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Title: Community models of local tourism development

Abstract:

The overall aim of this paper is to contribute to the reflection on the sustainable and innovative development paths of local communities. In addition, the paper offers insights into the relationship that exists between these innovative paths and the emergence of alternative forms of tourism established to contrast organized and standardized mass tourism, namely 'niche tourism' conceived and implemented mainly at a local level.
Specifically, the research discussed in this paper aims at reflecting on the actors and strategies (and/or empowerment processes) required for the promotion of sustainable tourism practices. For the purposes of the field research, the case study methodology in a comparative perspective was chosen. In particular, four experiences were identified, two in Argentina, one of which in the province of Buenos Aires and the other in the province of Santa Fe, and two Italian case study experiences in small communities in Southern Italy. All case studies have specific characteristics, i.e., communities located in inland areas, with tourism experiences, and with significant projects in terms of values, motivations, and the capacity to involve both local actors as well as those outside the territorial context.
The findings show that promoting sustainable tourism development of inland communities requires consideration of several factors, including the stakeholders involved and the strategies to be adopted to promote sustainable tourism practices in order to increase the well-being and quality of life of local communities. The case studies presented highlight how the empowerment of local actors and the enhancement of territorial capital are closely linked. Indeed, processes involving the local community can have a significant impact on the economic and social growth of a territory, through the enhancement of territorial peculiarities, which are at the basis of the construction of tourist and experiential products.

KEYWORDS: Local tourism development; niche tourism; local communities; social innovation; community-based tourism.

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Community Models of Local Tourism Development[2]

Introduction

The overall aim of this paper is to contribute to the reflection on the sustainable and innovative development paths of local communities. In addition, the paper offers insights into the relationship that exists between these innovative paths and the emergence of alternative forms of tourism established to contrast organized and standardized mass tourism, namely 'niche tourism' conceived and implemented mainly at a local level.

For the purpose of this research, the case of those territories defined as being on the 'margins', mainly called minor inland urban realities, is particularly interesting. These areas, which are not always exploited to their full potential, have experienced a significant loss of resident population over the years, resulting in the removal of essential services (such as schools and health facilities), widespread urban decay, and loss of identity, economic and social marginalisation.

For these communities, fostering processes of economic, social and cultural growth based on tourism market segments commonly defined as 'niche', has a twofold advantage: (i) it generates sustainable local growth processes as it benefits the maintenance and promotion of the natural and cultural resources of the area, and (ii) it helps mitigate the depopulation processes of inland communities by creating local job opportunities.

However, the variety and effectiveness of the results that can be achieved depends on the type and level of collaboration that is determined at local level between public administrators, population, economic actors and stakeholders. The end result depends on engaging in a sustainable local development project that pursues tourism objectives built around the area's cultural and natural resources and its capacity to welcome tourists: generating tourism products that, although niche, are clearly distinguishable, with specific features that make them 'visible' on the tourism market where competition is now global. Moreover, this aspect also concerns traditional tourist resorts (historical towns, mountain resorts, seaside resorts, etc.), which are also committed to enhancing their resources and potential, renewing them in a post-modern vein.

This paper discusses strategies for promoting sustainable tourism practices in an attempt to understand the determinants that contribute to the enhancement of inland communities for tourism. The focus of the research is on the forms of collaboration activated (competitive and non-competitive), the social capital that is needed and produced, and the presence of collaborative networks. In addition, the role played by local actors in the smaller centres of the hinterland, especially from a comparative perspective between nations that have had experience in this field for years is also investigated. In particular, the two countries chosen for the study are Argentina and Italy.

The results of the research carried out in Argentina and Italy, mainly using qualitative social research techniques, are illustrated. Specifically, four case studies were identified, two in Argentina, one of which in the province of Buenos Aires and the other in the province of Santa Fe, while the two Italian case studies are experiences of small communities in Southern Italy.

1. Theoretical framework

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With modernity, tourism developed into a mass social phenomenon involving practically all the countries of the western world, creating the preconditions for its subsequent transformation into a global phenomenon. In this context, the tourism industry had monopolised the sector, organising the tourist journey of millions of people all over the world, with standardised and pre-packaged itineraries, packages and experiences. However, in the transition from modernity to post-modernity (Giddens, 1994; Harvey, 1989; Lyotard, 1979; De Masi, 1985), there has been a gradual as well as unstoppable process of change in the nature of the phenomenon, opening up to partial forms of tourism that are substantially unrelated to the idea of the organised and standardised mass "tourist experience" of modernity (Savelli, 2002; Feifer, 1985).

More precisely, there has been a significant and substantial change in the phenomenon, moving towards approaches aimed at favouring not sightseeing but real knowledge, based on the experience of travelling and staying. This evolution has triggered a change both in the behaviour of tourists and in the tourism industry itself, leading to a redefinition of traditional dynamics. On the one hand, there has been a shift towards more self-directed forms of tourism, where travellers personally shape even a significant part of the chosen experience (Romita, 1999; Romita, 2010; Romita, Perri, 2011). On the other hand, this evolution has forced the tourism industry to a profound re-examination of the previous hetero-directed and flattened "production" logic that dominated the creation of tourism products throughout modernity, seeking solutions that envisage the possibility for the tourist to be able to interpret the travel and stay experience in an individual, subjective way, thus transforming tourism consumption into an opportunity for personal cultural and social growth (Miller, 1997). Furthermore, the practice of tourism has acquired an increasingly experience-centred value, where the possibility of choosing how to experience it has proved to be a distinctive element, a factor of cultural and social distinction, a significant indicator of preferences and perspectives within society (Battilani, 2009).

However, within the tourism market, the additional and "new" way of practising and understanding tourism has had considerable difficulty in being fully understood and interpreted. The tourism industry, especially the thousands of entities operating in the provision of tourist services, have shown a certain rigidity to change, accustomed as they have been for almost half a century to designing and creating products that standardised the tourist offer.

Recent years have witnessed a gradual transformation of tourism towards highly differentiated and fragmented mobility models: so-called experiential tourism. The difficulties in interpreting the "multiplication of meanings attributed to tourism and the growth of motivations and drives for mobility" (Monaco, Calicchia, 2019, p.10), have led some authors to speak of the "end of tourism" (Savelli, 2012, p. 287). However, more probably the mobility of people is today the "new paradigm" to be used to understand social change (Sheller, Urry, 2006), and in this context the idea that in contemporary society we are all tourists (Bauman, 2001) finds further justification.

In fact, in modern society, the tourism production system has not generally contemplated the offer of "products" capable of providing tourists with an "authentic", "non-trivial" and "non-superficial" experience (Morin, 1965; Enzensberger, 1965; Boorstin, 1961; Burgelin, 1967; Turner, Ash, 1975; MacCannell, 1976). The demand for tourism experiences substantially different from what was being offered on the tourism market was interpreted, as an indication of the existence of tourism market "segments", difficult to manage according to the established rules of the tourism industry, and probably, almost always, of quality and value. These segments were identified with the expression "niche tourism", representing the reflection of a tourist demand that was sometimes complex to classify and satisfy, and were often considered 'uninteresting' from the point of view of economic effects (Romita, 2011). Operators in the sector sometimes use this expression to refer to forms of tourism considered "minor", generated by unusual and/or marginal demand compared to that of the large tourist flows.

In today's postmodern society, aimed at recovering the history, culture, and traditions of the place, which modernity had, instead, sacrificed to benefit the new, we are witnessing a multiplication of

niche tourism, due to the social transformations that have broadened and modified its meaning (Romita, 2011). In fact, the postmodern tourist "no longer buys goods or services but experiences that project him or her out of the everyday routine and into a new space, read and constructed in relation to one's own subjectivity" (Corbisiero, 2022, p. 36). Tourism experiences that not only contrast with everyday experiences, but are also an extension and intensification of them (Quan, Wang, 2004).

This "demand for experiences" (Pine, Gilmore, 1999) sees a holistic involvement of the tourist (besides physical, also emotional, cultural, intellectual and spiritual) during the travel experience, which is increasingly aimed at existential improvement and personal enrichment (Longo, Cicirello, 2017).

In travel experiences, the tourist searches for meaning and authenticity, where authenticity is more "existential" (Wang, 1999), where the tourist is essentially in search of his or her authentic self. In this perspective, the process of authentication is also relevant (Cohen, Cohen, 2012), and in particular the process of "hot" authentication. This process "is emotionally loaded, based on belief, rather than proof, and is therefore largely immune to external criticism" (Cohen, Cohen, 2012, p. 1300).

So, niche tourism has always existed, but over time it has undergone significant evolution, taking on significantly different meanings, contents and dimensions than in the past. These forms of tourism offer experiences that go beyond mere tourist satisfaction, and as we will try to show, contribute to the sustainable development of local communities.

Indeed, a new way of thinking about tourism is emerging, in which local communities are at the centre of tourism development. The revitalisation of cultural traditions, combined with the enhancement of environmental quality and natural resources, is becoming the driving force behind this change. There is a growing interest in culture, and travel and holidays are seen as opportunities for learning and discovery. It is not only about exploring historical and artistic heritage, but also about immersing oneself in traditions, interacting with local people, appreciating local products, and so on. What was considered off limits in modern times, i.e., MacCannell's (1976) back region today represents the space where tourists are advised to live and "transit". The preferred accommodations are those that integrate well into the territory and reflect authenticity. An attempt is made to live the tourist experience while respecting local rhythms, following a less planned and more authentic approach (Romita, Perri, 2020).

Indeed, what tourists seek today is determined by various "stimuli and messages: naturalistic, artistic, ethno-anthropological, gastronomic", elements that can be found in complex local realities (Savelli, 2012, p. 337).

In this perspective, a strand of literature is developing, particularly in Latin America, which, starting from what has already been theorised on "community tourism" by Maldonado (2005), redefines the concept as "the set of tourism activities that generate, through the dynamics specific to the sector, processes of social inclusion and integration of local communities and operators, encouraging the participation and decision-making of these actors in the management of destinations and activities" (Azeglio et al., 2020, p. 18). According to this strand of studies, community practices, based on social and solidarity economy values, encourage associative and democratic forms of management, which can help promote the development of tourism activities that respect the environment, common goods and cultural heritage (Azeglio et al., 2018).

From this point of view, the role of communities, understood not "as a simply given entity", but "as the object of a social construction by cooperating, competing or even conflicting actors, whose stake is the creation of an individuality of the territory, within the framework of a globalised urbanism" (Mela, 2016, p. 73), becomes central in local tourism development. They become real "project communities, [...] that is, new groups of social subjects who, guided by collaborative logics, reinterpret the concept of territorial heritage as a common good" (Gisotti, Rossi, 2020, p. 10). In fact, these social spaces are the protagonists and custodians of the construction of the heritage fabric, giving meaning to collectively recognisable elements, where the recovery and innovation of territorial heritage values are nothing but strategies of self-sustainable local development (Magnaghi, 2000).

In this context, the concept of community maps is interesting, i.e., "a dynamic way of collectively exploring and demonstrating what people judge to be of value in a place" (Clifford, 2006, p. 4). The creation of these maps has as its ultimate goal the recovery and communication of the different resources present in the area (tangible and intangible resources). This is done through the active involvement of the local population, by detecting the values of the local heritage in order to enhance the territory, entailing "implications that reverberate on social, ideological, and collective responsibility change with respect to 'making plans' in and for territories" (Cerruti, Menzardi, 2021, p. 88). However, the challenge for the territories lies in the difficulty of creating a system network that, involving the public and private sectors, can deal with the development of the tourist destination (Coscarello, Ruffolo, 2022).

Moreover, communities are centres of sense-making and reconstruction of belonging, where "traces" of identity, reciprocity and trust are detected (Bagnasco, 1999). The sense of belonging of local populations is strong and prevails over a universal social and spatial world (Gubert and Pollini, 2002), contrary to what has been hypothesised by various scholars on what the intense processes of modernisation and globalisation of society would have produced (Bauman, 2001). Nevertheless, the strong sense of belonging does not preclude interaction with the world, both because it is facilitated by new communication and information technologies and because it is useful for local development.

The feeling of belonging refers to the positive ties that one establishes with places during the course of one's life (Perri, 2021). In fact, ties to places have much to do with the emotional and meaningful experiences that each person experiences within them; they are the result of the integration between the objective characteristics of the place and the mental representations created by people about the place itself (Canter, 1977).

In the literature, several concepts, articulated in a complex manner, with respect to which there is no common agreement among the various authors dealing with these issues, are used to indicate ties to place (Arace, 2007). Among the most frequently used are: sense of place, identity of place and attachment to place.

Place provides individuals with a subjective spatial identity that is identified with the concept of sense of place (Hummon, 1992). The existing literature points out that by identifying relationships with place as a whole (cognitions, affects and behaviour), sense of place includes the other two concepts of place identity and place attachment (Perri, 2021). In fact, *place identity* (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983) mainly represents the cognitive aspect, as well as the meanings that are attributed to places (Mead, 1934), while attachment to places mostly represents the affective aspect (Arace, 2007; Romita, 2023).

Relevant for the purposes of this paper is the reference to the literature on social innovation, "understood as the capacity of local actors to promote creative practices and processes and new models of development" (Spillare, Moralli, 2019, p. 170). A very complex theme, which is analysed and defined in different ways, depending on the discipline of reference and the scientific approach adopted (Jessop *et al.*, 2013; Demoustier, 2001; André *et al.*, 2009; Bellamare, Klein, 2011). Significant are the studies of Moulaert (2009), who places the territory, with its norms, values and concepts, at the centre of social innovation. From this perspective, social innovation represents a "form of learning that enables the emergence of institutions whose objective is the revelation and satisfaction of needs that relate to the consideration of social, environmental or institutional capital" (Hillier *et al.*, 2004, p.142).

Furthermore, another interesting theory is the theory of social action (Pareto, 1916), which shows that the behaviour of human beings is characterised by objective actions (rational actions) and subjective actions (all other actions, those in which it is difficult to discern). Emotions, instincts and states of mind play a predominant role in influencing decisions, behaviour and attitudes, thus determining how we interact with the world.

2. Methodological note

This contribution is guided by the following research questions: (i) Who are the local actors and how do they act to enhance communities in inland areas? (ii) What are the elements that contribute to the creation of community models of local tourism development?

Through an initial phase of investigation, the working hypothesis was structured, i.e., *to what extent can the ability to network "territorial capital"* (Dezio, 2020; Mela, 2007; Camagni 2009*), understood as the multiplicity of resources available in the territory, determine the emergence of tourism activities capable of generating sustainable local development and, therefore, creating community models of local tourism development.*

Therefore, as already mentioned, the overall objective of this paper is to reflect on the actors and strategies (and/or empowerment processes) required for the promotion of sustainable tourism practices. For the purposes of the field research, the case study methodology in a comparative perspective was chosen. In particular, four experiences were identified, two in Italy and two in Argentina, with specific characteristics, i.e., communities located in inland areas, with tourism experiences, and with significant projects in terms of values, motivations, and the capacity to involve both local actors and those outside the territorial context.

In particular, the case studies identified are: in Argentina, *Hotel Tapalqué Cooperativo* in the province of Buenos Aires and *Paraje La Boca- Alto Verde*, in the province of Santa Fe; while in Italy, the two cases investigated are the *Casabona Community Museum Project* and the *Jacurso to Live and Learn Project*, both in Calabria, in the south of the Country.

The research strategy of the *case studies* adopted the perspective of practices as a way to better grasp the institutional and social dynamics that organize the analysed contexts. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with the protagonists of the experiences; in particular, seven men and seven women, aged between 18 and 65, were interviewed. The semi-structured interview outline was organized in four sections in order to (i) reconstruct the history of the experience, and identify (ii) the main issues, (iii) the collaboration networks and, finally, (iv) the development strategy.

In addition, thirty informal interviews were conducted to residents, operators, administrators and tourists living in the community, fifteen in Argentina and fifteen in Italy, with the aim of capturing the peculiar elements of the community and the attachment to the place. Finally, a participant observation phase was carried out for four non-continuous months in Argentina from September 2022 to May 2023. For the Italian cases, this activity took place for three months from January to December 2023. These actions were complemented by the study of relevant scientific literature, grey literature and other documents produced by the actors involved in the social practices studied.

3. Research results

3.1 Case studies in Italy

3.1.1 The Case Study: Jacurso to Live and Learn

"Jacurso da vivere ed imparare" (Jacurso to live and learn) is a project that was launched in 2013 with the aim of safeguarding and enhancing specific aspects of traditional life in the small municipality of Jacurso. The project idea stems from a cultural anthropologist, a specialist in the preservation of intangible heritage, who, after several work experiences outside her home region, wanted to return to live and work in her home town of Jacurso. The project, which can be defined as sustainable tourism, as the author herself says, aims to ensure the longevity of oral traditions, customs, to revive the local everyday life, through the opportunity given to the tourist to spend a short period in direct contact with the local community, and with the possibility of learning ways of life, customs and basic expressions of the local dialect. The following is a description of the results of the project idea based on an in-depth interview with the project leader.

The creator of the project runs it herself, although she claims to have "experimented with community tourism", meaning by this expression the direct involvement of the inhabitants, both in the management of the holiday homes (the only accommodation on offer) and in the workshops and excursions.

The flow of visitors generated by the project has been constant over the years, with guests staying for a minimum of three to a maximum of seven nights, around 50 per year, people from various countries and different age groups, mainly root, experiential and bleisure tourists. The activities offered to tourists are: cooking lessons, Italian lessons, workshops of activities related to local traditions, tasting of Calabrian products, excursions and entertainment. The design strategy is to focus on "green" and "short supply chain". Eco-sustainable structures are used, old dishes are proposed, thus enhancing the historical and cultural heritage of ancient local customs. The focus is on the revaluation of the territory and the community, also through digital communication.

For the project to be successful, various public and private collaborations were activated (trade associations, various cultural and voluntary associations, Local Action Group[3], commercial or craft activities, farms, Airbnb). However, at the same time, there are major difficulties linked to the inadequate management of public services by the municipal administration, the limited capacity of the local community to welcome tourists, and the widespread difficulties in networking among tourism operators, also in order to work together to create and offer a "tourist destination". The project is self-financing and has never participated and/or benefited from public funding. Ultimately, the creator of the project does not aim to create a business-to-business activity, but a development model to regenerate disadvantaged inland areas.

Figure 1 - *Jacurso to Live and Learn*

Source: https://jacursodavivereeimparare.it/jacurso/attivita-dinteresse-turistico/

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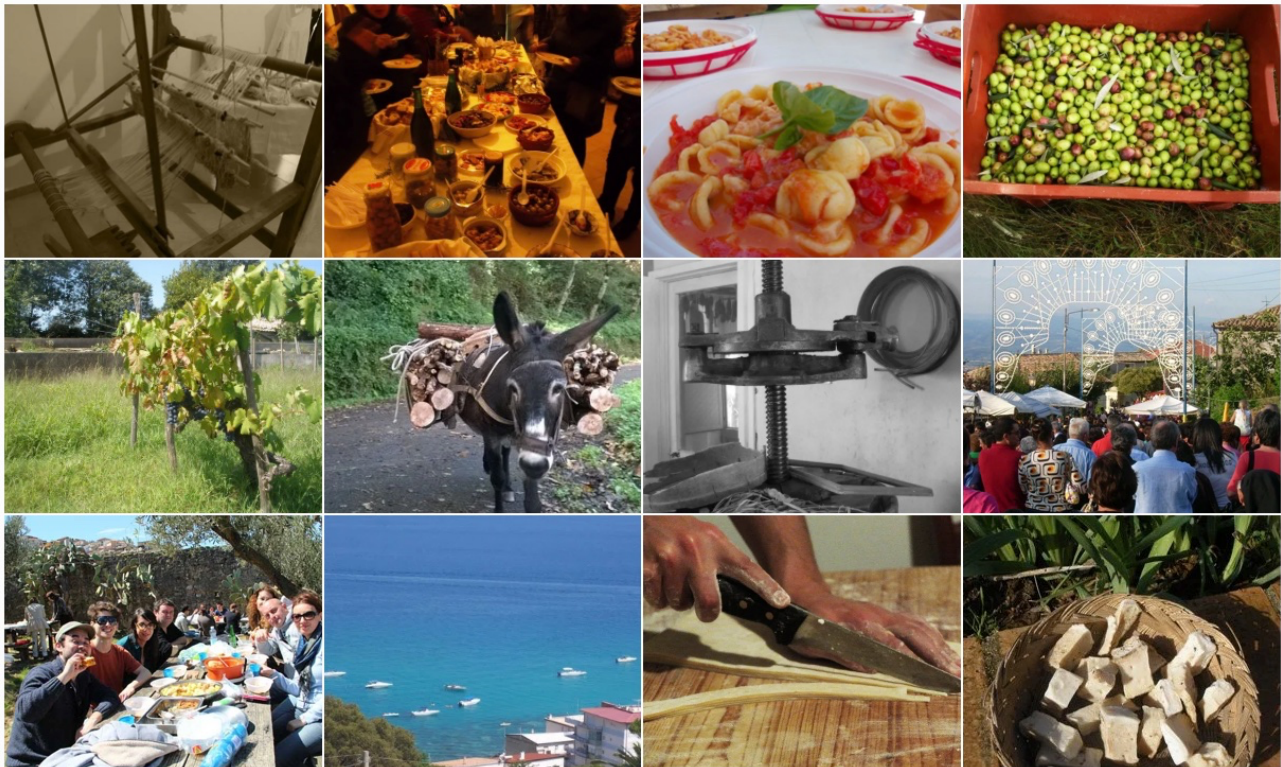
[3] Local Action Groups are entities made up of public and private entities concerned with the development of the rural area to which they refer. They are co-financed by the European Union but also make use of national and regional funds.

3.1.2 Casabona Community Museum Project

The project, promoted by the municipal administration of Casabona, was born in 2022 and is a local development process that sees the active participation of citizens in the competitive, shared and sustainable organisation of the territory, and the strengthening of local networks already active in the area. The aim of the project is to enhance the identity of the place and the material and intangible resources available.

Initially, the municipal administration of Casabona had intention of creating a Civic Museum, also thanks to funding from the Region of Calabria, in order to conserve, enhance and make Casabona's historical-archaeological heritage accessible. However, the municipal administration, with the support of researchers from the University of Calabria, deemed it appropriate to dynamically design the museum. Therefore, a broader local development project path was conceived, espousing the idea of the Community Museum. This type of solution is proposed when the objective is to activate territorial resources and encourage the construction of relevant meanings and values around objects and places, with the participation of the local population.

The project has stimulated the widespread participation of citizens and local stakeholders in the working meetings held, by retrieving and producing information on territorial resources, for the populating of a computerised territorial information system designed for tourism and identity enhancement. Another activity included in the Community Museum project is the recovery and enhancement of the relationship with the population of Casabonese origin who emigrated. Indeed, during the period of the economic boom, depopulation of inland areas, and in particular rural areas, became a widespread phenomenon due to the intense processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and migration, which radically transformed Italian society (Tocci, 2022).

To this end, a survey was carried out by interviewing root tourists present in the municipality during the summer period. In this context, useful information was sought to set up municipal services for root tourism as well. This activity also saw the active involvement of the local population, and in particular some young people.

Moreover, by finding additional economic resources, the municipal administration, in connection with the "Community Museum" project, is working to better organize the reception of travellers arriving in the area. Of particular significance is the ongoing creation of bed places through the refurbishment of private dwellings to be entrusted to a local social cooperative, and the recovery and valorisation of important natural (salt domes and hundreds of rocky caves) and cultural assets in the area, which already attract particular types of visitors linked to specific forms of tourism: slow, naturalistic, sustainable and responsible.

Figure 2 – "Casabona Museum"

Source: Antonella Perri

3.2 Case studies in Argentina

3.2.1 Hotel Tapalqué Cooperativo

The Hotel Tapalqué Cooperativo was created by a group of local young people who accepted the challenge of putting their knowledge of the area and their notions of tourism into practice to offer a local tourism proposal. The organisation is made up of young people aged between 18 and 35, all originally from Tapalqué, who, thanks to the project, have the opportunity to work in their place of origin, enhancing the area's resources from a tourism perspective. The founders have, therefore, constituted themselves as *Cooperativa de Trabajo Puente Viejo Limitada*. In this way, they manage and administer the Hotel Tapalqué Cooperativo, in the town of the same name, which means "place of swamps and reeds", in the centre of the province of Buenos Aires, which is 273 km from the city of Buenos Aires, the Federal Capital. In former times it was an expanse of land with large swamps, but over the last two centuries it has become a destination town for tourists, who are looking for a rest in contact with the countryside. In fact, there are several attractions in the area, natural and cultural and historical. This is the case of the Tapalqué stream, which flows through the municipal bathing establishment, equipped with volleyball, basketball, football and bocce courts, tables, benches, grills, a barbecue area and a restaurant. The municipal campsite and the "Eva Peron" holiday camp are located on the same site. A museum and cultural centre are located in the historical and cultural area. In addition, one of the main historical attractions is the Pulperia San Gervacio, founded in 1850 and located 25 km from the city centre. Some of the places of interest are the Complex for the Elderly, Produtap (dairy cooperative), Tapalim (municipal solid waste treatment centre), the

Church of San Gabriel Arcángel, the Dr. Ricardo Romera Cultural Centre (cinema theatre), among others.

There was only one hotel in the city, but it was not active for many years. Stimulated by other experiences related to the Argentinean community tourism network, a path was started to involve various actors who could have contributed to the birth of the project. The project therefore starts with some young people from Tapalqué who are students at the University of Quilmes, enrolled in the Tourism and Territorial Development degree. During this experience, some of them acquire the first skills for the start-up and management of tourism development projects. Stimulated by some of the teachers, they also participated in the activities of the University Social Incubation Programme and, in particular, in the Community-Based Tourism Incubator within the Programme. These stimuli gave rise to the idea of forming a cooperative to participate in the management of the hotel. Upon the teachers' advice, the young people drew up a map of places where the cooperative could have a role to play and identified the Hotel Municipal, which, although it operated, did so without a hotel logic. "As a cooperative, we started to put together a management model to present to the municipality", says one of the members. The project involves several aspects: managing the hotel as a cooperative and, at the same time, transforming it into a vocational hospitality school for students from the area and from different universities, thus turning it into a space for professional practice.

The facility has always been a hotel, which was previously called Hotel Avenida and when it closed it went to auction, was renovated and put out to public tender in 2015. The cooperative submitted the bid. The City Council approved it in November 2022. The Hotel Tapalqué Cooperativo offers full service, but there are plans to organise other services, such as the possibility of using the spa. In addition, due to the proximity of the river, other services are being organised, such as the possibility of kayaking.

Figure 3 - *Hotel Tapalqué Cooperativo*
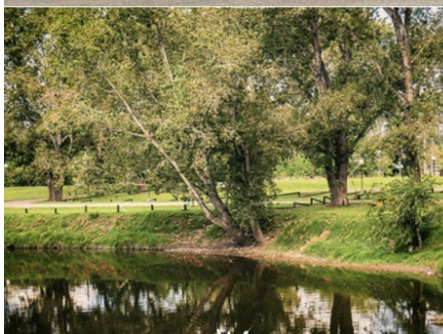
Source: Mario Coscarello

3.2.2 Paraje La Boca- Alto Verde: Island of Open Doors

Paraje La Boca is a neighbourhood in the La Costa district of Santa Fe, in the insular area of the Paraná River alluvial valley, known as the Micro Insular Region (MRI). In this area, the community tourism project "LA BOCA: isla a puertas abiertas" (name of the tourist itinerary that retraces the daily life and identity places of the area) was launched. Since 2022, a group of seven citizens has formed the pre-cooperative community tourism group, in the role of permanent promoters of the experience. This is a community and sustainable tourism programme. The aim is for the inhabitants of Upper Verde to take ownership of their territory and manage it themselves to welcome visitors, based on the area's potential: the coastal idiosyncrasy, the river, the fishing and a history that goes back more than a century, when the first settlers arrived in the area. The place is inhabited by working families who have a strong sense of rootedness to the land and to that island memory.

The area presents a difficult territorial context. The districts of the La Costa district of Santa Fe, in particular, constitute a complex and vulnerable territory, the result of a sustained and spontaneous process of land occupation in the alluvial valley of the Paraná river. There is an under-utilisation of a natural heritage (representative of the eco-region of the delta and the islands of the Paraná) and a unique cultural heritage (linked to the insular culture and the role of the port for the settlement) that is under severe pressure and in the process of degradation. Infrastructure and public services are lacking and inadequate for the area's needs. There are few endogenous job opportunities (forcing long commutes to the city centre). There is little local production related to fishing, hunting, beekeeping, etc., which is underdeveloped; disorganised and extractive tourism activities; failure to take advantage of incipient community tourism initiatives; lack of coordination between neighbours and actions by public bodies and groups; weak associative capacity; lack of a development strategy appropriate to the coastal district of the city of Santa Fe.

In this context, a group of seven young people from the area started the inter-institutional and social network Alto Verde as early as 2006, in order to try to tackle territorial problems. Since 2011, through several projects, they have been working with various actors (public and private) to identify the problems mentioned at municipal level. In addition, a series of state, municipal and provincial interventions, the action of non-governmental organisations and university groups have contributed in a more or less coordinated manner. Indeed, in recent years, together with the team of the National University of Litoral, they have been promoting weekly coordination meetings, designing the itinerary with the identification of the tourist value content of the natural and cultural heritage, the definition of the local gastronomic offer adapted to the products available in the different seasons of the year, the use of recyclable materials, the design and elaboration of graphic material for communication and giveaways for visitors, the preparation and cleaning of paths and grounds, the invitation to neighbours who wish to join the role of possible guests on the day of the event to offer their products, communication and organisation of the event.

From the point of view of social and cultural rights, the objective is to promote good practices of conservation, consumption and responsible production associated with island lifestyles in the territory of the Santa Fe River, enhancing the natural and cultural heritage and consolidating productive proposals based on solidarity and self-management. With the collaboration of the research group of the National University of Litoral, the territorial planning activities are constantly evolving.

Figure 4 – *Paraje La Boca- Alto Verde: Island of Open Doors*

Source: Mario Coscarello

## 3.3 Community models of local tourism development in Italy and Argentina

Through the analysis of the four case studies, a number of factors that can contribute to the enhancement of communities and the territory were identified. In particular, the following were considered: the actors; the empowerment process; and territorial capital.

Local actors can be divided into three categories: (i) *institutional actors* exercising the public or collective interest (municipalities, universities); (ii) *economic actors* pursuing private interests, which are constituted by the various business sectors; and (iii) *social and cultural actors* that are somewhere in between the previous categories (Spillare, 2019). The involvement of the local community is one of the relevant aspects emerging in the experiences, as emphasised in the literature on social innovation (Moulart *et al.*, 2005).

As highlighted by Cole (2006), the empowerment processes**,** that can be activated, are various: *economic* empowerment (improvement of economic conditions/job creation); *psychological* empowerment (improvement of self-esteem, pride and sense of belonging); *social* empowerment (development of positive social capital/improvement of networks of relationships) and *political* empowerment (balancing disproportions in positions of power/recovery of a disadvantage of position vis-à-vis other subjects). In this sense, it is possible to contribute to the construction of "communities of practice" according to the *social learning system* literature (Wenger, 2000, 2011; Pastore, *et al.*, 2015). These processes could be relevant for the development of a participatory tourism plan and for forms of capacitation and training.

Finally, territorial capital, which is characterised by the multiplicity of multidimensional resources present in the territory. In this paper, a framework for interpreting territorial capital is proposed, based on Dezio's (2020) model of rural territorial capital. Thus, territorial capital is composed of cultural capital, natural capital, human capital (social and individual), and economic capital. Figure 5 below shows a proposal of a possible community model of tourism development.

Figure 5 - *Elements contributing to the creation of community models of local tourism development*
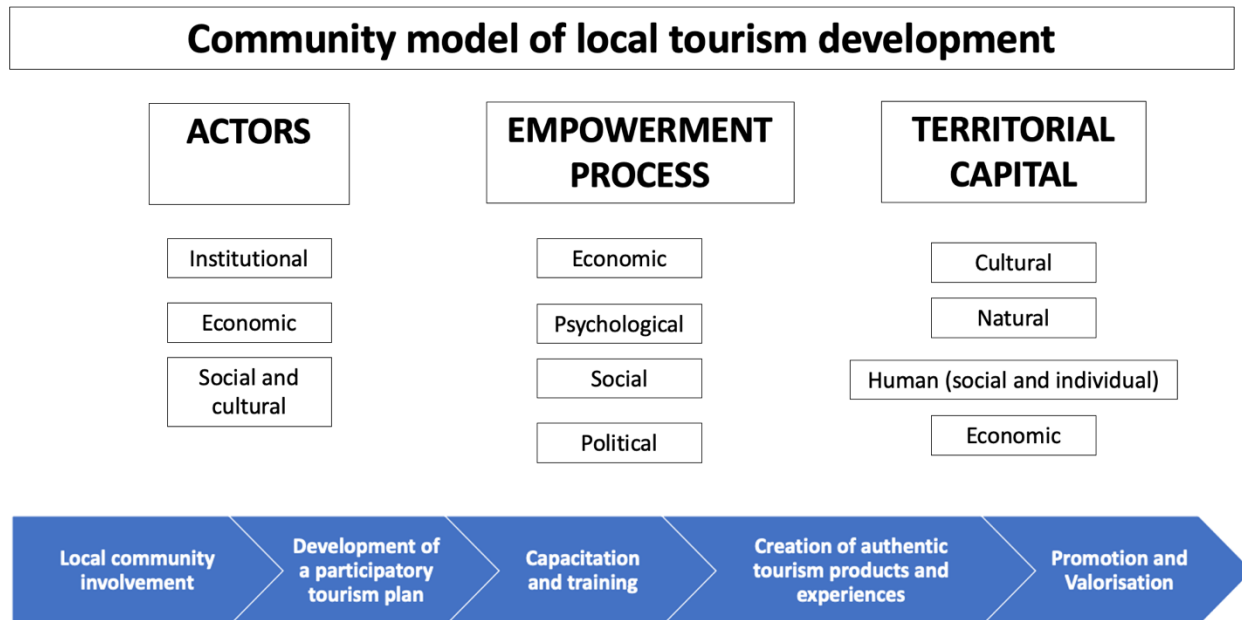
Source: our elaborations

The determinants identified in the model are in line with some fundamental dimensions of social innovation that Moulart *et al.* (2013) had already identified. In particular, (i) *the fulfilment of unmet human needs*, either by the market or the state; (ii) *a change in social relations,* with particular reference to participatory governance; and (iii) the added value of increased *socio-political capacities (empowerment* processes*).* In this sense, it seems possible that the research could contribute to the analytical reflection on the potential offered by tourism and social innovation in terms of local development, a topic not yet extensively addressed in the literature (Spillare, Moralli, 2019).

Local actors play a fundamental role in the creation of community models of local tourism development. In Argentina, the experience stems from a group of young people who want to stay in the area and create job opportunities by forming a cooperative and reactivating the Hotel Cooperativo in Tapalqué. It is therefore an informal group that becomes an *economic actor*. Driven by that strong personal motivation and attachment to place (Arace, 2007; Hummon, 1992), the young people of the cooperative who decide to take over the management of the hotel, initiate a collaborative approach with the *institutional actors of* the place. Firstly, with the municipal administrators for the creation of a protocol for the management of the facility. In addition, a collaboration was established with the group of researchers of the University of Quilmes' Social Incubation Programme. With the university, training opportunities were created on the specific management of a hotel and the establishment of the cooperative.

In the case of La Boca, the resident population carried out initiatives to enhance the territory and create job opportunities. In this case, these are *social and cultural actors*, who set up collaboration paths with a research group of the National University of Litoral, then *institutional actors.* Collaboration in this case focuses on territorial design activities.

Even in Italy, there is a sense of belonging and attachment to places that seems to be the engine that allows the experience to develop over time. In the case of Jacurso, the project stems from an anthropologist, who first emigrated and then returned to Calabria, and whose goal is to involve the entire community. A *social and cultural actor,* therefore, whose aim is to involve other actors in the area. In this case, many difficulties emerge in the active involvement of *institutional actors*. In the other Italian case, the Casabona Museum, the local project is initiated by the municipal administration. In this case*,* therefore, an *institutional actor* is the promoter of a broader project. Among the actors involved is a research group from the University of Calabria, which contributes in the planning phases in the area.

The actors of the experiences investigated in Italy and Argentina are, therefore, strongly linked to the local contexts in which they live. The original and concrete aspect of these experiences is that the path initiated by different actors includes the involvement and participation of other local stakeholders (institutional, economic, social and cultural actors). In this way, programmes can be designed, partnerships formed, and strategies defined (e.g., a participatory tourism plan), which can contribute to the enhancement of marginal territories. The reconstruction of the start-up phases of the case studies identified indicate the extent to which each experience can be defined as place-based, i.e. "focused on individuals who are aware that their well-being and the effectiveness of any intervention depends on where they live" (Angelini, Bruno, 2016, p. 37).

The process through which local actors act seems relevant in contributing to the enhancement of the territory and, therefore, of the networking of territorial capital (Mela, 2016). In this sense, the process of empowerment (Cole, 2006) that can be activated in a local territory becomes relevant. Indeed, collaboration between the various local actors can contribute to creating innovative social processes (Moulart *et al.*, 2013) and opportunities for building a community of practices (Pastore *et al.*, 2015).

In Argentina, in the case of the Hotel Cooperativo of Tapalqué, the collaboration with the Social Incubation University Programme of the National University of Quilmes, which guided the design process, in a participatory research-action perspective, is relevant (Azeglio *et al.*, 2018). This also triggered collaboration with the municipal administration, but also with other community tourism experiences that are a reference for young people. The capacitation process that led to the establishment of a cooperative to manage the activities was significant. Moreover, in the case of La Boca, the collaboration with a group of researchers from the Universidad Nacional del Litoral seems to strengthen the activities initiated. The collaborations generated favoured the constitution of a network of relations, thus, *social* and *economic empowerment,* but also the capacity to create positive *psychological* and *political empowerment* (Cole, 2006).

In Italy, in the case of the Community Museum of Casabona, the collaborations set up with a research group at the University of Calabria are important for the creation of *psychological* and *social empowerment*. In the Calabrian case, even though the idea started from the municipality, an attempt is made to build a cooperative, but equally competitive path (Mela, 2016). In the case of Jacurso to live and learn, the collaboration of the local population (*social and cultural actors*) is relevant, but the scarce involvement of public institutional actors makes the management of the project difficult. Therefore, the network of actors involved appears weak.

In the general strategy of the community experiences identified, the logic of creating a variety of supply and services seems to prevail. In this way, the necessary conditions can be created for the activities to really constitute a path of sustainable local development, thanks to the network of relations with other actors (administrators, academics).

In the Italian cases, the interviewees pointed out that the greatest difficulties lie in the low propensity of other (institutional and private) actors to collaborate. Collaboration between economic and institutional actors (Universities in particular) seems to be the main explanation for the creation of *political empowerment* processes, capable of helping to balance the power relations that are also triggered in local contexts, as other studies show (Azeglio *et al.*, 2018). In fact, collaboration with

universities seems to help trigger a broader and more complex project vision, which generates activities more aimed at building a local community model (Pastore *et al.*, 2015).

Table 1 illustrates the degree of participation of the actors involved in the analysed case studies and the level of *empowerment* activated.

Table 1 - Case studies: summary diagram of actors' degree of participation and level of empowerment activated

Case studies	Actors			Empowerment process			
	Institutional	Economic	Social and cultural	Economic	Psychological	Social	Political
Jacurso to live and learn (Italy)	/	+	+++	+	++	+	+
Casabona Community Museum (Italy)	+++	+	+++	/	++	+++	++
Tapalqué Cooperativo Hotels (Argentina)	++	+++	+	++	+	++	++
Paraje La Boca-Alto Verde (Argentina)	++	+	+++	+	/	++	/

Note: symbols in the table indicate 'absence' (/), 'little presence' (+), 'strong presence' (+++) or 'intermediate presence' (++) of the dimensions considered, respectively. These values must be interpreted in "relative" terms with respect to the four cases considered.

Source: our elaboration on Spillare and Moralli's model, 2019, p. 183.

The case studies presented highlight how the empowerment of local actors and the enhancement of territorial capital are closely linked. Indeed, processes involving the local community can have a significant impact on the economic and social growth of a territory, through the enhancement of territorial peculiarities, which are at the basis of the construction of tourist and experiential products.

The experiential tourist routes created in the experience of La Boca in Argentina and Jacurso in Italy have become an important reference for tourist reception. The recovery of the Hotel Tapalqué and the design of a museum become the main attractions around which to revive a local context. Nevertheless, there are several difficulties in both contexts. In Argentina, distance from large centres seems to be one of the main ones. A common positive element of the experiences investigated seems to be related to the ability to effectively communicate the activities being carried out both locally and internationally, in order to attract visitors.

These experiences adopt "place-based" approaches and aim to lay the foundations for sustainable development, oriented towards integrating social, economic, environmental aspects. In this way, it seems possible to promote welfare solutions that are representative of a wider range of legitimate stakeholders in the local area. In addition, the involvement of *stakeholders* to create a community model seems relevant, thanks to the establishment of a *Participant-Governed Networks*, as defined by Provanis and Kenis (2008), which is often characterised by *shared participant governance.* In this way*,* through mutual trust and the relationships that are created, it is possible to coordinate and manage activities in a shared way (Coscarello, 2020).

In both contexts, in fact, there seems to be traces of community as defined by Bagnasco (1999). In particular, in his work, Bagnasco explores fundamental concepts such as *identity*, *trust* and *reciprocity,* which are crucial for understanding the dynamics of modern communities, and which are

interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Indeed, shared identity promotes trust, as community members recognise themselves as part of a group with shared values and goals. Trust, in turn, facilitates reciprocity, creating a virtuous circle of cooperation and mutual support. This set of dynamics is essential for the formation of cohesive communities capable of facing the social and economic challenges of the modern world.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this work is to reflect on the actors and strategies (and/or empowerment processes) necessary for the promotion of sustainable tourism practices, with the aim of aiding the understanding of the determinants that contribute to the enhancement of inland communities in terms of tourism. In particular, the forms of collaboration (competitive and non-competitive) that are activated, the social capital needed and produced, and the presence of collaborative networks were explored. Territorial actors and *empowerment* processes were considered as determining elements for the valorisation of territorial capital (Dezio, 2020).

Attachment to place has become a very relevant social phenomenon that can foster local tourism development, as people are more inclined to value and defend the natural, cultural and historical resources of their area. The literature on local communities is regaining centrality in analyses focusing on spatial development (SUR, 2016; Bozzato, 2021; Mela *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to what has been called a new geography of theory (Roy, 2009), new interpretative categories of the territory. In this sense, as far as community studies are concerned, the case studies investigated seem particularly interesting. In fact, the work is situated with a view to understanding those "processes through which influential actors in a territory seek to bring out spatial singularities, exercising various forms of planning and catalysing in various ways non-designing forms of action" (Mela, 2016, p. 82). In this perspective, the research shows that these paths can also originate from some actors who do not have specific institutional roles and not exclusively from influential actors. The relevant aspects seem to be strong personal motivations and attachment to the place and, therefore, the ability to activate *empowerment* processes.

This contribution, moreover, aims to enrich the strand of studies, still little investigated (Spillare, Moralli, 2019; Moralli, 2019), on social innovation and tourism, in particular on the social aspects that are generated (empowerment). Through that change in social relations and forms of participatory governance, and the activation of forms of socio-political capacitation (Moulart *et al.*, 2013), as emerges from the research, it has been possible to implement experiential pathways that have created tourist flows in places that are not properly touristic, but nevertheless rich in elements typical of local communities (Savelli, 2012). It emerges, therefore, how these processes can contribute to enhancing territorial capital, therefore, the starting hypothesis of the present work seems to be confirmed.

The limitations of this work can be attributed to the few case studies investigated and to the fact that the role of tourists was not considered in this work. Therefore, future research could be extended by considering the perspective of tourists, who are in search of territorial specificities, and how they can contribute to sustaining these territorial paths. Therefore, it would be interesting to focus future research on different national and international contexts, identifying additional types of actors participating in the tourism process.

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