten earth and gravel	25			
	asphalted and gravel	1	beaten earth	16			
	gravel	14	paved	2			100
Shading (%)	full sun	64	part shade	15	full shade	18	97
Crossing (n.)	69		linear density 1.13 crossing/km				
Signage (n.)	59		linear density 0.96 signs/km				

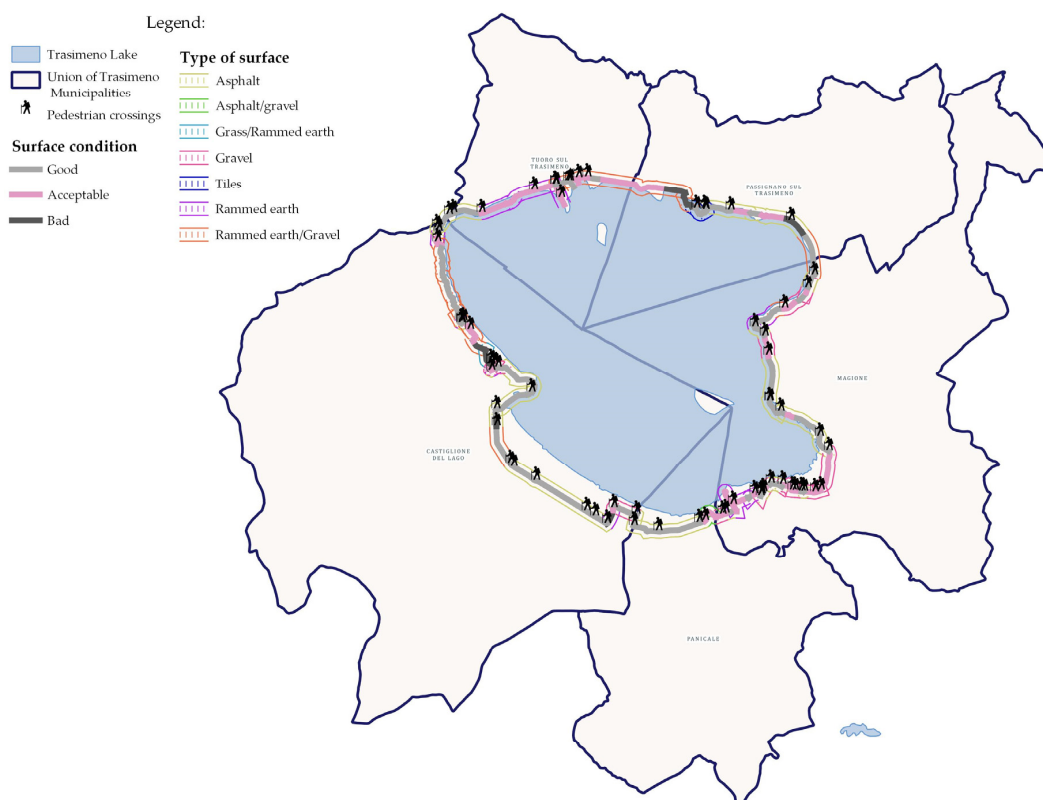


Figure 3. Type of surface, surface condition, pedestrian crossings.

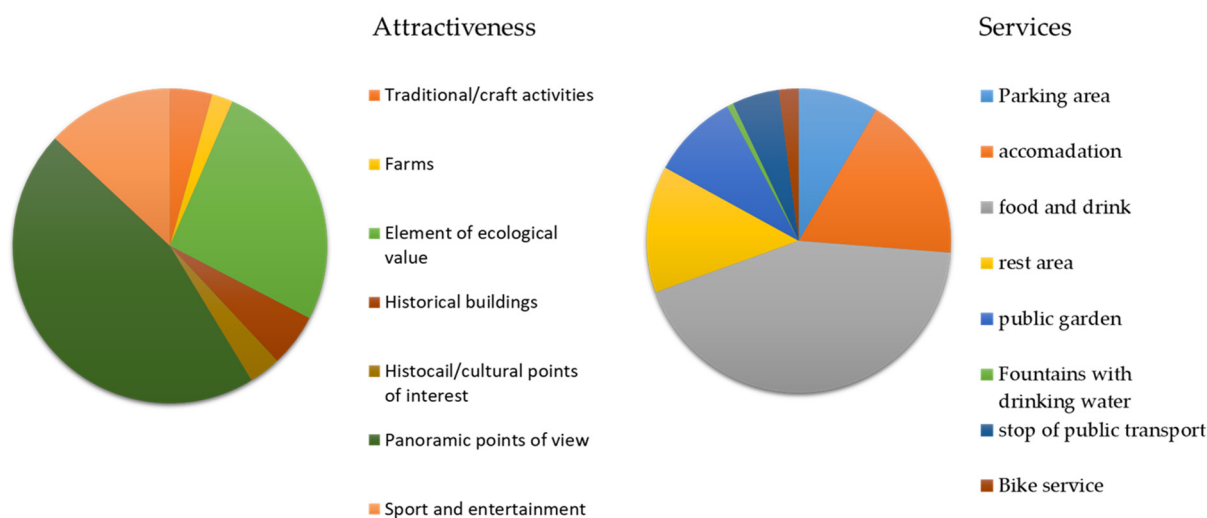


Figure 4. Services and attractions along the RSR.

Magione possesses 27.22% of the agricultural land of the Union of Trasimeno Municipalities [54]. The service area of the Trasimeno ring and Trasimeno Lake cover 38% and 22% of the municipality's surface, respectively. There are 35 rural activities; 80% of the stakeholders participated in the three workshops, and, in the end, 78% of the participants decided to promote themselves in a collaborative map. Figure 5 reports the final decisions of the participants, and Appendix A reports the link to the collaborative online map (in Italian). Figure 6 shows a translation from Italian to English, with an example of the information provided for the map by every participant. The information varies by type of activity.

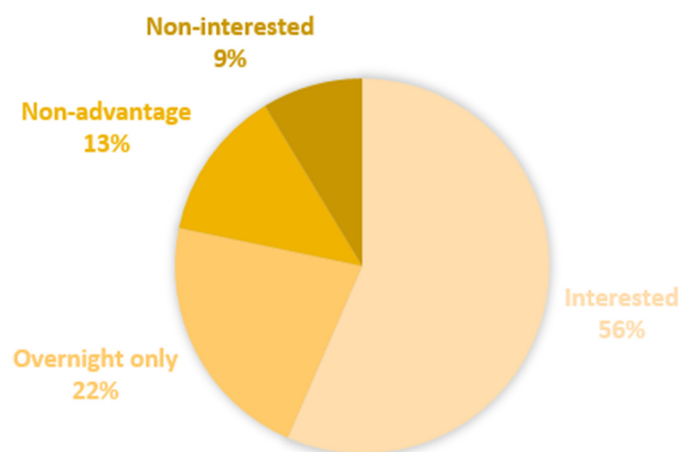


Figure 5. Response of the participants to “Do you want to be included in the collaborative map to promote your activity and the place identity to users of the Trasimeno ring?”.

3.2. Optimal European Network to Connect the Trasimeno Ring

Table 3 shows that 27% of the Trasimeno ring is on mixed-traffic routes, so it is impossible to link the case study to an existing traffic-free network. For this reason, we evaluated the suitability of connecting the Trasimeno ring to the EuroVelo network, which allows for some mixed-traffic sections. Local administrations affirm that current users of the Trasimeno ring are mainly families on vacation at the lake [49]. Furthermore, the ring is also used for cycle holidays. These users are typical of demanding and regular EuroVelo paths [14].

Figure 7 shows that the nearest EuroVelo route is the “Sun Routes” (colored green in the figure). Furthermore, there is a cycle route, belonging to the Umbrian cycle routes

(colored brown in the figure) and recognized by the Italian Environment and Bicycle Federation [55], that connects the Trasimeno ring and the EuroVelo network.

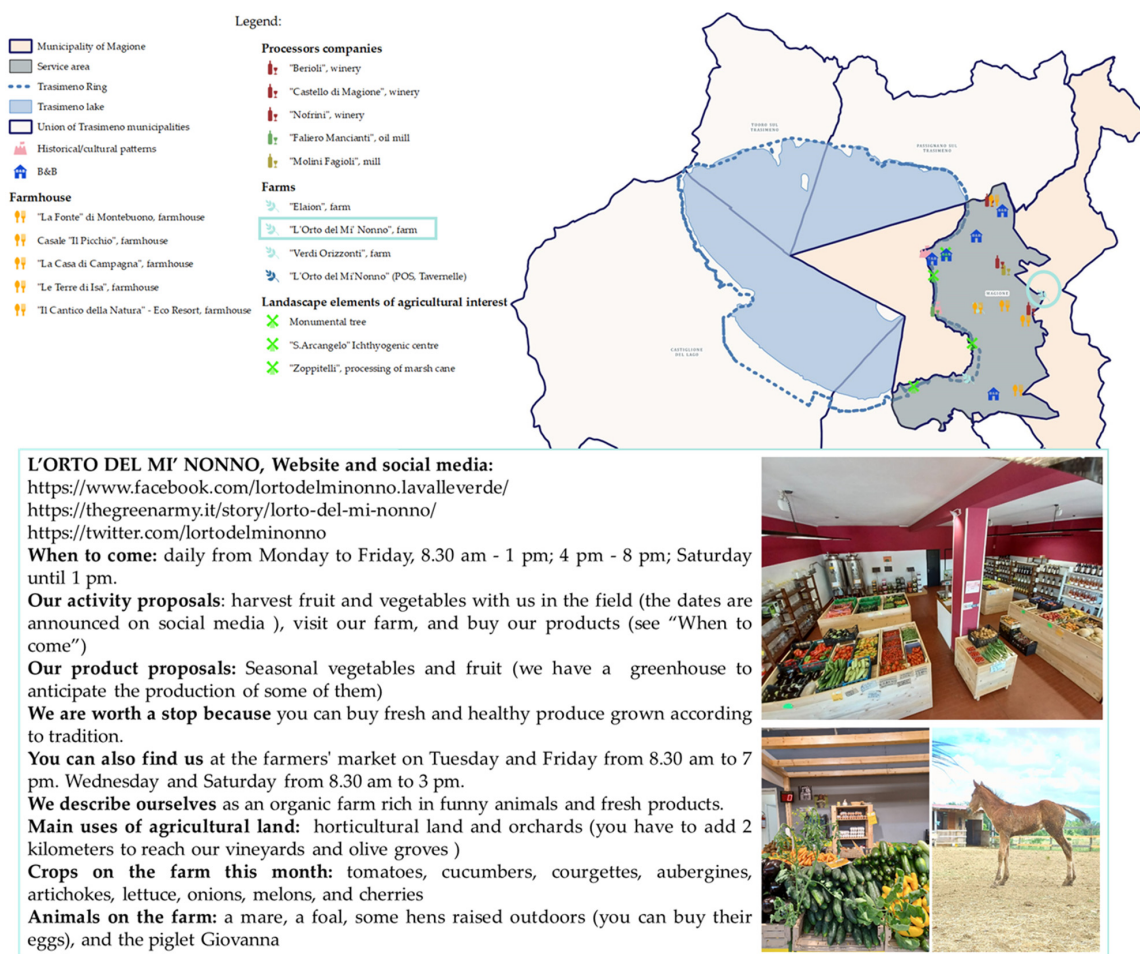


Figure 6. Screenshot of the collaborative map with an example of the information that a participant gave for their activity.

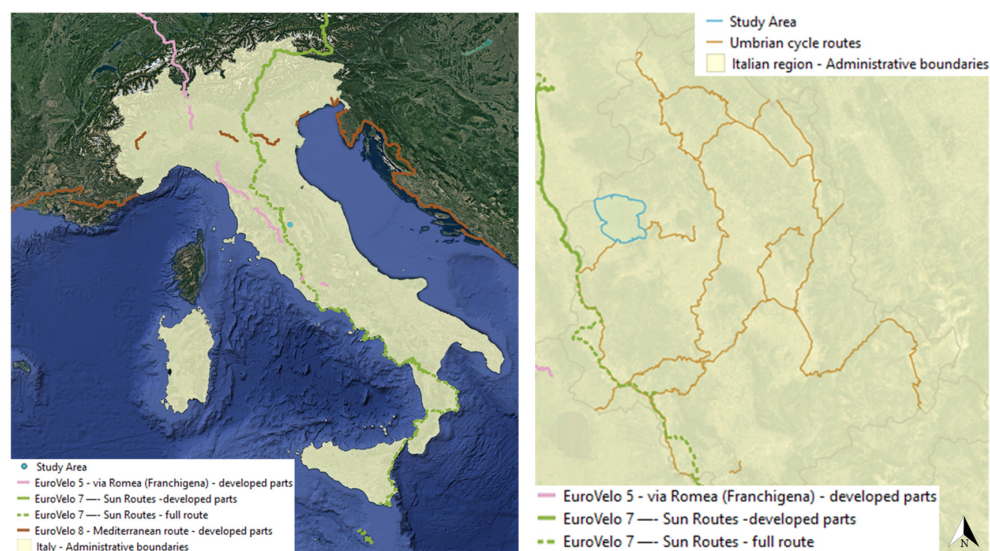


Figure 7. Italian routes of the EuroVelo network and Umbrian cycle routes recognized by the Italian Environment and Bicycle Federation.

To propose a modification to an existing EuroVelo route, the EuroVelo rules fix a maximum aerial distance between the new and the old route of 50 km [6]. The distance between EuroVelo 7 “Sun route” and the Trasimeno ring is 16.8 km. Therefore, in Table 4, we have compared the characteristics of the case study (Table 3) with the EuroVelo quality criteria (Table 1) for a daily section of a long-distance cycle route [14]. Indeed, the ring (61 km) can be traveled in one day by fit cyclists and in two or more days by all types of users.

Table 4. Fulfilled (✓) and unfulfilled (X) EuroVelo criteria by the Trasimeno ring.

Fulfilled (✓) and Unfulfilled (X) Criteria	Essential Criteria	Important Criteria	Additional Criteria	Reasons of Unfulfilled (X) Criteria
Route components	✓	✓	X	There was 7% moderate traffic
Surface and width	X	X	X	In total, 56% of the route lead on cobblestone or unimproved surfaces, and parts of the route have a width that does not allow traffic of bicycles in both directions
Signing	X	X	X	The linear density is 0.5 signs/km, but their distribution leaves sections longer than 5 km without signs. The signs are not retroreflective and do not use the EuroVelo guideline [56]
Bike services	X	X	X	There are not bike repair workshops, self-service stations, helplines, and pedelec charging stations
Web communication	X	X	X	Many websites of public and private stakeholders are promoting the Trasimeno ring, but there is a lack of a systematic and organic process for its promotion
Print communication	X	no criteria	no criteria	There is not a guidebook dedicated to the Trasimeno ring, nor to EuroVelo 7 (the route has some sections to develop)
Fulfilled criteria for the three types of the path (✓)	Continuity; Gradients; Attractiveness; Public transport; Accommodation; Bookable offers; Food, drink and rest areas; Information along the route			

4. Discussion

4.1. Implication for the Case Study

Table 4 shows that the Trasimeno ring fails some criteria for both EuroVelo regular and demanding paths. Concerning the EuroVelo criteria, the main weaknesses of the ring are the bad surface quality, the presence of bottlenecks, the inhomogeneous distribution of signs, and the lack of bike services. Indeed, 56% of the RSR is on cobblestone or unimproved surfaces, and parts of the route have a width that does not allow the traffic of bicycles in both directions. The linear density of the signs is 0.5 units/km, but their uneven distribution leaves sections without signs longer than 5 km. Regarding bike services, there are five bike rentals and one bike seller, but there are no bike repair workshops or helplines. Furthermore, 7% of the route has moderate traffic, representing an uncomfortable section, mainly for families. EuroVelo criteria do not consider the route’s shading. Table 3 shows that 64% of the Trasimeno ring is in full sun, which is a critical characteristic of the ring because the study area has sweltering and sunny summers. Otherwise, the Trasimeno ring is rich in attractiveness and services for tourists and users. Indeed, its landscape is heterogeneous and has a linear density of 1.5 attractions/km. EuroVelo criteria require at least one attraction, a food and drink area, and an accommodation in every daily section [14], corresponding to the length of the case study that offers 92 rural, ecological, and historical attractions (Figure 4). Furthermore, the linear density of accommodations, rest areas, and food and drink areas are 0.4, 0.5, and 1 unit/km, respectively, and they are well distributed along the route. Overall, there is a lack of a systematic and organic process for the promotion

of the ring, and a coordinated multi-actor approach is needed (municipalities, specialists, local and regional institutions, associations, and private companies) [57]. Indeed, websites and print communications of public and private stakeholders promote Trasimeno lake's resources, but without clear coordination. Local institutions need to become aware of the benefits provided by slow routes for the improvement of the environment and public health, a reduction in car use, the creation of jobs in local and national sectors, a contribution to eco-friendly tourism, and the enhancement of cultural and natural resources along the route [58–60]. Once the ring is requalified to respond to all the EuroVelo criteria, the Union of Trasimeno Municipalities has three alternatives for connecting this route with the European network: (a) proposals for deviations of a EuroVelo route, (b) alternative sections of an existing route, and (c) autonomous routes reachable by the EuroVelo network [6]. To propose a deviation (a), the new section must have a maximum distance from the previous EuroVelo section of 50 km [6]. The case study has a distance of 16.8 km from the nearest EuroVelo route (Sun route, EuroVelo 7). Regarding an alternative section (b), a EuroVelo route generally has only one official course. Still, there are some possible exceptions, e.g., routes that follow rivers are encouraged to have variants on both sides [6]. Both connection methods are viable for the case study but need differentiated start and end points along a line parallel to the nearest EuroVelo route. For the Trasimeno ring, the nearest EuroVelo route is positioned north–south, so these points should be selected, one at the north and one at the south of the lake, excluding the current west section of the ring. Because the results for the western section of the ring (the Municipality of Castiglion del Lago) report a high number of historic and environmental resources, confirming previous analyses for this area [61,62], the optimal solution seems to be to propose an autonomous ring, (c) reachable by the EuroVelo network. This choice has already been made successfully by another Italian lake, the lake of Garda [63].

Local administrations of the Trasimeno ring are afraid to invest in this route as it runs along an already highly touristic area, and would like to distribute arrivals in areas even further away from the shores of the lake. To achieve this aim, this paper developed a service area analysis to define which areas could be reached from the designed RSR, improving the use of rural roads by non-motorized means of transportation.

In the case study, this area has a surface of 325 km², belonging to five municipalities. Still, the participatory process was developed in a section of the service area that was located in only one municipality, in order to control the numerosity of participants [42]. In this manner, the involved stakeholders were all the people who possessed a rural activity in this section of the service area (Municipality of Magione), guaranteeing inclusivity [64]. For the municipality of Magione, at the end of the participatory process, 80% of the participants decided to promote their activities in a collaborative map. Further developments will repeat the participatory process inside the other municipalities of the lake.

4.2. Strengths and Weakness of the Developed Method to Use RSRs for the Valorization of Rural Place Identities

The paper develops a multi-scale complex method for rethinking RSRs in order to enhance rural place identities, using three different levels of spatial zoom. Menconi et al. [57], reviewing design criteria for green infrastructures in general, show that a multi-scale approach avoids the oversimplification of green infrastructure, improves the efficient use of resources, and considers the links between them. Our results confirm these previous findings. Indeed, at the design level (detailed view), our results show a low quality of RSRs, and the method proposes shared criteria to optimize their design. Then, it expands the study area in a GIS environment, using a network analysis tool to evaluate the inner surface, which could benefit from the slow route. To activate these benefits in the served area, the method involves local rural stakeholders in selecting traditional rural resources to be enhanced and choosing strategies for their promotion. Finally, at the last zoom level (global view), the method evaluates the joining of the RSR with an international network. These findings are helpful to local administrations and practitioners (planners and designers of

RSRs) that need multi-scale approaches to respond to the complexity of territories and in order implement efficient promotion strategies in rural areas. Furthermore, this method helps slow tourism scholars and practitioners to promote their beautiful landscapes and cultural heritage.

4.2.1. Quality Criteria for an RSR

The results show that the EuroVelo network quality criteria (route components; surface and width; gradients; attractiveness; signing, public transport; accommodation; food, drink, and rest areas; bike services; bookable offers; web communication; print communication; information along the route [14]) are a reasonable basis for defining design criteria for slow routes in rural contexts. This study's method suggests adding the percentage and distribution of shading to these criteria because shaded areas along a slow route are crucial for comfort [15] and safety [27]. Planners and designers of RSRs should pay attention to this aspect, especially in the Mediterranean regions.

The future development of this research should involve the comparison of these criteria with the E-path criteria for the long-distance walking routes that the European Ramblers Association is currently defining. In addition, in rural contexts with spread activities and attractions, it is essential to consider that a cycle path reaches more resources than a pedestrian one, with the same amount of time available for the journey, and maintains the benefits of the deceleration. Indeed, our results show that the Trasimeno ring responds to the request to decelerate the daily rhythm, combining sports and cultural activities [64], and building food and tourism synergies [65,66].

4.2.2. Spatial Method to Define the Service Area of an RSR

How do we reach inner areas using an RSR? The developed method uses a GIS network analysis tool to evaluate the geographic boundaries of the surrounding area that benefit from implementing an RSR. Our results define the area served by an RSR as the surface that can be reached with detours from the route not exceeding 5 km along rural roads with low traffic (max 2000 v/d) and gentle slopes (maximum gradient of 15% and a cumulative elevation change for every kilometer of the road lower than 50 m). This result is cyclist-tailored because we invited the main users of the case study to define the criteria for the GIS analysis. When varying the kind of users, the service area needs to be re-calculated, changing the criteria of calculation in the GIS environment. Maltese et al. [29] use as criteria that defines 3.75 km as the maximum distance along routes. The users defined our criteria, and the results highlight that the users of RSRs prefer flat routes with low vehicular traffic compared to shorter routes. The current efficiency of GIS network analysis, combined with the worldwide availability of open data regarding existing road networks and traffic fluxes, makes it easy to select the contexts in which the method can be applied. To reach inner areas, scholars generally propose to design dense RSR networks [15,24], multiplying the costs of building a single designed RSR. Instead, our method has developed a network analysis method that is aimed at promoting the use of low-traffic rural roads as mixed-traffic links to reach local resources. Our results show that Italian rural areas have a dense network of minor roads that are characterized by low flows of vehicular traffic that could be valorized for slow tourism, regardless of the designed RSRs.

4.2.3. Collaborative Maps to Enhance Rural Place Identities

The spatial identification of the area served by an RSR is the first step in developing a place-based valorization strategy. Indeed, these boundaries are crucial to select rural stakeholders that could benefit from their promotion along the route. In rural development strategies, experts generally evaluate rural resources involving local administrations [29], using available online databases [28], or involving local communities [30]. In previous participatory processes, experts determined which rural resources needed to be valorized with a top-down approach and, in a successive step, involved local communities in their evaluation [30]. Instead, this method involves, from the get-go, rural stakeholders that own

activities inside the service area (local farmers, owners of local services) in order to select which local resources and activities can benefit from a visit by RSRs' users (inhabitants and tourists) and how to promote them in a collaborative map (video, text, photo, link to social media). Results show that the precise boundaries of the served area helped rural stakeholders understand their sense of belonging in the site in depth and, consequently, select the resources important to identity to be promoted. This result confirms the findings of Mee and Wright [67] and Neal and Walters [68], which show that place attachment in rural communities tends to focus mainly on people's sense of locationality. The results of the participatory process show how rural stakeholders have clear goals and ambitions related to their business sector. Still, they also have a holistic understanding of their contexts' transformations and the value of preserving traditional characteristics. The resulting collaborative map shows that short detours by an RSR along minor rural roads allow users to discover small realities and live authentic experiences. Indeed, participants propose many activities belonging to the rural context, such as meals, workshops, and cultural events. This result confirms that rural stakeholders understand that these activities are attractive modalities for understanding local culture and heritage for visitors [69], and for and maintaining the place's identity [70]. Furthermore, the developed participatory process helped build trust between entrepreneurs, responding to one of the main weaknesses in developing systematic and shared methods of rural identity valorization [42]. All the participants affirmed that they increased their ability to control their choices and to discuss with their neighbors, confirming the value of participatory processes in improving people's empowerment and in strengthening networks [42]. The resulting map offers detours via the RSR, in order to discover local traditions and feel as part of the community. The map's high number of agricultural products and local foods confirms previous findings [38,39] that highlight their essential contribution to the definition of rural place identities. This paper shows that collaborative maps are valuable tools for building innovative shared strategies to valorize local rural identities and traditional rural products. When a collaborative map becomes a finished product, the map fails. Indeed, its success depends on participants' commitment to periodically updating their information, adapting their offer to the variability of users' choices and context conditions.

5. Conclusions

This paper develops a multi-scale approach to retrain and design RSRs as resources to valorize rural areas. This paper considers an RSR as a variable of a complex rural green infrastructure network [57]; therefore, it first evaluates its characteristics, then calculates its service area, and finally evaluates its connection with European networks.

The first level of this approach concerns the RSR components. The results highlight that designers of RSRs need to guarantee continuity, a good surface (conditions and materials) and width, a low gradient, good shading, and good signing. Furthermore, along the route, users must find a heterogeneous landscape that is rich in attractions and services, such as public transport, bike services, accommodation, food, drink, and rest areas. The results show that the European certification standard of EuroVelo could be a valid document to evaluate the quality of RSRs in European regions [14]. Still, this standard does not consider shading, another element to be assessed for an optimal design [15,27].

The second level of this approach evaluates the rural areas surrounding the RSR. The results of the paper show that Italian rural areas are rich in scattered resources [61,62] and are characterized by a dense network of very low and low-traffic roads that could be promoted instead of adding newly designed RSRs. This paper proposes a method to evaluate the area served by the RSR, using its rural road network as a link to reach inner rural resources. For the case study, a local association of cyclists defined the service area reachable by the Trasimeno ring, those being within 5 km along rural roads, with a maximum gradient of 15% and a cumulative elevation change for every kilometer of the road lower than 50 m. Varying the studied RSR, it will be necessary to revise the criteria to calculate the service area, tailoring the criteria to its users. Using this method,

investing in building up an RSR that respects the listed quality criteria widens its area of benefits, and promotes the resources that are reachable with rural roads and have user-defined characteristics.

As a tool to promote the rural resources of this area, this paper developed a collaborative map. The involved participants showed that rural stakeholders living in areas with high landscape values have a deep-rooted propensity for enhancing their territory and consider that sharing their information in online maps is an effective strategy for encouraging both the tourist and the inhabitant to discover, use, and respect the place identity.

Finally, the third level of this approach showed that, compared to greenways and E-paths, which are entirely traffic-free routes, EuroVelo is a network able to valorize traditional rural European streets with low traffic.

In conclusion, this paper shows that RSRs represent a valuable resource for promoting rural areas and their identities when designed following the shared criteria of comfort and safety, and considering their connections with nearby rural resources and the existing networks of RSRs.

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Abbreviation

RSR: Rural Slow Route

Appendix A

The method develops three nested maps (in Italian). Links to the maps are <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1gY-jMrjtyfpFpc38aDlsq14MZNCA9LQF&usp=sharing> (accessed on 20 December 2022), <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/viewer?mid=1z-qKy7XZJnb5dUnZ0N72HrYMFqzNUSzJ&ll=43.15386761734669%2C12.118263318646537&z=12> (accessed on 20 December 2022), https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1a1J5TUG2xnhtAVrenSgBP_IKIXx7mm2C&usp=sharing (accessed on 20 December 2022).

The first link opens “Characteristics of the Trasimeno ring”, reporting valuable information about the municipal administrations, in order to highlight the weaknesses and potentiality of the Trasimeno ring. This first map also provides links to video reports of the slow route, recorded by a local citizen association (Parte Civile APS). The link for the second map is nested inside this map’s first layer. The second map, “Discovering the Trasimeno ring”, reports valuable information to users (services and attractiveness). The waypoint in the middle of the lake (green star) opens a video of the study area realized with a drone by a local citizen association (Parte Civile APS), while the yellow star (waypoint of the first layer) links to the last map. The map “Exploration: taking a detour off the Trasimeno ring to discover the area’s rural identity” reports information about farms and other activities

open for visit and about traditional landscape resources reachable with sustainable detours off the Trasimeno ring (Municipality of Magione).

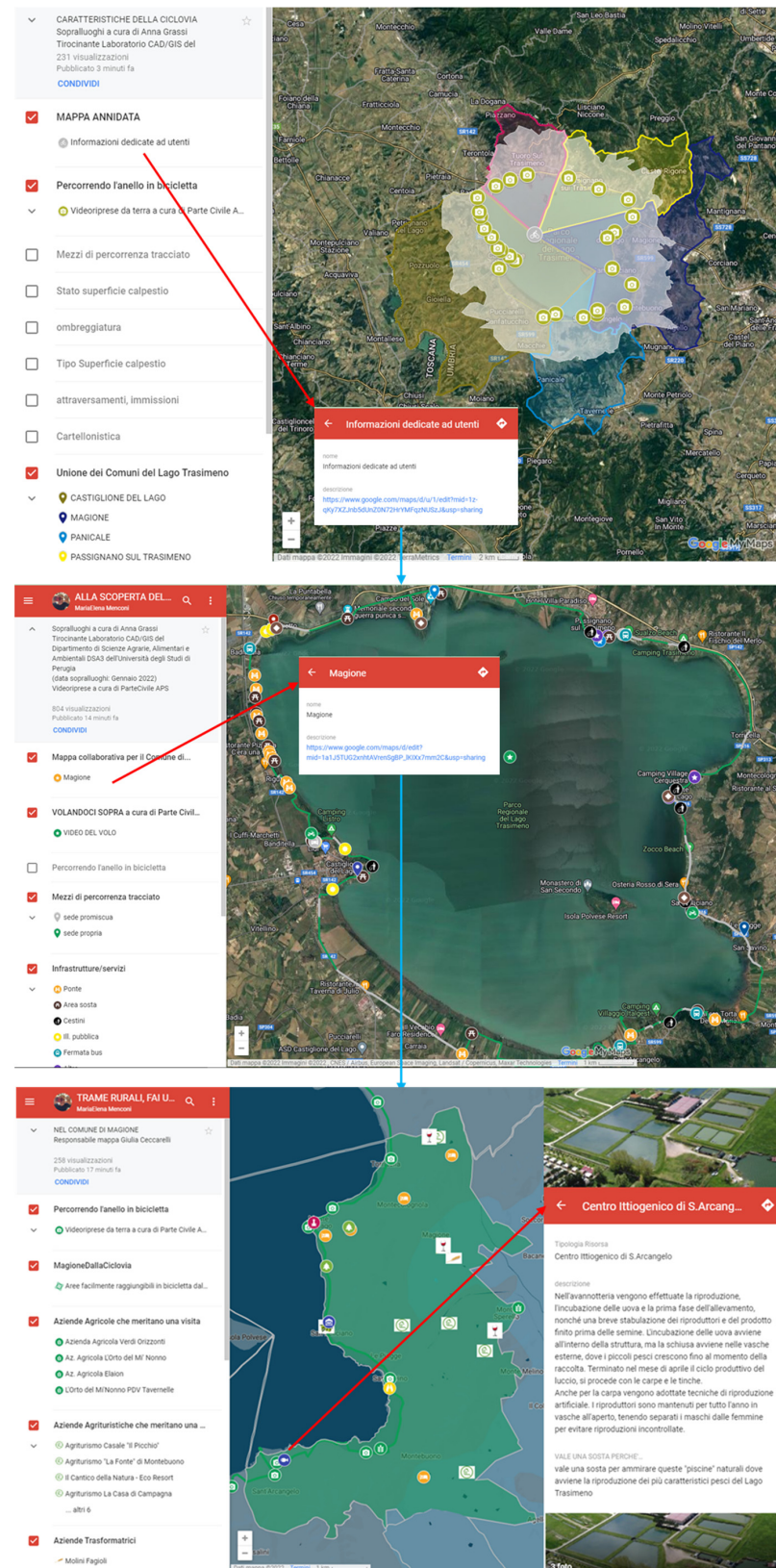


Figure A1. Screenshots of the three nested maps available in Google maps.

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