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*Ecologia e sostenibilità:
strategie per affrontare le sfide del terzo millennio*



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Identification of priority areas for reforestation using landscape ecology methods: a case study in Siracusa, Italy

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In recent years, Sicily has experienced a reduction in forest areas due to fires, which have depleted the heritage accumulated through reforestation efforts over the past century. The new European Nature Restoration Law and the National Forestry Strategy (NFS) provide a fresh impetus by setting binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems and strengthen the resilience and ecological functionality of landscapes. These are particularly important in Mediterranean regions such as Sicily, where the effects of climate change, ecological fragmentation and human activity are severe. This study aimed to identify priority areas for reforestation in the Siracusa province, particularly within state-owned areas managed by the Department of Rural and Regional Development (DSRT). The methodology aimed to provide tools that would integrate spatial complexity and management constraints into reforestation planning. Priority areas were selected by excluding those subject to specific constraints, such as Natura 2000 areas, pasture areas, or areas affected by fire within the last five years. This enabled us to focus on areas that could actually be used for forestry operations, in line with the provisions of the Nature Restoration Law and the NFS. We applied a forest structural connectivity model based on graph theory (Conefor) to the selected areas. We used this model with different dispersal distances (500 m, 1,500 m and 3,000 m) to assess connectivity at a multitaxa level. This type of analysis enables us to move beyond point planning and focus on optimising the ecological functionality of the landscape. Once the priority areas had been identified, the most suitable plant species that respected the local ecology were also selected. This study emphasises the importance of adopting an integrated, landscape-based approach to reforestation that combines ecological effectiveness with the effective implementation of interventions.