

Special Issue
Enhancement, Management,
and Sustainability of Tourism in Italian
Small Villages

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Ilaria Marotta

Salvatore Monaco

Marina Novelli



Editor in Chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Managing Editor: Carmine Urciuoli

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The Emergence of Lazy Tourism

Small towns constitute a significant portion of the total population in many countries. However, there has been a relative scarcity of sociological research focused on these areas, with scholars devoting more attention to the impacts of globalization and technological change on large cities and urban regions. Nevertheless, as the effects of globalization increasingly manifest in small towns, transnational grassroots movements have arisen to address the needs, challenges, and opportunities faced by these communities. Many of these movements involve partnerships and networks that connect local and international levels. They are often framed in terms of community sustainability, emphasizing livability and quality of life.

This special issue of *Fuori Luogo* situates the emergence of cross-border collaborations between small towns within the broader context of the transition from “first” to “second modernity.”

Through in-depth case studies on environmentalism, entrepreneurship, and creativity in Italy, the scholars contributing to this issue examine a topic that has captivated academics, policy-makers, and tourists worldwide. The severe experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 highlighted the risks associated with rapid, mass tourism in urban centers (McCabe, 2024).

After this period, slow tourism saw a remarkable resurgence, as travelers sought authentic experiences connecting them with nature, local culture, and the charm of small communities. The allure of these small villages, or “borghi,” lies in their picturesque landscapes, rich history, and the warm hospitality of their residents. These quaint settlements often stand in stark contrast to the fast-paced lifestyle of urban centers, allowing visitors to slow down, immerse themselves in the local way of life, and appreciate the simple pleasures that come with “lazy” living.

One of the primary attractions of this type of tourism is the opportunity to explore the stunning natural surroundings typical of these villages. From rolling hills and vineyards to breathtaking coastlines and mountains, the scenery is both diverse and captivating. Activities such as hiking, cycling, and agritourism enable visitors to engage directly with the environment, often leading to a deeper appreciation for the land and its resources (Sharpley, 2022). Many of these small villages also take pride in their local produce, offering farm-to-table dining experiences that showcase traditional recipes and seasonal ingredients.

Cultural heritage is another cornerstone of lazy tourism. Many of these “borghi” boast historic architecture, ancient traditions, and vibrant festivals celebrating local customs, as seen in several villages currently accessible in the Campania region—including Zungoli, which served as the site for the research papers upon which this special issue is based. Visitors can participate in workshops such as pottery, weaving, or cooking classes that not only impart new skills but also provide insight into the community’s heritage. These experiences foster a connection between tourists and locals, promoting cultural exchange and understanding.

Moreover, the economic impact of slow travel on these small communities can be profound. By attracting visitors, small villages can stimulate their local economies, creating jobs and supporting local artisans and innovative businesses. This influx of tourism can help preserve traditional crafts and ways of life that might otherwise be at risk of disappearing.

However, it is essential that such growth be managed sustainably to ensure that the charm and authenticity of these villages are not lost to commercialization. The main question is whether tourism can thrive under a new paradigm characterized by reduced resource consumption and a significantly lower environmental impact. This challenge has proven difficult for the tourism sector to address. Even during periods of temporary socio-economic crisis, the dominant narrative has been one of resilience and renewed growth; press releases from leading tourism institutions reflect such sentiments. Some argue that a recovery in the second decade of the 21st century is entirely achievable, given the global population of eight billion, the expanding middle class in developing economies, and a supply sector eager for commerce. However, how does this align

with the realization that oil production has peaked and that scientists worldwide predict severe negative consequences from global warming if current trends continue?

Moreover, for the majority of people living in developing countries, owning a car is not currently feasible. Regular vacations are also uncommon; only a small segment of the population has both the disposable income and the inclination to travel. Nonetheless, travel to nearby destinations or visits to friends and family has become more frequent than in previous decades. The significant rise in economic migration to urban areas in the late 20th century also led to an increase in domestic travel, largely motivated by family commitments—many stemming from economic and political displacement. Traditional holiday practices exist in various parts of Italy as well. For instance, some residents of the Campania region prefer beach vacations in nearby inland or coastal areas, reachable by ferry or bus.

Thus, before promoting mindful and moderate tourism, we need to ensure that everyone has the means—economic and otherwise—to regard travel as a time of well-being for both individuals and the places they visit. These small villages, with their unique character and rich traditions, are ideal destinations for travelers seeking a more meaningful connection with the world around them.

As more people discover the beauty of these enchanting locales, the future of “lazy tourism” looks promising—provided it is approached with care and respect for the communities that welcome us.

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Village Tourism: From Vector for Local Sustainable Development to Victim of its Own Success

In the last few decades, tourism has played a significant role in shaping economies and societies across the globe. The rapid growth of tourism arrivals has fostered the development of many destinations, bringing with it an increase in employment opportunities and the potential enhancement of cultural heritage. At the same time, when destinations carrying capacity is surpassed—often as a result of urban-centric economic policies—the negative effects of mass tourism, touristification and overtourism emerge (Milano *et al.*, 2025), as the result of the disproportionate consumption of natural resources, overcrowding, gentrification, and the folklorization and trivialization of traditions as historically denounced by Urry (1990).

The decline of tourism during the pandemic provided an opportunity for reflection among stakeholders and policymakers, offering the chance to revise and possibly reverse the trends described above. It introduced the possibility of an alternative tourism model, one that is more responsible and driven by sustainability principles (Adey *et al.*, 2021). Within this context, with the growth of proximity travel stimulated by the pandemic related ban on international travel, village tourism has been gaining further momentum. Its potential to contribute to the revitalization of rural areas (Bramwell, 2009) and small towns (Corbisiero, 2020; Monaco & Marotta, 2022) as places, often characterized by low population density and a greater abundance of cultural and natural resources, have seen increasing recognition as viable alternative tourism destinations. This trend has been also recognised through initiatives such as the UN Tourism “Best Tourism Villages” program, which seeks to reward best tourism practices in rural areas worldwide, and other place-marketing strategies aimed at attracting residents and visitors to depopulated areas. In numerous European countries, village tourism is seen as a key rural development strategy, providing economic opportunities and helping to rejuvenate communities. For instance, the “1-euro house” project, was launched in 2008 in Italy by the municipality of Salemi (in Sicily), followed by several other villages all around the Country. This initiative seeks to encourage urban dwellers to move to small towns at risk of depopulation, offering government subsidies to renovate abandoned properties. While some of these initiatives have not entirely resolved the issue of touristification, overcrowding and overtourism that continues to affect many locations, they have succeeded in revitalizing certain historical and rural villages, promoting local economic development, and improving the well-being of their communities (Delon & Graziano, 2023).

The European Union has historically supported various initiatives to promote rural tourism as part of its broader rural development policies, particularly emphasizing the importance of enhancing the attractiveness of rural regions, improving infrastructure, and increasing the competitiveness of rural economies (Maliuta *et al.*, 2022). This focus allows rural and urban villages to present themselves as potential unique alternatives to the fast-paced mainstream tourism settings that dominate the industry. One of the most compelling arguments for village tourism as a driver of sustainable local development is its ability to foster economic diversification. By attracting tourists, villages can generate income through local businesses, including accommodations, restaurants, transportation, and artisanal products. The introduction of tourism also leads to the creation of jobs in areas such as hospitality, retail, and cultural services, thus helping to mitigate some of the economic challenges faced by rural areas. These economic benefits can, in turn, contribute to the social sustainability of rural communities, fostering a sense of pride and local identity while encouraging young people to remain in or return to their home regions.

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Moreover, village tourism has the potential to incentivize the protection of natural resources, as communities recognize the social and economic value of preserving the landscapes and biodiversity that attract visitors. Tourism revenue is frequently reinvested in the restoration of historic sites, the conservation of natural areas, and the maintenance of traditional architecture, creating a positive feedback loop that benefits both the local economy and the environment. In fact, in a recent study by the European Committee of the Regions has partnered with UN Tourism² (2024) a comprehensive analysis of rural tourism and its impact on European regions is offered. The report highlights “the remarkable resilience displayed by rural tourism during and post-COVID-19. Despite global challenges, rural tourism witnessed a surge in popularity, particularly among local travelers. This resilience underscores its potential as a robust economic driver and showcases its ability to adapt to changing circumstances”. The potential of rural tourism to drive economic diversification and job creation in rural areas is once again identified as underscoring tourism’s contribution to preserving cultural heritage. “Rural tourism is seen as a bridge between tradition and modernity, fostering community participation and sustaining local services while preserving the unique identity of rural regions.” The study also identifies “the challenges faced by rural areas, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and declining local populations. Simultaneously, it recognizes these challenges as opportunities for growth.”

Some of the challenges identified for rural areas are common to urban settings and while the promotion of village tourism is often characterized by a strong emphasis on local culture and a slower pace of life, its promotion is associated with its ability as a catalyst and vector for local sustainable development. Several European governments have recognized the importance of addressing the specific needs of rural and inner urban areas through initiatives like the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), that is part of the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) program, which was launched as a response to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic (Mileva & Lyutova, 2023). It is important to clarify that the development of village tourism does not come without risks and the potential to become a victim of its own success. Over-reliance on tourism as a primary engine of economic growth can result in significant social, environmental, and infrastructural challenges, which may ultimately undermine the essence of the intended sustainable development interventions. In particular, the capital accumulation practices typical of urbanized tourist destinations, combined with rapid or top-down territorial transformations, may pose a threat to the ecological and social balance of rural communities (Barbera *et al.*, 2022). For instance, the increased pressure on local infrastructure and services can compromise the quality of life for residents. As noted by Milano *et al.* (2025), in many popular destinations, the rapid expansion of tourism has placed an enormous strain on local resources, including transportation networks, waste management systems, and public services. Villages have often struggled to accommodate the influx of visitors, leading to overcrowding, heightened pollution, and the degradation of natural resources. This situation is especially problematic in regions with fragile ecosystems, such as mountain and coastal areas, where the unchecked growth of tourism can result in soil erosion, water contamination, and loss of biodiversity. Furthermore, the commercialization of local culture and traditions can diminish the authenticity that attracted visitors in the first place. What once may have been a vibrant local custom can be reduced to a mere spectacle designed to cater to the tastes of visitors. As a result, cultural expressions are diluted, and the unique identity of communities risks being lost in the process. Moreover, the growth of tourism can lead to a significant increase in the cost of goods and services, making it difficult for locals to continue living in their own communities. As house prices rise, often driven by the demand for second homes or short-term rentals, many long-term residents may be forced to relocate, contributing to further depopulation.

In light of these challenges, village tourism can only be a sustainable development tool if accompanied by inclusive policies that encourage integrated value chain development and stake-

2 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/european-committee-regions-and-un-tourism-break-new-ground-study-rural-tourism-and-development> (2024)

holders' collaborations, protect common goods, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and promote gender balanced and decent work ecosystems. Such policies must seek to encourage socio-ecological transition from traditional economies into sustainable tourism, that minimizes the exploitation of resources, prevent the abandonment of primary activities such as agriculture, fishing, traditional trade and crafts, and benefits residents equitably, while safeguarding the region's long-term environmental and cultural sustainability (Novelli, 2024).

The idea of a "just transition" appears relevant in this context, as the world faces the need to address climate change and the socio-economic inequalities that accompany it (Rastegar, 2022). A just transition in village tourism involves ensuring that local communities, especially those that have been historically marginalized or disadvantaged, are not left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. This means ensuring that local people have access to the economic opportunities generated by tourism, but also that their rights and way of life are respected. The just transition framework emphasizes fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability, all of which are essential for ensuring that tourism can continue to serve as a means of development without compromising the social and environmental integrity of rural areas (Monaco, 2024).

Given these complexities, the future of village tourism depends on the ability of local communities, policymakers, and the tourism industry to find ways to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the need to preserve the unique characteristics of rural areas.

This special issue aims to critically analyze the dual nature of village tourism, examining both its positive contributions to rural development and the potential risks it poses when not managed responsibly. It delves into the various dimensions of village tourism, including its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts, and offers insights into the strategies that can be employed to mitigate the negative consequences of its rapid growth. Through this collection of papers, the issue seeks to highlight the ways in which small communities navigate the balance between embracing tourism as a development vehicle and protecting the distinctive qualities that make them desirable destinations.

One key theme across the contributions is the necessity for sustainable tourism practices that respect and enhance local cultures while minimizing the adverse impacts associated with mass tourism. Mario Coscarello and Antonella Perri's paper underscores the importance of niche tourism as a tool for fostering sustainable development in inland communities. Through case studies from Italy and Argentina, the authors show how tourism, when locally driven, can empower communities and leverage territorial capital to create authentic and sustainable tourism experiences. Their research emphasizes the need for local actors to be directly involved in tourism planning and decision-making processes, ensuring that the development of tourism is aligned with the community's values, priorities, and capacities. The authors underline that tourism, by focusing on smaller-scale, experiences, can contribute significantly to the economic and social well-being of local populations, as long as it is approached in a way that values the community's input and strengthens local identity.

In a similar vein, the paper by Mariaclaudia Cusumano and Marco Ingrassia takes a critical look at the impacts of UNESCO World Heritage designation on small tourism destinations. Their study focuses on the Aeolian Islands, an UNESCO site, and analyzes how the islands' growing popularity among international tourists has led to increased anthropogenic pressures, such as overuse of natural resources, environmental degradation, and social disruption. The authors argue that, while the UNESCO recognition has brought global visibility and tourism to the islands, it has also introduced the risk of overtourism, which threatens to undermine the very aspects that make these islands special—its cultural and natural heritage. The paper critiques the inadequacy of current management plans and calls for more robust strategies that ensure sustainable tourism, particularly in fragile environments. The authors emphasize the importance of implementing effective local governance mechanisms that include both public and private stakeholders, and stress that the preservation of the islands' cultural and natural resources must be integrated into all tourism planning efforts.

Paola de Salvo and Marco Pizzi bring a unique perspective to the discussion of sustainable tourism in rural areas with their exploration of “Non-tourism,” a project designed to reconnect local residents with visitors in a way that fosters mutual respect and cultural exchange. Their case study of Ussita, a small village in the Marche region devastated by earthquakes in 2016 and 2017, illustrates how tourism can be reframed as a tool for community empowerment and identity renewal. The “Non-tourism” project encourages visitors to engage with the community in ways that are not based on traditional tourist activities but instead focus on the local culture, heritage, and way of life. The authors argue that this approach counters the typical touristification of rural areas, which often leads to the displacement of local residents and the erosion of cultural identity. By promoting a more collaborative and participatory form of tourism, “non-tourism” offers a promising model for rural revitalization, one that balances economic growth with cultural sustainability and social cohesion.

Similarly, Fiammetta Fanizza and Fiorella Spallone’s paper examines the role of Italy’s NRRP and its impact on small rural communities through the “Bando Borghi,” a program designed to revitalize Italy’s historic villages. Their research, focusing on four villages in Puglia, highlights how the initiative has provided a unique opportunity to address the challenges faced by rural communities, including depopulation, economic stagnation, and environmental degradation. The authors argue that the success of these regeneration projects depends not only on financial investment but also on the capacity of local communities to engage with the planning process. By emphasizing the need for community-driven approaches to regeneration, Fanizza and Spallone call for a shift in focus from simple demographic growth to the creation of sustainable communities that can thrive in the long term. They suggest that the regeneration of these villages should be approached as a holistic process, integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, with a strong emphasis on local identity, cultural heritage, and social innovation.

Giovanni Tocci’s contribution adds another layer of insight into the topic of rural regeneration, particularly in the context of the NRRP. His paper focuses on the post-COVID era, in which the demand for tourism in small villages has increased as people seek less crowded, more nature-oriented experiences. Tocci’s study identifies the specific challenges and opportunities of this new demand, particularly in the context of Italy’s southern and central regions, where many villages are at risk of depopulation and economic decline. Through his analysis of selected case studies, Tocci argues that the success of these regeneration efforts depends on the ability to integrate sustainability into the core of development projects, ensuring that tourism does not simply become a tool for economic growth but also contributes to the long-term resilience of rural communities. He stresses that the regeneration of small villages is framed not as a return to a nostalgic past but as an opportunity to build a more sustainable and resilient future.

The importance of integrating digital tools into rural tourism development is explored in the paper by Michaela Colangelo and Rita Salvatore, who investigate Airbnb’s Gastro-Experiences platform and its role in promoting rural tourism in Italy. Their research focuses on how this platform facilitates the promotion of local gastronomic traditions and creates new opportunities for rural communities to engage with global markets. Although Airbnb’s digital platform offers significant potential for the visibility and economic growth of rural tourism businesses, there are several challenges associated with this model, including the risk of rural gentrification and the need for improved digital infrastructure. For these reasons, the authors argue that Airbnb’s expansion into rural areas must be accompanied by a commitment to sustainability and social equity. They call for more collaboration between Airbnb, local stakeholders, and public institutions to ensure that these tourism models do not exacerbate existing inequalities or disrupt local ways of life but instead contribute to the long-term well-being of rural communities.

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Community Models of Local Tourism Development²

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 areas 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.

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1. Theoretical framework

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, 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

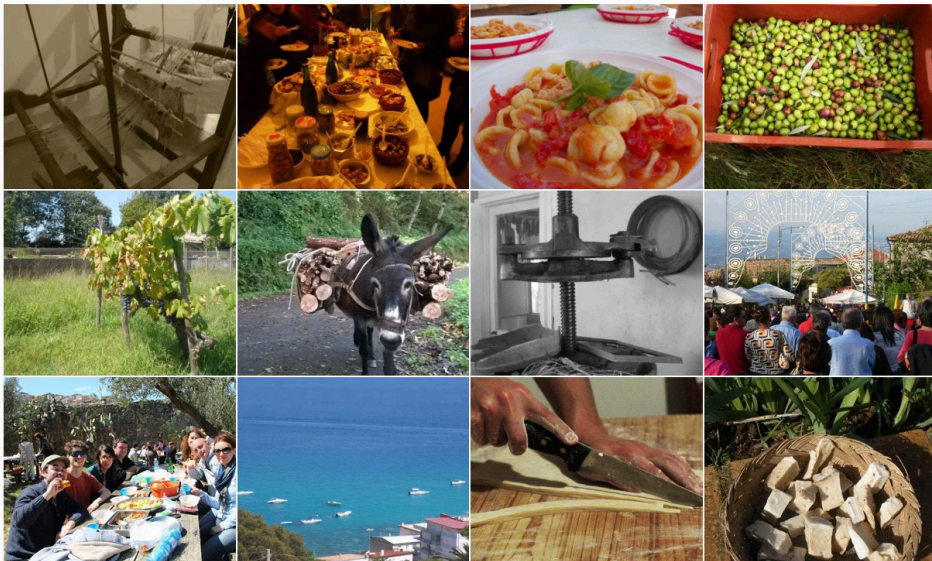
3.1.1 The Case Study: Jacurso to Live and Learn

“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 Group³, 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/attivit -dinteresse-turistico/>

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,

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.

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 areas 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 teacher’s 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 areas 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

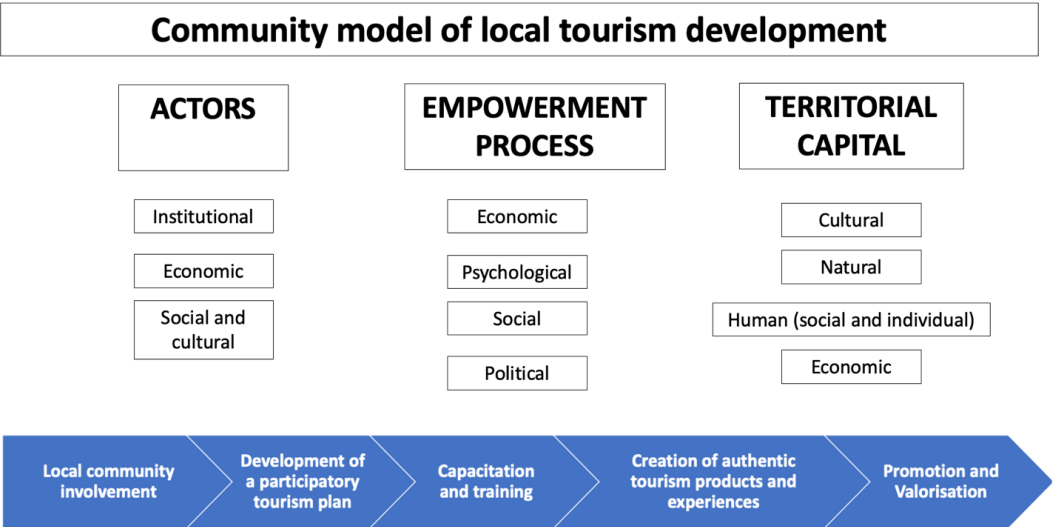
Through the analysis of the four case studies, a number of factors that can contribute to the enhancement of communities and the territory were identified. In particular, the following were considered: the actors; the empowerment process; and territorial capital.

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 Dezios (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 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: Elaboration of the authors

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 activated⁴

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

Source: Elaboration of the authors on Spillare and Morallis 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

4 Symbols in the table indicate absence (/), little presence (+), strong presence (+++) or ‘ntermediate presence (++) of the dimensions considered, respectively. These values must be interpreted in “relative” terms with respect to the four cases considered.

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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The UNESCO Heritage of the Aeolian Islands (Italy) Tourism, Sustainable Development and Territorial Management²

Introduction

Since 1950, tourism has increased all over the World. Europe is the mainland that has the most considerable increase. Tourism remains the most significant worldwide tourism market, taking 41% of international tourism receipts, with growth concentrated mainly in Southern and Mediterranean Europe, including Southeast Europe (OECD, 2016), which is the most visited area of the European Mainland. This importance is due to several factors, among them the diversification of the tourism destination. First, the prominent Cultural Heritage, a legacy that traces back to the Phoenician and Greek colonization, comprises several cultural sites recognized by UNESCO for their prominent value. Secondly, the Mediterranean area is attractive thanks to the gastronomy culture, which is recognized as Healthy and tasty; example of this cooking are the *Nouvelle cousin* and the *Mediterranean Diet* (Lo Verde *et al.*, 2023). Third, The Mediterranean area is a geographical area that is (and was) a crossroads of many cultures and societies due to a favorable bioclimate. In the past, coastal areas were attractive for settling the population, and currently, they are attractive to tourists worldwide. Its 38.000 Km of cost is ideal for tourist destinations as vacations (Lo Verde *et al.*, 2023, p.115). Touristic flows and consumption in some coastal cities in Southern Italy from 2009 to 2019 increased thanks to the ability of the *coastal landscape* to be attractive to tourist (Colloca, Lipari, 2022). Fourth, the intersection of the African and Eurasian plates occurred in the Mediterranean area, allowing high concentration of biodiversity; the geological history is characterized by *volcanic, clayey-marly, evaporitic, sandstone-clayey-calcareous, carbonate, phyllitic*, and shale-crystalline elements (Basilone, 2018). It is possible to find all those four elements in the Aeolian Islands on the Northeastern coast of Sicily in the province of Messina, Italy.

This contribution aims to investigate how UNESCO branding has impacted the Archipelago by paying attention to the strengths and weaknesses of tourism in the Aeolians islands. This controversial phenomenon risks the sustainability of fragile territorial ecosystems and raises community concerns. The contribution aims to offer a systemic perspective of tourism on Aeolians Island by showing how both over-tourism and lack of adequate and measured management can impact the environment in the local community by tampering with the precarious eco and social system of the villages. This contribution aims to raise attention towards the tourism capacity in small towns or places with limited anthropic pressure to anticipate phenomena such as the city of Venice (Italy), where city dwellers are moving to the nearest cities (Mestre). This change resulted from the fact that Venice has become a mass tourist destination that fails to ensure proper living for the residents; on the contrary, the limited capacity due to competition for the allocating resources caused Venetian to move away. In the case of Aeolians island, this would mean the depopulation of the village in favor of Capo d'Orlando and Messina city; in other words, this would means address the prominent value of the Archipelago only for mass tourism instead of its cultural, scientific, and environmental value.

On the one hand, the visibility of tourism correlates to the growth of the local economy as the creation of jobs; on the other hand, mass tourism can contribute to conflicts between visitors/tourists and residents/locals, depopulation of the villages, mostly for new generations due to precarious working conditions." (Cristiano, Gonella, 2020).

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Moreover, *overtourism* can threaten the physical nature of the places and monuments, and their integrity, as well as the environment; the lack of proper communication and insufficient plans to manage tourism may lead to a deterioration of the environment. The crowd of tourists in the streets and squares may cause conflict between residents and tourists due to the limited space, as the price is in specific markets such as food or renting (Responsible Tourism, 2020).

Additional risk impacts on the environment in terms of air pollution, scarcity of water and land cover.

The Croatian Heritage is threatened by cruise ships, their enormous capacity causes long queues at attractions, large crowds of tourists, noise, and a lack of services for residents (De Villa, Šulc, 2021). In Florence, UNESCO Heritage residents are implementing survival strategies in their daily lives to defend against invasiveness by avoiding 72 streets in the center of Florence. A phenomenon that changes the perception of the space as an overlap of two populations-tourists and residents (Del Bianco, Montedoro, 2023).

The contribution is structured through the following research questions:

(i) What are the main factors that are contributing to the visibility of the Aeolian islands and their identification as a tourist destination? Has the inscription in the WHL represented a pull factor favoring an increase or a typological variation of tourist flows?

(ii) Has the inscription in the WHL favor adequate management of the Aeolians Islands as a strategy to preserve the Outstanding Natural value?

(iii) Has the inscription in the WHL contributed to promoting Sustainable Development for the Socio-economic and Territorial system at the local level, as prescribed by the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals of the UN?

The methodology employed in this study involves a multifaceted approach. Firstly, it analyzes various factors contributing to the visibility of the Aeolian Islands, such as the emergence of cinematography following the Second World War. This investigation aims to understand how cultural and media influences have shaped the islands' perception as a tourist destination.

Secondly, the study delves into the intricate process through which the UNESCO management plan was developed for the Aeolian Islands. This includes examining the strategies, policies, and frameworks implemented to preserve the islands' Outstanding Natural Value as recognized by the WHL. Finally, quantitative data is analyzed to assess tourist flows and patterns post-WHL inscription, examining if there has been an increase or diversification in visitor demographics.

1. The Aeolian Islands

The Aeolian archipelago is a constellation of seven inhabited islands: Lipari, Vulcano, Salina, Stromboli, Filicudi, Alicudi, and Panarea (figure 1). Those islands are fragile areas and small villages, primarily marine villages; Lipari was recently inscribed in the REIMAR³ (Registro per le identità della pesca mediterranea e dei Borghi Marinarì). Aeolian villages are focal points of a landscape and culture layered over time. In those villages, the relationships with the Sea and the land for millennia were crucial for local sustenance.

In addition to the seven villages, there are five uninhabited cays, and this archipelago has volcanic origins as a result of the geological evolution in the area. The islands are displaced in 1,216 *ha*, originating from a progressive historical shift of volcanic activity. Still, on the Island of Vulcano, the volcanic activity is part of this environmental context. This phenomenon is tangible not only due to the Eruption of the Volcanic and Seismic activity but also due to an intense Hydrothermal activity that occurred in the Southern Tyrrhenian Sea in which Aeolian islands that represented a series of low-energy eruptive events (De Astis *et al.*, 2023).

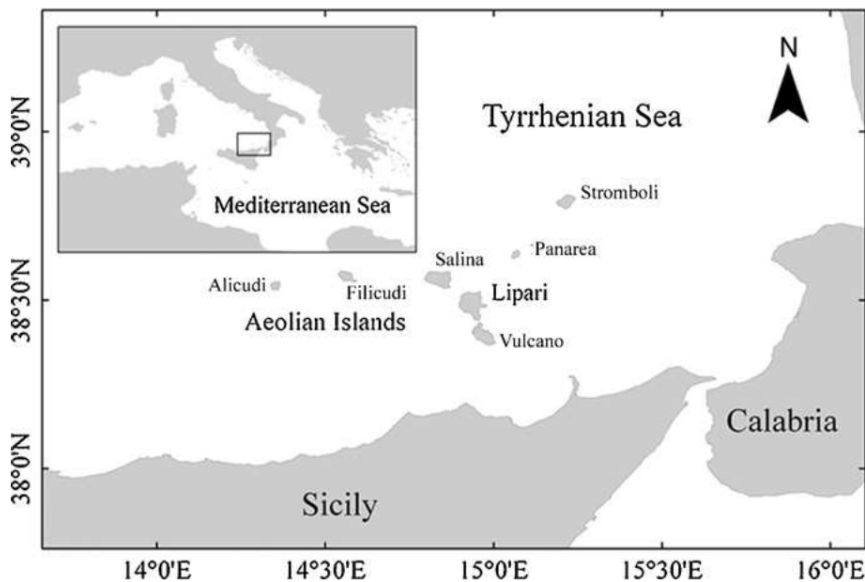
3 <https://reimar.it> (30th January 2024)

Those volcanic landforms of the site represent classic features in the continuing study of volcanology worldwide. Since the 18th Century, the islands have provided vulcanology and geology textbooks and have featured prominently in the education of all geoscientists for over 200 years. Still, the islands continue to offer a rich field for volcanological studies of ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms.

The Outstanding record of volcanic island-building was recognized in the 24th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 2000. The presence of Outstanding Heritage as a place for Research and Scientific relevance in terms of geodynamics, volcanology, nature, ecology, and landscape makes this vast territory, constituted by the National Park, an area of Outstanding Universal value. The relevance of the marine ecosystem, which comprises 5.5% of the world's marine fauna (Battaglia *et al.*, 2010), has been conducted in the proposal of the institution of the Marine Protected area for the protection of the marine environment and the prevention of harmful effects on the resources of the sea, providing for the formation, in agreement with the regions, of the general plan for the defense of the sea and the marine coasts from pollution and the protection of the marine environment (Italian Law 979/82, Art. 31). Mainly to protect pelagic fishes such as *Xiphias gladius*, *Thunnus alalunga*, cetaceans, striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba* and dolphins. Since 1982, this proposal for the institution of the marine area has still been pending with the other 16 Italian areas.

The area is characterized by a community of artisanal fishermen, who play a significant role in providing an essential source of food for the islands (Battaglia *et al.*, 2010). However, they present themselves as sea stakeholders, so they refuse the implementation of the marine area. They believe that establishing the protected area may pose an obstacle to the economic activity of fishing.

Figure 1 - Aeolian Islands



Source: Battaglia *et al.*, 2010

On the one hand, in the contemporary era, there is an increase in the city and urban areas as tourist destinations; on the other hand, there is an increase in *niche tourism markets*, such as what occurred on the Aeolian Islands. Here, we are referring to some categories of tourism that belong to a problematic sphere, which encompasses Sustainable Tourism, Slow tourism, Eco tourism, Rural tourism, and Sports Tourism (Trekking, swimming, snorkeling, sailing), which are

intertwined with emotional, experiencing (Lo Verde *et al.*, 2023) and relational tourism but also Scientific one. The intersection of Natural Heritage, Landscape, and Volcanic is an extraordinary example of reconciling humans with natural beauty.

2. Cinematography and Tourism

Tourism arose in the Aeolian islands at the beginning of the 1950s when tourism became a leisure activity in Italy; in this period, thermal tourism also started to be attractive, especially for French, Holland, and Belgian tourists.

In 1949, the volcanologist Haroun Tazieff showed "Connaissance du Monde" in France and Belgium, a movie shot on Stromboli and Vulcano islands, as a strategy to promote the islands as a destination management. At the end of the 1950s, the binomial Volcanic and Cinema became more robust thanks to two movies; the first was directed by R. Rossellini, "Stromboli, terra di Dio," while the second "Vulcano," acted by A. Magnani, both movies were presented in 1950. The film's success allowed those islands to be open to international visibility. During this period, tourists were mainly attracted by the contact with nature and local culture (Knafou, 2020) as local techniques such as Malvasia production, traditional knowledge, and handcraft, but also the value of solidarity, the usage of the square as a space of relationship and social bonds.

By 1970, the Aeolian Islands had become a thriving tourism market, leading to the construction of hotels and other tourist services. This influx of tourists significantly impacted the island's economic and social dynamics, presenting opportunities for the exploitation of local culture and environment through the tourism industry (Angelini, 2014).

In 1964, there was 31.897 presence, distributed mainly in Vulcano and Stromboli islands; during those years, prominent action was taken building construction and land cover started of the territory, while the wildness and the pristine were slowly disappearing. At the end of the 70s, 80% of tourists in Aeolians were European.

A second wave of tourism was registered during the 1990s when the archipelagos was transformed into a new cinematographic set; at the beginning was "Caro Diario" by N. Moretti in 1993, shot in Stromboli and Vulcano represented poor and underdeveloped Sicilian village and then the movie "Il Postino" of Massimo Troisi in 1994. The cinematography contributed to increasing the visibility of the *Spiaggia di Pollara* in Salina Island (and the island itself) - now the bay has basically disappeared due to coastal erosion phenomenon as well as the repeated collapse of boulders coming off the ridge above, but the bay, accessible only by sea remains one of the most suggestive landscapes of the archipelago, still attractive for boats and yacht that navigate the archipelago-.

The Aeolian culture and its landscape became the subjects of the Cinema; this contributed to provide a new identity to the Aeolian Islands, as face of the "Modern World". An example is the institution of the "Casa del Postino," which in the movie is supposed to be the house of poet Pablo Neruda. (Angelini, 2014).

In recent decades, tourism has continued to arise, mainly from April to September, but since the 1980s, some islands have tried to switch to *niche tourism*, characterized by luxury hotels and elite restaurants; this change has started to attract yachts all over the Archipelagos as a destination for privileged people due to the prominent increase of the local price registered in all sectors. On the one hand, this prominent change presented an opportunity for economic development, but on the other hand, in the islands were disappearing local culture, architecture, and local production due to tourism's impact in the Archipelago as the primary driver of (over)development. The popularity of the island has continued to increase and with that, the tourism flow has increased. Currently, islands are experiencing a concentration of tourism during the months of August when the Tourism Carrying Capacity is achieved (Long *et. al*, 2022); in other words, this

occurs when “How many is too many,” when the appropriate or acceptable tourism conditions are at risk. Overloading the Tourism Carrying Capacity impacts the well-being of the tourists (full reservation hotels, restaurants, berths in the port). Moreover, the pressure on tourist causes an impact on the marine ecosystem, on the territory, and on the hosting society. It is essential to ensure adequate management, which pays attention to Sustainable tourist flows to ensure an increase in the number of nights and presence during the low season; this can provide a unique experience to the tourist.

3. UNESCO Heritage and the Management Plan

In 2000, after the evaluation of the International Union for Conservation of Nature IUCN⁴, the UNESCO Committee inscribed the Aeolian Islands on the World Heritage List (WHL) under the natural criterion (i) in the motivation for inscription was reported:

«Criterion (i): The volcanic landforms of the site represent classic features in the continuing study of volcanology worldwide. With their scientific study from at least the 18th Century, the islands have provided two of the types of eruptions (Vulcanian and Strombolian) to volcanology and geology textbooks and so have featured prominently in the education of all geoscientists for over 200 years. They continue to provide a rich field for volcanological studies of on-going geological processes in the development of landforms».

In other words, the UNESCO Commission recognized the Outstanding Universal Value in terms of scientific knowledge developed in this geodynamic and volcanology context.

To ensure the prominent value of the Natural Heritage and its integrity, UNESCO requires the adoption of a Management Plan for each site inscribed to the WHL as a strategy to preserve the Heritage and to ensure the integrity of the property; in Italy, the Management Plan has implemented accordingly the Law N. 77/2006 which provide special measures for the protection and enjoyment of Italian sites included in the “World Heritage list,” placed under the protection of UNESCO; in Art. 3, related to the Management Plan, is reported that *«should be included the priority of intervention and the agreements between public entities institutionally responsible for the preparation of management plans»*; in other words, the Management Plan Should be a participatory process shared among all those stakeholders of the Archipelago.

- (i) Institutions (Municipalities, Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, Ispra, MASE (Area Marina Protetta), Guardia Costiera;
- (ii) Economic actors (tourism business, traditional activity-fisher community, local farmers;
- (iii) Local community.

The coordination of a strategy for Sustainable Development would have limited the impact of tourism in the Archipelago. On the other hand, the nomination in the WHL has contributed to increased international visibility; UNESCOs prestigious recognition of the serial property is a multiplication factor for tourism since the UNESCO brand acts as a “magnet for visitors” (Cusumano, 2022), The UNESCO label act as a “superstar” by exerting a magnetic role on tourists, (Panzera *et. al.*, 2021) Indeed, the UNESCO branding is well-known all over the world, it provides visibility, identity (Makno, 2011) and loyalty.

On the other hand, this visibility contributes, as previously anticipated, to increasing tourism and with so, an increase in local economics, on the other hand this attractivity can be a driver for *over tourism*, as UNESCO Brand attracts visitors indiscriminately (Moreschini *et al.*, 2016).

The UNESCO Brand in the Aeolian Islands, as small villages in fragile areas, may constitute a risk of degradation of the entire Territorial Ecosystem due to the prominent international visibility.

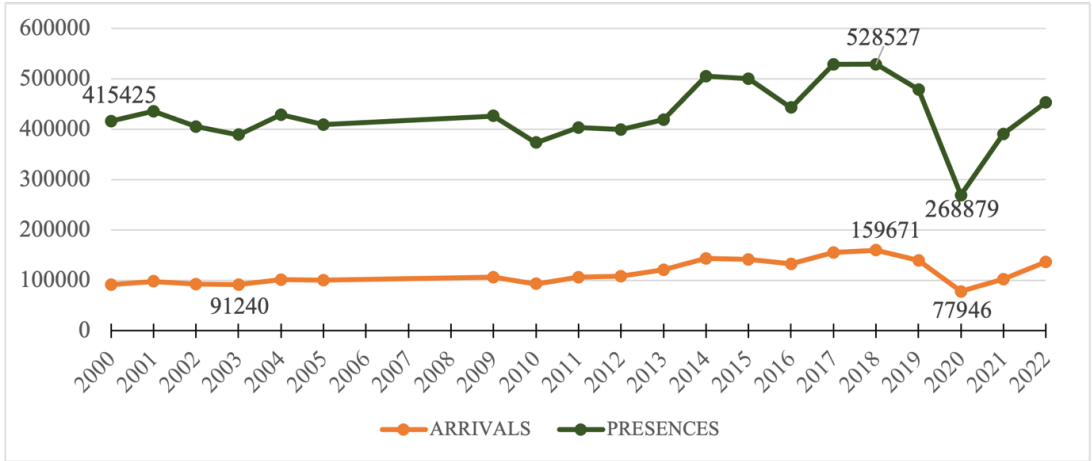
4 IUCN, 1999, Technical Evaluation Isole Eolie (Aeolian Islands) (Italy) Addendum To 1999 Iucn Evaluation <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/908/documents/>

Moreover, the fruition of the Islands is mainly concentrated during summertime, as coastal tourism, instead of a constant fruition spread during all the months of the year, may rapidly cause a collapse of the tourism system.

4. Tourist Attractiveness and UNESCO brand: data analysis

The Aeolian Islands are identified by ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) as a single statistical sample. Consequently, data on tourism encompasses islands with large population centers and numerous tourist and hotel infrastructures - such as Lipari or Volcano - and smaller islands with hospitality exclusively limited to a few private residences - such as Alicudi and Filicudi. The breadth of the statistical sample therefore does not allow for a detailed analysis of the distribution of presences and arrivals in different territories and with different tourist vocations. Nevertheless, available data is valid to analysis the variation of tourist arrivals and departures in relation to the inscription in the UNESCO WHL in 2000. Data analysis based on ISTAT⁵ shows that there are no significant variations since 2000, the year of inscription in the WHL, with an annual figure for presences (number of overnight stays) ranging from 410,000 to 430,000 units, and a figure for arrivals ranging from 90,000 to 100,000 units annually (Fig 2).

Figure 2 - Arrivals and Presences in the Aeolian Island from 2000 to 2022

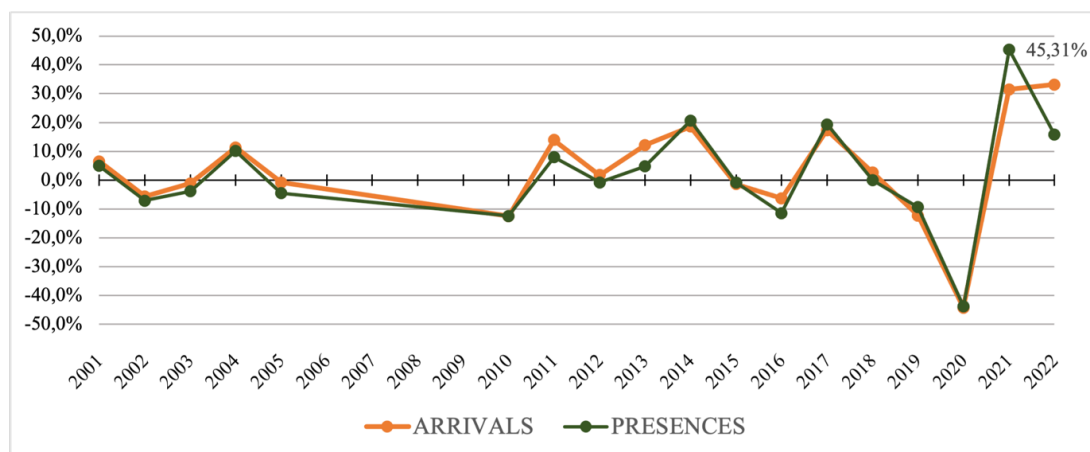


Source: Elaboration of the authors

A significant variation is instead observed starting from 2012-2013, during which there is an increase in both presences and arrivals. The analysis of the growth rate of arrivals and presences (Fig. 3) shows a coupling between the two indicators, with fluctuations ranging between +10% and -10% from 2000 to 2011, whereas from 2012 and 2019, it ranges between +20% and -10%. Therefore, the data suggests a non-linear trend, which is associated with a greater tendency towards growth starting from 2012. In both cases, the variation cannot be directly attributed to the UNESCO brand, as specific variations related to the brand’s tourist promotion have not been recorded since 2012.

5 ISTAT data: Aeolian Islands and Sicily - Arrivals and Presences
http://pti.regione.sicilia.it/portale/page/portale/PIR_PORTALE/PIR_LaStrutturaRegionale/PIR_TurismoSportSpettacolo/PIR_Turismo/PIR_Aretematiche/PIR_Linkutili/PIR_7338501.618136477

Figure 3 - Growth rates of arrivals and Presences in the AI from 2000 to 2022

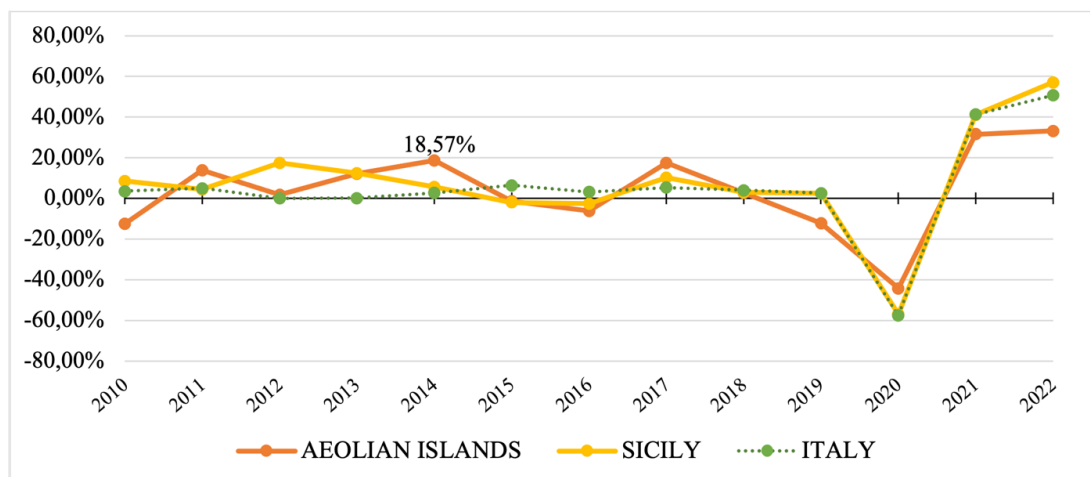


Source: Elaboration of the authors

The statistical variation after 2012 may depend on specific factors capable of increasing the attractiveness of the Aeolian Islands or on a greater attractiveness of the geographical area in which they are located, a comparison was made between the growth data of arrivals in the Aeolian Islands and other statistical samples. Figure 4 compares them with data from Sicily and Italy, while Figure 5 compares them with data both Italy and Italian coastal areas (data recorded by ISTAT⁶ up to 2017). In both cases, the analysis covers the period from 2009 to 2022.

In Figure 4, it is observed that the trend of the Aeolian Islands is almost analogous to that of Sicily, and excluding the pandemic period of 2020-2022, Sicily shows fluctuations ranging from -12% to 19%, with only three negative years. The growth rate is significantly higher than the average Italian rate, whose maximum value is 6.42% in 2015. In Figure 5, on the other hand, it is observed that the growth rate of Italian coastal areas is almost identical to that of Italy, thus falling within a range lower than that of the Aeolian Islands.

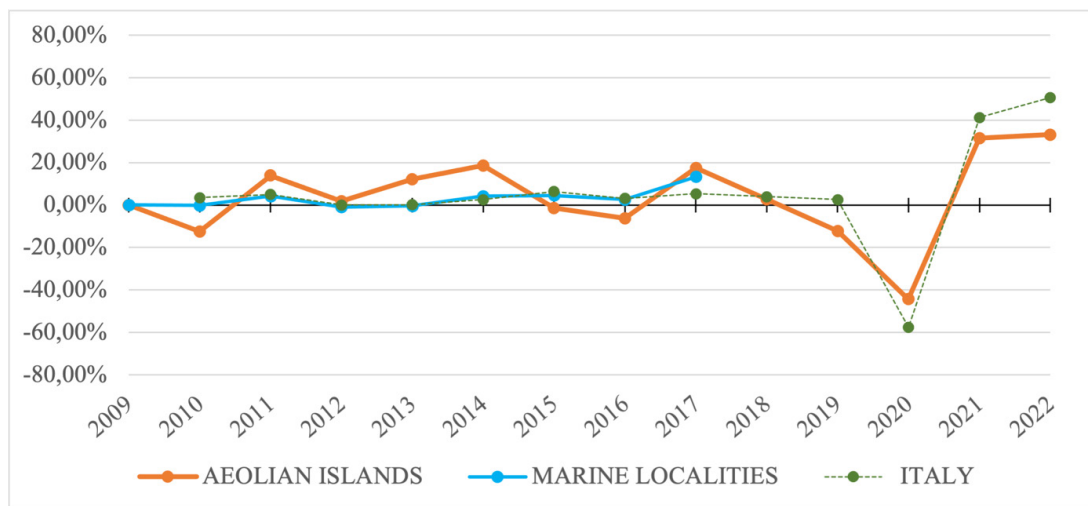
Figure 4 - Growth data of arrivals in the Aeolian Islands, Sicily and Italy



Source: Elaboration of the authors

6 ISTAT data: Italy and Maritime Localities arrivals
https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1,Z0700SER,1.0/SER_TOURISM/DCSC_TUR_OCCYEAR/IT1,122_54_DF_DCSC_TUR_10,1.0

Figure 5 - Growth data of arrivals in the Aeolian Islands, Marine localities, and Italy

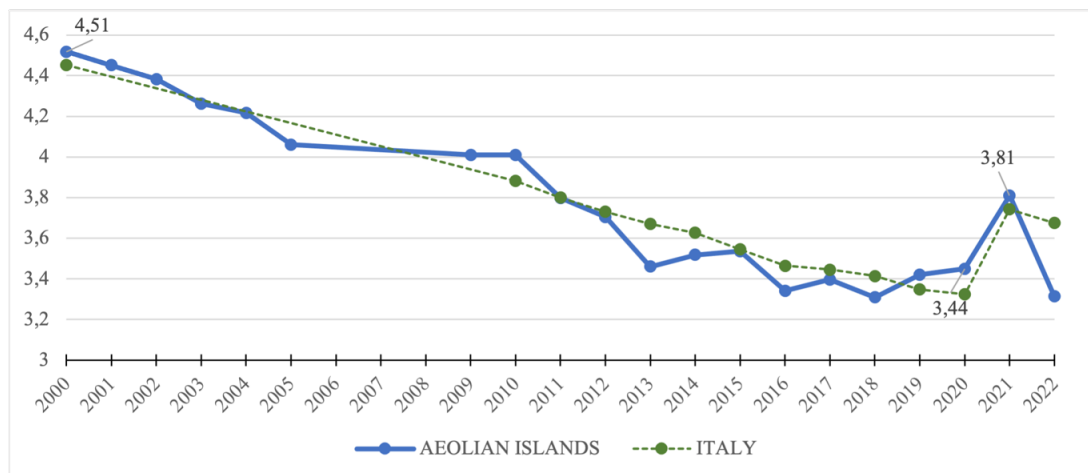


Source: Elaboration of the authors

From this comparative analysis, it is evident that the growth recorded in the Aeolian Islands starting from 2012 cannot be correlated with a greater attractiveness of the islands but rather to macro-trends occurring in the entire Sicilian region. This growth in arrivals can be attributed to the increased tourist attractiveness of the Mediterranean regions of the European Union in the decade from 2011 to 2020, and, consequently, according to some researchers, to the crises in competing tourist destinations in the Arab Mediterranean - Tunisia, Egypt, Syria - due to the upheavals triggered by the Arab Spring (Zambon, 2017).

In terms of the *quality* and *typology* of tourist flows, two factors under analysis are the average duration of stays and seasonality. Figure 6 shows how there is a progressive decrease in the average length of stay in the Aeolian Islands, similar to the trend in Italy, with a decrease from 4.51 nights in 2000 to 3.44 nights in 2019.

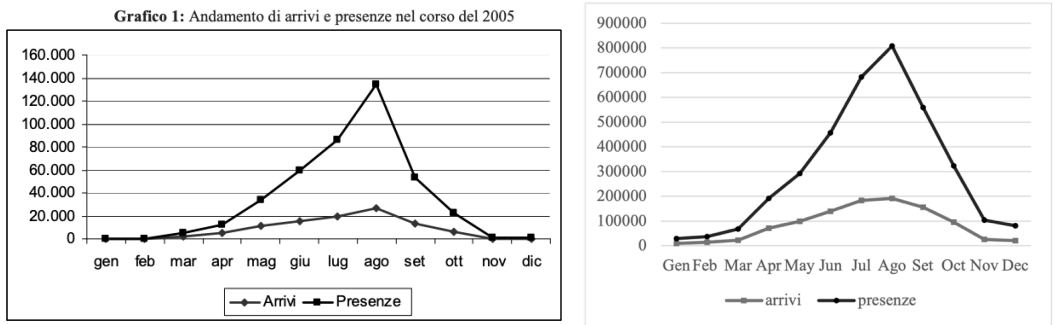
Figure 6 - Average permanence in Aeolian islands and Italy from 2000 to 2021



Source: Elaboration of the authors

On the other hand, data regarding the seasonality of tourist flows it is difficult to obtain, and it is not possible to assess the impact of the UNESCO brand on attracting tourist flows beyond the summer period. Figure 7 (left) compiled in the UNESCO Management Plan based on data from "AST⁷ Eolie" data from 2005, shows a peak in visits during the period between June and September. This is in line with the Sicilian trend, as recent data from the province of Messina in 2022 indicate (figure 7, right).

Figure 7 - Seasonality. On the left data referred to Aeolian Islands in 2005 - from UNESCO Management Plan
On the right data referred to Messina Province in 2022



Source: Elaboration of the authors on ISTAT data

5. Evaluating the role of the UNESCO Management Plan as a driver to ensure the integrity of the Heritage

Among the main phenomena of mass tourism and *overtourism* is daily tourism. This type of tourism is characterized by a generally negative impact on territorial systems, as it exerts intense anthropogenic pressure without generating income through the tourists prolonged permanence in the area - for example, staying in hotel or private residences or purchasing products and services. The condensed timeframe of visits to the islands also results in peak presence phenomena in delimited areas of the territory, predominantly in zones near the port of landing: among these are the small island villages and the beaches close to them. In recent years, the popular press has registered the dissatisfaction of residents of smaller islands, such as Panarea or Vulcano, in the face of these phenomena, highlighting the emergence of conflicts related to the islands' development model.

Similarly to what happens on the mainland, the daily tourist, mainly from Messina and Capo d'Orlando ports for a daily cruise, is drawn to rapid consumption of the main "iconic" places of the territory, often without a deep understanding of the Cultural and Environmental Heritage characteristics. UNESCO brand, therefore, represents a neutral attraction phenomenon. On the other hand, it is necessary to understand how inscription in the WHL, and the consequent presence of the Management Plan, can act as a tool for protection against excessive mass tourism flows, especially daily tourism.

The data described in the previous paragraph (tabs. 1-5) refer to the presence of tourists who stay overnight on the islands and do not include daily tourism, which occurs through landings from private or collective carriers. Regarding landings on private carriers, we refer to boats coming mainly from the Italian coasts, for which data is unavailable.

An orientation regarding data on daily tourist presence through landings from collective carriers - hydrofoils or ferries - can instead be inferred from ISTAT data⁸ (see fig.8), which, however, in-

⁷ "Azienda Soggiorno e Turismo"

⁸ ISTAT - Maritime transport: Passengers by port of embarkation and disembarkation
<http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=25765>

clude both tourists and residents. Net of residents' movements (there are approximately 15,000 inhabitants), data shows a significant number of daily tourists. A notable case is that of 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there were over 542,000 landings compared to approximately 77,000 arrivals.

Figure 8 - Landings and arrivals in the Aeolian Islands

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Port	Landings (thousands)							
Aeolian Islands	..	..	..	..	..	241	542	287
Island of Lipari	307	201	142	156	100	..	..	..
Island of Vulcano	164	134	288	189	247	..	..	..
	Arrivals (thousands)							
Aeolian Islands	143	141	132	155	159	140	77	102

Source: Elaboration of the authors on ISTAT data

As previously observed, the UNESCO Management Plan requires administrations to establish a series of restrictions capable of reducing the impact of mass tourism on territorial systems. Nevertheless, the path from the inscription in 2000 has been marked by conflicts between different development models for the archipelago: a sustainable one, and an economic growth centered one. The Management Plan was only implemented between 2008 and 2010 following a UNESCO World Heritage Centre/IUCN mission and the UNESCO decision adopted in 2007, which anticipated the possibility of the inscription of the property on the *List of World Heritage in Danger* in case the State does not take adequate measures to address the key recommendations.

In the decision, UNESCO identified three threats:

- (i) the lack of a management plan;
- (ii) excessive tourist development;
- (iii) the extraction of pumice from the quarry in Lipari.

The report expresses serious concerns about the conservation and management issues affecting the property's Outstanding Universal value and integrity due to the lack of a management pavement structure.

The prescriptions of the Management Plan, from 2010 to the present day, have in turn been largely disregarded. An example is represented by the case of the Marine Reserve, mentioned earlier, but also the lack of synergies among the different municipality of the Archipelago.

Regarding tourism in particular, the Management Plan proposed (i) the establishment of a local tourism governance system, (ii) the systematization and organization of tourism in apartments through the Integrated Relational Tourism (IRT) offer model, (iii) the systematization, organization, and control of nautical tourism in the Aeolian archipelago, and (iv) the strengthening of basic education: the establishment of a vocational institute for tourism and foreign languages with specialized technical training. Since these indications have not been respected by local administrations, the UNESCO Management Plan has not effectively served as a decisive tool in protecting against *overtourism*. Over 13 years since the extension of the Plan, a regular update - and subsequent implementation - as prescribed by UNESCO and law 77/2016, is now necessary to address new forms of emerging tourism, such as the growth of tourist apartments facilitated by digital platforms like Booking or Airbnb.

Conclusions

Italy has long shown struggle to develop coherent and lasting tourism policies and strategies on; this circumstance is linked to the lack of a strategic vision capable of linking tourism to other relevant sectors and allocating responsibilities to different levels of government (Banca d'Italia, 2018). Those difficulties have emerged in (i) the adoption of the UNESCO Management Plan (MG) and (ii) the implementation of the MG.

The inscription of the Aeolian Islands in the WHL and the other 58 UNESCO sites in Italy represents challenges and opportunities for Territorial development and the local community. Enforcing an integrated and participatory approach, as prescribed in the Management UNESCO Plan, is necessary to activate territorial synergies for promoting Sustainable Development and Sustainable Tourism to ensure the integrity of the Heritage.

The UNESCO nomination contributed to increasing the visibility of the site, but this increase is not so prominent in terms of touristic attractiveness; on the other hand, the nomination impacts mainly the local community and, on its traditions, as it increases the risk of congestion that may put in danger the authenticity of the site (Panzera *et al.*, 2021). In terms of fruition, we are assisting in slow growth in the long term. The prediction of the Sicilian flow suggests an increase in tourism flow of tourism in the Aeolian Islands continues to grow due to the unique touristic experience or immersive experience, as fragile areas and small villages with limited carrying capacity, the over-tourism will impact the Heritage, Ecosystem of small villages shortly. To avoid the risk it is necessary to make a joint effort to ensure the Sustainability of the Aeolian Islands in the light of promoting Sustainable Tourism for the community, Protecting the Ecosystem and the local community in the perspective to avoid conflict among inhabitants and tourists but also to ensure the integrity of the UNESCO Site as a privileged area for the Scientific Research on the geological and volcanological transformation of our living Planet that still occurred.

To ensure long-term and Sustainable tourism development, village dwellers should have a role in the tourism strategy as ensuring life-quality of residents. Supporting and encouraging youth aspirations to avoid depopulation, and local tradition should be preserved as the Heritage of the specific area. Moreover, strategies for supporting sustainable tourism, such as denationalization and Scientific tourism, should be encouraged to give value to the geographic Heritage. Tourism required the conceptualization of an integrated description of the tourism urban system to ensure livability in the villages and to favor tourism in the next generations. Limits of this research consisted of having analyzed partially tourist data on tourism, for instance, the lack of data related to:

- (i) marine traffic;
- (ii) difficulties in monitoring the number of boats yacht effectively.
- (iii) difficulties in calculating effectively the number of tourists in the Archipelago that spend nights on the boats and yachts;
- (iv) difficulties in tracking passengers of daily cruises, which elude the official data recorded.

Additional limits are due to the lack of reports and monitoring assessment of the area (both land and Sea) that the Archipelago should provide and update regularly. Moreover, the lack of institutional reports complicates the general framework of the Archipelagos. Furthermore, the existence of islands that belong to different municipalities, where each one has its own idea of "development" or "tourism development," does not allow for intercepting the specific needs of each island nor provide a general framework of the Impact of UNESCO in the Archipelagos.

Further research on the Aeolian Islands may be conducted to evaluate the impact of the maritime fleet and daily visitors. Additional suggestions consist in reducing the area of interest in each Island by focusing on the Island Level instead of the Archipelago to investigate, among other the perceptions of tourism and over-tourism in the Islands.

This research strategy would require close collaboration with the *Guardia Costiera* and other institutions to monitor visitors and tourism flow effectively in the Aeolian Islands to ensure the well-being of inhabitants, visitors, and UNESCO Heritage for the future.

In conclusion, UNESCO sites (but not only) should look after their attractivity to ensure the future of tourism by preserving their Environmental Heritage. Some cities, such as Venice, are experiencing limited access to the city, but the challenge is finding solutions to ensure Tourism for future generations.

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The Case-Study of “Non-Tourist” Guidebook of Ussita. A Participatory Bottom-Up Approach to Place Branding and Tourism Destination Management²

Inland Areas Between Discontinuities and Challenges for the Future. Is Tourism the Only Option for a Relaunch of Inland Areas?

In Italy, as well as in Europe, the depopulation of rural areas significantly affects the conditions and development prospects of places often defined as “fragile”. These places are commonly far from the main urban centers which offer essential services and are often left to their own devices, despite their wide extension. This kind of places covers almost 60% of the entire surface area of the Italian territory, amounting to 52% of the municipalities and 22% of the population. This is the Italy defined as “the most authentic” by the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (2020), whose main objective is to promote areas where people can reside, live in or return. In this context, the National Strategy for Inland Areas³ (hereafter SNAI) has been set up, in 2014, to develop cohesion policies and strengthen citizenship rights all over the Country. SNAI takes into consideration services as an essential premise to avoid the abandonment of small centres, which possess numerous development opportunities, although difficult to exploit due to context conditions.

The deep socioeconomic changes occurred along the entire Twentieth Century strongly impacted the balance between local culture, identity, social cohesion, and productive power within inland areas. The abandonment of these places, in fact, caused a fracture in the relations that local communities created with their environment. A fracture that many inland territories had to face between both structural problems (i.e. natural disasters and changes in productive assets) and their specific surfacing phenomena, like a slow, but constant and silent physical, functional and relational estrangement between inhabitants and the environment, which slowed down to the point of breaking the social ties established until then.

This has resulted in a slow and steady disintegration of the ties that communities have with their surroundings. The effects of this process are negative both for the social fabric and for the area itself: the community becomes less cohesive, the environment less and less cared for, social ties weaken. Local traditions and culture are lost, with tangible consequences on the territory, leading to the abandonment of structures and spaces that were previously actively utilised.

Even if degradation and abandonment lead to a severe alteration of their wealth, many inland areas continue to show signs of vitality. These signals vary in quality and stability. In some areas they are discontinuous, fragile and unstable while in others they are steadier and more established, thanks in part to the presence of a resident population that continues to live in these areas on a permanent basis.

During the centuries, the inland areas have also accumulated a widespread heritage of products, environment, landscapes, culture, and civic spirit. Although the gradual abandonment of these places is jeopardizing the existence of such resources, in many cases they can still be recovered and enhanced. They actually could be an inspiration in responding to the crisis of today's soci-

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3 In this paper, the authors will use the terms “inland”, “internal”, or “inner” areas. Such places, however, are not necessarily located in the internal parts of the Country. The Italian term, *aree interne* literally means “inner areas”, but such “internality” has to be considered a socioeconomic characteristic rather than a geographical one and represents these places’ exclusion from the global connections and traffic of people, goods, capitals, and information. SNAI defines “inland areas” as that majority part of the Italian territory characterized by significant distance from the supplying centers of essential services.

ety, which is at once economic, social, political, and ultimately also health-related. This strong point opens up the possibility of reconsidering in a positive perspective what was previously considered disadvantageous, evaluating it as a new development opportunity for these areas (Brown, Hall, 2000). Long therefore considered marginal, inland areas represent an interesting environment instead in which new opportunities for socioeconomic national development can be looked for and designed. Their actual strong constraints can be overcome through sustainable development choices, innovations in traditional activities and new strategies for their habitability. However, to return to living in marginal territories, it is necessary to assume a point of view able to put new processes at the centre and seize opportunities to reshape spaces and development cycles (Carrosio, 2019). Not only recovering and enhancing cultural resources, but also envisaging actions on socio-economic aspects, public health, employment and services is essential, too. These inhabitant-oriented interventions are indispensable to substantially regenerate these territories, acting on the factors of marginality that characterise them and rediscovering elements of centrality that have worked for centuries.

Over the past few decades, numerous practices have been activated, which have been able to enhance the potential of marginal areas thanks to the ability to know, understand, and narrate the multifaceted potential of places. These actions have primarily sought to reinsert these places into active and dynamic territorial contexts. In this way, inland areas have been progressively populated by future-oriented prospects, which, as Sabatini (2023) argues, compose a repertoire of images of regeneration. The community is often considered the protagonist in the innovation and rebirth processes of inland areas. Small, enterprising, solidarity-based and inclusive communities, in particular, have in many occasions emerged assuming such role (Euricse, 2022).

Nevertheless, during these last four decades, the inland areas relaunch is undergoing a contradiction in choosing the economic sector to bet on, which determines further issues related to the role of local communities. As a matter of fact, inland areas have been more and more frequently the subject of regeneration actions aimed at revitalising the local economy and reusing local heritage. Such place-based plans try to give new meanings to abandoned resources, on one hand, but are too often focused on tourism development, on the other. These recent policies for inland areas have mostly been aimed at commodifying their tangible and intangible cultural heritage, anchored to an elitist conception of development. Consequently, the inhabitants have often been marginalised and the resident community altogether excluded from the development design process (de Salvo, Pizzi, 2020). These territories have been affected by a steadily increasing, excessive museumization process, which represented an economic enhancement for only a few local actors. Several tourism operators had the occasion to take advantage of such situation but with infrequent benefits for places (D'Eramo, 2017).

This approach, which is the outcome of the affirmation of the heritagisation paradigm (Ciuffetti, 2019), supports and foresees forms of places regeneration policies exclusively based on tourism enhancement. The long-term adoption of this way to manage and interpret the landscape accompanied and strengthened its understanding as a mere "icon" (Ciuffetti, Vaquero, 2019) or "postcard". This highlighted how the presence of tourists does not automatically imply a places habitability enhancement. This way to conceive fragile places corresponds to excluding any care to the socioeconomic issues that determine their marginality. Moreover, it considers these territories as a mere reservoir of resources to be passively exploited, corresponding, moreover, to homologating methods that do not consider any uniqueness or specificity.

Betting on tourism as the main - if not the only - economic sector to ensure the inland areas subsistence trivialised the biodiversity of inland areas, extracting value only from what has been shallowly considered an "excellence" and neglecting the rest. This mental framework caused many political choices that, in recent years, interpreted and financed the regeneration of these territories exclusively by means of tourism.

The National Strategy for Inland Areas (SNAI) itself, at first, and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), later, considered tourism as one of the elements for activating sustainable

local development processes and reversing the depopulation trends that now structurally afflict these territories. For long years, the development of inland areas has been considered by Italian politicians and, sometimes, academics, as a necessarily tourism-driven process. Tourism, thus, has been described as Italy's "gold" or "petroleum" (Barbera *et al.*, 2022; D'Eramo, 2017; Settis, 2007) denoting the endurance of a "mining" conception of the inland areas economy. This implies framing them as mere passive deposits of environmental and cultural resources to be exploited, rather than active places that can contribute in designing their own future.

The challenge for these territories should be avoiding a tourism-centric future, then. The way to do so is engaging in deeper activities and strategies capable of filling the gaps in the social and cultural structure of these areas, providing a decent life for its residents, before the tourists (Barbera *et al.*, 2022).

While considering the risks of the tourism industry in rural settings, it is undeniable that it can have important positive effects for places. Some interesting case studies (Chen, Kong, 2021; Young, Markham, 2019; Wei, Zheng, 2023) reviewed recently outside of the Italian context, for example, show that rural tourism can have several benefits, such as: the economic returns from different subjects of tourism entrepreneurs, tourists, and lifestyle immigrants by the efforts of commodifying real estate, creative tourism experience, and nature; the expansion of employment opportunities for women, and the readjustment of the social structure of the family in the demographic structure; an increased awareness of place in protecting ancient buildings and indigenous culture.

The conversion of local resources into tourism products and their subsequent exploitation can have both positive and negative effects at the same time. The very same case-study, above mentioned, confirms also that the tourism negative impact is undeniable, including among the effects of the rural tourism industry also the gentrification and the sense of deprivation for local communities.

Under this light, therefore, there is no need to avoid or condemn the tourism development itself, which could be a good way to give value to the local resources, given certain conditions. Tourism must not become a potential agent of place-destruction, but it should try to identify new symbolic values and everyday possible uses of the territory. Symbolic values and non-material heritage is exactly what traditional place marketing and development policies usually consume and exhaust, producing commodification of places, *touristification*, and an urban-citizens and *loisir*-centred local economy. It is widely accepted by many tourism experts, nowadays, that such policy and economy trends lead to eco-gentrification, overtourism (Seraphin *et al.*, 2020), desertification, and loss of local culture and traditions (Osti *et al.*, 2019, Xu *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, the attempt should be directed at overturning visions and challenges for the inland areas future with policies in favour of accessible housing, the use and transmission of local knowledge, personal services, the strengthening of inhabitants economies, and practices oriented to the use of resources rather than their abandonment (Olori, 2021). The goal, therefore, should be to reverse the degenerative trends of these territories, activating local development processes that bring, in a virtuous way, benefits to the inhabitants and the territory. The new tourism model should be significantly linked to local communities, where tangible and intangible resources are valorised as possibilities for a unique endogenous local development. This perspective refuses the monopoly of tourism, fosters a community empowerment, allows local communities to recognise their resources as inalienable common goods and bases a constructive dimension of development. It is possible to define it as «a process of reinterpretation of the collective self, oriented to project it into a constructive dimension of development, contributing to a progressive mending of the social storyline» (Prosperi *et al.*, 2019,144).

Finally, for tourism to be able to draw a continuous and sustainable path of territorial development, communities in inland areas should integrate it into their usual sphere of daily life and involve it in strategies that primarily promote local identity. Cocco *et al.* (2020), in their field research, showed that in some inland areas social innovation processes were activated thanks

to the ability to mobilise cultural capital and build networks. In this regard, Matarazzo (2022, p. 60) argues that «tourism development should be pursued as one of the components of a broader social empowerment work, rooted within the identity physiognomy of the local community, which should be questioned and involved as the protagonist of a plural and lasting enhancement process ». Inland areas become places in which facing the upcoming socioeconomic crisis challenges is possible, and which are capable of innovating ways of living, traditions, and practices by drawing on the memories that are the "leaven of the future" (Nigro & Lupo, 2020). This is why inland areas need to be part of national and international networks of culture, participation, production and tourism. Networking could greatly reduce their isolation and overcome morphological limitations, revitalising material and immaterial resources, and giving to this place an active role in socioeconomic and territorial innovation circuits. These territories can become capable of promoting socioeconomic and cultural processes, which are at the origin of their own local development, regeneration, and innovation according to a place-based approach. This approach, moreover, is based on the idea that a proper knowledge and storytelling of places can reactivate lost connections and re-elaborate strategies for territorial management, control and governance. Furthermore, creating a places narrative based on local knowledge can reactivate the co-evolutionary relationship between human beings and the environment, preserving local identities. New paths are outlined that are significantly linked to local realities, projected towards new cultural, social, and economic dynamics, that can foster both the attractiveness of abandoned places and new permanence and stable communities.

Reversing the gaze on internal areas also means a storytelling twist. A new narrative through which the resident community tries to renew its attachment to the territory is required, giving a voice to those who are generally not considered in the development paths of inland territories. Places storytelling projects (i.e. a place marketing campaign to attract tourists) are normally decided and established far from the villages and local communities, as a result, usually, of top-down, standardised decision processes. The consequent communication products constantly demonstrate to have no real contact with local communities, their experiences, stories and peculiarities. This is the aim of the *Non-Turismo* Travelbook Project ("anti-tourism" travelbook) of Ussita. Ussita is a small inland Italian municipality of 364 inhabitants in the province of Macerata in the Marche region.

Figure 1 - *Non-Tourist Guidebook of Ussita*



Source: Ph. Organizzazione culturale Sineglossa (2024)

This paper presents the “non-tourist” guidebook of Ussita as a case study focused on the establishment of new modes of territorial storytelling. This guidebook is framed here as a placetelling technique produced by participatory pathways that enabled the representation of the heritage, landscape and knowledge in which the community identifies. The purpose of the paper is to highlight how the non-tourist guide represented a possibility for the local community to observe, value and perceive its territory, its memories and its transformations.

The project has born among the numerous activities of the Ediciclo publisher and the Sineglossa cultural association of Ancona, both of which are particularly attentive to the promotion of a conscious tourism different from the mainstream and negatively impactful way to do tourism. The project was coordinated on site by C.A.S.A⁴, a social promotion association based in Frontignano, a small village near Ussita. Furthermore, the “non-tourist” guide concept matured in a particular phase in the history of the municipality of Ussita, when the processes of depopulation and long-term decline were compounded by the trauma of the 2016 earthquake, which definitively altered the fragile social and economic equilibrium of the towns on the Apennine ridge.

The Ussita guidebook, published in 2020, is the second volume in the #NONTOURISM series, the result of a participatory journey - of about two years - with the community, including meetings, stories, comparisons and guests-in-residence who dialogued with residents about the stories of the past, the challenges of the present and visions of post-earthquake rebirth.

The article presents the guidebook as a case study that makes clear how new modes of territorial narratives are developing as the outcome of participatory pathways that allow for the representation of the heritage, landscape, and knowledge with which the inhabitants identify themselves. In addition, an attempt will be made to highlight how the non-tourist guide has enabled the local community to observe, value and perceive its territory, its memories and its transformations.

1. Narration, Territorial Identity and Tourism. The Participatory Place Branding Approach Versus the Commodification of Places.

Territory results from a dynamic co-evolution between nature and culture (Beretta, 2022; Magnaghi, 2020; Noorgard, 1994), reflecting both tangible and intangible relationships and the meanings attributed to places characteristics by the local community. It encompasses daily life elements, actions, and functions, making it a place of everyday experiences that are physical, social, cultural, relational, and affective (Mazzette, 2017). Interpreted in its material, sociocultural, and symbolic dimensions, territory is shaped through processes of territorialization that produce unique values, practices, traditions, and knowledge, giving it a distinct identity. The concept of “genius loci”, or spirit of the place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Relph, 2009; Vecco, 2020) includes both tangible resources and the emotions, experiences, and atmospheres that represent collective identity. Identity construction is increasingly shaped by stories that evoke symbols, meanings, choices, and life experiences, resulting from an open and dynamic process. As long ago as 1989, Pocock emphasised the number of narrators and languages that contribute to the process of identity formation and how this offers different possibilities for knowledge of territories and the emotions that lead back to them.

Images, representations, and narratives play a fundamental role in the process of constructing territorial identity, because they solicit and stimulate the formation of opinions about the territory itself. They are the same narratives that allow the territory to be defined in the minds of its inhabitants and that determine attachment and a sense of belonging to the community. In fact, a significant part in the construction of identity concerns the representations produced by local communities, and in this case, it becomes a process of social construction from below. Attention to the role of narrative has been growing in recent decades as a result of what some social

4 The acronym means “house,” in Italian, and means “What happens if we inhabit”.

scientists (Czarniawska, 2004; Herman *et al.*, 2010) have termed “the narrative turn,” that is the growing interest in the narratives and stories of individuals and their role in the construction of relationships between the self, the other and the community.

Before the relational aspect, however, the practices that embodied the narrative turn regarded the economic competition dynamics, first. Even when considering the connection between places storytelling and their own identities as something ancestral, we can observe an increasing trend of rational and systemic places storytelling coming forward only from the 70s (Vuignier, 2016). Not coincidentally, this is the very same period of deindustrialisation we will recall later: looking for new opportunities of economic growth, nations, regions and cities started now to face the economic crisis occurring by that time, betting on the renovation of their own image and reputation (Oguztimur, Akturan, 2016).

Despite the several positive outcomes of this strategy, which fostered the relaunch of many different cities (i.e. New York, with the logo “I♥NY”), it took some decades to consider how it was commonly resulting in homogenisation, commodification, and touristification of places. With the passing of time, many practitioners and academics started to understand the huge role that tourism was playing as an easy-access economic reserve for places (Kavaratzis, 2007), but it took a while to realise that the actual resources are the territories themselves, with their intangible heritage, and not the tourism. While the place identity was being depicted as a sort of economic asset to be exploited in the global competition (Anholt, 2007), specific guidelines for communication of rural areas were being developed already (Dinis, 2004). And even if these suggestions were not automatically implying to “sell” places as any other asset (Ashworth, Voogd, 2013) a rushed reiteration of incorrect practices was taking place.

Such trend started in big cities but has become soon an unavoidable theme of debate, entrepreneurial activities, and public policies for inland areas, too. Ussita, which started to fall into a tangible socioeconomic crisis only by the end of 80s, suffered the negative demographic impact related to the economic structural changes that were happening (i.e. abandonment, aging and tourism crisis), only a decade later than the other mountainous Italian villages. This forced Ussita to develop its own communication strategies in a different context as compared to other mountainous villages.

This timing had different implications: as first, themes like the negative tourism effects on places had become a public domain matter, when the work on the guidebook started. Secondly, the strengthened ecological thinking and the emerging of interconnections and complexity in environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural themes in the occasion of the COVID-19 pandemic, let the inhabitants of Ussita to start and develop their work with a completely different mindset comparing to other towns in a similar condition of marginality. Thirdly, it should not be forgotten that the town of Ussita has been hit by the earthquake in 2016, which was a tragic event that forged the place resilience as well. Lastly, it must be kept in mind that Ussita began to experience the typical effects of the crisis in inland areas when business communication applied to territories was already an established reality.

All these preconditions projected Ussita towards a more holistic, integrate, participative, and sustainable way to design and maintain the narrative about its own territory. From our point of view, this associates the Ussita case study more to the Participatory Place Branding approach (Lambert, 2013; Zenker, Erfgen, 2014), according to which places are often seen as “empty spaces” to which any kind of storytelling can be associated, despite their actual peculiarities (Hudak, 2019). The Participatory Place Brand approach entails the preparation of a long-term, more balanced, and deeper place communications strategy. The whole communication process, from the design phase to the implementation and maintenance phases, is designed with the participation

of the largest number of stakeholders and inhabitants possible, which offers a wider range of sustainable development opportunities also in the contradictory tourism field.

Narrative turns out to be a fundamental tool for an adequate response to the knowledge needs of territories. The inhabitants central position in places storytelling can positively affect local development policies and can change the desires and hopes of those who live in them, guiding choices. In the construction of a place's identity, citizen participation has assumed an increasingly important role in recent years, particularly those forms of participation in which the individual acts on behalf of their community. Involving local communities in identity-building processes leads, as in the case of the non-tourist guide of Ussita, to giving value and recreating a sense of community living, but above all to feeling that they are the actual authors of processes of care and valorisation of their own territory. In this way, strategies with no real links to communities, for which political decision-makers alone are responsible, are avoided in favour of actions where the experiences and needs of the territories are brought into resonance. Participatory practices play an important role in creating links between inhabitants and places. Manzo and Perkins (2006) argued that the affective and emotional ties that members of a community have to the places they hold dear can more spontaneously induce them to act for their care, enhancement, and growth, and that «an understanding of place attachments and meanings can provide lessons about what mobilizes people» (p. 347).

Territorial identity, in this case, is not disclosed, but built on the narratives, needs and expectations of local communities, through constructions and reconstructions of ideas, daily experiences and memories. Experimenting with participatory strategies for local development also means co-producing new territorial values by transversally involving citizens and all the social, economic, and cultural realities that live and operate in the various territories to activate synergies through which to practice a new approach to territorial development based on proximity and civic responsibility.

Greater political emphasis on participatory forms of place communication in rural areas is certainly desirable. In a globalised context, local places and local dimensions are above all the scale at which the priorities of international agendas, oriented towards sustainability, participation, attention to cultural emergencies, can be socially implemented. Above all, the knowledge, values, experiences, narratives, memories, and actions of people that make the territory a space of both collective meaning and shared social action can shape its material transformations (Banini, 2017). The objective is to contribute to activating stable processes of dialogue and collaboration, to bring out priorities, needs, indications and proposals, imagining and practising shared solutions for the construction of territorial identity and development policies.

According to the idea that territory is the result of a communicative and relational process (Mela *et al.*, 2024), it turns into a collective narrative that describes the identity of the community and is shaped by it. The territory is generated through a ceaseless creative narrative, a reflection of the evolving relationships that communities have with their lands. This dynamic interaction gives rise to fresh identity markers rooted in presence rather than abandonment, fostering inclusive processes where diverse viewpoints and experiences blend together, inaugurating new ways for development strategies anchored in envisioned futures and collective planning.

By narrating their stories and referring to the memory of places, communities become protagonists of their history and their present, outlining the future of their territories. The community's narrative acquires an important role in the processes of territorial development, highlighting the complexity that characterises territorial identity where meanings and symbols are defined, negotiated, reshaped and redefined.

2. Ussita, the transformations of an internal area municipality: a brief presentation

The municipality of Ussita is included in the inland area category proposed by the National Strategy for Inland Areas (SNAI) and is included as a peripheral area ⁵in the Alto Maceratese area with other sixteen municipalities.

Figure 2 - *The experience of community editing*



Source: Moira Spitoni (2024)

All the municipalities of this internal area underwent, over the years, the main processes of social, economic and cultural transformation like the other internal territories of the Apennines did. From the end of the 19th Century, indeed, a series of policies adopted by the Italian government favoured the industrialization process, making the urban context more attractive for an increasingly larger part of the Italian population, who abandoned the inland areas.

In addition, all of the inland areas considered in this study lay within the zone damaged by the 2016 earthquake. On October 26, 2016, there was a violent earthquake tremor with epicenter in Ussita that resulted in extensive structural damage. Many buildings, including houses, churches and other historic structures, were severely damaged or destroyed. Ussita's architectural heritage suffered significant losses. Much of the population was evacuated and many residents were forced to leave their homes. Essential services such as electricity, water and gas were disrupted as a result of the earthquake, further complicating the lives of residents and relief efforts.

⁵ The National Strategy for Inner Areas maps the country starting with the identification of service delivery centres, classifying the remaining municipalities into four bands: belt areas, intermediate areas, peripheral areas and ultra-peripheral areas.

The already fragile local economy was further affected. Business and tourism activities suffered severe losses due to the destruction of infrastructure and the decrease in visitors. The reconstruction process was long and complicated, requiring significant funds and resources to repair damage and rebuild infrastructure. These effects have had a lasting impact on the community of Ussita, affecting the daily lives of its residents, the tourist economy, and the future of the municipality itself.

Ussita and the nearby municipalities, therefore, recently fell in a deeper level of vulnerability, which worsened the structural marginalisation process that was already running.

Alongside growing political and cultural inattention, there has been a slow social and economic impoverishment in this territory that led over time to the appearance of what Varotto (2020) defines as monocultural economies. From the late 1970s, the process of profound economic change led to the abandonment of agriculture, woodland and pastoral economy, so that the Ussita economy turned towards tourism, but also to the hydroelectric sector, with the construction of a power plant. This attempt at change was made to respond to the general trend of abandonment of mountain territories and to rethink the socioeconomic development adopted so far. Tourism development became a solid trend, bringing wealth in the area. From the beginning of the 1980s, however, tourism began to undergo profound transformations that affected not only the tourist offer but also the needs and expectations of tourists (Corbisiero, 2022; Gemini, 2008). Ussita has not being extraneous to this and suffered a decline in the flow of tourists (Cutrini, Cerquetti, 2020).

In this phase, tourists are seeking out experiential tours, sustainable tourism practices that are not yet present or developed in the Ussita area. The perception of the territory's tourism potential was rising, putting an end to this problematic period just before the earthquake hit, not only in Ussita, but also in many other municipalities on the Marche Appennines (Cerquetti *et al.*, 2019). The seismic events had a clear influence on the future of these territories, which, however, realised how the theme of economic revitalisation could necessarily play a decisive role in post-earthquake reconstruction. In the regional planning documents, POR 2021-2027 (Regional Operational Plan) and PSR 2014-2022 (Rural Development Plan), investments are allocated in tourism programming and in the development of what are identified as the main "vocations", namely nature and landscape-culture.

In these last ten years, the areas affected by the earthquake are investing more and more in on integrated and sustainable development by leaning on their peculiar identities. Cultural and tourist operators, associations, inhabitants, and local authorities initiated social innovation processes through tourism proposals that bring together the environment, the cultural heritage and the local knowledge (Cocco *et al.*, 2020).

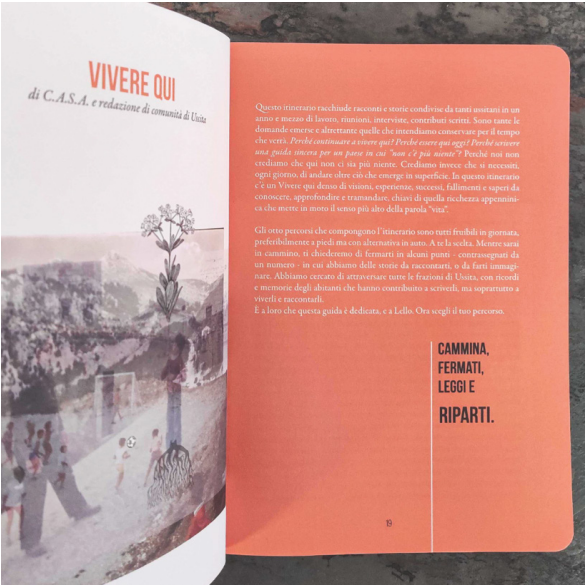
An expression of these forms of tourism is what is now being proposed by the C.A.S.A., the local association which leads the guide editing process: "a place born in the aftermath of the 2016/2017 earthquakes, open to conversations, temporary residences projects at high altitudes, networks and other kind of projects to enhance the territory. It was born from the desire to continue to be in a wounded and changing place, together with the communities of the Alto Nera and guests in residence that C.A.S.A. continuously welcomes, like artists, teachers, writers, designers, technicians, photographers, video makers, journalists, researchers, naturalists, sportsmen, walkers, students and active citizens. C.A.S.A. define itself as a "a mountain port"⁶: a crossroads of different cultures, energies, backgrounds, experiences, and languages. A space dedicated to dialogue under the banner of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. "One enters to feed himself and leaves to feed others"³.

6 From www.portodimontagna.it (last consultation 19th January 2024)

3. The Experience of the Non-Tourism Guide of Ussita

The Ussita non-tourism guide project was born as a result of the collaboration between the C.A.S.A. association and the cultural organisation Sineglossa of Ancona, within the activities of the publishing house Ediciclo.

Figure 3 - Inside the guidebook



Source: Organizzazione culturale Sineglossa (2024)

Figure 4 - Inside the guidebook



Source: Organizzazione culturale Sineglossa (2024)

The non-tourist guide of Ussita is an editorial project written by local communities through participatory paths, attempting to redefine the identity of their territory.

«A guidebook that is as mobile as the territory it narrates: from the movement of the earth shaken by the earthquake to a community on the move, guiding the traveller to discover itself through a “seismic” narrative, in which texts and images speak of old, new and imaginary at the same time»⁷.

Ussita is an area destroyed by a seismic event: such situations cause profound changes and fractures that can damage the social fabric and sense of community. In the case of Ussita, the writing process of the guide made it possible not to lose ties and orientation, rediscovering local identity through a collective narrative. The entire project has been as inclusive as possible, since it was immediately clear that excluding any inhabitants could exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities or create new ones.

Meeting the Ussita community made it possible to share and discuss what happened with the researchers and, starting from the history of individual places, to identify any possibility for the future. The non-tourist guide to Ussita was born from a community editing experience in which the narratives of the places have been shared and elaborated thanks to a series of meetings. During these assemblies, a collective memory effort has been made within a territory undergoing a strong transformation. A participatory process has been activated, involving the community in an exercise of identity self-representation and recognition of the values characterizing the place in which they live (Zaleckis *et al.*, 2023). Community drafting has enabled the community to re-acquire a heritage of common memory, attempting to outline new imaginaries for the future. Virtuous stories of women and men who have rethought the link with their territory, through a collective process that brings together environment, stories, and innovation. The procedure that led to the writing of the non-tourist guide was particularly interesting and innovative in its methods. In the non-tourist guide project, nothing is preordained, but the

«Travelbooks form and content is defined as it goes along, according to the spirit of the place. However, every guide cannot lack certain fundamental elements, which define its backbone: the *genius loci*, i.e. the historical, traditional, folkloristic, but also naturalistic elements that have contributed to creating the identity of the place; the “emergencies”, that is what appears on the surface, what is emerging, both positively and negatively; and finally, the visions, more or less utopian projections of what the territory will be like in fifty years’ time»⁸.

The main voice of the guide is the community in dialogue with writers, artists, sociologists, photographers and historians and accompanies the non-tourist on «itineraries and paths sewn on the stories of the past, the challenges of the present and visions of rebirth»⁹.

The visits of experts allowed many local cultural traits to be “emplotted” (Lambert, 2013) into a new tale enriched each time by a specific expertise. This allowed the community to structure reflections on its present and build visions and development opportunities for the future.

The very shape of the guidebook represents its originality. It does not look like a guidebook so much as a notebook, a travel diary. The guide is therefore positioned in the sphere of narratives favourable to a certain type of tourism, namely that of seeking an authentic experience with the territory. A tourism that prefers tranquillity, a slow, self-determined pace and where experientiality is configured as the outcome of the bond between tourists and inhabitants.

In this sense “non-tourism”

«Presupposes a sort of initiative from the non-tourists towards the community visited, with which they create profound interactions. It is not by chance that some parts of the guide are intentionally suspended and must be completed with experiences in the area. It is not coincidence that the guidebook says, “go there”, “ask about this or that”, “see if”»

(Member of the C.A.S.A. Association, 10 January 2024).

7 From <https://sineglossa.it/progetti/nonturismo> (last consultation 19th January 2024)

8 www.sineglossa.it/progetti/nonturismo (last consultation 9th January 2024)

9 <https://www.ediciclo.it/blog/dettaglio/nasce-una-nuova-collana-nonturismo> (last consultation 9th January 2024)

The importance of the tourist's relationship with the territory is highlighted: the tourist does not put the consumption first, but the relationship. "Non-tourism" is in fact a way of understanding the encounter between a community and those who come from outside: "non-tourists" should seek an intimate and authentic relationship with the territory. Non-tourism takes on the characteristics of slow tourism (Calzati, de Salvo, 2017; Clancy, 2017; Moscarelli, 2023; Sousa *et al.*, 2021) prompted on concerns about mass tourism development and its negative impact on local communities.

It is no coincidence that the Ussita guide predominantly supports forms of slow tourism. The narration and the enhancement of local identity promotes sustainability and conviviality and focuses on combating the loss of uniqueness of places (Woehler, 2004). Therefore, the guide values the *genius loci* and establishing relations with the local community serves to promote rhythms of life and modes of tourist consumption oriented towards a sustainable development of places. The guide embraces and proposes tourism experiences characterised by a new relationship with the use of time and space. The tourist-place relationship is no longer unidirectional (i.e. giving satisfaction only to the tourist) but becomes bidirectional when the tourist not only derives satisfaction from the consumption of the good, but simultaneously takes an active role in its protection and enhancement (Savoja, 2011).

«The non-tourist does not ask what can I do, but asks how is it going?»
(Member of C.A.S.A, 10th January 2024).

The non-tourist accesses the territory through the stories of the inhabitants or people who have passed through or have decided to return to that territory; the concept of community in the guide broadens to include also those who have decided to resettle after having moved away.

«Community is who makes community»
(Member of C.A.S.A, 10th January 2024).

The non-tourist also momentarily becomes an active part of the community, and, in the guide-book, they are invited to explore the area and return because tourism experiences will be always different. Although non-tourism encourages a slow and prolonged relationship with the places, it is not yet configured as a new housing practice and retains its character of temporariness. In fact, it should rather be regarded as a new way of organizing the hospitality capacity, communicating, and creating a sense of attachment in those who stay, the local community.

Figure 5 - The position of the municipality of Ussita in Italy



Source: Bing maps

The tourist, through the narratives proposed, accesses a temporary citizenship of little-known places. The non-tourist guide of Ussita proposes a knowledge of the territory that belongs to those who experience it with a load of sensitivity and special emotions, and the non-tourist, through the guide, makes these emotions their own and enters into the community, becoming an active part of it.

«Visitors are asked not to look, but to place themselves in the same perspective as those who live in the area. A more complete degree of knowledge and thus understanding can be achieved only in this way. The non-tourist guide project is important because it shifts the centre of gravity of the narration of a place from its exterior to its interior»

(Researcher and collaborator of C.A.S.A and the Ussita non-tourist guide¹⁰, 11th January 2024).

What emerges is a narrative that Pollice *et al.* (2020) defined as community oriented. The community, repository of intangible resources, becomes itself a territorial attraction, renewing a sense of belonging to its territory through the narration of emotions and memories linked to the place itself. That's why the guide's subtitle is *Unpublished detours narrated by the inhabitants*. It is a way of understanding the encounter between a community and those from outside, where the community rediscovers its identity through a collective narrative. In this way, memory is secured:

«The guidebook is in its third reprint. We realised that many people are no longer here, by the time we began the project; they have been important with their stories, their anecdotes - which perhaps are not always true - handed down orally and each time enriched. Safeguarding memory is an urgent need»

(Member of C.A.S.A, 10th January 2024).

The experience of community editing made it possible to develop and strengthen an emotional attachment to places. These are narratives from the territory for the territory that affect the evolutionary dynamics in accordance with the principles of sustainability. The community narratives convey feelings, sensations, public and private memories. What emerges is a description of a country from an internal point of view: places and itineraries are proposed within the guide because they are important to those who live there.

«It is not the monuments or works of art themselves that are important, but those places and objects that have value for those who frequent them on a daily basis. This kind of approach has resulted in a guidebook that looks at the depths of a community and not at its surface, that proposes unusual and special routes. In this way, even the tourist who decides to live an experience that differs from the one proposed by mainstream guides has the opportunity to get closer to what we can define as the 'real' community, to discover the uniqueness and peculiarities of an area and, above all, to experience the same emotions as those who live there»

(Researcher, 11th January 2024).

This modality also made it possible to mitigate the difficulties of the earthquake, helping to accept them more easily. The earthquake influences the guidebooks narrative, since it deeply affected both the dwellers relationship with the environment and the environment itself.

«Telling the story of one's own country hit by the earthquake, reasoning about a before and an after, allows to re-elaborate the trauma. The tourist who arrives in the community is also able to better understand the sense of what happened and how this can continue to influence the future» (Researcher, 11th January 2024).

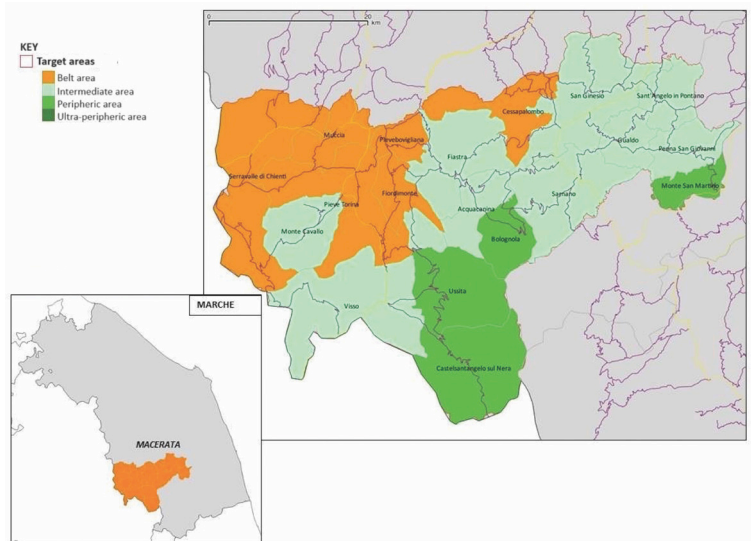
Another relevant aspect to be emphasised is that the guide was created primarily for the Ussitani, respecting completely the Participatory Place Branding criteria of giving local inhabitants the main role in designing the place storytelling (Hudak, 2019; Lambert, 2013; Zenker & Erfgen,

¹⁰ This interviewee is an academic who had been observing the Ussita case and the Central Apennine context for some years.

2014) this article presents a framework for applying digital storytelling (DST). The guide has been indispensable above all for the inhabitants to take back, through memory and emotions, their spaces, places, and stories

«that until that moment had been little considered even by themselves and that the earthquake risked cancelling forever, making a precious heritage irrecoverable»
(Researcher, 11th January 2024).

Figure 6 - Alto Maceratese area



Source: Elaboration of the authors by www.agenziacoesione.gov.it

It is an emotional guide that attributes importance to emotions; that gives back to the communities of the inland areas roles and functions decided by themselves; that proposes the territory not as an object to be transformed through large investments - as in the previous case of the so-called "golden years of Ussita" (1960-1980) - but as a repository of the population's needs and desires. The experience of the guide contributes to the change of perspective through which inland areas are observed, countering the media infatuation for the rhetoric of mere tourist development steeped in *metrophilia* (Barbera *et al.*, 2022).

The guide is based on a new model that is capable to connect experiences and needs of communities by re-establishing new frames of meaning around which territorial and even tourism policies can be designed. Non-tourism is a project that renews the sense of place and lends it greater authenticity. It attempts to mitigate the ever-increasing risk of seeing typically city-oriented projections become actual economic and urban development policies in areas that are far from cities. The local community must help to dispel what has been called *borgomania* (*ibidem*), the recent return to the prominence of little towns tourism in Italy. This phenomenon implies the encouraging of a purely hedonistic touristification of city dwellers who experience these places only superficially. The non-tourism project tries to counter the drift towards homogeneity of places; through the contact with the community, the tourist is invited to abandon habitual tourist behaviour in order to establish a different relationship with the environment in which they are present. The Ussita guide itself represents a journey that starts from the experience of living there, a place which the community does not want to sacrifice in favour of a living imposed from outside and far from its identity. The non-tourism project experiences the territory as a relational space, a social construction where territorial identity is consolidated as a sense of belonging that binds the individual to their territory and gives meaning to the territory itself.

In this way, the self-narration to external subjects gives back to the communities their own power of agency and becomes a process of co-construction and co-evolution, through which communities attribute symbols and meanings to local resources and peculiarities, making their own identity emerge (Banini, Ilovan, 2021). The non-tourist guide of Ussita narrates the territory of an inland area that does not want to be simply made available to be used and exploited. The place storytelling served to mend the community's bonds, weakened also by the earthquake, to strengthen it internally. This restores dignity to its territory through innovative local development paths that change the perspective through which one can observe inland areas.

Conclusions

For two decades, inland areas have been the focus of renewed interest in sociological studies, as they are privileged places and sometimes precursors of dynamics and processes that highlight processes of territorialization and policies aimed at innovation, resistance and also the co-participation of communities in local development actions. Inland areas are the subject of numerous reflections ranging from the increasing demand for natural experiences, forms of slow tourism, the recovery of memory, traditions without neglecting the critical issues related to the abandoned heritage, the lack of services, and hydrogeological instability.

In the case study analyzed, the co-participation and co-design of the tourist image of the territory was an attempt to fill the void of marginality but also of emergency.

The non-tourist guide of Ussita in this context has tried to narrate the image of an inland area through the involvement of its own community that has restored its ties with its own territory, made fragile by the earthquake. The process of drafting the non-tourist guide has strengthened the community from within, but has also outlined actions for innovative tourist development, where the territory of Ussita emerges as a relational space and as a social construction, where processes of territorial identity and sense of belonging have consolidated.

The case of the non-tourist guide of Ussita can also be framed as a form of Participatory Place Branding. This tourist guide, in fact, represents a communicative initiative that influences the perception and external image of the territory - as all tourist guides do - but following a procedure different from the mainstream one. The territory narrated in this guide, in fact, is not that of an external observer who tries to capture for the reader a kind of "authenticity" but is the open and indefinite result of the work of a community, which represents only a passage of a broader process of elaboration of local identity.

Within this guide, in fact, the narrating voice is precisely that of the community, which tries to represent its own point of view to visitors and tries to welcome them already from the preliminary phase to the trip, that is, that of the story and the representation of the territory. In this case, it is the community itself that makes available to the traveller a vision, waiting for them to come and enjoy it, modify it and make it evolve together with the inhabitants.

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Development Policies for the Valorization of Italian Villages: an Apulian Perspective²

The NRRP urban renewal leanings

On a global perspective, the pandemic effects of the last two years have had a significant impact not only on economic dynamics, but also on the processes of regeneration of entire territories. In the current context of rising inequalities, made worse by energy crisis and ecological transition, people and communities, especially those in inner areas and small villages, can be considered as a good sample to experiment a profound change in the way of work, and generally speaking, in the way of life (Carrosio, 2019).

In the Italian scenario, the opportunities offered by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) impact very much on local governments, as proven by the "Bando Borghi", which granted an investment of one billion euros aimed at the recovery of Italian villages³. In the light of this situation, what could have been considered as an intervention of social nature up until the period before the pandemic from Sars-cov-2, nowadays can be seen as concrete opportunity of economic growth and civic development (De Rossi; 2019; Barbera & Parisi, 2019).

Since the "Bando Borghi" framework aims at recuperating the ability of small villages to attract inhabitants and to empower employment, the NRRP final goal is to generate social shared values. For this reason, like a sort of social mission, the "Bando Borghi" aims to invest in projects based on the preservation and enhancement of the pre-existing natural and cultural heritage.

Focused on increasing the attractiveness of the Italian villages and fighting depopulation (Bruno *et al.*, 2021), the "Bando Borghi" emphasizes the scope of each action in terms of possible impact on communities and territories (Graziano, 2021). Directed at villages with fewer than 5000 inhabitants, the "Bando Borghi" is rightly dedicated to the recovery of historic villages and provides EU funds for financing urban regeneration projects in small villages. It's therefore clear that the intentions of both the European Union and the Italian legislator tend towards the development of the marginal territories through infrastructure growth projects in the broad sense. For this reason, it deals not only with buildings, roads, railways, but also with security, digital and welfare systems assumed as strategic issues to activate cohesion and innovation among public power, citizens and private stakeholders (Fanizza, 2019).

Within this general context, the depopulation of small villages, not only in the province of Foggia but throughout the Italian peninsula, represents one of the most difficult challenges for the entire territory (Reynaud & Miccoli, 2018). Indeed, in recent decades, many communities, once vibrant and full of traditions, have seen their population gradually decrease, due to their youth emigrating to the cities and the job opportunities that these offers (Carrosio, 2020). The consequence is a progressive lack of essential services, such as schools and health facilities, which, combined with the absence of economic attractiveness, has led new generations to seek fortune elsewhere, leaving behind once prosperous towns, now decadent and silent (Quaranta *et al.*, 2020).

The themes of depopulation and youth mobility not only undermine the social and economic vitality of these places, but also put at risk the cultural and historical heritage they hold. The small villages, with their traditions, artistic and cultural heritage, popular folk festivals and typical cuisine, represent a fundamental identity fabric for the province of Foggia. The challenge is to find effective strategies for revitalizing these communities, attracting new residents and promoting

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2 Received: 8/2/2024. Revised: 2/5/2024. Accepted: 28/12/2024. Published: 31/12/2024.

3 In terms of content and requirements, the "Bando Borghi" involves historic villages with less than 5000 inhabitants (according with ISTAT data at 31 December 2020).

sustainable tourism that enhances local features. Therefore, it is in this perspective that the “Bando Borghi” of the NRRP aims at preserving the wealth of a heritage that risks succumbing to the silence of abandonment.

1. The “Bando Borghi” theoretical framework and methodological approach

For the most part, the planners’ job is helping a community to achieve a vision of the reality. Unfortunately, planners often try to impose what they perceive as the best, so they consider participation as a merely listening activity. Planners collect social needs but this “public hearing” is not what people want (Fanizza, 2015). Since it is very difficult to transform “public hearing” into commitments, one of the expected results of the “Bando Borghi” focuses on helping a community to achieve a vision of the actual reality.

Mostly inspired by radically trans-disciplinary approaches, especially by recalling the Innovation Studies (Ramella, 2013), the participative planning between the University of Foggia and INU provides conceptual and methodological tools to support the effort of a new social design of communities (Fagerberg and Martin, 2013). It deals with a methodological approach that makes it possible to understand regeneration as a social process, or, better, on improving a general model that can act as a base for actions of collective scope.

In order to identify the regeneration projects in the villages of Chieuti, Zapponeta, Rignano Garganico and Serracapriola addressed in this article, it is important to focus on the integrated and inclusive approach adopted; a result of an agreement between University and INU, it is a valuable tool for presenting a different participative practice in planning activity. Following this parameter, the steps for defining each project have been supported by:

- 1) detailed analysis of socio-economic and historical-cultural context of each village;
- 2) tutoring activities on local public decision-makers for explaining the aim of Bando Borghi;
- 3) operative activities both technical and related to the collection of communities needs and expectations;
- 4) writing proposals and assistance for the submission.

These steps were fundamental, because these Villages are very tiny and municipalities lack of officials with either knowledge or expertise on project activities. To put it more clearly, even if the officials are present, they don’t have time because they are busy in a wide variety of activities, that normally don’t involve the skills and expertise useful for project submission.

Thanks to the connection with University of Foggia and the Apulian section of the National Institute of Urban Planning, these little Villages submitted projects and, no matter the outcome, they had been involved into a NRRP process.

The methodological approach for identifying regeneration projects in the villages of Chieuti, Zapponeta, Rignano Garganico and Serracapriola was based on an integrated and inclusive approach. First, a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and historical-cultural context of each village was carried out, involving public decision-makers and the Apulian section of the National Institute of Urban Planning. This process has identified community needs and expectations, facilitating the co-creation of sustainable solutions for communities, public decision makers and the territorial ecosystem in general.

The connection with University of Foggia and the Apulian section of the National Institute of Urban Planning allowed the definition of territorial ecosystems, open both for the achievement of sustainable goals and for the empowerment of the local communities. Then, in accordance with this ecosystemic vision, each Village developed targeted action plans, combining the preservation of historical and cultural heritage with the development of strategies that can promote innovation and architectural renewal at the same time. Subsequently, in order to respond to the NRRP call, targeted action plans were developed, combining the preservation of architectural heritage with the development of strategies that can simultaneously promote innovation.

So, in order to respond to the NRRP call, a shared activity of validation of projects involved all categories of stakeholders, to:

- identify community needs and expectations;
- facilitate the selection of strategies;
- ensure projects effectiveness towards spatial dynamics over the time.

Finally, the validation phase of projects was shared with all major stakeholders in the boroughs to ensure resilience and adaptation of strategies over time, ensuring that projects respond effectively to evolving spatial dynamics.

Since discussing the function of participation involves the role of civic engagement, one of the most important aspects in this planning activity was to avoid the trend to consider villages as commodities (Fanizza, 2013). Against the tendency which evaluates villages only from an economic point of view, the participative planning between the University of Foggia and INU was founded on a different link between the urban environment and citizenship condition (Wagenaar, 2014). Strictly related to the significance of new models of urban living, these planning proposals focus on the interaction between cultural roots and historical memories, especially because any planning sets itself as a storytelling (Diers, 2004).

By following a modern village dialectic, these planning adopt an inter-organizational approach for translating the variety of social identities and cultural signs into a code able to both put into practice the concepts of village living (Torres, 2003) and to promote social behaviors useful to spread new urban rights.

Sociologically speaking, it possible to assert that these planning select rules and criteria useful to develop empathy toward NRRP choices (Desideri & Ilardi, 1997), because they involve both the quality of social organization and the general state of well-being. So, more than just an abstract goal, they enforce social integration processes and challenge a collective intelligence lifelong learning program.

In contrast with many planners who start from their own expertise and add community participation as a necessary but secondary component of their proposals, the planning team by the University of Foggia and INU identified what people might debate on (Rosenberg, 2007).

To start, the planning team created a very interesting scenario with ethnographic tools (thanks to photographs and reportages) and with deliberative meetings with any groups and categories of people. In doing so, the team both reduced the scope of dialogue with politicians and contained the interferences of designers.

Lastly, the very same concept of space of resilience can be functional to support the collective intelligence lifelong learning program (Pellizzoni, 2017). It leads to the improvement of participative citizenship, because it goes beyond the involvement of politicians while also being focused on the importance of social identity (Neal, 2003).

Specifically, when communities are unable to deal with some specific aspects of urbanism - in these specific cases because they are little villages - cultural roots can create new urban geographies to confer significance both to urbanism and village living. Cultural roots can ensure a proper use of public space if they provide for a substantial re-thinking of planning's social function. Together with the replacement of the contents for selecting the government's choice, cultural roots can be essential for an over-structural and infrastructural filling of villages and to avoid or reduce any forms of territories' discrimination (Low, 2000).

2. The “Bando Borghi” purposes and expected results

The analysis presented below aims to describe the process that allowed four municipalities in the Apulia Region - Chieuti, Rignano Garganico, Serracapriola and Zapponeta - to design ideas for urban regeneration (Bindi *et al.*, 2022). Thanks to the description of project activities carried out by the University of Foggia in collaboration with INU, National Institute of Urban Planning, Apulia

Section, the intention is to show the fundamental guidelines for the potential investments of the NRRP toward the micro-reality of internal areas and small villages. Far from the multiple regulatory and administrative aspects, the aim is to address the importance of identity roots and local history for territories' local management and, above all, for growth and development of villages. The methodological steps which drove the process were particularly relevant, since they stimulate the partnership cleverness.

Undoubtedly, we can consider the entire process as the result of common learning that links together all the project activities, especially because the final output turns around the opportunity of triggering widespread well-being (Farnsworth *et al.*, 2016).

The scientific coordination by University of Foggia was important for the definition of drafting activities with the direct involvement of municipalities. Therefore, if on the one hand there was the direct involvement of the clients (municipalities), on the other hand the collaboration between the University and INU concretized the idea of valorizing the villages as a dimension capable to better define the collective identity in order to impose new trends in local policies management. To do this, some concepts were revised to align the expectations of local authorities with the assessment of the feasibility of the project ideas themselves. The revision of these concepts was carried out through a multi-context analysis of geographical, historical and cultural features of the villages.

To put it more clearly, the context analysis phase was the main tool for drafting the project proposals. By doing so, some concepts were used both to take into great consideration the expectations of local authorities and to evaluate the concrete feasibility of the project ideas.

According to this perspective, the potential impacts on the territories of the financing of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan define a new strategy focused on the need for new governance levers of territories. Putting the attractiveness of the villages at the center of the stage, considering them as engines of cultural and social regeneration, ensues the creation of public space and highlights that territories need participatory administrative work (Fanizza, 2016; Minguzzi & Solima, 2012).

Specifically, the information relating to the knowledge of the villages constituted a wealth of knowledge, mostly because it helped both to decode and understand the complex and composite articulation of the Call, while also providing preliminary reading and interpretation of various elements that characterized the "Bando Borghi" structure.

The deep knowledge of the villages avoids the simplistic reduction of regeneration project ideas, and in particular tackles the risk of homogenization among different projects. In other words, knowledge is the wealth to be evaluated and on which to develop well-being. Accordingly, the rediscovery of the history of the villages became fundamental to design the proposal. Especially when this history is unknown, it becomes important to rebuild the community and act on the identity roots (L'Erario, 2017).

This is inextricably linked to the fight against the abandonment of the territory: the extent of the depopulation processes, the mobility problems, the gap between large cities and inland areas and hydrogeological risks make the definition of intervention strategies urgent and necessary for the implementation of a territorial welfare system, which has the ultimate goal of guaranteeing fundamental social rights to villages as well (Lucatelli, 2015). They must be considered as social innovation processes, especially if they concern cultural heritage.

3. The planning activities: four proposals in the territory of Foggia

The entire design process lasted three months, from January to March 2022. The design experience, established on a very close collaboration among University, INU and the four municipalities in the province of Foggia, was focusing on strengthening the network of knowledges and skills which are useful firstly for achieving regeneration goals, and also for framing the items

necessary for the redevelopment of villages involved. In short, we can assert that the real opportunity of "Bando Borghi" concerned the possibility to transform culture heritage, slow tourism and green mobility into economic growth objectives.

When looking at the characteristics and social dynamics that develop within the four small villages of the province of Foggia - Chieuti, Rignano Garganico, Serracapriola and Zapponeta - it is really evident the desire to be attractive and to become a beautiful place in comparison with other places all over the Italian land. The idea of urban regeneration is therefore supported by a sort of social redemption, perhaps linked to their peripheral geographic position. This position seems like a kind of stigma, a sort of segregation that awaits final liberation.

Being more attractive with respect to the national and the EU context is the principal intention of local administrators who ask the University of Foggia for help. Actually, the local administrators of the villages grasped the potential of Bando Borghi, but they were not able to design an idea, also because no one in the municipalities is expert enough in project activities. To put it more plainly, the local governance of small villages is mostly composed by a mayor and municipal bodies (Giunta and Consiglio) largely busy with more tasks and responsibilities and not capable of managing the entire load of responsibilities entrusted onto them.

In particular, the local administrators were aware that local welfare is not generated only through top-down processes, but it is born and spread according to a precise definition of strategic actions. In this view, their request to the University of Foggia regards the possibility of developing a model of co-planning to be allocated almost exclusively to a portion of population and territory defined as disadvantaged. Because this co-design interventions to innovate the territories of the internal areas qualify themselves as devices to manage the issue of internal areas and communities in a specific territory, the University of Foggia became the promoter of local development. Given the absence of planning expertise within local administrations, the University of Foggia took the responsibility of identifying objectives useful for defining new development strategies. Founded on the in-deep analysis of the characteristic aspects of each village, the University of Foggia discovered that for the "Bando Borghi", sustainable development and the potential for valorizing the cultural heritage represent the two main themes, or rather two "experimental fields". Accordingly, the application of policies for the ecological transition, and more generally of sustainability, synchs well with the theme of well-being.

Since what is called civic engagement depends on the relationships between welfare and society, over the time the identification of public skills within local governance has become an implicit interpretation scheme into the paradigm of civic participation. However, civic participation dynamics are affected by rhetorical discourses who generate endless problems of inadequacy of local policies while taking as a fact the invisibility of civic engagement in planning activities. It is quite possible to read these contrasting dynamics as the reason of the request for methodological and instrumental support advanced by the municipalities at the University of Foggia.

The presentation of the project resulted into the four case studies shown below, and the intention is to highlight the lens of observation used for each project planning.

The need to utilize the issue of regeneration of the villages through a different lens of observation starts from the awareness that the numerically understood demographic aspect is inadequate. It is actually necessary to consider the increase or decrease in population as possible effects of different aspects: methods of participation, community building, perception of social welfare, sustainability features, new forms of social capital, levels of resilience of villages citizens. The following tables summarize the peculiarities and the main thematic focuses developed in the individual projects.

What clearly emerges is how the use of tools such as the NRRP could enable both the promotion of a diversified use of the Apulian cultural heritage and the proposal of forms of social innovation in terms of community involvement.

Tab.1 - Chieuti

Title of the project	The door to Apulia
Brief description of the context	Chieuti has an extension of 61.52 km² and is located at the extreme north-west of the Gargano coast. Thanks to its position (on the border with the Molise Region and overlooking the Adriatic) Chieuti represents a natural door to Apulia. Chieuti represents one of the two Arbëreshë countries in the Province of Foggia so it maintains a very strong link both with Kosovo and with the ancient Albanian culture (archaic customs and language). Historically speaking, Chieuti is part of the settlement structure of the lagoon of Lesina and Varano, characterized by a series of early medieval and Norman centers. Its geomorphological patrimony involves the panoramic range (from Gargano promontory to the coasts of Maiella) and the presence of numerous farms (called masserie).
Brief description of the strategy	"The door to Apulia" enhances agricultural traditions to boost the social empowerment by promoting new forms of turistic accommodations. Focused on gastronomy, the proposal of journeys into local tradition are the key point to promote a broad tourist seasonality, slower and more immersive, able to mix together cultural trips with emotional experiences.

Tab.2 - Rignano Garganico

Title of the project	The Gargano Amusement Park
Brief description of the context	With less than 2000 citizens, Rignano Garganico is the smallest village in the Province of Foggia. To fight the stigma caused by the presence of the biggest immigrant land-workers ghetto, Rignano Garganico wants to preserve the medieval matrix of its ancient neighborhood, with particular regard both to the houses embellished with stone portals and to the cave houses that define a mediterranean urban plot, characterized by narrow streets and white-washed houses (called mugnali).
Brief description of the adopted strategy	The Gargano Amusement Park envisions a theme-park reconstruction of prehistoric settlements. Thanks to the strength of popular knowledge, the Park aims to bolster local empowerment, with particular regard to the promotion of historical heritage, integration and social innovation.

Tab.3 - Serracapriola

Title of the project	The village of ancient streets of well-being
Brief description of the context	From 1991 onwards, Serracapriola has been part of the Gargano National Park with a population of 3,759 people. It has a strategic biogeographical position - between the hills of the high plateau at almost 300 meters above sea level and the valleys of the rivers Fortore and Saccione - and a very charming urban layout, emulating the Parisian tree-lined avenues.
Brief description of the adopted strategy	The village of ancient streets of well-being aims to increase and de-seasonalize the flow of tourism focusing on the direct involvement of families, citizens, companies and non-profit associations. The slow tourism concerns a public-engagement process, based on the link among landscape preservation, heritage enhancement and human relationships.

Tab.4 - Zapponeta

Title of the project	Well-being on the beach
Brief description of the context	Zapponeta is a small coastal village inhabited by 3,320 citizens and its territory is filled with locations strategically important for the long-term maintenance of natural habitats and endangered or rare flora and fauna species.
Brief description of the adopted strategy	The well-being on the beach consists in the redevelopment of the waterfront area, by enhancing some peculiarities and geographical features. So, it does not consist in socio-urban interventions, but rather in the planning of social activities, addressed to increase both happiness and health lifestyles.

Final comments

The process of designing and writing the regeneration projects for the Apulian villages has been a crucial moment in defining possible local development strategies. Nevertheless, this paper wanted to highlight how the drafting of such projects is not only a technical act, but should be a highly collaborative process, in which different visions, expectations and skills are intertwined. This approach is valid for all the Villages, whose characteristics and dynamics are often the same. More specifically, although the villages of Chieuti and Zapponeta are maritime areas, and therefore apparently affected by tourist logic, they are in fact in the same condition as the villages of Serracapriola and Rignano Graganico because they are all affected by dynamics of depopulation and the needs of local communities represent the unsolved constant of local governance. Despite this, the traits linked to historical and cultural identity remain unchanged.

These proposals are innovative because they open perspectives onto the villages, whose political economy acquires a lifelong learning perspective. This is possible when the forces of interaction between individuals and territories manage to synthesize and create «learning regions» (Florida, 1995), namely forming a relationship between the socio-logical perspective and the typically economic one.

These four proposals can become a model only if the mere economic goals can trigger a rethinking of the social function of the economy, or, even better, to spread the innovative ability that resides in the knowledge acquired through processes of socialization and sharing.

The possibility for success of a «learning region» in the province of Foggia depends on the ability to bet on its solidarity, which can produce «contagious social forms», or rather behavior that is capable of connecting (material and immaterial) resources with social practices in a truly sustainable and generative manner (Ramella, 2013).

From the sociological point of view, these proposals have been supported by multidisciplinary approaches with methodological tools that characterized the cultural and social regeneration. Developed by some small municipalities in collaboration with the University of Foggia and the Puglia Section of the INU, Institute National Urban Planning, these tools triggered a learning by doing process, which set up the improvement of the participative citizenship.

Since the planning activities have been focused on the importance of social identity, this experience teaches the importance to go beyond the involvement of politicians and local leaders.

Going beyond the involvement of local leaders created the conditions to better understand how to organize the villages' future. Especially when villages are structurally unable to deal with some specific aspects of urbanism, going beyond the involvement of local leaders can stimulate civic knowledge while encouraging people to offer suggestions and options: in short, a local empowerment strength (Sclavi, 2004).

Overall, when any decision-making is supported and tutored by cultural roots (Bovone *et al.*, 2002), going beyond the involvement of local leaders means that cultural roots can create new urban geographies to confer significance both to urbanism and the villages' life.

Since social sciences can be the stage and not only the frame on which urbanism can find the right way to be implemented, understood and shared, the cultural roots can ensure a proper use of public space and the replacement of contents into public policies together with a substantial re-thinking of the social function of planning.

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Village Regeneration and NRRP. Tourism Development Perspectives in the Post COVID Era²

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2017 as the “International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development” based on the assumption that planned and well managed tourism can also contribute to job creation and boost the economy of countries. The declaration was designed to raise awareness towards environmental issues, and most importantly, it credits tourism with playing a key role in protecting the ecosystem, people and sustainable development. It is therefore argued that tourism is considered first a social and human phenomenon rather than an economic one, that has undergone profound changes, thus taking on unprecedented trends.

Due to ongoing research into sustainable development models in territories - particularly in fragile areas, and in margins and inner spaces (Lozato-Giotart, 2018)³ - and the emergence of new tourism trends, tourism is no longer regarded solely as a leisure activity. In addition to promoting virtuous approaches to development in weaker contexts by enhancing their natural, cultural, and legacy heritage, tourism can also serve to strengthen these communities.

As part of this scenario, Italy has also seen the renewal of tourism proposals, increasingly focusing on sustainability and adaptability to new trends in demand and quality of hospitality. Within this perspective, the situation of Italian villages, typical products and local food and wine have gained a pivotal role. Thanks to the Strategic Tourism Development Plan (STP 2017-2022), a program was launched, largely based on the promotion of the food and wine heritage and of smaller villages. This project is part of a strategy oriented towards the implementation and development of new models of sustainable tourism and management to foster the integration of the environment and landscape with the agricultural, handcrafted and tourist-cultural activities of the whole country (MiBACT, 2016).

As a result, such a context has been instrumental in the emergence of small towns as increasingly popular destinations for travelers and the establishment of village tourism as a new travel trend. Indeed, this has led to a reappraisal of the rural landscape and lifestyle typical of these settings. Increased awareness towards environmental issues and sustainability «has encouraged new tourism practices where interior spaces and more isolated margins are at the heart of new challenges and limits» (Lozato-Giotart, 2018, *op. cit.*, p. 47). The issue of regeneration of smaller towns has become more relevant thanks to the opportunities they offer, being potential sites for generating alternative models of growth and renaissance for deteriorated or abandoned villages (Villani and Dall'Ara, 2015). Although the policies of recent years - as observed in the case of the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI in Italian) - consider tourism as one of the possible ways for local development, as a tool for the potential enhancement of territorial capital (Ferrari, 2018), «numerous and heterogeneous territories have identified tourism as their sole or prevailing strategic focus» (Evangelista, Di Matteo, Ferrari, 2018, p. 93). It remains the main area in which the most recent practices and lines of intervention are concentrated. In this vein, and in line with the STP 2017-2022, the Italian Ministry of Culture, as part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), launched the National Villages Plan by allocating more than 1.6 billion euros for the regeneration of the rural landscape and the attractiveness of villages at risk of depopulation (PNRR, 2021).

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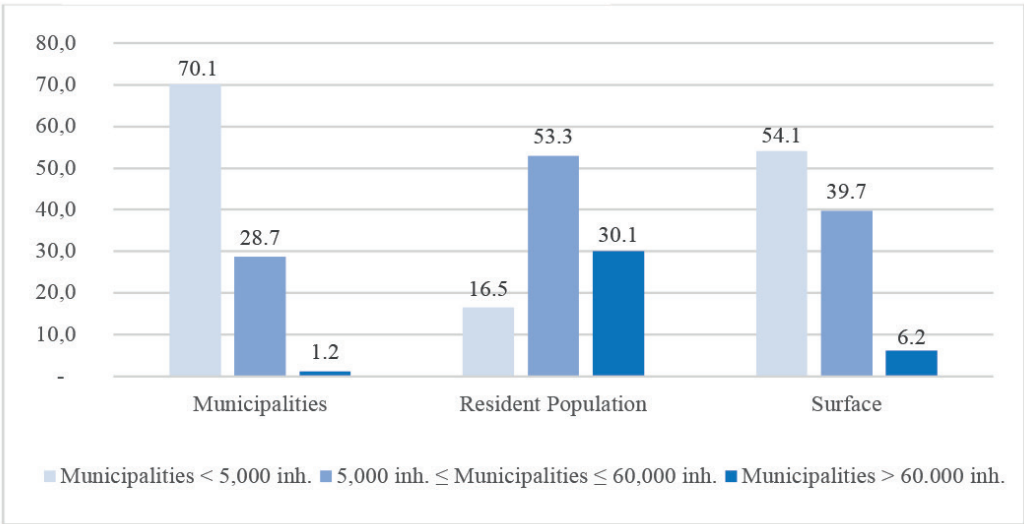
3 For an accurate definition of “inner or interior” spaces, see Lozato-Giotart (2018) who proposes a typological classification of inner tourism spaces in order to define and delimit them, considering physical and geographical criteria, and economic, social and cultural indicators.

1. The spatial organization of the Italian territory

Italy is characterized by small municipalities, or villages as they are more commonly referred to, due to its peculiar spatial organization based on the widespread distribution of small towns and centers.

The Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT in Italian) defines Small Municipalities as centers with a population under 5,000. On January 1, 2023, the latest available data show that there are 7,904 municipalities in Italy (see Fig. 1); 5,537 of them have fewer than five thousand inhabitants, thus classified as small municipalities. Over half of the nation's land is occupied by them, accounting for approximately 70% of the total (54.1%), reporting a population density of only 60 inhabitants per sq. km., compared to the 261 for larger centers with over 60,000 residents (ISTAT, 2023).

Fig. 1 - Population and spatial distribution of the Italian Territory, 2023 (% Val.)



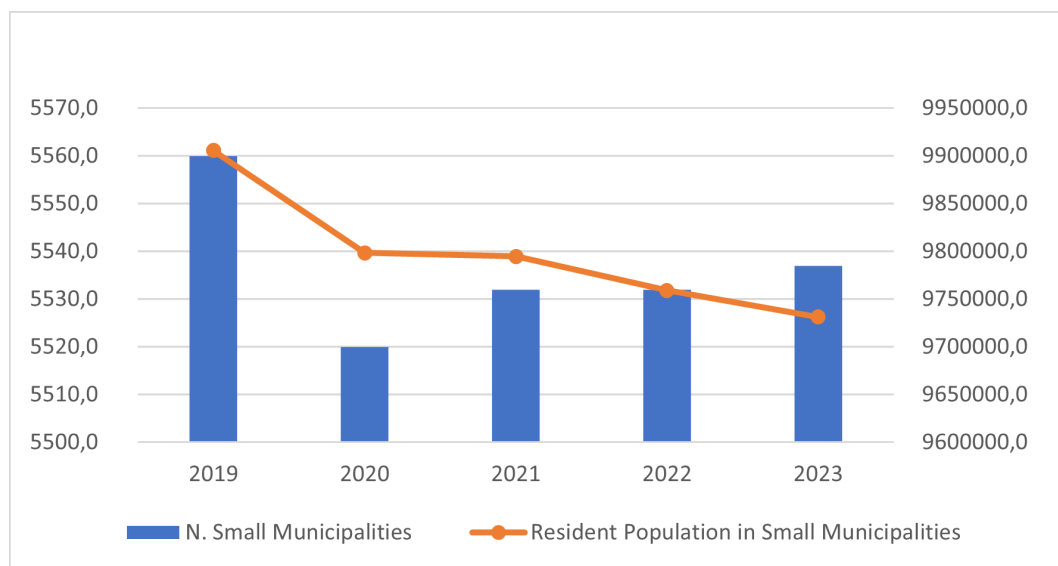
Source: Elaboration of the authors on ISTAT data

The low population density of these territories is the outcome of a depopulation process with remote origins and diverse causes, which affected, and still affects, mainly inland areas and smaller towns.

According to a survey by the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI in Italian), based on ISTAT data, in just over four decades, from 1971 to 2015, the resident population has more than halved in most small Italian municipalities (Calandra, 2019). This negative trend has continued in the following years. In fact, population demographics data (ISTAT, 2023, *op. cit.*) related to the past 5 years (2019-2023) indicate that small municipalities have suffered an additional 2% population decrease and consequently have also increased in number (see Fig. 2). Despite the significant decline in 2020⁴ and a few mergers, the total number of small municipalities has nevertheless grown steadily over the last few years, due precisely to the decrease in population, which caused several centers to fall below the 5,000-population threshold.

4 In 2020, there was a significant decrease compared to the period under review in both the number of small municipalities - decreasing from 5,560 to 5,520 as a result of several mergers that took place in 2019 - and the population, which experienced a loss of 106,972, partly due to an increase in the number of deaths related to the COVID-19 pandemic. During 2019, there were 31 municipal mergers approved, including six by incorporation, for a total of 65 municipalities less (<https://www.tuttitalia.it/variazioni-amministrative/nuovi-comuni-2019/>, last access 18 November 2023). This decline mostly affected small municipalities, which decreased to 40. Instead, from 2020 to 2023, a total of 17 mergers were approved, resulting in the elimination of 13 centers, regarding small municipalities only.

Fig. 2 - Trend in the number of Italian Small Municipalities and Resident Population, years 2019-2023



Source: Elaboration of the authors on ISTAT data

Today, depopulation and the effects related to population aging have led inland areas and small municipalities to significant challenges from a demographic perspective (Comitato Europeo delle Regioni, 2021), and, most importantly, to the loss of memories and traditions rooted in the oldest centers. Moreover, the lack of an efficient infrastructure and facilities network, and the steady growth of the digital divide, complement a critical situation which shapes these areas as fragile contexts.

Within this scenario, a number of reflections on the villages of the future are taking off, also under the drive of various actions both at the national and European level. These are intended to provide growth prospects for rural areas and smaller centers, while unleashing their full economic, environmental and tourism potential, especially in light of the opportunities they may provide from a sustainability standpoint. For instance, as part of its objectives, the SNAI also aims to boost tourism attractiveness by acting on the latent strengths of these territories (Barca *et al.*, 2014). As a matter of fact, tourism can benefit from territorial identities, diversity and richness of natural and cultural resources, and from the self-representation of local communities in inland areas (Cavallo *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, in the European context, the debate has started from the digital divide between urban and rural areas, and from the need to bridge the gap through digitalization policies for basic services (Bars, 2020). Specifically, the core of the debate focuses the idea of smart villages that encompasses actions aimed at developing rural areas and peripheral contexts primarily using innovative growth models facilitated by digital technologies (European Commission, 2017, 2020).

Therefore, if properly enhanced, such contexts may provide greener solutions based on circular economy models, or offer opportunities to live in more peaceful and qualitatively better settings compared to crowded cities. Last but not least, they are also suitable areas for sustainable tourism development. As is well known, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a heavy impact on the tourism industry. As a matter of fact, during the health emergency, a higher number of people were registered specifically in inland areas - perceived to be safer places - and in some cases for longer stays, supported by remote working opportunities.

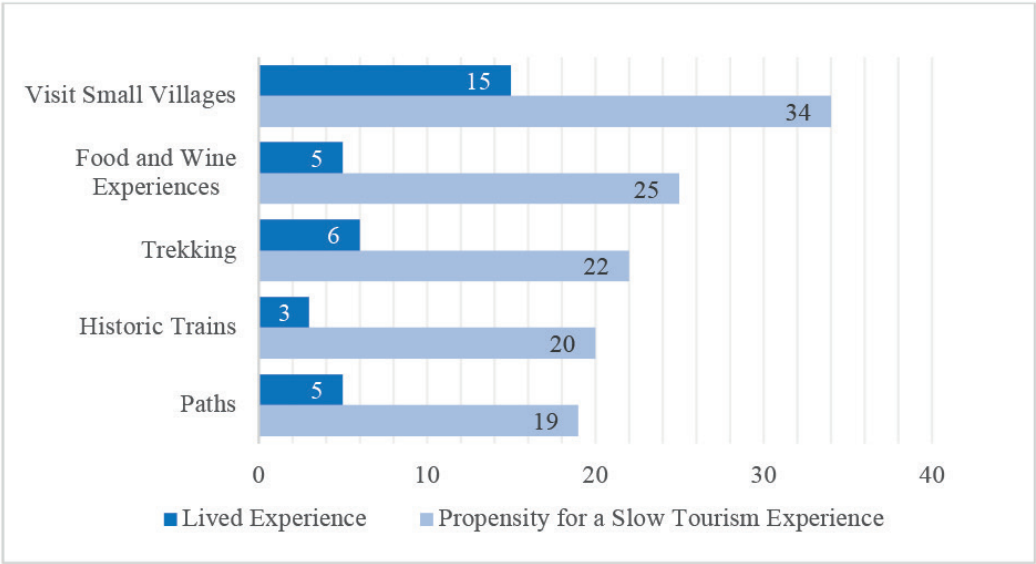
2. Small villages and tourism

Small village tourism, initially defined as “minor tourism” (Dall’Ara, Morandi, 2010), has become a specific tourism product in recent years. This is a kind of tourism driven by visitors’ interest in discovering places characterized primarily by specificity, typical products and local tastes which makes them different from traditional destinations.

In the past few seasons, partly due to the impact of the health emergency, villages have been among the most requested destinations by tourists (ENIT, 2022). They are regarded as places that can offer opportunities and larger spaces where it is possible to combine the need for freedom with greater security, while enjoying excellent typical food and wine products.

In 2022, the Italian National Agency for Tourism (ENIT in Italian) carried out a survey on Italians tourism demand focusing on experiences on slow tourism (Clancy, 2014, 2018). The study, conducted through the administration of a semi-structured questionnaire to a representative sample of the Italian population⁵, revealed a significant growth in this tourism sector. In particular, visits to small towns and places out of the traditional circuits recorded the highest attendance, according to respondents preferences (see Fig. 3). The data collected refer to Italians slow tourism experiences in the first semester of 2022 and to the predictions related to their eagerness for outdoor stays in summer 2022. The survey showed that a quarter of Italian tourists had had at least one slow tourism experience. Specifically, vacations in small villages were the most recurring choice, i.e., 15% of the cases, followed by nature trekking and food and wine tours (ENIT, 2022, *op. cit.*).

Fig. 3 - Italians’ demand for slow tourism, 2022 (% Val)



Source: Elaboration of the authors on Italian Ministry of Tourism data

Moreover, four out of ten Italians are interested in a future slow tourism vacation. In particular, more than a third of respondents (34%) were willing to spend a vacation in small villages or away from traditional destinations, followed by an interest in food and wine tours (25%) and trekking

5 The ENIT survey on domestic tourism was conducted in June 2022. 3,500 interviews were conducted with people aged 18 and over, and the questionnaire was administered using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) methodology (ENIT, 2022, *op. cit.*). CATI is a telephone surveying technique in which the interviewer follows a script provided by a software application.

tourism (22%). In regard to the key factors for choosing a slow-paced experience, contact with nature was the most appealing aspect for more than 50% of them (*ibidem*).

On the other hand, food and wine experiences were the key factor in 21.8% of cases. Villages and small towns provide the ideal context for such adventures, as they preserve a heritage of ancient agro-food productions handed down from generation to generation. Recent research by the Fondazione Symbola-Coldiretti (2018) clearly highlights this strong bond. Specifically, the study involved the mapping of all Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) branded products in Italy, in relation to municipal territories. The results show that almost all typical products are from the territories of smaller towns. In particular, a total of 297 typical products were mapped in the country, and 268 (90.02%) of them, exclusively or partially, referred to municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants (*ibidem*).

3. Attractiveness of small villages and the NRRP

The development of such a framework has contributed to the popularity of villages as tourist destinations as well as to village tourism as a new travel trend.

In addition, the ecological and digital transition process, together with the experience from the pandemic emergency, have triggered great transformations in rural areas which have steadily become the focus for interventions promoted by the central government.

Accordingly, and in continuity with the 2017-2022 strategic planning, within the framework of the NRRP, the Italian Ministry of Culture (MiC) set up a Plan aimed at improving the attractiveness of villages and the enhancement of rural landscapes. Specifically, this intervention was placed within the framework «of strategies [...] that construe culture as a cross-cutting factor in territorial and local development policies» (MiC, 2022, p. 3).

Thus, this investment was consistent with several initiatives launched in recent years, such as the "Save Villages"⁶ Law; the cohesion policies related to the implementation of the SNAI; the 2016 ministerial directives of the then Mibact designating the year 2017 as the "Year of Italian Villages", and 2018 as the "National Year of Italian Food" (*ibidem*).

For instance, within Mission 1 of the NRRP, Component 3 (Tourism and Culture) was aimed to boost the economic sectors of culture and tourism⁷. Therefore, the objective of this component was to increase the country's tourist and cultural attractiveness through the modernization of tangible and intangible infrastructures of the historical and artistic heritage.

The second area of intervention (Measure 2) of Component 3 addressed actions for the regeneration of cultural sites and rural heritage:

«aimed at improving attractiveness, safety and accessibility of places. The interventions are not only directed to "major attractions," but also to the protection and enhancement of minor places (e.g., "villages"), and to the regeneration of urban suburbs, while promoting distinctive places and strengthening the social fabric of the area. These interventions are matched with efforts to upgrade tourist accommodation and tourism services in order to improve supply standards and increase the overall attractiveness». (PNRR, 2021, p. 89).

6 Law No. 158 of October 6, 2017, "Measures for the support and development of small municipalities, and provisions for the redevelopment and recovery of the historic centers of the same municipalities." GU Serie Generale No. 256, 02.11.2017. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/11/02/17G00171/sg> (last access 02 January 2024).

7 The Italian NRRP is made up of 6 Missions. Each MISSION (M) is divided into several COMPONENTS (C), which are broken down into one or more Measures (or Areas of Intervention) organized into specific Investments. Each Investment is made through the implementation of the funded interventions and/or projects. The investment related to Attractiveness of Villages is identified with the acronym M1C3.2.1, corresponding to MISSION 1 (DIGITALIZATION, INNOVATION, COMPETITIVENESS, CULTURE AND TOURISM), COMPONENT 3 (TOURISM AND CULTURE), Measure 2 (Regeneration of small cultural sites, religious and rural cultural heritage), Investment 1 (Attractiveness of Villages).

Measure 2 is consisted of four investments. The first two focused on the Attractiveness of Villages (Investment 1), with 1.02 billion euros allocated, and the Protection and Enhancement of Rural Architecture and Landscape (Investment 2), with 600 million euros in funds allotted.

As for the implementation of the interventions related to the first investment, the “National Village Plan”⁸ was set forth, i.e., «a program to support the economic and social development of disadvantaged areas through the cultural regeneration of small towns and tourism revamping» (*ibidem*, p. 112). Firstly, these actions were based on projects aimed at the recovery of spaces and at the establishment of new facilities and services in the cultural, tourist and social areas. Secondly, they were designed to create and promote new routes, such as thematic paths and historical itineraries. Finally, this measure also provided financial support for cultural, creative, tourism, commercial, agribusiness and craft activities to support local economies by showcasing local products, knowledge and know-how.

The “National Villages Plan” was structured into two separate lines of action. LINE A was oriented to the economic and social recovery of uninhabited villages or those characterized by an advanced process of decline and abandonment; LINE B was directed to the implementation of cultural regeneration projects to stimulate employment and contrast depopulation of small municipalities (MiC, 2021)⁹.

The first line covered the funding of 21 pilot projects, one for each Italian Region and Autonomous Provinces, with the allocation of 420 million euros. On the other hand, the second action line was allocated 580 million euros and was aimed at funding cultural regeneration projects in 229 historic villages. In particular, the 580 million euros of LINE B were divided into two shares; 380 million were intended to support proposals submitted by municipalities; and 200 million were addressed to micro, small and medium-sized businesses located or intending to settle in the selected villages, for an amount of approximately 2.53 million euros per village.

The first step of the plan ended with project proposals related to the two lines of action, i. e., pilot and cultural regeneration projects, that were submitted to the MiC by the call deadline, March 15, 2022. With regard to Line A, the proposal submission was then followed by a negotiation process between the municipalities involved and a technical Committee appointed by the MiC. The process, aimed at verifying the consistency of project proposals with the NRRP implementation processes and timelines, resulted in 20 projects being funded.

As for Line B, approximately 1,800 applications were submitted by municipalities within the deadline. Out of these, 1,595 projects were accepted for assessment, and following the proposal evaluation phase, 289 villages were eligible for funding.

In June 2022, with a special Ministerial Decree¹⁰, funds for the attractiveness of villages were allocated for both Line of Action A - to 20 Pilot Projects for the regeneration of abandoned villages or those at risk of abandonment - and Line B - to 289 municipalities for the implementation of 207 Local Cultural and Social Regeneration Projects (PNRR Cultura-MiC, 2023).

8 Investment 2.1 also includes the Project “Tourism of the Roots - an integrated strategy for the recovery of the tourism sector in post-Covid-19 Italy”, with 20 million euros allocated, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI in Italian) as the implementing body.

9 Villages are defined as small historical settlements that have maintained the recognizability of their historical settlement structure [...]; in the case of small and very small municipalities, they may coincide with the urban center of the municipal territory, while all other cases are considered as historical clusters predominantly isolated and/or separated from the urban center (MiC, 2022, p. 4). However, since the investment was addressed to municipalities with a population under 5,000, the term was appropriately used here to refer to all centers with a population below that threshold.

10 By Ministerial Decree No. 453 of June 7, 2022, a total of 761,866,602.09 euros were allocated. As for Line A, 398,421,075.00 euros were allotted in favor of 20 municipalities for the implementation of an equal number of pilot projects for the cultural, social and economic regeneration of 20 villages at risk of abandonment or abandoned, distributed, one for each Region and Autonomous Province, with the exception of Molise Region due to TAR suspension. Line B was allocated 363,445,527.09 euros in favor of 289 municipalities for the implementation of local projects for the cultural and social regeneration of historic villages under 5,000 inhabitants, selected by public announcement (<https://pnrr.cultura.gov.it/misura-2-rigenerazione-di-piccoli-siti-culturali-patrimonio-culturale-religioso-e-rurale/2-1-attrattivita-dei-borghi/>, last access 2nd January 2024).

The rankings thus defined were updated following a renewed assessment by the Commission. As a result, 4 additional projects and 5 municipalities¹¹ proved to be eligible for funding (one project proposal was submitted in aggregate form by two municipalities). Therefore, to date there are 294 villages and 211 projects that have been funded with the amount allocated to Line B.

4. Examples of Line A projects

Line A pilot projects, selected as part of the Village Attractiveness investment, were granted 20 million euros per municipality.

In relation to the areas of intervention and purposes (see Tab. 1), these projects mainly focused on the enhancement of local productions, the development of agribusiness, the creation of new cultural, economic and tourism functions (beekeeping study center, cultivation of abandoned lands, typical product itineraries, and promotion of archaeological heritage), the development of tourist destinations (establishment of tourist accommodation activities), and the transformation of the villages into smart communities.

Tab. 1 - Small Villages National Plan (Line A):
some pilot projects for the regeneration of small villages at risk of depopulation

VILLAGES	AREAS OF INTERVENTION	PURPOSES
<i>Campolo (BO)</i>	Restoration of public and private assets; launch of cultural start-ups	Residential housing; new cultural and tourism purposes
<i>Cesi (TR)</i>	Sports and tourism, accommodation and housing, handicraft and agribusiness sectors	Creation of a village-territory
<i>Elva (CN)</i>	Establishment of Beekeeping Study Center, Astronomical Observatory and Traditional Knowledge Center	Refurbishment of areas for cultural, social and economic regeneration
<i>Fontainemore (AO)</i>	Agribusiness hub, creation of historical paths and enhancement of the chestnut and Toma production chains, e-infrastructures	Digitalization and enhancement of services, enhancement of land resources
<i>Livemmo (BS)</i>	Arts and culture, nature and hospitality, local productions, community services	Establishment of new enterprises, collaboration dynamics, renovation of estates
<i>Pietrabbondante (IS)</i>	Enhancement of archaeological heritage	Residential housing, enhancements of visits to the archaeological site, tourism destination development
<i>Recoaro Terme (VI)</i>	Recovery of thermal real estate properties, refurbishment of buildings, implementation of educational center on spas	Activation of thermal facility, Little Dolomites among sustainable mountain tourism destinations, halt of population decrease
<i>Stelvio (BZ)</i>	Ecological renovation of old property assets, cultivation of abandoned lands	Implementation of socio-cultural and socio-economic projects
<i>Ulassai (NU)</i>	Tourist accommodation, enhancement of natural, cultural and artistic heritage, digital innovation	Village transition into smart community

Source: Elaboration on Ministry of Culture data (MiC, 2021)

In accordance with the general objectives of the Plan, the corresponding actions are geared towards fostering the development of new services, also through social participation as a lever of inclusion and regeneration, in order to improve attractiveness and accessibility both physically and digitally, for residents and new inhabitants, in an overall perspective of environmental sustainability.

¹¹ By Decree of the Secretary General No. 381 of April 20, 2023, funds totaling 6,811,971.58 euros were allocated to four additional projects (*ibidem*).

More specifically, some of the selected proposals fully fit into this trend thanks to planning strategies primarily based on recovery and redevelopment projects that mainly leverage the community's full involvement¹² in the development and implementation of actions.

4.1 Sustainable recovery plans and participatory approach: two symbolic proposals

The project proposal for the village of Campolo was selected as a pilot project for the Emilia-Romagna Region¹³. Specifically, the project called *"Da Campolo l'arte si fa Scuola"* corresponds to the proposal submitted by the municipality of Grizzana Morandi, a small village of 3,900 inhabitants in the metropolitan city of Bologna, including the village of Campolo. There are 150 housing units in Campolo, 80% of which are no longer inhabited and in a state of abandonment. The project proposal of the Municipality of Grizzana Morandi was selected as the best strategy to comply with the guidelines of the MiC within the NRRP. In fact, it focused on integrated actions for the protection, recovery and enhancement of the local cultural, architectural and artistic heritage and aimed at the social and economic regeneration, as well as at contrasting its depopulation. Among the reasons provided to support their choice, and in relation to the strengths of the project strategy, Emilia-Romagna Regional Council highlighted, the presence

«of a rich associational and institutional network that joined the project, and the creation of a Community Cooperative able to manage the new forms of residential housing and tourist accommodation. The recovery of high-quality housing in Borgo di Campolo, together with employment benefits generated by the establishment of new cultural and artistic activities, supports the strengthening of eco-sustainable mobility infrastructures (Eurovelo 7 bicycle-pedestrian pathway, the hiking network included in the regional system of itineraries, and the creation of shared mobility systems) » (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2022, pp. 7-8).

Under the adopted governance model, the municipality of Grizzana Morandi, being the proposing party, took on the role of facilitator in the process of integration and collaboration among a number of stakeholders (local associations, stakeholders operating in specific areas, institutional bodies providing guideline and cultural guidance, such as the University, the Conservatory and the Academy of Fine Arts).

From this outline, it is understood that the project strategy was designed to integrate proposing stakeholders with the local community based on a collaborative governance model, then resulting in an inclusive process of resource management and wide participation through the integration of local knowledge and expertise (Tocci, 2020). In a similar vein, the creation of a community cooperative aligned with this perspective, as it was an innovative model based on a bottom-up approach. Here, community members collaborate and become both producers and users of goods and services, thus fostering growth opportunities, cohesion, and synergies in the community (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2022, *op. cit.*).

The Village of Ulassai is another remarkable project proposal entitled *"Dove la natura incontra l'arte"*. It was selected as pilot project by the Region of Sardinia, thus being awarded 20 million euros as part of the NRRP funds for the cultural, social and economic regeneration of villages.

12 In the long term, local community participation is fundamental for projecting a sustainable and successful tourism offer, since citizens' involvement would make the planning process fairer and more effective. However, participatory experiences take on very heterogeneous characteristics, therefore in some cases several issues may be critical. For a clear treatise of the potential and critical issues of community-based tourism planning, see Evangelista (2018).

13 With regard to the selection of the 21 project proposals for Line A of the National Villages Plan, the Guidelines of the Ministry of Culture required each Italian region to identify an exemplary regeneration project for the allocation of 20 million euros. In the case of the Emilia-Romagna Region, the selection was carried out by a special Evaluation Board which determined the ten best applications out of 31 proposals made by municipalities across the Region. These were submitted to the Regional Council, which then appointed the pilot project by a specific resolution (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2022, *op. cit.*).

Ulassai is a small town in the province of Nuoro accounting for only 1,400 inhabitants. Their proposal was based on a sustainable program combining the villages environmental and landscape resources with Maria Lais¹⁴ artistic heritage, considering the artists work as the common factor of social and cultural regeneration.

The rationales that led the Regional Council to choose Ulassai as a pilot project highlight its strategy of transforming the village into a sustainable community based on its artistic environmental heritage and identity, through the promotion of an extensive and concrete participation of the community and local stakeholders in a shared partnership approach.

As stated in the Regional Councils resolution, the project proposal of the Municipality of Ulassai, in addition to fully meeting the objectives of the Guidelines of the Ministry of Culture and being consistent with the cross-cutting priorities of the NRRP, was also chosen due to the unstoppable depopulation of the village. This downward demographic trend has recorded 20% decline in resident population in 20 years.

«According to the Multiple Deprivation Index of Sardinia, the Municipality is classified as a municipality in a state of current and foreseeable demographic distress [...]. Conversely, the Village has a distinctive cultural and environmental background [...] as it is a destination for tourists interested in art and in experiential and nature tourism, owing to its two main attractions: the *Art Station* and the Heels of Ulassai. [...]. The entire project includes a large involvement of the local population [within] a specific action aimed at making [systematic participation] of the population [...] in the definition phases of building and infrastructure interventions and in the participatory co-planning of initiatives» (Regione Sardegna, 2022, pp. 6-7).

The project consists of 38 tangible and intangible actions, ranging from energy efficiency improvements of a tourist facility to the completion of a museum hub, from the refurbishment of a former school building into a multifunctional space for coworking and remote employees, to building recovery and environmental redevelopment, from the organization of events to animated workshops and living labs¹⁵. Specifically, the last initiative entails the active involvement of the community in the creation of «ways to co-create new social, cultural and tourism services, products and facilities» (Comune di Ulassai, 2024).

In this case as well, digital innovation is the cross-cutting direction of the project strategy that aims to convert the village into a smart community striving to offer better services, generate economic growth and reduce its environmental impact.

Similar to community cooperatives, smart community is also an innovative model which entails a bottom-up approach and focuses on the central role of the community in local development processes.

Such models promote continuous innovation within a collaborative system. Indeed, they include a number of stakeholders gathered in a community, i.e., citizens, purchasing groups, cooperatives, and businesses, seeking to combine services, resources, and skills according to a virtuous circle which can ensure the achievement of important community goals, namely sustainability, inclusiveness, collaboration, and territorial enhancement. Consequently, community cooperatives and smart communities are defined as models of social innovation as they are driven by the development of collective actions intended to meet material and immaterial needs and increase people power of action and participation (Vicari Haddock, Moulaert, 2009).

14 She is one of the most important Sardinian artists known especially for her art related to the original use of textiles and poor elements and characterized by the enhancement of the traditions of Sardinia.

15 According to Pallot (2009) «a Living Lab is a user-centred open innovation ecosystem integrating concurrent research and innovation processes within a business-citizens-government partnership». It is a methodology that has already been tested in urban regeneration processes and based on the idea of fostering participation and collaboration between public and private stakeholders in designing solutions and interventions in order to improve their implementation, also including citizens' needs and perceptions.

Final Remarks

In recent years, the debate on small towns and inner areas as a resource has been fuelled by specific strategies to attract new inhabitants, new tourists, and new activities (Fenu, 2020). COVID-19 health emergency has been a further driving factor behind the growing interest in the value of small centres and the opportunities they offer.

The rediscovery of villages and inner spaces (Lozato-Giotart, 2018, *op. cit.*), «linked to the growing awareness of the unsustainable urban-metropolitan model of living, and to the opportunities to recover slower rhythms and ways of living and working» (Bindi, 2021, p. 411), has become the predominant narrative which guides public practices and policies.

In summer 2020 an “invasion” of second-home owners in mountain territories took place (Giacomino, 2020). Also, a boom in proximity tourism in inner areas occurred, which partially coincided with the real reception capacity of these places (Della Valle, Mariani, 2022) - especially in terms of services and infrastructures - which were generally unprepared to face the excessive anthropic overload.

The fact that inner areas have important resources, both tangible and intangible, that can contribute to generating new growth and sustainable development paths is unquestionable. However, as highlighted by De Rossi and Mascino (2020), this implies a radical change in the perspective and policies addressed to these territories so far, which are «almost always focused on local resources capitalisation and their enhancement for tourism» (*ibidem*, p. 51).

Such actions have repeatedly been based on selective and competitive approaches and have encouraged «an elitist use of these territories, where (purely environmental) qualities are “regenerated” to benefit the urban middle class, [reproducing, instead overcoming, precisely those] socio-territorial dynamics that have led to the marginalization of inner areas» (Della Valle, Mariani, 2022, *op. cit.*, p. 39).

In this perspective, the National Villages Plan of the NRRP is an emblematic case. Within the framework of the two lines of intervention envisaged by the Plan related to Attractiveness of Villages, several projects were submitted with the purpose of undertaking actions for regeneration, recovery of heritage, enhancement of typical products (Agribusiness and local food) and tourist reception. In line with the aims of the first Mission of the NRRP, digital innovation is the cross-cutting component of all interventions. Thus, sustainable recovery and the community-driven approach, along with the technological aspects, represent the key features of all the project proposals submitted by the municipalities. Investing in slow and more sustainable forms of tourism, based on the preservation and innovative re-shaping of places, memories, knowledge and craftsmanship, may also turn out to be a boosting strategy for villages and tourism business in general. Indeed, the programs set up by the villages within the MiC Plan apparently fit within this framework. The considerable economic resources provided by the Villages Plan certainly represent important external “inflows” (Piroddi, 2008), which offer fragile contexts the possibility of partly overcoming the deep-rooted difficulties of carrying out recovery processes on their own.

However, it is yet to be explored whether and how effectively the NRRP resources will be implemented for the development of growth models that may fully generating social innovation besides increasing tourism flows. These actions imply the risk that only mere material transformations are made and may lead to a re-shaping of villages and minor centers that will be transformed by the standardizing recovery of tourism. Instead, it would be advisable and necessary to use the available resources in order to provide actual solutions to local communities needs. In its original meaning, social innovation is ultimately about “change” and “social transformation” (Moulaert *et al.*, 2017) and, more specifically, how change can meet emerging collective needs (Moralli *et al.*, 2017). This perspective must necessarily be applied to the technological component as well. The purpose of planning strategies is to develop models that are strongly aligned with the implementation of technology-based solutions. However, the planned interventions

should not lead to mere digital applications. Conversely, to develop models for growth, technology must become an empowering tool and support (Berardi, 2018). In order to be effective, technological components must always be developed and used in a collaborative manner by sponsoring stakeholders, such as institutions, and users, including citizens and the community. As a result, social innovation is not limited to technical issues, but encompasses the collective use of processes, products and models derived from innovative ideas, which are able to meet social needs more effectively than existing alternatives, while simultaneously creating new relationships and collaborations (Murray *et al.*, 2010).

As part of this framework, economic and technological resources must be intertwined with strong cultural action and social innovation in order to achieve a tangible revamping of the villages and create values, relationships, and approaches for (re)building more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable communities, as well as making refurbished spaces more attractive to new residents and tourists.

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From Rural to Digital: Insights from Airbnb Gastro-Experiences in Italian Inner Areas²

Introduction

A new interest in the enhancement of local assets within inner areas has been increasing during recent years, eventually leading to a tourist transition of many formerly abandoned places (Salvatore *et al.*, 2018). This process has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes, leading to measured improvements in rural and inner areas, balanced with certain threats to their authentic heritage. In some ways, this tourist transition has helped small towns overcome the stereotyped images of marginalization, while in other cases, it has led some to risk falling into a category of a fabricated “idyllic rural lifestyle” (Bell, 2006) suitable for holiday purposes, but lagging in the support and development of adequate services for year-round residents (Barbera *et al.*, 2022). Extensive literature on sustainable rural development and tourist transition relies, among others, on two concepts of countryside capital (Garrod *et al.*, 2006) and nexogenous development (Bock, 2016) to frame these processes.

The study here presented applies these concepts to assess the impacts of eno and gastro-tourism offerings through Airbnb’s *Experiences* platform—an offshoot of the company’s original accommodation model. *Experiences* are a compilation of activity-based offerings, with the aim of highlighting more “authentic” services to tourists in coherence with local cultural heritage. *Experiences* have allowed Airbnb to expand its model, providing a space to market activities that are often sold without a tie to accommodations or an overnight stay. Launched in 2016, the *Experiences* project aimed to engage rural tourism providers and expand Airbnb’s network beyond an urban context (Airbnb, 2017a). This kind of networked hospitality exemplified by Airbnb’s model (Oskam, Boswijk, 2016) has already triggered significant innovations by combining advantages for travelers by offering low-cost accommodations with those for residents, who earn extra income from their existing assets. However, the idea of *Experiences* offers an even further step in “alternative hospitality” by gaining specifically from its “secondary effects” (Oskam, Boswijk, 2016)—namely, the experiential value of “living like a local.”

In recent research, Leick *et al.* (2023), highlighted how the Airbnb tourism model has become a “double-edged sword” for small communities. On one hand, Airbnb tourists can positively impact local economies by increasing daily spending on attractions and services, such as museums, restaurants, and shops. However, its predatory nature—largely based on a rather unregulated marketplace—raises concerns. Additionally, Airbnb undeniably contributes to rural gentrification and overtourism pressures, with rental price increases (particularly in urban contexts) and excessive tourist influxes, especially during peak seasons. It may also trigger social conflict driven by unfair competition with other common low-cost accommodation facilities in rural regions, like B&Bs, hostels, and camping sites. This research presented narrows in on one category of these *Experiences*—food and drink offerings—with the intention of understanding how their slow proliferation, via this socially innovative digital platform, has impacted sustainable development across rural and inner communities throughout Italy. The main question to guide this research ask: has Airbnb’s new initiative achieved the aim of supporting the enhancement of local heritage in a socially and economically sustainable way?

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To further inform the study, the following three sub-issues are addressed:

How has the proliferation of Airbnb Food and Drink Experiences in rural Italian spaces triggered new forms of gastro-tourism, if at all?

How does Airbnb's platform either support or undermine tourism initiatives of local community members in rural and/or marginal spaces?

What role could innovative digital platforms like Airbnb play in driving rural development efforts in terms of nexus?

Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study draws insights from three different case studies. After a detailed desk mapping of all Italian eno and gastronomic *Experiences* advertised via the online platform, fieldwork was conducted from June to August 2022, which entailed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with tourism providers and survey responses from rural tourism *Experience Hosts*.³

1. Gastro-tourism in rural areas

From the theoretical standpoint, this study relies mainly on the nexogenous framework (Bock, 2016), which calls for both endogenous and exogenous approaches to rural development through socially innovative strategies. Bock's definition emphasizes «the importance of reconnection and reestablished socio-political connectivity of especially marginal rural areas» (p. 570). Nexogenous development is driven by bottom-up community initiatives, coupled with the utilization of external resources and capital to support these efforts. Airbnb's Experience model fits this framework by attempting to bridge the gap between the commodification of rural resources through agricultural-based, eno or gastro-tourism offerings and the power and capital of a global digitalized platform. The element of social innovation (Barbera, Parisi, 2019) is equally significant and has served as a complementary guiding category of this research, as it is a notable avenue of development recognized by the Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas (INSIA). Namely, innovation in this context refers to a social and organizational change that can establish a mutual learning relationship among various social actors: formal institutions, economic operators, associations, and citizens. Such innovations can be achieved through continuous dialogue that allows for the exchange of embedded local and external knowledge within the frameworks of community engagement and place-based policies (Lucatelli *et al.*, 2022).

A growing emphasis on multifunctional approaches to rural regeneration emerged during the twentieth century, with tourism highlighted as a compelling way of diversifying countryside economies. Given the documented outmigration of many young people from peripheral spaces in the Italian countryside (East, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2019), rural dwellers must seek innovative solutions to address the economic stagnation that accompanies this exodus. Some rural gastro-tourism offerings provide a nexus that links local producers and external consumers or investors, resulting in greater financial support through income diversification and the introduction of outsiders, often brought about by socially innovative offerings that may eventually make the countryside more economically and socially vibrant (Garrod *et al.*, 2006).

Territorial food heritages—or *terroir*—are often employed to convey value and legitimacy to community outsiders and tourists, and thus play a central role in developing a successful rural tourism offering. Bessière (2013) argues that utilizing territorial gastronomic identities is an effective way to shape a tourist offering. In a similar vein, Vaquero Piñeiro *et al.* (2019) frame local food offerings as both social and cultural capital linked to territorial growth, essentially reiterating the idea that heritage is the basis for rural development—particularly around food-related traditions. Contemporary rural offerings have worked to strike the balance between selling the idealized notion of rurality as framed through food heritage, while rejecting its original status as a place of

3 "Hosts" is the term Airbnb uses to describe tourism providers who advertise an offering on their website.

backwardness. To further this notion, some scholars (Guan *et al.*, 2019) refer to a “cultural turn:” indicative of the trending reimagination of rural spaces as havens of food heritage.

Yet, an inherent contradiction arises around heritage and authenticity when utilized for profit-centric activities. In Reynolds view (1994) as an attraction becomes more popular, it is often then perceived to be less authentic; thus suggesting the dilution of tradition through the food heritage title when utilized for the sake of tourism. However, while marketing rural experiences may inherently undermine food heritage authenticity, this process may support the longevity and survival of certain rural spaces. Therefore, the inherent contradiction in the fabrication of authenticity for the sake of tourism lies in its power to ensure the continual production and re-invention of local tradition.

To achieve this objective, Andreoli and Silvestri (2017) urge a greater emphasis on the connection between agriculture and tourism, particularly in inner areas, to provide a more comprehensive rural offering. Other scholars (Figuers, 2013; Uludağ, 2019) argue that a rural tourism offering lacking a focus on gastronomy can lead to an increase in the threats to the region by eventually weakening local agriculture. Thus, while some (Li *et al.*, 2019) ultimately conclude that the future of rurality is not agriculture in strict terms, the reality would seem otherwise, especially with a multifunctional approach.

Beyond and across food heritage practices, rural development via tourism is widely recognized as a way to capitalize on local resources (Garrod *et al.*, 2006; Li *et al.*, 2019; Ray, 1998)—whether through food, language, landscape, or cultural traditions—as commodities to attract tourists. The ability to recognize and utilize these resources in a touristic model is highly reflective of van der Ploeg’s (2010) emphasis on employing local knowledge—*art de la localité*—in multifunctional rural development efforts.

Relatedly, social innovation has become increasingly referenced in the literature as a way to emphasize efficiency and increased social benefits, along with a focus on collaboration and network building (Barbera, Parisi, 2019). These factors are also addressed within the paradigm of nexogenous development.

Approaching innovation in rural tourism can be done from multiple perspectives. In essence, alternative forms of tourism are considered innovations to the dominating form of mass tourism today. While innovations in tourism offerings need not be exclusively technical, the reference to Internet connectivity suggests that digital elements may play an integral role in the success of tourism offerings (Sidali *et al.*, 2011; Aleffi, Cavicchi, 2020). Alternatively, the intangible nature of these innovation processes must also be addressed (Quaranta *et al.*, 2016), as network building, trust, collaboration, and knowledge exchange are all essential immaterial factors for the sustainable development of rural areas.

Therefore, a successful development strategy through an innovative approach does not take root in isolation, but rather seems to depend on the empowerment of local community members (Aleffi, Cavicchi, 2020; Barbera, Parisi, 2019; Basile, Cavallo, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2019; Moscardo, 2008; Quaranta *et al.*, 2016; Salvatore *et al.*, 2018), as well as on the incorporation of urban or peri-urban resources and actors into the initiative, as argued by Bock (2016) and Li *et al.* (2019).

2. From rural to digital: where is the nexus?

It is widely accepted that connectivity and collaboration are key to effective rural development strategies rooted in innovation. A mix of endogenous and exogenous influences allows for greater resilience in rural systems. Within the context of the brain drain as a defining feature of marginalized areas, the return and expansion of more innovative thinkers with a greater ability to adapt and transform is seen as essential to the countryside’s survival (Li *et al.*, 2019).

Bock (2016) similarly notes the power of combining traditional, local knowledge with external sources of modernization through the nexogenous development model, which seeks to merge efforts of both internal and external actors. The nexogenous approach is itself an innovation in the realm of rural development efforts. The current literature, then, makes clear that the preservation of rurality, almost ironically, requires the incorporation of external resources—both of financial and social capital, as also highlighted by the INSIA approach to local development (Lucatelli *et al.*, 2022). Essentially, marginalized areas must aim to better connect with globalized spaces, which is not to argue for their urbanization, but rather for their ability to channel the services of urbanity while maintaining a local character. To pursue this principle of territorial cohesion—which ensures that economic activities, social development, and growth opportunities are evenly distributed across different regions—it is paramount to improve access to basic services and infrastructure, such as health, education, and work. However, the digital divide that often exists between urban and rural areas poses an additional challenge in meeting these social needs. In particular, the role of technology in the 21st century is also unavoidable and now widely recognized as an effective tool for marketing and communication, especially in tourism. Some scholars (Andreopoulou *et al.*, 2014; Pato, Duque, 2021) have recognized the inherent linkage between rural tourism and sustainability, and they call for the improved implementation of website-based marketing as a tool to successfully communicate those values. Pato and Duque (2021), for example, reiterate that technology should be included as an additional pillar of sustainability. Electronic word of mouth may also play an important role in the development and growth of rural tourism businesses, which is achieved through the creation and maintenance of captivating websites by tourism providers (Pato and Duque, 2021): a concept that today could extend to all forms of social media.

Within this realm, Airbnb *Experiences* have become a relevant case in nexogenous-driven rural development efforts through eno and gastro-tourism. As a relatively newer global platform with potential to encourage exchange amongst people from across the world, Airbnb activity might shed a new light on approaches to socially innovative rural development. Over the past few years, the company has used the platform to promote rural development and the regeneration of abandoned towns, most evidently through its Italian Villages project, which is the product of a partnership with the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Activities, and Tourism, or MiB-ACT (Airbnb Newsroom, 2017). The project intended to «Showcas[e] these small Italian towns to travelers from all over the world [...] helping to improve their local economies by encouraging off-the-beaten-track, sustainable tourism» (Airbnb Newsroom, 2017, p. 5). More recently, the company has also launched its Rural Bootcamp to train Hosts in these areas, with the aim of improving their platform utilization (Airbnb Newsroom, 2022). Another project, “The Italian Sabbatical,” launched in 2019 as a partnership between Airbnb and a local Italian NGO, brought volunteers from around the world to the village of Grottole to drive community regeneration (Airbnb Newsroom, 2019). Additional partnerships with Slow Food, Agritourist, Touring Club Italiano, and the Associazione Nazionale degli Alberghi Diffusi have contributed to the company’s work in this realm (Airbnb Newsroom, 2022).

Therefore, within community-based tourism, Airbnb may emerge as a particularly interesting player to drive nexogenous development by offering the services of expansive, digital connectivity to promote the values and local offerings of rural areas.

While initially, the utilization of modern technology and global capital to bolster local, traditional producers appears aligned with Bock’s framework (2016), it has become apparent that the actual efficacy of the platform in practice may deviate from its stated mission. Since research into the impacts of Airbnb’s *Experience* platform is almost non-existent, it proves difficult to draw conclusions on sustainability factors. There is extensive research, however, on the company’s original accommodation model, particularly in urban areas. In this realm, Airbnb has been criticized for its community and economic impacts. For example, in their Lisbon-based study, Petruzzi *et al.* (2020) note a mixed perception of Airbnb, with most complaints targeted toward the impacts on

local housing markets and the increase of overtourism in high traffic areas. In October of 2023, Florence instituted a ban on new short-term rentals across the city in an attempt to regulate housing and rental prices for locals (The Guardian, 2023). Leick *et al.* (2023) note similar concerns in the early findings of their fieldwork from Norway, Iceland, and Denmark.

Newer studies on Airbnb's role in rural areas has emerged only within the last three to four years, coinciding with its recent expansion outside of cities and urban contexts. Presenza *et al.* (2020) analyze Airbnb as a model case study for its reliance on social innovation to adopt a more sustainable business model. As a multisided platform, which is a digital space that allows two or more players to directly interact, Airbnb has succeeded in expanding its network and innovating new projects that involve both rural and urban actors. Particularly notable in the sustainable tourism realm was its recent addition of Social Impact Experiences (Presenza *et al.*, 2020).

Thus, while not yet widely developed, emerging literature recognizes the potential of innovations through multisided platforms to support sustainable rural development. Airbnb *Experiences*, then, are still a relevant case study, as tourists can search for an activity in their desired destination related to gastronomy, culture, sports, art, and more—all of which are hosted by locals. While opinions of the platforms expansion into rural areas are ultimately mixed, several tactics exist to mitigate the negative effects of Airbnb's growth—like taxations or limitations on its expansion. While the concerns around overpopulation, preservation of local identities, and economic investment in communities have largely impacted urban areas thus far, many fear that rural tourism providers may begin to face the same challenges if Airbnb continues to expand into the countryside. The potential for these trends to spread calls into question whether or not Airbnb's offering truly promotes a sustainable tourism model, and particularly if it effectively supports a sustainable approach to rural development through real social nexus and community engagement.

3. Research method and tools

To study the impact of Experiences in rural communities, the researchers adopted a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003), combining desk mapping and survey responses with participation in three case studies. From March to June 2022, the researchers' first phase of data collection focused on creating a database of every applicable Experience to cross-reference with corresponding indicators in the related municipalities. Then, qualitative data gained from in-depth interviews and participant observation during fieldwork from June to August 2022 served to support these findings. The study was not regionally bounded, but rather looked at Food and Drink Experiences throughout all of Italy. In fact, the researchers selected three cases based on geographical diversity—mountains, coast, and plains—to explore potential variances in tourism development according to the culture and economy of different territories.

Through the methodological framework, the researchers employed a place-based strategy to highlight the individual identities of municipalities within a wider national context. Comparing micro-level data on tourist flows to regional and national totals, alongside findings from qualitative interviews, the researchers intended to uncover the territorial differences in rural tourism development through social innovation.

3.1 Background interviews

From March to July 2022, the researchers conducted a limited number of background interviews with four key informants as part of an exploratory phase aimed at better understanding Airbnb's mission, model, structure, and dynamics through its Experience offerings. While they contacted numerous Airbnb corporate employees with requests for interviews, regrettably none were

granted. To compensate for this lack of internal perspective, the researchers instead conducted proxy level interviews with professionals working in the realm of rural development—most with some degree of collaboration with Airbnb. These included a Slow Food employee, the co-founder of a local start-up, the CEO of a social enterprise/NGO, and a popular food tourism provider. The interviews were semi-structured and primarily addressed themes around rural development, rural networks and coalitions, digital platforms, and values like heritage and terroir.

3.2 Airbnb Experiences mapping

Simultaneously, from March to June 2022, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to compile a thorough list of all relevant offerings on Airbnb’s website. The total count of relevant Experiences fluctuated in number from 1,675 to 1,683 over the months of data collection, as Hosts can add or remove their offering from the site at any point depending on their willingness and availability to accommodate tourists. Every applicable Experience was cross-referenced with the ISTAT grade of urbanization to filter only for those hosted in rural areas. Ultimately, the created database included a list of 329 Experiences that fit the predetermined criteria: those related to eno or gastro-tourism and hosted in a place classified as rural, according to ISTAT.

3.3 Survey design and distribution

To supplement the desk research, a fifty-five question survey was sent to Hosts in the sample of Experiences (239) and responses were collected from June to August 2022.⁴ Given the relatively low sample population, the survey was sent to all 239 providers with the hope of increasing responses to yield statistically significant data. The survey was composed of five sections referring to different research dimensions as stated below (Figure 1):

- (1) Host Background
- (2) Airbnb Experience Offering
- (3) Collaboration with Airbnb
- (4) Community Development via Tourism
- (5) Social Innovations and Offering Uniqueness

Figure 1 - Dimensions and aspects investigated in the survey

Survey Dimensions	Specific Aspects Investigated
Host Background	Demographics, Education, Business Establishment
Airbnb Experience Offering	Name, Focus, Seasonality, Visitors’ Profile
Collaboration with Airbnb	Duration, Booking Rate, Prices/Fees/Commissions, Quality Assessment
Community Development via Tourism	Engagement and Impact, Ecological Outcomes, Sustainability
Social Innovations	Training, Technology, Language, Territorial Networking, Business Evolution

The survey received 68 valid responses, representing a 28.5% response rate.

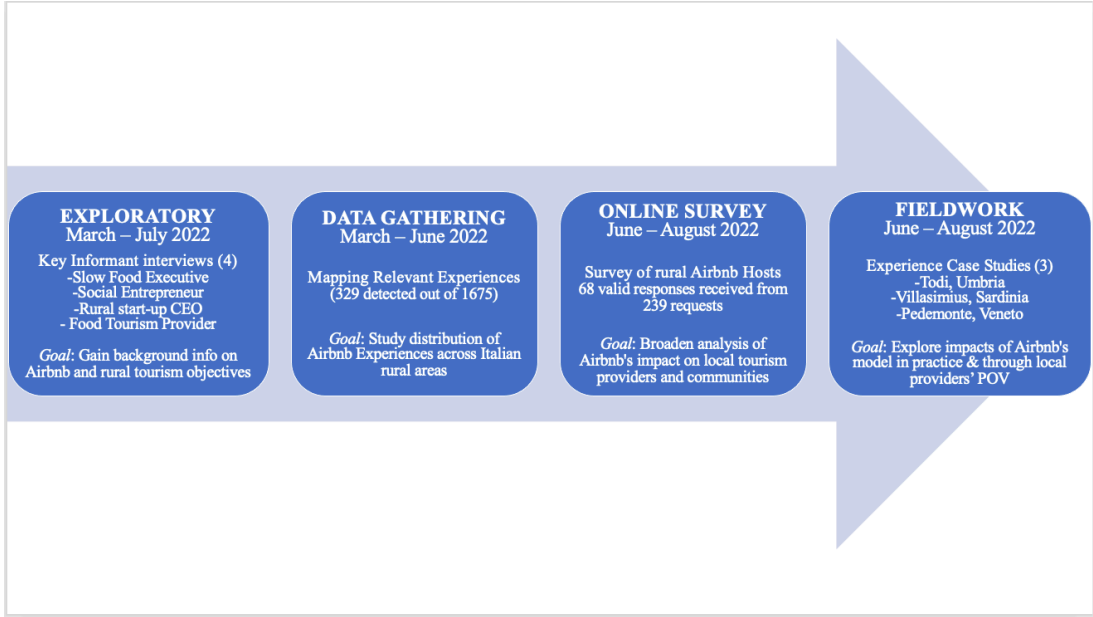
4 The number of Experience Hosts (239) was fewer than the number of Experiences (329) in the sample because some individuals sell multiple offerings. Furthermore, between the time of data collection and survey distribution, certain Experiences were removed from Airbnb’s website. These two factors account for the difference in number between included Experiences and the survey population.

3.4 Fieldwork and case study selection

To complement the data collection, the researchers made a purposive selection⁵ of three case studies, drawn from the Experiences sample, for participation and observation. Fieldwork for each case study Experience was conducted from June to August 2022, lasting approximately three days each. The researchers prioritized Experiences offered in inner areas, per the INSIA classification. Furthermore, to create conditions of comparability, the researchers guided the selection based on differences in ISTATs altimetric zone categories, selecting one in a mountainous area and one along the coast. The third case was classified as an Intercommunal Pole B (INSIA) and a small city or suburb (ISTAT); therefore, it was neither marginal nor rural.⁶ Instead, it offered a point of comparison about the use of digital platforms between rural and urban areas. The final case selections were in Todi, Umbria; Villasimius, Sardinia; and Pedemonte, San Pietro in Cariano, Veneto.

A total of eight interviews were conducted during fieldwork with both tourism providers and professionals in the field of rural development and tourism innovation. Only three of the eight interviewed collaborated directly with Airbnb to market their offering, while the remaining five were additional providers in the vicinity. Interviewing both classes of operators allowed for greater understanding about the platforms’ influence and prevalence in these communities. The interviews were semi-structured and the researchers followed a guide of main topics and sub-topics to conduct them, which included the following primary themes: demographic information, collaboration with Airbnb, the *Experience* offering, and sustainable development. The full research process is summarized below (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Timeline of research process and tools



5 The selection was purposive because researchers prioritized cases in rural and inner areas, with geographic diversity (North, Central, South/Islands). Once these criteria were accounted for, the selection of viable cases was ultimately random, relying also on the tourism providers’ willingness and ability to participate.

6 The selected case study located in Pedemonte, Veneto is considered a ‘*frazione*,’ which means that the area is too small to be listed in ISTAT and INSIA databases. Therefore, the researchers relied on census data from the municipality in which it resides: San Pietro in Cariano.

4. Findings and results

From the initial desk research, it became clear that the expansion of Airbnb *Experiences* into rural areas was limited. Only 20% of the sampled total of 329 were hosted in rural areas, and even fewer in inner areas, suggesting that while Airbnb may market its platform as a tool for rural development, its impacts thus far are minimal. Furthermore, an analysis of the distribution of sampled *Experiences* across regions showed that the highest number (43% of the sample) were located in Tuscany, which is already a popular tourist destination, whereas less visited regions, like Marche, Molise, and Val d'Aosta offered less than 3 *Experiences* each. These regional differences suggest that *Experiences* have increased proliferation in areas with an already developed economy for gastro-tourism. This disparity led the researchers to hypothesize that the cause may reflect a lack of authentic, locally-based engagement from Airbnb corporate personnel or appropriately targeted marketing in more marginal communities.

4.1 Key findings from the survey

The survey conducted among Airbnb *Experiences* Hosts (68 valid responses out of 239 distributed) helped to further contextualize the development of innovative, gastro-tourism offerings across rural Italy. Most of the sampled Hosts (about 68%) obtained, on average, a high level of education, but less than half (about 41%) received formal training in hospitality or tourism, suggesting a pre-existing level of innovation. Just over half of respondents (about 53%) indicated that their offering relied on seasonality and just under 80% reported that it revolved around a geographic origin label or heritage product, supporting the idea that agriculture and *terroir* are central to a rural tourism offering. From these responses, the researchers concluded that the influence of Airbnb has not significantly changed the type of offerings sold, but rather offered an innovation in marketing tactics to fulfill this long-lasting desire to encounter heritage.

When asked to report their satisfaction with Airbnb through a Likert scale rating from 1-5, the survey respondents indicated average satisfaction with regards to support provided (3.6), quality of communication (3.3), and profit split (3.0), as demonstrated below (Figure 3). Interestingly, about 34% of respondents reported receiving one to five bookings per week through Airbnb, while about 45% reported the same number of bookings per week through other Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). Despite the differences in bookings and the financial challenges posed by the commission rate, 94% of surveyed Hosts still reported a willingness to continue utilizing the platform. Thus, the desire for greater visibility, which providers frequently stated as a central motivator for its use, often seemed to override financial concerns. Ultimately, 65% of the survey respondents indicated that they believed collaboration with Airbnb has led to an increase of tourism in their area.

Hosts were similarly asked to rate the impact of their collaboration with Airbnb on various community indicators and their responses demonstrated that they perceived a much greater impact on business and economic development compared to community building and environmental considerations (Figure 4). However, almost 87% confirmed that sustainability was a central focus of their business, with various measures undertaken to support this objective, the most common of which was an *"exclusive use of local food"* in their offering (Figure 5).

The final section of survey questions revolved around innovation in the industry, such as through targeted trainings, the use of technology, language capability, business evolution, and the offering's uniqueness. About 20% of respondents indicated that technology was not a central part of their marketing strategy prior to the collaboration with Airbnb, and 19% indicated that they did not use technology in their business promotion at all prior to the collaboration. But the responses pointed at more than technical innovation, such as an ability to speak multiple languages and manage multiple businesses. Even prior to the survey collection, one key informant

had supported the notion that Airbnb Hosts tended to be innovative by nature: “Airbnb just select[s] projects that...you’ve never seen before. Only special projects. For example, the Italian Sabbatical was the first residency launched around the world. Also...Wonder Bee & Bee was the first house where you could sleep surrounded by one million bees. All these things because they [Airbnb] are very good in communication.” - Key Informant. In further support of this notion, 84% of respondents indicated that their business changed or evolved in recent years, but only 32% of respondents reported that no other similar businesses existed in the vicinity, suggesting that the uniqueness of offerings was low. Taken together, the survey responses suggest that Hosts tend to be fairly innovative, and that Airbnb collaboration may have pushed some toward more technological innovations in their business model.

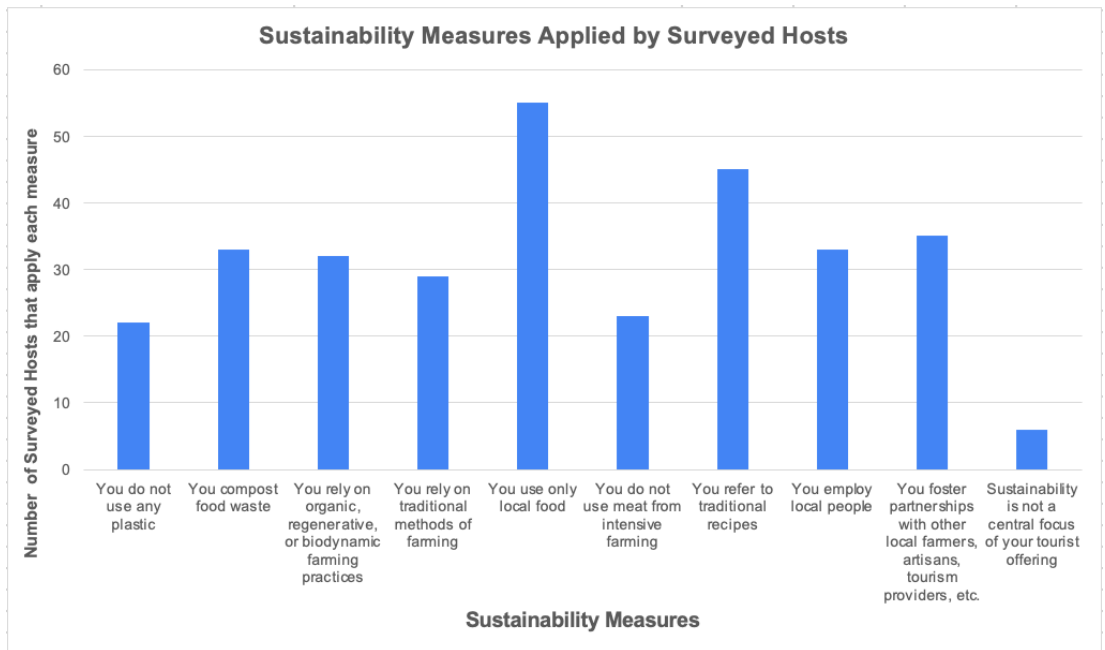
Figure 3 - Scores of Hosts level of satisfaction with Airbnb on various indicators

Level of Satisfaction with:	Average Scores
Technical support	3.6
Communication with Airbnb Operators	3.4
Individualized Support	3.4
Promotion and Marketing	3.3
Communication with Airbnb upper-management	3.2
Community building with other tourism providers	3.0
Percentage of Profit	3.0

Figure 4 - Scores of Airbnb's impact on various indicators according to surveyed Hosts

Impact of Collaboration with Airbnb on:	Average Scores
Your business development	3.9
Your quality of life	3.7
Local economy	3.7
Social culture of local community	3.6
Environmental conditions of local community	3.4

Figure 5 - Sustainability measures undertaken by surveyed Hosts



4.2 Fieldwork findings

The diversity of interviewee's geographical background offered an interesting point of comparison to understand how general perceptions of rurality across contexts influence digital platform use. Interestingly, only three out of the twelve interviewed providers (four key informants and eight tourist operators) obtained education in a field related to food or agriculture, while none were trained in hospitality specifically. Throughout the fieldwork, themes around coalitions, sustainability, heritage, capacity-building, and personal values emerged. Manual coding from the interview transcriptions made evident that the central guiding values for providers revolved around their sustainability initiatives, territorial identities, or personalization of the visitor experience.

In discussing their work, many referred, even if implicitly, to multifunctional approaches, while also referencing a concern for socio-economic sustainability, as much as for environmental. When asked about their use of digital platforms, all recognized the value, emphasizing the significance of greater visibility provided by digital marketing. While the interviewed tourism providers acknowledged the power of digital platforms to promote tourist offerings on a wider scale, they stipulated that the commission paid to OTAs created certain challenges. As one Host noted: *"Airbnb has become extremely expensive. [But] what I like of Airbnb is the social element... we can talk to people before we okay them. Sometimes, it's more than just reading the reviews, it's reading what they write"* - Airbnb Host from Todi.

In discussing the increase of tourism to local areas, providers attributed this trend in part to the use of digital marketing services. Another provider further noted that online connectivity was a highly significant component for business development, stating: *"without Booking [the OTA] you can't sell...let's say that it has become huge."* - Tourism provider from Villasimius. This statement supports the survey findings and helps to explain why providers continue to utilize digital platforms despite financial barriers. However, the importance of word of mouth also recurred across the interviews.

Finally, many regarded the impact of COVID-19 as an impetus for increased interest in and demand for rural tourism. Providers frequently mentioned innovations, not only in response to the

challenges posed by the pandemic, but also implicitly as a result of their role in the so-called new peasant generation (Dourian, 2021; Milone, Ventura, 2019).

Ultimately, while Airbnb advertises its work in rural development, its impacts may be minimal. Some of its greatest impediments revolve around a lack of recognition for embedded infrastructure and accessibility challenges that limit tourism growth in remote settings, as well as of awareness for the values that drive rural communities. Perhaps with time and especially through increased partnership with local stakeholders, the company could adopt new measures that would prove more effective to bridge the urban-rural divide, currently evident in the limited proliferation of *Experiences* in remote or peripheral areas. For a summary of comparisons among the three case study findings, see Figure 6 below.

4.1.1 Case one: Todi Umbria (central Italy)

Todi is a landlocked town in central Italy, classified as rural (ISTAT) and an intermediate inner area (INSIA).⁷ Todi's population has decreased by just under 5% between 2002 and 2020, in contrast to growth in both the province of Perugia (6.44%) and the region of Umbria (4.76%) over the same period. Despite the decline in its resident population, tourism in Todi has continued to expand, with a growth in both establishments and beds of over 150% and 130% respectively across the aforementioned years. The tourism function in Todi has also increased, with the current figure now suggesting an important level of activity. Its 2020 tourist function (0.144) surpassed both the provincial (0.113) and regional levels (0.101), positing Todi as an important center of tourism growth for Umbria as a whole. During fieldwork there, the importance of Todi's economy and cultural lifestyle were evident. Through observation, researchers noted that tourism was largely nature or agriculture-based in offering and reflective of the primary territorial productions: olive oil and wine. Slow Food, both as an organization and a philosophy, emerged as a significant force in the development of a territorial gastro-tourism in this area, and all interviewed providers expressed the importance of local food productions for both environmental and socio-economic sustainability.

The *Experience* attended revolved around olive oil and slow food values—a focus that demonstrates a clear linkage between territorial heritage and the centrality of agricultural production. The Host, a retired mechanical engineer, bought and regenerated his property seventeen years ago for the purpose of olive oil and wine production. He began complementing his farm activity with *Experiences* four years prior, employing a multifunctional business approach through the rental of his guest villa to accompany the tours, tastings, and agricultural productions. The visit began with an immersive tour through the olive groves, followed by an informational session on the characteristics that determine a quality oil, and a tasting of three varieties, including the Moraiolo, a Slow Food presidia. Throughout the *Experience*, the Host emphasized values for sustainability, authenticity, and territorial heritage, which all informed his dedication to provide a high-quality and exclusive product. These elements emerged as seemingly central to the marketing strategy—one centered around a B2C (Business to Consumer) philosophy to ensure quality and personalization.

Innovation in gastro-tourism initiatives in Todi was evident during the *Experience*, as well as in other local tourism projects. One of the newest offerings, the so-called "*Transameria*," was recently developed through a partnership between Slow Food and the cyclist organization *Uncover Umbria*. The *Transameria* is highly emblematic of a socially innovative and sustainable tourism project influencing Todi's development. A designated route for hikers or cyclists, the historic road serves to guide participants to local producers for a taste of territorial products. The project's founder indicated an interest in collaborating with Airbnb after undergoing a Slow Food-led training intended to educate potential future Hosts on Airbnb's founding principles, which

⁷ The intermediate inner area classification means that it is located between 20 to 40 minutes driving distance from a service center (Casavola, 2014, p. 25).

can then be transferred to others by capitalizing on the power and reach of digital platforms. She captured the significance of Slow Food's involvement in these projects, while suggesting the need for growth through global collaborations: *"That [the work] of Slow Food... has helped many small farmers, producers, agrarians, etc. But now, there is a need to do something more. Otherwise, there is the risk that young people abandon agriculture for good."* - Tourism Provider from Todi. While the role of OTAs and other digital services, like Google Reviews, play a significant role in building networks by helping to disseminate information more widely, a more traditional form of marketing through word of mouth is still highly regarded by local providers for its efficacy and more personal element. As one provider noted: *"the direct experience [is important]. In the sense that the guest obviously returns home, which is a fundamental thing, where you don't have to pay anything: word of mouth."* - Tourism Provider from Todi.

4.1.2 Case two: Villasimius, Sardinia (Islands)

Villasimius is a seaside town in the southeastern part of Sardinia, just below the Costa Rei and about 60 kilometers outside the regional capital of Cagliari. The area is known for its beaches and marine life and is categorized as a coastal hill (ISTAT). As both a rural and peripheral inner area, Villasimius' 2020 population reached just 3,688 residents—an increase of about 28% from 2002. Yet, its tourist function (2.2) in 2020 highly exceeded the marker of predominant activity in an area. Villasimius' infrastructure revolves around its seaside offerings. The researcher's initial online search for accommodations yielded an impressive number of hotels and beach resorts, while all activity recommendations made by the onsite hotel staff featured restaurants and beach clubs, suggesting that the economy is structured almost entirely around sea and sand tourism. This reality is reflected in the statement by one interview participant, who suggested an element lacking in Villasimius' tourist offerings: *"It [the island] has always been sold as sea. There is not a structured offer of Sardinia. You don't sell the beauty of the patrimony, the archeology, the wine, the food."* - Tourism Provider from Villasimius.

Contrary to its primary focus on coastal tourism, the researchers aimed to assess alternative forms of tourism that could enrich and diversify the typical offerings. For this reason, they selected an *Experience* focused on wine and hosted by the vineyard proprietor and his father. Trained in architecture, the Host turned to wine in 2005, transforming his family property into a vineyard from its former grain production. The business is family-run with just five employees, and the Host noted that only a handful of other cantinas of the sort exist in Villasimius—implying the uniqueness of their offer. The three-hour *Experience* began with a brief, guided walk through the vineyard, as the Host and his father spoke informally about their property, commitment to organic and sustainable methods of agriculture, and their general wine production, before offering a tasting of the product while seated around an outdoor table under a large tree overlooking the vineyard. The tasting was highly informal in nature, centered more around conversation between the visitors and tourism providers, which demonstrated their value for the personalization of every tour. The discussion of the actual product—the wines tasted—was minimal, but the Host offered a brief description of the two bottles opened: a Cannonau red and a Vermentino white, which are both classified as organic, DOC products on their website, speaking to a value of *terroir*.

By offering an alternative to beach tourism, the Host demonstrated a certain level of innovation simply in the focus of his *Experience*. Interestingly, while he emphasized certain agricultural measures around the environmental sustainability of wine production, he also referenced the highly seasonal nature of Villasimius' tourism, implying a greater need for attention to the socio-economic sustainability of a beach-centric economy. This sentiment was further expressed by the second operator interviewed in the area, who argued that: *"one of the disadvantages could be... the seasonality... in the sense that you go from not having many guests... this tourism is not enough anymore"* - Tourism Provider from Villasimius.

The evidence of a tourism focused on rurality and agriculture in Villasimius was hard to find; yet the presence of tourists was not. Nevertheless, the Host noted that his collaboration with Airbnb stemmed from a desire to gain more visibility, and he further recognized an increasing demand for more experiences outside of the sea. He attempted to diversify his business by hosting vineyard dinners, cheese-making lessons, and yoga in addition to the wine tours. He commented off-hand that Airbnb tends to seek out a “wow” factor type of experience, which perhaps was reflective of his choice to offer the tasting outdoors amongst the vines.

During an interview with the second provider in the area, she spoke more about a desire to offer a form of slow tourism that highlights the territory beyond the sea. While she does not utilize Airbnb’s bookings system, this provider recognizes the omnipresence of digital platforms to sell accommodation spaces, so much so that her previous work with a tourism consortium led to the creation of a digital booking site run independently by the territory itself to avoid the profit loss from traditional OTA’s commission fees. Although the site did not survive, the initiative suggested the potential value of innovation through digital platforms to promote tourism. Villasimius may not struggle to attract guests—in fact, interview participants felt the area was characterized by mass tourism and not at all representative of a rural offering. However, the need to create and promote alternatives beyond the sea to ensure greater continuity of income across the year was evident from the interviews. In this sense, the use of Airbnb to highlight unique *Experiences* may serve as a potent tool to garner attention for other territorial offerings of Villasimius during the off seasons, while bolstering the economic sustainability of tourism as a livelihood.

4.1.3 Case three: Pedemonte, Veneto (Northern Italy)

Researchers had the opportunity to attend one final Airbnb Experience in the northern region of Veneto, offered in the countryside but not in a classified rural or inner area. Despite these differences, they chose to attend and interview providers to explore distinctions in both attendance and in the use of digital platforms across the so-called rural-urban continuum (Pahl, 1966). Furthermore, the case offered a third point of comparison from a geographic standpoint, with the area classified by ISTAT as plains. The Experience was hosted by a cantina in the town of Pedemonte and given its proximity to regional points of reference, like Verona and Lake Garda, the researchers noted a higher presence of tourists, despite the subjective ‘remoteness’ of the town itself. Located in the larger municipality of San Pietro in Cariano, whose surface area totals only 20 squared kilometers, Pedemonte composes just a fraction of that space. Yet, a minimum of eight cantinas exist in the village alone, suggesting a high presence and significance of winemaking. In this sense, a more specialized tourism tied to oenology and highly developed in structure and quality was evident, particularly due to the unique territorial heritage associated with wine, and to the production of Valpolicella and Amarone varieties.

Beyond wine-associated businesses, the researchers observed no tourist accommodations and very few restaurants in Pedemonte itself. Despite its vicinity to nearby cities and centers of commerce, all interviewed tourism providers subjectively characterized the town as rural. When asked about the use of digital platforms to market their offerings, they noted various OTAs, some of which were much more tailored to the wine industry, depending on the type of tourist they sought to attract. One provider preferred a much more specific guest, knowledgeable and highly interested in wine, while others opened their offering to the general public. The Experience Host listed several OTAs and partnerships with local travel agencies that she utilized to promote the offering, in addition to her more recent collaboration with Airbnb, which had begun just four months prior to the fieldwork. Like the other rural tourism providers, those interviewed in Veneto noted a high value for word of mouth, along with a desire for greater visibility, which digital platforms and websites provide.

While impossible to draw conclusions from a single case to determine if proximity to urban centers impacts the use and efficacy of digital platforms, the researchers intuit that it may. As one key informant pointed out, the so-called brain drain and marginalization of rural communities makes developing an successful tourist offering even more challenging, which would ultimately impact the reach of visitors as well: “the problem is that everything in rural areas...doesn’t work really well. It’s really challenging. So, from suppliers, to access, to capital, to human resource... [there are many] difficulties to find people that want to work in the project because a lot of people that have [the knowledge] go to cities to work...And that’s why there are not a lot of companies that...invest in those areas.” - Key Informant.

Thus, a more in-depth exploration of digital platform use between rural and urban areas could represent a further step in the future development of this research. As expressed in additional interviews with other participants, the difficulty of selling Experiences in rural areas is often rooted in the lack of accessibility to those places: “We don’t really work with Experiences...because there is no demand... it’s hard for [people] to just go in the [remote] area to have an Experience. But its more common to go for an accommodation.” - Key Informant. Therefore, Pedemonte may prove more “popular” online than more remote offerings if tourists set a geographic boundary on their search for activities and offerings.

Figure 6 - Synthetic overview of the case studies from Airbnb Experience fieldwork

Case studies	Todi (Umbria)	Villasimius (Sardinia)	Pedemonte (Veneto)
ISTAT Municipality Classification	Rural	Rural	Small City or Suburb
INSIA Classification	Intermediate Inner Area	Peripheral Inner Area	Not an Inner Area
Altimetric Zone	Internal Hill	Coastal Hill	Plains
Airbnb Experience Type	Olive Oil Tasting	Wine Tasting	Wine Tasting
Number of interviews collected	3	2	3
Main keywords identified during interviews and direct observation	Innovation; Digital Platforms; Word of Mouth; Slow Food; Agriculture	Innovation; Coastal Mass Tourism; Diversification; Economic Sustainability	Terroir; Rurality; OTAs and digital platforms; Visibility; Agriculture; urban-rural dynamics

Conclusions and final considerations

The aim of this research was to study the impact of Airbnb’s eno and gastro-Experiences as potential drivers of rural development across Italy through the framework of nexogenous development and social innovation. As Barbera and Parisi (2019) note, the common thread among various forms of social innovation is the creation of new solutions that are more efficient, facilitate greater social benefits, and drive new partnerships. The researchers found that the current expansion of Experiences to rural and peripheral areas is limited—even if tourism is growing in some of these communities—suggesting Airbnb’s impact on rural development has been minimal thus far.

Airbnb's greatest support to rural communities is the visibility it provides on a global scale. The platform offers an innovative way to build networks and encourage electronic word of mouth (Pato and Duque, 2021). Rural tourism providers across the study highlighted the essentiality of partnerships, as well as the high value placed on word of mouth to grow their business. The platform offers a new way to achieve both goals digitally and on a much broader scale. Yet, in certain aspects, it also undermines rural provider's initiatives for growth, particularly through the commission rate, which is currently 20% (Campi, 2018, p. 44).

While Airbnb's catalogue of development initiatives and projects reflects a commitment to sustainable growth, the actual impact of its work is questionable. In some ways, the company does provide tools to help foster greater socio-economic and environmental sustainability to support growth, but the importance of a place-based approach in this study is fundamental. It appears that Airbnb has not yet fully succeeded in understanding the unique conditions of rural, and further, peripheral areas, to yield a notable and prolonged impact on development in these spaces—if any at all.

To enhance this study, a deeper investigation into the differing impacts of Airbnb eno and *gastro-Experiences* between rural and urban areas could yield interesting results. While this paper lightly touches on the urban-rural divide, more attention could be given to this dynamic. Furthermore, a number of limitations could be addressed in future research to strengthen this work. Limited time and resources prevented the researchers from conducting more extensive fieldwork. Increasing the number of case studies to be more nationally representative would yield further data from which to draw conclusions. Given that eno and *gastro-Experiences* were launched within the last 10 years and reached rural areas even more recently, it could additionally be valuable to repeat this fieldwork and data analysis within a few years to explore how Airbnb's growth in these spaces may impact the findings. Finally, a more thorough analysis of COVID-19's impacts on rural tourism growth should be considered, particularly given that this research was conducted on the pandemic's tail-end when its effects were still at play.

Airbnb's sustainability commitments and global reach make it an interesting case through which to study rural development driven by eno and *gastro-tourism*. In many ways it translates traditional forms of tourism marketing, such as word of mouth and network building, into digital versions through reviews and online connectivity. However, the values expressed by many rural tourism providers, both explicitly and subtly through their offerings, around personalization, *terroir*, and identity are not yet fully captured and transferred to guests by this platform. The inherent trade-off in the use of digital giants like Airbnb is reflected in the heightened visibility that diminishes personalization. Furthermore, amongst rural communities, Airbnb still seems to face competition from preexisting OTAs, including Expedia and Booking, or simply from the use of free platforms, like personal business websites, social media accounts, and Google.

Airbnb *Experiences* somehow seem to fit the model of social innovation that the INSIA has also sought to apply in addressing inner area marginalization. A more clearly defined and cohesive commitment from Airbnb in local rural development policies—which has been weak so far—might yield a synergetic relationship for the ultimate benefit of these communities. Together, the reinvestment of capital generated from Airbnb's activities into local knowledge, with the enhanced implementation of basic services currently lacking in these areas, have the potential to create a circular economy that could stimulate rural growth and allow a sustainable tourism to thrive. A robust economic system rooted in the services sector might produce returns to ensure the longevity and sustained growth of inner areas, and the strategy proposed by Airbnb might support a successful, innovative rural development strategy—if it can successfully incorporate rural values into its business model in the long term.

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3T SECTION

3T SECTION



FUORI LUOGO READINGS

Mariangela Bellomo, Angela D'Agostino, *Sfide e temi tra tecnologie innovative e network di paesaggi. Apprendere da Aquilonia*, Firenze, Altralinea Edizioni, 2020

Il volume *Sfide e temi tra tecnologie innovative e network di paesaggi. Apprendere da Aquilonia*, di Mariangela Bellomo e Angela D'Agostino, rappresenta un'opera multidisciplinare che esplora come l'innovazione tecnologica possa dialogare con il paesaggio e l'architettura, prendendo come esempio il piccolo centro di Aquilonia. Questo libro è un viaggio attraverso le sfide contemporanee e le soluzioni innovative per la gestione e la valorizzazione dei paesaggi, integrando sostenibilità ambientale e tecnologie avanzate.

Il volume nasce dalle riflessioni a valle di una ricerca svolta, a partire dal 2010, da un gruppo di ricercatori del Dipartimento di Progettazione Urbana e di Urbanistica coordinato da Mariangela Bellomo. Con la ricerca si sono avviati i primi studi sul piccolo centro di Aquilonia, connotato da una storia secolare, reinsediato dopo il terremoto del Vulture del 1930, inserito in una spettacolare condizione naturalistica e caratterizzato da un'architettura testimonianza dei valori dei piccoli centri delle aree interne della Campania. Nell'incipit della ricerca si sono gettate le basi per incontri con i portatori di interesse, sopralluoghi tecnici e descrizione dei luoghi, linee guida legate al rendimento energetico degli edifici e alla regolamentazione dei sistemi di produzione di energia eolica. Si è trattato di un lavoro che, in ambito universitario, viene inquadrato come attività di Terza Missione, che esprime la capacità di ottenere ricadute sul territorio dalle attività formative e di ricerca sviluppate a partire dalla capitalizzazione di esperienze, di metodologie, di lavoro tecnico-scientifico.

La trattazione del libro è suddivisa in tre macrosezioni: le sfide, i temi e le proposte.

Nella sezione dedicata alle sfide viene esaminata la mitigazione climatica, l'identità architettonica e l'innovazione digitale applicata ai piccoli insediamenti. Ripristinare, attraverso l'architettura, il legame tra individuo e la sfera naturale, richiede la formulazione di nuove relazioni tra gli interventi costruttivi e i diversi fattori dell'ambiente naturale, in particolare il clima e le fonti energetiche. Si discute come l'architettura dei piccoli insediamenti debba considerare il clima e l'energia come elementi fondamentali per la conformazione dell'ambiente costruito. Viene evidenziata l'importanza del *deep retrofit* come strategia per migliorare l'efficienza energetica degli edifici esistenti, trasformandoli in strutture sostenibili. Inoltre, si affronta il ruolo delle tecnologie digitali nella salvaguardia del patrimonio architettonico minore, sottolineando il loro potenziale nel ricomporre comunità e connettere conoscenze.

La sezione relativa ai temi si concentra sull'architettura dell'Italia minore, esplorando la storia e le prospettive dei piccoli centri italiani attraverso la Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne (SNAI). A fronte della disparità tra l'Italia dei "poli" e l'Italia dei "margini", per individuare soluzioni condivise e partecipate che tengano al centro l'obiettivo della coesione territoriale nasce nel 2012, su proposta del Ministro della Coesione territoriale Fabrizio Barca, l'idea di una Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne (SNAI), nell'ambito di un Accordo di Partenariato con l'Europa per la Programmazione dei Fondi 2014-2020. Si evidenzia come le piccole comunità italiane custodiscano un patrimonio architettonico che racconta storie di resilienza e adattamento. La SNAI è vista come un'opportunità per rivitalizzare le aree interne, promuovendo lo sviluppo sostenibile e la coesione territoriale. Inoltre, si sottolinea l'importanza delle ricostruzioni post-catastrofe come occasione per ripensare il territorio in chiave sostenibile.

Nella sezione sulle proposte, vengono presentate visioni e strategie per il futuro dei piccoli insediamenti. Le sfide e i temi trattati in questo libro rappresentano una possibile interpretazione e individuazione di fenomeni in atto che coinvolgono il campo dell'architettura e che richiedono al progetto contemporaneo, sia esso incentrato sul singolo edificio piuttosto che sull'intero insediamento, nuove dimensioni per costruire un futuro desiderabile. Viene proposta la creazione

di *network* di paesaggi che integrino architetture diffuse, archeologia e altre reti, con l'obiettivo di sviluppare strategie di valorizzazione integrata, con un forte impatto culturale e ambientale. Si mette in evidenza il ruolo dell'architettura diffusa e del patrimonio archeologico come risorse fondamentali per il turismo sostenibile. Locale/globale, lineare/circolare, reale/virtuale, materiale/immateriale, rete/nodo, solido/liquido, grande/piccolo sono binomi, più volte emersi nella trattazione, che restituiscono un mosaico da comporre e ricomporre per collaborare alla definizione di una nuova cultura della progettualità nella quale è necessario, nonché opportuno, raggiungere un equilibrio attivo e dinamico esito di un sapiente bilanciamento tra il "senso della realtà" e il "senso della possibilità", per evitare sia di stare al di sopra della realtà proponendo l'utopia, sia per evitare di stare al di sotto della realtà, proponendo la rassegnazione e l'immobilità dello stato di fatto.

Il volume si distingue per la sua visione sistemica e per l'integrazione di discipline diverse, dal progetto architettonico alla tecnologia, dalla pianificazione urbanistica alla sociologia. Le autrici sottolineano l'importanza di un approccio generativo, capace di valorizzare le specificità locali e di promuovere nuovi modi di abitare, tenendo conto delle potenzialità offerte dalle tecnologie digitali e dalle reti di connessione.

Sfide e temi tra tecnologie innovative e *network* di paesaggi. Apprendere da Aquilonia offre un contributo significativo al dibattito contemporaneo sull'architettura e il paesaggio, proponendo soluzioni innovative e sostenibili per il futuro dei piccoli insediamenti urbani. Il volume si presenta come un'opera di grande interesse per studiosi, professionisti e decisori politici, offrendo spunti di riflessione e strumenti operativi per affrontare le sfide del nostro tempo.

Feliciano Napoletano

University of Enna Kore

Mariella Nocenzi, *Dal cambiamento alla transizione. Ripensare la società tra crisi e sostenibilità*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2023

Dal cambiamento alla transizione di Mariella Nocenzi si presenta come una proposta di riflessione epistemologica e sistematica particolarmente interessante nell'ambito delle scienze sociali. Il percorso teorico e il discorso sviluppato nella discussione e nella presentazione di dati sperimentali abbracciano varie dimensioni nel tempo e nello spazio, che ci portano, attraverso un viaggio intellettuale e scientifico, a conoscere gli elementi che potenziando la portata del cambiamento lo trasformano in una transizione dagli esiti necessari.

La "transizione sostenibile" viene vista come equilibrio tra gli ecosistemi naturali e sociali e si configura come chiave di cambiamento profondo caratterizzato dalla sua natura multidimensionale. Risposta e strumento per un mutamento sociale che rappresenta il passaggio radicale e irreversibile verso un nuovo modello sostenibile globale. Strumento adeguato e necessario in un periodo storico, o meglio, in un'era, o meglio ancora, riprendendo il film *2018*, nell'epoca umana per eccellenza: *l'Antropocene*; momento nel tempo in cui sono fin troppo evidenti l'impatto dell'attività antropica e le profonde influenze dell'umanità sull'ambiente.

Il lavoro di Nocenzi presenta una struttura circolare, che a ogni cerchio approfondisce il discorso e ci porta verso l'approfondimento successivo. Questo ci permette di seguire l'autrice attraverso passaggi teorici e, quando presenti, sperimentali che argomentano efficacemente la discussione. Introduce il tutto un'esposizione sulla complessità del cambiamento sociale in cui si incontrano i quadri teorici maggiormente rilevanti con la presentazione dei grandi provvedimenti messi in campo dalle più importanti istituzioni, a livello nazionale ed internazionale, come l'approvazione del Next Generation EU e la modifica della Costituzione italiana.

La pubblicazione presenta, quindi, un discorso complesso, che partendo dal cambiamento, declinato come sfida per la società e la sociologia (Introduzione), si snoda, attraverso l'analisi del cambiamento nei paradigmi sociologici tradizionali (cap. 1) e la riflessione del rapporto tra transizione e il nuovo paradigma della sostenibilità (cap. 2), fino ad arrivare, nell'ultimo capitolo, alla presentazione del progetto VEG4FUN che rappresenta la dimensione finale e sperimentale dell'applicazione di quanto precedentemente illustrato. Nel progetto VEG4FUN, muovendosi dal lavoro in laboratorio, si arriva ai dati empirici che si riferiscono non solo al lavoro sotto cappa, ma anche alla rilevazione e all'analisi delle modalità di produzione e di consumo di cibo.

Il cambiamento sociale e la sostenibilità sono messi sempre in relazione alla necessità di una revisione dei paradigmi sociologici classici che hanno tradizionalmente interpretato il cambiamento in termini di evoluzione, progresso, conflitto e trasformazione strutturale. L'analisi del cambiamento sociale viene affrontata come elemento fondante della sociologia, sottolineandone l'importanza nell'ambito dei paradigmi sociologici tradizionali, nelle diverse dimensioni spaziali e relazionali e in rapporto con le strutture sociali. Ma nella contemporaneità si manifesta la necessità di adeguare la sociologia e i suoi strumenti alla realtà che ci circonda per affrontare nuove sfide che sono emerse con forza.

Auguste Comte e Herbert Spencer hanno interpretato il cambiamento sociale in chiave evolutiva. L'autrice, invece, mette in risalto l'idea che il cambiamento non è di per sé sempre evolutivo o positivo. La sfida della sostenibilità ci porta e ripensare il concetto di progresso passando da un modello lineare a un modello circolare e integrato con l'ambiente. Basti pensare al lavoro di Kate Raworth, citata da Nocenzi, con la *Doughnut Economics* (l'Economia della ciambella), in cui si introduce un modello di economia sostenibile che cerca di bilanciare i bisogni umani con i limiti planetari: "L'obiettivo è garantire che tutti raggiungano il benessere, rimanendo entro i limiti ecologici del pianeta" (*Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, 2017).

L'idea di limite, che ispira tutta la discussione verso la necessità di nuovi paradigmi di sviluppo, la ritroviamo più volte nella pubblicazione in cui viene, a tal proposito, citato il lavoro del Club di Roma.

Questo modello si allinea all'idea di una sostenibilità che integri dimensioni economiche, sociali ed ecologiche.

Nocenzi rilegge in un'ottica ecologica e sostenibile gli esponenti della sociologia classica e di quella contemporanea. Per esempio, Weber viene citato e rivisitato più volte, la transizione ecologica in questo modo viene letta come una "razionalizzazione"; la consapevolezza dei limiti del pianeta e della necessità di una relazione con l'ecosistema si avvicina all'uso della "razionalità" weberiana orientata a fini ecologici. Sempre per quanto riguarda Weber, l'utilizzo del concetto di "azione sociale" con la relativa rilevanza dei significati soggettivi che gli individui attribuiscono alle loro azioni, permette di affrontare in modo comprendente il cambiamento. La centralità dell'azione umana diventa il perno di tutto il discorso anche nell'ambito della transizione sostenibile, in cui il cambiamento è influenzato dalle scelte individuali e collettive in un contesto di crisi climatica e sociale.

Sempre per rimanere tra i grandi classici, Nocenzi dà una rilettura ecologica anche della visione marxista dei conflitti tra classi sociali, visti come il motore delle trasformazioni della struttura economica e sociale. Nella rilettura, il conflitto diventa globale, non è più agito tra esseri umani, tra classi sociali, ma tra l'essere umano e l'ambiente, tra le esigenze di crescita economica e la necessità di preservare le risorse naturali. In quest'ottica la "transizione sostenibile" diventa strumento di cambiamento radicale nella relazione tra l'essere umano e la natura.

Nell'era dell'Antropocene l'umanità ha la grande responsabilità rispetto alle crisi ecologiche e sociali, che sono collegate alla "società del rischio", come definita da Beck, in cui è necessario un nuovo paradigma che riconosca il rischio ambientale e che contestualmente proponga soluzioni e trasformazioni che rappresentino il cambiamento sostenibile.

Promuovendo un equilibrio dinamico tra sviluppo umano e la protezione ecologica il nuovo paradigma di sostenibilità risponde all'incertezza che caratterizza la contemporaneità richiedendo alla sociologia di studiare e sostenere trasformazioni che riducano i rischi, promuovano stili di vita sostenibili e incentivino azioni collettive per ridurre le emissioni e preservare la biodiversità. Quindi, l'approccio proposto nel testo mostra come la sociologia possa affrontare i temi ambientali più attuali abbandonando modelli lineari e sviluppando una sensibilità ecologica e transdisciplinare. La sostenibilità diventa un nuovo paradigma sociologico, in cui il cambiamento sociale non è solo un'innovazione interna alle dinamiche umane, ma un processo che considera le interazioni complesse tra società e ambiente, anticipando un futuro basato su equilibrio e giustizia per tutte le forme di vita.

Pertanto, la sociologia viene chiamata a supportare e interpretare le transizioni economiche e sociali che favoriscono cicli di produzione e consumo sostenibili in cui è necessario comprendere le conseguenze di un'economia basata sulla conservazione e sul recupero delle risorse. Inoltre, è spinta a integrare la biodiversità come parte essenziale delle proprie analisi, ampliando la "solidarietà organica" durkheimiana per includere una coesistenza equilibrata e rispettosa tra esseri umani e natura.

Il concetto che è alla base della transizione sostenibile, come descritta nella pubblicazione, ci porta a cercare una coesione tra ecosistema e società dove risuona costantemente la proposta di Latour di abbattere le divisioni tra natura e società.

Antonella Pillozzi

Italian National Institute of Health (Environment and Health Department)

Serenella Iovino, *Gli animali di Calvino. Storie dall'Antropocene*, Roma, Treccani, 2023

Questo brillante volumetto, che esce per i tipi di Treccani libri, scritto da una studiosa italiana esperta di *Environmental Studies*, professoressa di Italianistica e Scienze Umane dell'ambiente presso la North Carolina University, ha il merito di rintracciare le origini dell'attualissimo dibattito sull'antropocene nell'opera di Calvino, restituendoci la visione naturalistica calviniana che preannunciava, *ante litteram*, molti dei temi oggi largamente dibattuti da animalisti, ambientalisti e in generale da chi ha a cuore l'equilibrio del pianeta. Calvino non era un animalista, oggi tuttavia forse sarebbe un difensore dei diritti degli animali, spesso strumentalizzati e utilizzati dall'uomo, perché collocati su un piano gerarchico inferiore, che legittima di utilizzarli, di sottometterli a processi di *testing* per verificare gli effetti dell'agire umano (il caso delle capre usate nell'atollo di Bikini come cavie per testare gli effetti delle radiazioni emanate dalle esplosioni nucleari; il coniglio velenoso di Marcovaldo, che attende la morte per sperimentazione da farmaci, il gorilla albino dello zoo di Barcellona, sradicato dalla sua vita nella giungla ed esposto per i visitatori). Oggi, il concetto di Antropocene viene esplorato da diverse prospettive, che includono la trasformazione dei paesaggi, la modifica degli habitat naturali, l'impatto sull'atmosfera, i cambiamenti climatici e le disparità sociali generate dalle sfide ambientali. Calvino affronta questo tema a partire dal periodo successivo alla Seconda guerra mondiale, tracciando nelle sue opere le tappe salienti della cosiddetta Grande Accelerazione: dall'ascesa delle attività industriali agli effetti devastanti sugli ecosistemi. Egli discuteva delle radiazioni atomiche, delle variazioni atmosferiche e climatiche, e del diluvio di cemento che minacciava di cancellare il paesaggio italiano, oltre alle disuguaglianze generate dalla società industriale e alle conseguenze di questi mutamenti su tutte le forme di vita.

La lettura dell'opera di Calvino proposta da Iovino emerge come un'analisi che parte dall'umano per abbracciare l'intero regno animale, il mondo non umano, la biosfera e il pianeta nel suo complesso.

L'attualità di Calvino è stata recentemente testimoniata da una pubblicistica di altissimo livello, che, come in questo saggio, ci mostra la potenza dell'immaginario, in questo caso letterario, nella rappresentazione di problematiche del nostro tempo.

Il tema dell'ambientalismo nelle città immaginate da Calvino riflette o anticipa i concetti di abitare, affrontando questioni cruciali come la sostenibilità, la sovrappopolazione, la globalizzazione e la memoria delle esperienze che si generano e si perdono. Le parole di Calvino, reinterpretate da Serenella Iovino, ci guidano attraverso un viaggio letterario che non esclude la dura realtà delle catastrofi materiali, morali e discorsive del nostro tempo. Iovino si pone in una posizione liminare tra diverse discipline, facilitando un dialogo interdisciplinare tra le *Environmental Humanities*, la critica sociale, l'etica, l'estetica, le questioni socio-politiche e i temi dell'ecologia e della biodiversità.

Riprendendo una frase dell'autrice: «Non è un bestiario calviniano. È una guida alla biosfera del nostro presente geologico, siamo accompagnati a comprendere il significato profondo del discorso sugli animali: la co-appartenenza dell'umano e dell'animale viene spiegata sulla base di una orizzontalità ontologica, una sorta di parentela viscerale» (p. 121) che lega uomo e animali. Gli spunti proposti dall'autrice, supportati dalla sua solida formazione filosofica, lasciano intravedere piani di riflessione complessi e interrelati: la capacità critica che ci guida a stabilire differenze tra i generi, umano e animale, che stanno alla base di scelte pragmatiche come quella di nutrirsi degli animali, pur condividendo con loro una appartenenza ontologica, richiamano le posizioni del "carnivorismo etico" teorizzato da Dominique Lestel. Senza spingersi alle posizioni di contrapposizione e di colpevolizzazione di chi porta avanti una dieta vegetariana o vegan, per citare i due orientamenti prevalenti, occorre invece costruire una consapevolezza informata,

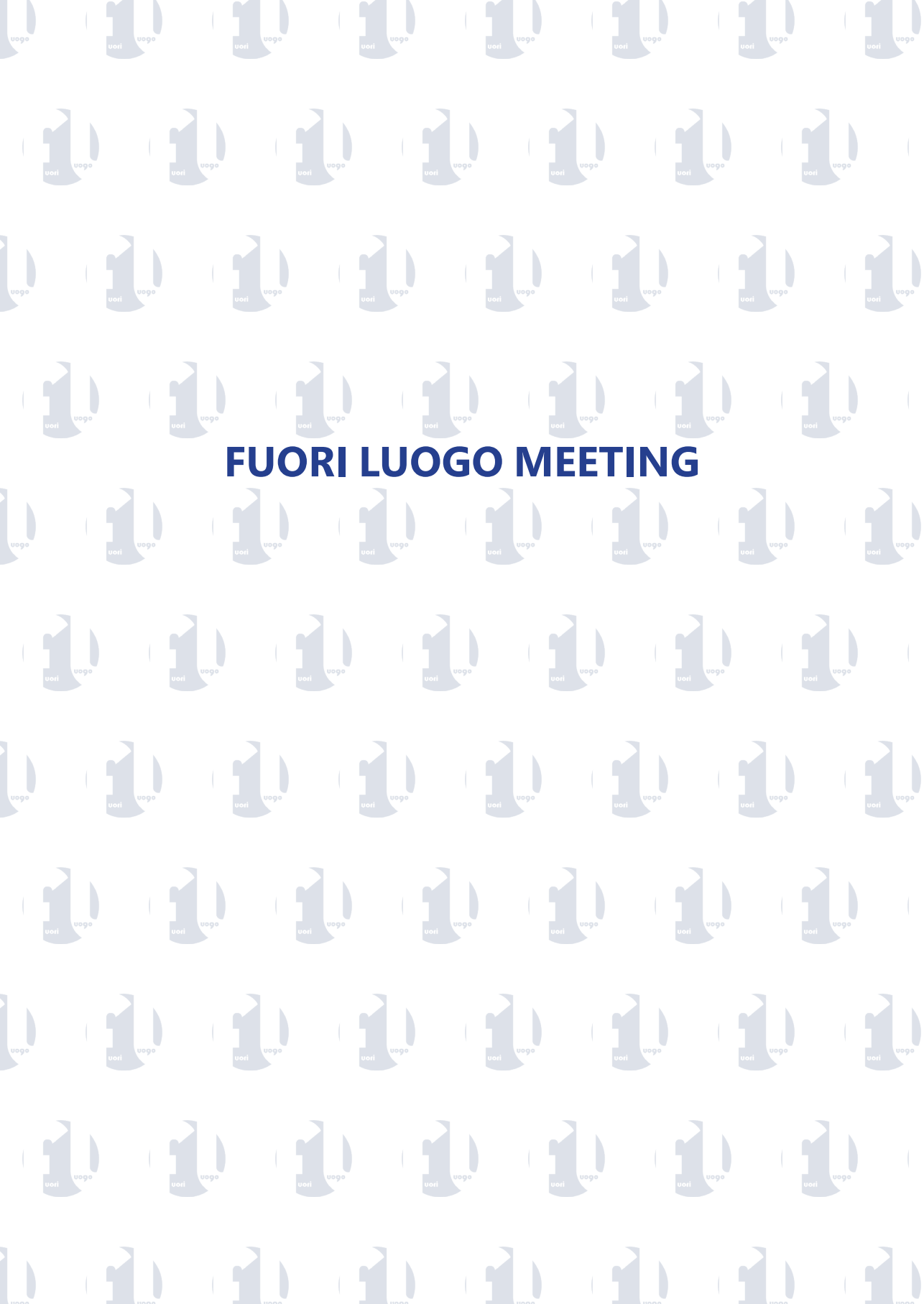
occorre riflettere sui processi (industriali o meno) che portano i prodotti finiti nei nostri piatti, occorre riflettere criticamente sulla loro provenienza e stagionalità. Ma questo vale soprattutto per le società occidentali che tendono a proiettare una dinamica antropica ad ogni livello: «Questo *Anthropos* ha un impatto potente sia sulle dinamiche della terra che sulle comunità dei terrestri, ed è forse l'unico a beneficiare della fine dei rifugi e delle zone di contatto tra specie diverse che hanno reso possibile la vita umana» (p. 85). L'*Anthropos* alienato e alienante diviene espressione del Capitale, al punto che sarebbe più corretto, dice l'autrice, richiamare la locuzione Capitalocene, secondo la definizione proposta da Jason W. Moore. Il tema diviene quello del determinismo del sistema economico su scala planetaria, della sua capacità di condizionare l'uso risorse naturali, animali e umane fino a diventare a tutti gli effetti una sorta di forza geologica. L'importanza di libri come questo sta soprattutto nella grande capacità di attualizzare e di gettare una luce interpretativa nuova su autori che non dovremmo smettere di leggere. Per fortuna Calvino vive una stagione di rinnovato interesse e di rilettura da parte di critici e studiosi in occasione del centenario della sua nascita, che contribuiscono non solo ad attualizzare l'autore, ma anche ad arricchire il dibattito attuale con i temi che Calvino affrontava.

Un altro aspetto molto interessante, in chiave sociologica, è la funzione della visionarietà e dell'immaginario per la comprensione del reale e della sua complessità che Calvino utilizza nei suoi romanzi. Se consideriamo l'immaginario come il risultato diretto delle tensioni e delle relazioni che gli esseri umani hanno con il loro ambiente, sia esso fisico o mentale, possiamo anche vederlo come la realtà trasformata nella sua rappresentazione. È una narrazione che si è accumulata nel tempo e che continua a influenzarci al di là della sua manifestazione concreta. Sebbene i suoi contenuti siano principalmente astratti, i simboli, le immagini e le idee hanno un impatto tangibile e spesso emotivo sulle persone. L'immaginario costituisce il fondamento della vita mentale, una dimensione intrinseca all'umanità stessa.

Il potere della letteratura, del sogno, la forza dei simboli agiscono come una forma di fantastico trascendentale di cui gli individui non possono fare a meno. Calvino ha fatto un grande utilizzo dell'immaginario per creare mondi fantastici e descrivere situazioni future. Nei suoi romanzi, dipinge scenari ricchi di dettagli fantastici e surreali, spesso proiettati in un futuro immaginario o in mondi alternativi. Utilizza l'immaginazione per esplorare temi complessi come il rapporto tra individuo e società, la natura della realtà e la dimensione dell'umano e del non umano. Grazie alla rilettura dell'autrice, siamo guidati a riconsiderare la relazione con gli animali e a comprendere l'importanza di vivere in equilibrio sul nostro pianeta. Questa prospettiva ci riavvicina alla consapevolezza che gli animali non sono estranei o separati da noi, ma che sono parte integrante della nostra esistenza e del nostro ecosistema.

Federica Viganò

Free University of Bolzano-Bozen

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of a light blue logo. The logo consists of a stylized, blocky letter 'U' with a small, curved shape on its right side. Below the 'U' is the text 'fuori' and to its right is the text 'luogo', both in a small, sans-serif font.

FUORI LUOGO MEETING

Tourism in Inland Areas. A Talk with Claudio Milano

Claudio Milano is a social anthropologist with a background in economics. Currently, he is a Ramón y Cajal fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Barcelona. He is a member of the Research Group on Anthropology of Crisis and Contemporary Transformations (CRITS) at the University of Barcelona and co-chair of the Commission on the Anthropology of Tourism of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). His main research area is the political economy of tourism, where he explores the dynamics of touristification processes and examines urban tourism policies. Together with Joseph M. Cheer and Marina Novelli, he co-edited “Overtourism: Excesses, Discontents and Measures in Travel and Tourism” (CABI, 2019), a publication that presents cases of social problems resulting from urban tourism to foster critical debate in urban and tourism studies. Additionally, as a board member of the Smart Tourism Capital Award and of the International Advisory Board of the Rotterdam Pattern for drafting a Strategic Tourism Plan. He has advised the Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) of the European Parliament on European tourism policies.

QUESTION: *During the pandemic period, there seemed to be a tendency to divert established urban tourist flows to rural areas, which are characterized by low population density and a greater presence of natural capital. For many, this would lead to a revitalization of inland areas by tourists and a gradual emptying of saturated urban centers, solving the problems of overtourism. Almost four years later, not only has the gap between inland areas and urban centers widened, but we see that cities are increasingly collapsed by massive tourist flows, which in many cases exceed pre-pandemic figures. In your opinion, why has this prediction of a future of equitable and sustainable development throughout the territory through the decentralization of tourist flows not come true?*

ANSWER: Let us start a bit before the pandemic and think about how the experience prior to COVID-19 is related to the exit and economic adjustments of the great financial crisis of 2008. Historical materialism teaches us that in order to overcome a crisis, the capitalist system tries to fix capital in other physical spaces and spheres to solve its own internal crises. David Harvey's (1982) theory of “spatial fix” is of great help in understanding these processes. For example, since 2008, what has been called platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017) has produced a certain touristification of everyday life. For example, we have seen tourist apartments in residential buildings, the rise of cars from companies like Cabify or Uber as players in urban mobility, and companies like Glovo, Deliveroo, and Uber Eats in the food service sector acting as new intermediaries along the food and beverage supply chain. This metamorphosis of financialized capitalism has progressively provoked other crises: the congestion of public spaces, the replacement of housing by short-term rentals, the precarization of labor regimes, and the commodification of the commons, confirming the workings of the capitalist system: solving crises by creating and generating new ones.

In this context, the tourism sector has faced a crisis of overaccumulation, known as “overtourism.” Overtourism crises are related to extractive practices that overload and make the economy dependent on a specific resource or activity. Other sectors have experienced similar extractive practices. Consider, for example, overfishing as an example of an overaccumulation crisis in a primary economic sector. Heavy reliance on tourism has led to a deterioration in the quality of life of those living in these highly tourist areas. Since the 2010s, this heavy reliance on tourism has caused social unrest in many tourist cities, especially in the southern European cities of the northern Mediterranean region, giving rise to increasing tourism activism.

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Indeed, activist groups have sprung up in many cities that are somehow struggling to solve the problems created by overtourism.

Yes, since the last decade tourism has become part of the political agenda of social movements. In Barcelona, where I began my research, this tourism politicization and agitation was clearly manifested, leading to the creation of several platforms. One example is the *Assemblea de Barris pel Turisme Sostenible*, founded in 2015 and which in 2017 changed its name to the *Assemblea de Barris pel Decreixement Turístic (ABDT)*. This was a narratively interesting choice, as it moved from talking about sustainable tourism to discussing degrowth-oriented public policies, echoing the theoretical postulates of Serge Latouche (2006), which are currently very relevant in contemporary debates on ecological transition. 2017 also saw the birth of the SET (South European Cities Against Touristification) network, which includes cities such as Naples, Florence, other Italian cities and several cities in southern Europe.

The central theme is that these touristification processes have integrated the problems of tourism into daily life, linking them to other urban problems that generate great inequalities in our societies. Examples of these problems are housing, privatization of urban spaces, and air quality due to pollution from cruise ships, especially in southern European tourist destinations, where ports are very close to urban centers, causing heavy pollution. Another significant problem is the precariousness of labor in tourist cities, based on strong gender inequalities, outsourcing of labor, and temporary conditions of employment in the sector.

So, in the end, the prediction we were talking about, of decentralizing tourist flows to rural areas, has not been realized, perhaps because the city continues to be the great attractor of capital.

Inevitably, cities, following David Harvey (1982), play a key role in the circulation and fixation of capital. This can be observed in both large cities and medium-sized cities in Europe, which compete to attract large events. One thinks of congresses such as the Mobile Congress or events such as the Formula 1 circuit, Louis Vuitton fashion shows or the celebration of the America's Cup in the city of Barcelona or, finally, large music, fashion or food festivals in other European cities. The MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Congress and Events) sector plays a key role in capital accumulation. Urban centers continue to be the main reproducers of these capital flows, especially now that a new mobility paradigm is in place. In this sense, English sociology in the 1990s, with the contributions of John Urry, showed us how tourism can no longer be understood from a binary perspective, with tourists and locals, but that there are now many mobilities, such as that of international students, digital nomads, lifestyle immigrants and expats. These cities welcome different users and consumers who leave their mark. In this sense, what we are seeing in rural areas is a pressure and a wave of gentrification that is occurring on a planetary level (Lees, Shin, & López-Morales, 2016), where peri-urban areas are beginning to be re-inhabited and new investments appear to convert depressed areas into technological centers and hubs. This is the case of the area east of Naples and Hospitalet de Llobregat, on the outskirts of Barcelona, which now has the urban brand "LH." Think also of areas such as Marvila in Lisbon and examples such as Amsterdam Noord, where rentier capitalism plays a key role.

QUESTION: *Turning our attention to inland areas, the small villages located in rural areas, a number of initiatives have sprung up in recent years to promote these areas. For example, in Italy we find the association "I Borghi più belli d'Italia," in Spain its counterpart "Los pueblos más bonitos de España," and the United Nations World Tourism Association (UNWTO) recently launched the "Best Tourism Villages" initiative, with the aim of rewarding the best tourism practices in rural areas around the world. Can these regional marketing strategies, along with initiatives to attract new inhabitants to inland areas such as digital nomads, serve to revitalize the rural world?*

ANSWER: In rural areas, tourism plays a very different role than in urban centers. In the Global South, we have seen rural tourism proposals with a small-scale community and inclusive approach. Consider, for example, what some experiences in Latin American countries teach us about community tourism proposals. In some rural contexts, community tourism projects have diversified and strengthened the local economy, for example through the revitalization of primary activities such as agricultural production or fishing, without specializing their economy in the tourism sector. These primary activities have thus been used as an attraction to diversify local economies. Although there is still a large exodus to the cities, since the pandemic we have observed a gradual intensification of new forms of inhabiting rurality. Although many rural economies are still linked to the urban economy, new ambivalent identities of living in rural areas and working in urban centers have appeared with remote work.

However, tourism practices designed from a community and inclusive perspective can offer an alternative in contexts of rural depopulation. These spatial transformations must be linked to the implementation of policies aimed at a just ecological transition, the protection of the commons in rural areas, and the promotion of decent jobs from a gender equality perspective in order to minimize the extractive dynamics of tourism capitalism itself. Moreover, authors such as Jason Moore (2015) remind us that capitalism reproduces itself through lowering the costs of the four cheaps (raw materials, energy, food and labor). In rural areas, which have very fragile balances in terms of energy issues and problems related to recent droughts, such as those experienced in the Iberian Peninsula, it is crucial to promote non-extractive tourism models, especially in relation to the exploitation of natural resources and commons and economic specialization and abandonment of primary activities.

QUESTION: *Indeed, together with Gascón (Milano, Gascón, 2018) you discuss the dilemma of duality, highlighting the negative and positive aspects involved in tourism development in rural areas based on the experiences of different case studies. In addition to problems such as the folklorification and trivialization of traditions, is there a risk of transporting capital accumulation practices now typical of the urban tourism context to rural settings not yet explored by the tourism industry?*

ANSWER: If we analyze what is happening in rural and peri-urban, but especially rural contexts, we see that they represent a great opportunity, especially after the crisis, for capital accumulation and circulation. At the theoretical level, we have moved from talking about primitive and primordial accumulation to talking about accumulation by dispossession and even accumulation by extinction (Allinson *et al.*, 2021). These accumulation dynamics confront us with major crises of depletion of natural resources and energy sources.

Moreover, in terms of the relationship between production and consumption, the interdependence between rural and urban is crucial. If we fail to balance food and energy production with the urban extractive pattern, ecological balances will irreversibly worsen in the midst of the climate crisis. Therefore, any production process cannot disregard the climate emergency and direct any policy toward a just ecological transition. At the same time, when discussing sustainability and tourism in rural settings, it is important to remember that tourism will never be sustainable unless comprehensive policies of economic decarbonization are implemented. Similarly, in the rural world, the crises of agricultural activities and the environmental impact of intensive livestock farming respond to the needs of urban extractive economies, which, in turn, overburden and intensify the crises of the rural world in terms of extraction and replacement of ways of life in rural contexts.

QUESTION: *You speak of a crisis in the rural world, but perhaps it could be said that the rural world is experiencing a permanent crisis that has led to the depopulation of many inland areas with the consequent loss of productive activities, especially agricultural ones. In Italy, as in many other areas of Southern Europe, the agricultural production fabric is characterized by small and*

very small farms that are extremely tied to the territory, which in recent years have suffered from the lack of attention and consideration by European institutions, that have often favored large companies oriented to the production of commodities. Today, also thanks to the support of various public institutions, many of these small farms have decided to opt for multifunctionality, offering complementary goods and services not strictly related to traditional farming, including tourist services and products, such as guided tours, tastings or accommodation. In your opinion, can this opening of farms to tourism contribute to their survival while strengthening inland areas and rural ecosystems?

ANSWER: Going back to the beginning of your question, I think Nancy Fraser's (2022) idea of permanent crisis and/or epochal crisis is interesting. If we currently talk about polycrisis in the capitalist system, it is because crises cannot be understood as external to the economic system itself and detached from other crises. The pandemic helped us reflect on this. Today we cannot understand the COVID-19 health crisis without understanding the ecological crisis and the financial crisis. Transmission of animal diseases to humans has irrevocably increased due to deforestation phenomena, and the ecological crisis should be understood as a response to the outsourcing of production processes in the global South and in contexts characterized by the absence of environmental controls on the management of polluting chemical wastes (see the example of Fast Fashion in Asian countries such as Bangladesh). This concatenation of crises is the result of the continuous reproduction of capital through the accumulation and extraction of natural resources and commons. In this sense, science warns that these resources, unfortunately, are not infinite. In light of these processes, the production of growing inequality is also due to the great concentration of capital. In the context of the financialized capitalism of the neoliberal era, we have never been so unequal, nor have so many means of production been concentrated in the hands of so few people.

When considering the reactivation of rural economies through tourism, it is crucial to consider concepts and practices such as agroecology or regenerative agriculture, which seek to regenerate territories. The popular concepts of regeneration and circular economy derive precisely from regenerative agriculture, with the goal of allowing local resources to regenerate between production cycles.

Another necessary reflection concerns food waste. The big global problem is not lack of access to food, but food waste. We produce more than we consume, while many people, not only in countries of the Global South, go hungry. This reflects the severe inequality in the framework of food production and redistribution. Western economies base their capital accumulation on the extraction of raw materials from the rural world. A case in point is the fact that electrification in Western countries is based on the extraction of lithium in Latin American countries or cobalt and coltan in Africa. Euro-Atlantic bloc economies and countries have gone from exporting "civilization," exporting "democracy," and now exporting "crisis" to solve their own endemic crises. While there is talk of just transition, the countries of the Global South are paying the costs of the lifestyle of the Euro-Atlantic bloc countries. And, in terms of tourism, concepts such as mobility justice are worth thinking about. So when we talk about revitalizing rural economies, we have to remember that they continue to pay the costs of extractive economies in urban settings.

So based on what you said, maybe this multifunctionality of small farms that I mentioned earlier, in addition to tourism, should focus on other kinds of activities geared toward regeneration, to the more social, to the community...

If we think about the neoliberal capitalist model that began to consolidate in Western economies in the 1970s and 1980s, one of the main readings is the shift to a society of individuals. This was exemplified by Margaret Thatcher's vision of a society composed of individuals and their families. "There is no alternative," she exclaimed. In this sense, the idea of the commons, regener-

ation and communitarianism contrasts with the neoliberal notion that individual freedom ends where the freedom of others begins. In reality, our freedom depends on others and the role that others play in society. We are free because of others. Therefore, we need to reverse this trend of individualism toward a new reaffirmation of communitarianism.

QUESTION: *Earlier we talked about various initiatives, often top-down, that seek to revitalize inland areas and the rural world through the promotion of tourism products related to the different resources of these territories. In addition to those already mentioned, are you aware of any other tourism policies that share these objectives? And, if they exist, could you also mention some bottom-up initiatives?*

ANSWER: It is difficult to think of such practices in the European context. However, there are many examples in Latin America. The BATUC network in Bahia State (Brazil), where a community tourism model linked to rural production has been activated around indigenous and quilombola peoples. Other successful proposals for this type of tourism can be found in countries such as Ecuador, as in the case of the Agua Blanca community. In general, at the rural level, it has been more convenient to organize these models through community organizing. Likewise, tourism projects that have offered gastronomic itineraries in areas of agricultural production have been able to integrate different actors in the area, diversifying its economy and gaining more visibility through tourism. Undoubtedly, this diversification of the rural economy through the creation of tourism products linked to agricultural production activities have been successful models for reactivating the rural economy, especially at certain times of the year.

In urban settings, although not directly related to the tourism sector, there are alternatives to the hegemonic models of the distribution sector that represent new *modus operandi*. In Spain, for example, attempts have been made to respond to GAFAM models based on algorithmic governance with regard to the distribution sector. The model of cooperativism in the urban context has seen proposals such as Mensakas and Las Mercedes in Barcelona, which are successful examples of fairer labor regimes, gender equality, and decarbonized mobility.

In order to rethink extractive economic models, cooperativism in the urban context and communitarianism in the rural context have resulted in successful examples that would be important to observe and monitor.

SPANISH VERSION

PREGUNTA: *Durante el periodo pandémico, parecía existir una tendencia de desvío de los flujos turísticos consolidados en ámbito urbano hacia zonas rurales caracterizadas por una baja densidad de población y una mayor presencia de capital natural. Para muchos, esto conduciría a una revitalización de las áreas internas por parte de los turistas y a un vaciado gradual de los saturados centros urbanos, solucionando los problemas del overtourism. Casi cuatro años después, no sólo se ha ampliado la brecha entre las áreas internas y los centros urbanos, sino que vemos que las ciudades están cada vez más colapsadas por flujos turísticos masivos, que en muchos casos superan las cifras anteriores a la pandemia. En su opinión, ¿por qué este pronóstico de un futuro de desarrollo equitativo y sostenible en todo el territorio gracias a la descentralización de los flujos turísticos no se ha cumplido?*

RESPUESTA: Empecamos un poco antes de la pandemia y pensemos en cómo lo vivido antes de la COVID-19 está relacionado con la salida y los ajustes económicos de la gran crisis financiera de 2008. El materialismo histórico nos enseña que, para superar una crisis, el sistema capitalista busca fijar el capital en otros espacios físicos y ámbitos para resolver sus propias crisis internas. La

teoría del “arreglo espacial” (*spatial fix*) de David Harvey (1982) es de gran ayuda para entender estos procesos. A modo de ejemplo, a partir del 2008 lo que ha venido a llamarse el capitalismo de plataforma (Srnicek, 2017) ha producido una cierta turistificación de la vida cotidiana. Por ejemplo, hemos visto apartamentos turísticos en edificios residenciales, la aparición de automóviles de empresas como Cabify o Uber ser protagonista en la movilidad urbana, y empresas como Glovo, Deliveroo y Uber Eats en el sector de la restauración actuando como nuevos intermediarios a lo largo de la cadena de suministro de alimentos y bebidas. Esta metamorfosis del capitalismo financiarizado ha provocado paulatinamente otras crisis: la congestión de espacios públicos, la sustitución de vivienda residencial por vivienda turística, la precarización de los contratos laborales y la mercantilización de los bienes comunes, confirmando el funcionamiento del sistema capitalista: resolver crisis creando y generando otras nuevas.

En este marco, el sector turístico se ha enfrentado a una crisis de sobreacumulación que en inglés ha venido a denominarse “overtourism”. Las crisis de sobreacumulación están relacionadas con prácticas extractivas que sobrecargan y vuelven la economía dependiente de un recurso o una actividad específica. Otros sectores han experimentado prácticas extractivas similares. Pensemos, por ejemplo, en la sobrepesca (overfishing) como un ejemplo de crisis de sobreacumulación en un sector económico primario. Esta gran dependencia del turismo ha conllevado a un deterioro de la calidad de vida de quienes habitan estos espacios altamente turísticos. A partir de la década de 2010, esta gran dependencia del turismo ha provocado un gran malestar en muchas ciudades turísticas, especialmente en ciudades del sur de Europa en la cuenca mediterránea norte dando vida a un creciente activismo turístico.

De hecho, en muchas ciudades han nacido grupos de activistas que, de alguna manera, luchan por revertir los problemas creados por el overtourism.

Sí, desde la década pasada el turismo empezó a formar parte de la agenda política de los movimientos sociales. En Barcelona, donde inicié mis investigaciones, esta politización y el malestar turístico se han manifestado claramente, resultando en la creación de diferentes plataformas. Un ejemplo es la Asamblea de Barris pel Turisme Sostenible, que se fundó en 2015 y en 2017 se cambió de nombre en Asamblea de Barris pel Decreixement Turístic (ABDT). Esto es narrativamente interesante, ya que se pasó de hablar de turismo sostenible a discutir sobre políticas públicas orientadas al decrecimiento, retomando las postulaciones teóricas del francés Serge Latouche (2006), actualmente muy relevante en los debates contemporáneos sobre transición ecológica. En 2017 también nació la red SET (South European Cities Against Touristification), que incluye a ciudades como Nápoles, Florencia, otras ciudades italianas y diversas ciudades del sur de Europa.

El tema central es que estos procesos de turistificación han integrado los problemas turísticos en la vida cotidiana, vinculándolos con otras problemáticas urbanas que generan grandes desigualdades en nuestras sociedades. Ejemplos de estos problemas son la vivienda, la privatización de los espacios urbanos, la calidad del aire debido a la contaminación de los cruceros, especialmente en los destinos turísticos del sur de Europa, donde los puertos están muy cerca de los centros urbanos, causando gran contaminación. Otro problema significativo es la precarización laboral en las ciudades turísticas asentadas en fuertes desigualdades de género, externalizaciones laborales y condiciones temporales en las contrataciones del sector.

Por lo tanto, al fin y al cabo, esa predicción de la que hablábamos, de descentralización de los flujos turísticos hacia las áreas rurales no se ha cumplido quizás porque la ciudad sigue siendo ese gran atractor del capital.

Inevitablemente, las ciudades, siguiendo a David Harvey (1982), juegan un papel fundamental en la circulación y fijación del capital. Esto se observa en grandes ciudades como también en me-

dianas ciudades de Europa que compiten para atraer grandes eventos. Pensemos a congresos como el Mobile Congress o eventos como el circuito de la Fórmula 1, los desfiles de Louis Vuitton o la celebración de la América's Cup en la ciudad de Barcelona o, por último, a los grandes festivales de música, moda o gastronomía en otras ciudades europeas. El sector MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Congress and Events) desempeña un papel fundamental en la acumulación del capital. Los centros urbanos siguen siendo grandes reproductores de esos flujos de capital, especialmente ahora con un nuevo paradigma de la movilidad. En este sentido, la sociología inglesa de los años 90, con las contribuciones de John Urry, nos mostraban cómo ya no podíamos entender el turismo desde una perspectiva binaria, con turistas y locales, sino que existen actualmente muchas movilidades como las de estudiantes internacionales, nómadas digitales, migrantes de estilo de vida y expats. Estas ciudades reciben diferentes usuarios y consumidores que dejan su huella. En este sentido, lo que vemos en lo rural es una presión y una ola gentrificadora que se registra a nivel planetario (Lees, Shin, & López-Morales, 2016), donde se empiezan a rehabilitar las zonas periurbanas y aparecen nuevas inversiones para reconvertir áreas deprimidas en centros y hub tecnológicos. Este es el caso de la zona este de Nápoles, así como el Hospitalet de Llobregat a las afueras de Barcelona, que ahora cuenta con la marca de branding urbano "LH". También podemos pensar en áreas como la de Marvila en Lisboa, y en ejemplos como Amsterdam Noord donde el capitalismo rentista juega un papel fundamental.

PREGUNTA: *Desviando ya nuestra atención hacia las áreas internas, los pequeños pueblos situados en zonas rurales, en los últimos años han surgido numerosas iniciativas para promocionar estos territorios. Por ejemplo, en Italia encontramos la asociación "I Borghi più belli d'Italia", en España su homóloga "Los pueblos más bonitos de España" y de la mano de la Asociación Mundial de Turismo de las Naciones Unidas (OMT) ha surgido recientemente la iniciativa "Best Tourism Villages", con el objetivo de premiar las mejores prácticas turísticas en zonas rurales de todo el mundo. ¿Pueden servir estas estrategias de marketing territorial, junto con iniciativas dirigidas a atraer nuevos habitantes a las zonas de interior como los nómadas digitales, para revitalizar el mundo rural?*

RESPUESTA: En las zonas rurales, el turismo juega un papel muy diferente al de los centros urbanos. En el sur global, hemos visto propuestas de turismo rural con un enfoque comunitario e incluso propuestas en pequeña escala. Pensemos, por ejemplo, en lo que nos enseñan algunas experiencias en países latinoamericanos con las propuestas de turismo comunitario. En algunos contextos rurales, los proyectos de turismo comunitario han diversificado y reforzado la economía local, por ejemplo, a través de la revitalización de actividades primarias como la producción agrícola o la pesca, sin especializar su economía en el sector turístico. Por lo tanto, se han utilizado estas actividades primarias como atractivo para diversificar las economías locales. Aunque seguimos viviendo fenómenos de gran éxodo hacia las ciudades, después de la pandemia hemos observado una intensificación paulatina de nuevas formas de habitar la ruralidad. Aunque muchas economías rurales siguen ligadas a la economía urbana han aparecido con el trabajo en remoto nuevas identidades ambivalentes de vivir en lo rural y trabajar puntualmente en centros urbanos.

Sin embargo, prácticas turísticas pensadas desde la comunidad y desde una perspectiva inclusiva pueden llegar a ofrecer una alternativa en contextos que viven un despoblamiento rural. Estas transformaciones territoriales deben estar ligadas a la puesta en marcha de políticas orientadas a una transición ecológica justa, a la protección de bienes comunes en el medio rural y a la promoción de trabajos dignos desde una perspectiva de igualdad de género para así minimizar las dinámicas extractivas del propio capitalismo turístico. Además, autores tales como Jason Moore (2015) recuerdan que el capitalismo se reproduce a partir del abaratamiento de los costes de los cuatro baratos (materias primas, energía, alimentos y mano de obra). En zonas rurales, que presentan equilibrios muy frágiles con respecto a temas energéticos y problemas con las recientes

sequías, como aquellas vividas en la península ibérica, es crucial promover modelos turísticos no extractivos, especialmente con relación a la explotación de recursos naturales y bienes comunes y la especialización económica y el abandono de actividades primarias.

PREGUNTA: De hecho, junto con Gascón (Milano, Gascón, 2018) discutes sobre el dilema de la dualidad, destacando los aspectos negativos y positivos que implica el desarrollo del turismo en zonas rurales a partir de las experiencias de diferentes estudios de caso. Además de problemas como la folclorización y banalización de las tradiciones, ¿existe el riesgo de transportar las prácticas de acumulación de capital ahora típicas del contexto urbano turistificado a contextos rurales aún no explorados por la industria turística?

RESPUESTA: Cuando analizamos lo que ocurre en contextos rurales y periurbanos, pero especialmente rurales, vemos que representan una gran oportunidad, sobre todo post crisis, para la acumulación y la circulación de capital. A nivel teórico, hemos pasado de hablar de acumulación primitiva y originaria a hablar de acumulación por desposesión, y hasta de acumulación por extinción (Allinson *et al.*, 2021). Estas dinámicas de acumulación nos enfrentan a importantes crisis de agotamiento de recursos naturales y fuentes energéticas.

Además, en términos de relación entre producción y consumo, la interdependencia entre lo rural y lo urbano es fundamental. Si no logramos equilibrar la producción de alimentos y energías con el modelo extractivo urbano se agravarán irreversiblemente los equilibrios ecológicos en plena crisis climática. Por ello, todo proceso productivo no puede no tomar en cuenta de la emergencia climática y orientar cualquier política hacia una transición ecológica justa. Al mismo tiempo, cuando hablamos de sostenibilidad y turismo en contextos rurales, es importante recordar que el turismo nunca será sostenible si no pondremos en marchas políticas globales de descarbonización económica. Asimismo, en el mundo rural, las crisis de las actividades agropecuarias y el impacto para el ambiente de la ganadería intensiva responden a las exigencias de las economías extractivas urbanas que, a su vez, sobrecargan e intensifican las crisis del mundo rural en término de extracción y sustitución de las formas de vida en los contextos rurales.

PREGUNTA: *Hablas de una crisis del mundo rural, pero quizás se podría decir que el mundo rural vive una crisis permanente que ha provocado el despoblamiento de muchas zonas internas con la consiguiente pérdida de actividades productivas, principalmente agrícolas. En Italia, como en muchas otras zonas del sur de Europa, el tejido productivo agrario se caracteriza por pequeñas y muy pequeñas explotaciones extremadamente vinculadas al territorio, que en los últimos años han sufrido la poca atención y consideración que les han prestado las instituciones europeas, favoreciendo a menudo a las grandes explotaciones orientadas a la producción de commodities. En la actualidad, gracias también al apoyo de diversas instituciones públicas, muchas de estas pequeñas explotaciones han decidido apostar por la multifuncionalidad, ofreciendo bienes y servicios complementarios no estrictamente ligados a la actividad agraria tradicional, incluyendo servicios y productos de carácter turístico, como visitas guiadas, degustaciones o alojamiento. En su opinión, ¿puede esta apertura de las explotaciones hacia el turismo contribuir a su supervivencia al tiempo que fortalece las áreas internas y los ecosistemas rurales?*

RESPUESTA: Volviendo al principio de tu pregunta, creo que es interesante la idea de crisis permanente y/o crisis epocal de Nancy Fraser (2022). Si estamos hablando en la actualidad de policrisis en el sistema capitalista es porque las crisis no pueden ser entendida como elementos externos al propio sistema económico y desligadas de otras. La pandemia nos ayudó a reflexionar sobre esto. Actualmente, no podemos entender la crisis sanitaria de la COVID-19 sin entender la crisis ecológica y la crisis financiera. La transmisión de enfermedades animales a seres humanos ha irremediablemente aumentado debido a los fenómenos de deforestación y, la crisis ecológica, debe entenderse como respuesta a la externalización de procesos productivos en el

sur global y en contextos caracterizados por ausencia de controles ambientales sobre la gestión de residuos químicos contaminantes (véase el ejemplo del Fast Fashion en países asiáticos como es el caso de Bangladesh). Esta concatenación de crisis es resultado de la continua reproducción del capital a partir de la acumulación y extracción de recursos naturales y bienes comunes. En este sentido, desde la ciencia se alerta que estos recursos, lamentablemente, no son infinitos. A la luz de estos procesos, la producción de las crecientes desigualdades se debe también a la gran concentración de capital. En el marco del capitalismo financiarizado de la era neoliberal nunca hemos sido tan desiguales y ni se habían concentrado tantos medios de producción en las manos de tan pocas personas.

Al considerar la reactivación de las economías rurales a través del turismo, es crucial tener en cuenta conceptos y prácticas como la agroecología o la agricultura regenerativa, que buscan regenerar los territorios. Los conceptos tan en boga de regeneración y economía circular justamente provienen de la agricultura regenerativa, con el objetivo de permitir que los recursos locales se regeneren entre los diversos ciclos productivos.

Otra reflexión necesaria es sobre el desperdicio alimentario. El gran problema global no es la falta de acceso a alimentos, sino el desperdicio de comida. Producimos más de lo que consumimos, mientras muchas personas, no solo en países del Sur global, sufren hambruna. Esto refleja la gran desigualdad en el marco de la producción y redistribución de alimentos. Las economías occidentales basan su acumulación de capital en la extracción de materias primas del mundo rural. Un ejemplo emblemático es cómo la electrificación en países occidentales se basa en la extracción de litio en países de América Latina o de cobalto y coltán en África. Las economías y los países del bloque euroatlántico han pasado de exportar "civilización", exportar "democracia" a actualmente exportar "crisis" para resolver las propias crisis endémicas. Si bien se habla de transición justa, los países del Sur global pagan los costos de los estilos de vida de países del bloque euroatlántico. Y, en términos turísticos, cabe reflexionar sobre los conceptos tales como el de movilidad justa. Así, al hablar de reactivar las economías rurales, debemos recordar que éstas siguen pagando los costos de las economías extractivas en el marco de los contextos urbanos.

Por lo tanto, según lo que has dicho, puede que esta multifuncionalidad de las pequeñas empresas agrícolas que mencionaba anteriormente, además del turismo deberían apostar por otro tipo de actividades orientadas hacia lo regenerativo, a lo social, a lo comunitario...

Si pensamos en el modelo capitalista neoliberal que comenzó a consolidarse en las economías occidentales en los años 70' y 80', una de las grandes lecturas es la transición hacia una sociedad de individuos. Esto lo ejemplificaba Margaret Thatcher con su visión de una sociedad compuesta por individuos y sus familias. "There is no alternative", exclamaba. En este sentido, la idea de lo comunitario, lo regenerativo y de comunitarismo contraviene la noción neoliberal de que la libertad individual termina donde comienza la de los demás. En realidad, nuestra libertad depende de los demás y del rol que otras personas desempeñan en la sociedad. Somos libres gracias a los demás. Por lo tanto, debemos revertir esta tendencia del individualismo hacia una nueva reafirmación del comunitarismo.

PREGUNTA: *Anteriormente hemos hablado de diferentes iniciativas, a menudo de tipo top-down, que intentan revitalizar las áreas internas y el mundo rural a partir de la promoción de productos turísticos relacionados con los diferentes recursos de esos territorios. Además de las ya mencionadas, ¿usted está al corriente de otras políticas turísticas que compartan estos objetivos? Y, en caso de que existan, ¿nos podría mencionar también algunas iniciativas de carácter bottom-up?*

Es difícil pensar en prácticas de este tipo en el contexto europeo. Sin embargo, en América Latina podemos encontrar numerosos ejemplos. La red BATUC en el Estado de Bahía (Brasil), donde se ha activado un modelo de turismo comunitario ligado a la producción rural en torno a pueblos

indígenas y quilombolas. Otras propuestas exitosas de este tipo de turismo se encuentran en países como Ecuador, como es el caso de la comunidad de Agua Blanca. De forma general, a nivel rural ha sido más viable organizar estos modelos a través de la organización comunitaria. Asimismo, proyectos turísticos que han propuesto rutas gastronómicas en áreas de producción agrícola han podido integrar diferentes actores del territorio consiguiendo diversificar su economía y obtener mayor visibilidad gracias al turismo. Sin duda, esta diversificación de la economía rural a partir de la creación de productos turísticos relacionados con las actividades productivas agropecuarias han sido exitosos modelos para reactivar la economía rural, especialmente en algunos momentos del año.

En contextos urbanos, a pesar de no estar directamente relacionado con el sector turístico, existen alternativas a modelos hegemónicos del sector de repartimiento que representan nuevos *modus operandi*. En España, por ejemplo, se ha intentado dar respuesta a los modelos de las GAFAM basados en la gobernanza algorítmica con respecto al sector del *delivery*. El modelo de cooperativismo en el contexto urbano ha visto propuestas como Mensakas y las Mercedes en Barcelona, que son un ejemplo exitoso de regímenes laborales más justo, igualdad de género y movilidad descarbonizada.

Para repensar los modelos económicos extractivos, el cooperativismo en el contexto urbano, así como el comunitarismo en el ámbito rural han dado lugar a ejemplos exitosos que sería importante observar y monitorear.

VERSIONE ITALIANA

DOMANDA: Durante il periodo della pandemia, sembrava esserci una tendenza a dirottare i flussi turistici urbani consolidati verso le aree rurali, caratterizzate da una bassa densità di popolazione e da una maggiore presenza di capitale naturale. Per molti, questo avrebbe portato a una rivitalizzazione delle aree interne da parte dei turisti e a un graduale svuotamento dei centri urbani saturi, risolvendo i problemi di *overtourism*. A distanza di quasi quattro anni, non solo si è allargato il divario tra aree interne e centri urbani, ma vediamo che le città sono sempre più collassate da flussi turistici massicci, che in molti casi superano le cifre pre-pandemiche. Secondo lei, perché questa previsione di un futuro di sviluppo equo e sostenibile su tutto il territorio grazie al decentramento dei flussi turistici non si è avverata?

RISPOSTA: Partiamo un po' prima della pandemia e pensiamo a come l'esperienza precedente al COVID-19 sia legata all'uscita e agli aggiustamenti economici della grande crisi finanziaria del 2008. Il materialismo storico ci insegna che, per superare una crisi, il sistema capitalista cerca di fissare il capitale in altri spazi e sfere fisiche per risolvere le proprie crisi interne. La teoria della "fissazione spaziale" (*spatial fix*) di David Harvey (1982) è di grande aiuto per comprendere questi processi. Ad esempio, dal 2008 quello che è stato definito capitalismo delle piattaforme (Srnicke, 2017) ha prodotto una certa turistificazione della vita quotidiana. Ad esempio, abbiamo visto appartamenti turistici in edifici residenziali, l'emergere di automobili di aziende come Cabify o Uber come protagonisti della mobilità urbana, e aziende come Glovo, Deliveroo e Uber Eats nel settore della ristorazione che agiscono come nuovi intermediari lungo la catena di approvvigionamento di cibo e bevande. Questa metamorfosi del capitalismo finanziarizzato ha progressivamente provocato altre crisi: la congestione degli spazi pubblici, la sostituzione dell'edilizia residenziale con quella turistica, la precarizzazione dei contratti di lavoro e la mercificazione dei beni comuni, confermando il funzionamento del sistema capitalistico: risolvere le crisi creandone e generandone di nuove.

In questo contesto, il settore turistico ha affrontato una crisi di sovraccumulazione, nota come "overtourism". Le crisi di sovraccumulazione sono legate a pratiche estrattive che sovraccaricano e rendono l'economia dipendente da una specifica risorsa o attività. Altri settori hanno speri-

mentato pratiche estrattive simili. Si pensi, ad esempio, alla pesca eccessiva (*overfishing*) come esempio di crisi da sovraccumulo in un settore economico primario. La forte dipendenza dal turismo ha portato a un deterioramento della qualità della vita di coloro che vivono in queste aree altamente turistiche. A partire dagli anni 2010, questa forte dipendenza dal turismo ha provocato numerosi disordini in molte città turistiche, soprattutto nelle città dell'Europa meridionale del bacino settentrionale del Mediterraneo, dando origine a un crescente attivismo turistico.

In effetti, in molte città sono nati gruppi di attivisti che, in qualche modo, stanno lottando per risolvere i problemi creati dall'overtourism.

Sì, dall'ultimo decennio il turismo è entrato a far parte dell'agenda politica dei movimenti sociali. A Barcellona, dove ho iniziato la mia ricerca, questa politicizzazione e agitazione turistica si è manifestata chiaramente, portando alla creazione di diverse piattaforme. Un esempio è l'Assemblea de Barris pel Turisme Sostenible, fondata nel 2015 e che nel 2017 ha cambiato nome in Assemblea de Barris pel Decreixement Turístic (ABDT). Si tratta di una scelta narrativamente interessante, in quanto si è passati dal parlare di turismo sostenibile a discutere di politiche pubbliche orientate alla decrescita, riprendendo i postulati teorici del francese Serge Latouche (2006), attualmente molto attuali nei dibattiti contemporanei sulla transizione ecologica. Il 2017 ha visto anche la nascita della rete SET (South European Cities Against Touristification), che comprende città come Napoli, Firenze, altre città italiane e diverse città dell'Europa meridionale. Il tema centrale è che questi processi di turistificazione hanno integrato i problemi del turismo nella vita quotidiana, collegandoli ad altri problemi urbani che generano grandi disuguaglianze nelle nostre società. Esempi di questi problemi sono gli alloggi, la privatizzazione degli spazi urbani, la qualità dell'aria dovuta all'inquinamento delle navi da crociera, soprattutto nelle destinazioni turistiche dell'Europa meridionale, dove i porti sono molto vicini ai centri urbani, causando un forte inquinamento. Un altro problema significativo è la precarietà del lavoro nelle città turistiche, basata su forti disuguaglianze di genere, sull'esternalizzazione del lavoro e sulle condizioni temporanee di impiego nel settore.

Quindi, in fin dei conti, la previsione di cui parlavamo, di decentramento dei flussi turistici verso le aree rurali, non si è realizzata, forse perché la città continua a essere il grande attrattore di capitali.

Inevitabilmente, le città, seguendo David Harvey (1982), svolgono un ruolo fondamentale nella circolazione e nella fissazione del capitale. Questo si può osservare sia nelle grandi città sia nelle città di medie dimensioni in Europa, che competono per attrarre grandi eventi. Si pensi a congressi come il Mobile Congress o a eventi come il circuito di Formula 1, le sfilate di moda di Louis Vuitton o la celebrazione dell'America's Cup nella città di Barcellona o, infine, i grandi festival di musica, moda o gastronomia in altre città europee. Il settore MICE (*Meeting, Incentive, Congress and Events*) svolge un ruolo fondamentale nell'accumulo di capitale. I centri urbani continuano a essere i principali riproduttori di questi flussi di capitale, soprattutto ora che è in atto un nuovo paradigma di mobilità. In questo senso, la sociologia inglese degli anni Novanta, con i contributi di John Urry, ci ha mostrato come non si possa più intendere il turismo da una prospettiva binaria, con turisti e locali, ma che oggi esistono molte mobilità, come quella degli studenti internazionali, dei nomadi digitali, degli immigrati lifestyle e degli expats. Queste città accolgono utenti e consumatori diversi che lasciano il loro segno. In questo senso, ciò che vediamo nelle aree rurali è una pressione e un'ondata di gentrificazione che si registra a livello planetario (Lees *et al.*, 2016), dove le aree periurbane iniziano a essere riabitate e appaiono nuovi investimenti per riconvertire aree depresse in centri e hub tecnologici. È il caso dell'area a est di Napoli e di Hospitalet de Llobregat, alla periferia di Barcellona, che ora ha il marchio urbano "LH". Si pensi anche ad aree come Marvila a Lisbona e ad esempi come Amsterdam Noord, dove il capitalismo rentier gioca un ruolo fondamentale.

DOMANDA: *Volgendo la nostra attenzione alle aree interne, i piccoli borghi situati nelle zone rurali, negli ultimi anni sono nate numerose iniziative per promuovere questi territori. Ad esempio, in Italia troviamo l'associazione "I Borghi più belli d'Italia", in Spagna l'omologa "Los pueblos más bonitos de España" e l'Organizzazione Mondiale del Turismo delle Nazioni Unite (UNWTO) ha recentemente lanciato l'iniziativa "Best Tourism Villages", con l'obiettivo di premiare le migliori pratiche turistiche nelle aree rurali di tutto il mondo. Queste strategie di marketing territoriale, insieme alle iniziative volte ad attirare nuovi abitanti nelle aree interne come i nomadi digitali, possono servire a rivitalizzare il mondo rurale?*

RISPOSTA: Nelle aree rurali, il turismo svolge un ruolo molto diverso rispetto ai centri urbani. Nel Sud globale, abbiamo visto proposte di turismo rurale con un approccio comunitario e inclusivo su piccola scala. Consideriamo, ad esempio, ciò che alcune esperienze nei Paesi dell'America Latina ci insegnano sulle proposte di turismo comunitario. In alcuni contesti rurali, i progetti di turismo comunitario hanno diversificato e rafforzato l'economia locale, ad esempio attraverso la rivitalizzazione di attività primarie come la produzione agricola o la pesca, senza specializzare la propria economia nel settore turistico. Queste attività primarie sono state quindi utilizzate come attrazione per diversificare le economie locali. Sebbene si verifichino ancora fenomeni di grande esodo verso le città, dopo la pandemia abbiamo osservato una graduale intensificazione di nuove forme di abitare la ruralità. Anche se molte economie rurali sono ancora legate all'economia urbana, con il lavoro a distanza sono apparse nuove identità ambivalenti di vivere nelle aree rurali e lavorare nei centri urbani. Tuttavia, le pratiche turistiche concepite a partire dalla comunità e da una prospettiva inclusiva possono offrire un'alternativa in contesti di spopolamento rurale. Queste trasformazioni territoriali devono essere collegate all'attuazione di politiche volte a una giusta transizione ecologica, alla tutela dei beni comuni nelle aree rurali e alla promozione di posti di lavoro dignitosi in un'ottica di parità di genere, al fine di ridurre al minimo le dinamiche estrattive del capitalismo turistico stesso. Inoltre, autori come Jason Moore (2015) ci ricordano che il capitalismo si riproduce attraverso l'abbassamento dei costi dei quattro fattori a basso costo (materie prime, energia, cibo e lavoro). Nelle aree rurali, che presentano equilibri molto fragili per quanto riguarda le questioni energetiche e i problemi legati alle recenti siccità, come quelle vissute nella penisola iberica, è fondamentale promuovere modelli di turismo non estrattivo, soprattutto in relazione allo sfruttamento delle risorse naturali e dei beni comuni e alla specializzazione economica e all'abbandono delle attività primarie.

DOMANDA: *In effetti, insieme a Gascón (Milano, Gascón, 2018) discutete il dilemma della dualità, evidenziando gli aspetti negativi e positivi coinvolti nello sviluppo del turismo nelle aree rurali sulla base delle esperienze di diversi casi di studio. Oltre a problemi come la folclorizzazione e la banalizzazione delle tradizioni, c'è il rischio di trasportare pratiche di accumulo di capitale ormai tipiche del contesto urbano turisticizzato in contesti rurali non ancora esplorati dall'industria turistica?*

Se analizziamo ciò che accade nei contesti rurali e periurbani, ma soprattutto rurali, vediamo che essi rappresentano una grande opportunità, soprattutto dopo la crisi, per l'accumulazione e la circolazione del capitale. A livello teorico, siamo passati dal parlare di accumulazione primitiva e primordiale a parlare di accumulazione per esproprio e persino di accumulazione per estinzione (Allinson *et al.*, 2021). Queste dinamiche di accumulazione ci mettono di fronte a grandi crisi di esaurimento delle risorse naturali e delle fonti energetiche.

Inoltre, in termini di rapporto tra produzione e consumo, l'interdipendenza tra rurale e urbano è fondamentale. Se non riusciamo a bilanciare la produzione di cibo ed energia con il modello estrattivo urbano, gli equilibri ecologici si aggraveranno in modo irreversibile nel bel mezzo della crisi climatica. Pertanto, qualsiasi processo produttivo non può non tenere conto dell'emergenza climatica e orientare qualsiasi politica verso una giusta transizione ecologica. Allo stesso tempo, quando si parla di sostenibilità e turismo nei contesti rurali, è importante ricordare che il turismo

non sarà mai sostenibile se non si attuano politiche globali di decarbonizzazione economica. Allo stesso modo, nel mondo rurale, le crisi delle attività agricole e l'impatto ambientale degli allevamenti intensivi rispondono alle esigenze delle economie estrattive urbane che, a loro volta, sovraccaricano e intensificano le crisi del mondo rurale in termini di estrazione e sostituzione dei modi di vita nei contesti rurali.

DOMANDA: *Lei parla di crisi del mondo rurale, ma forse si potrebbe dire che il mondo rurale sta vivendo una crisi permanente che ha portato allo spopolamento di molte aree interne con la conseguente perdita di attività produttive, soprattutto agricole. In Italia, come in molte altre aree del Sud Europa, il tessuto produttivo agricolo è caratterizzato da piccole e piccolissime aziende estremamente legate al territorio, che negli ultimi anni hanno sofferto della scarsa attenzione e considerazione da parte delle istituzioni europee, che spesso hanno privilegiato le grandi aziende orientate alla produzione di commodities. Oggi, anche grazie al sostegno di diverse istituzioni pubbliche, molte di queste piccole aziende agricole hanno deciso di optare per la multifunzionalità, offrendo beni e servizi complementari non strettamente legati all'attività agricola tradizionale, tra cui servizi e prodotti turistici, come visite guidate, degustazioni o alloggi. Secondo lei, questa apertura delle aziende agricole al turismo può contribuire alla loro sopravvivenza, rafforzando al contempo le aree interne e gli ecosistemi rurali?*

Tornando all'inizio della tua domanda, credo che l'idea di Nancy Fraser (2022) di crisi permanente e/o crisi epocale sia interessante. Se attualmente parliamo di policrisi nel sistema capitalistico, è perché le crisi non possono essere intese come esterne al sistema economico stesso e staccate da altre crisi. La pandemia ci ha aiutato a riflettere su questo. Oggi non possiamo comprendere la crisi sanitaria di COVID-19 senza comprendere la crisi ecologica e la crisi finanziaria. La trasmissione di malattie animali all'uomo è irrimediabilmente aumentata a causa dei fenomeni di deforestazione, e la crisi ecologica va intesa come risposta all'esternalizzazione dei processi produttivi nel Sud globale e in contesti caratterizzati dall'assenza di controlli ambientali sulla gestione dei rifiuti chimici inquinanti (si veda l'esempio della Fast Fashion in Paesi asiatici come il Bangladesh). Questa concatenazione di crisi è il risultato della continua riproduzione del capitale attraverso l'accumulo e l'estrazione di risorse naturali e beni comuni. In questo senso, la scienza avverte che queste risorse, purtroppo, non sono infinite. Alla luce di questi processi, la produzione di crescenti disuguaglianze è dovuta anche alla grande concentrazione del capitale. Nel contesto del capitalismo finanziarizzato dell'era neoliberale, non siamo mai stati così diseguali, né tanti mezzi di produzione sono stati concentrati nelle mani di così poche persone.

Quando si considera la riattivazione delle economie rurali attraverso il turismo, è fondamentale prendere in considerazione concetti e pratiche come l'agroecologia o l'agricoltura rigenerativa, che cercano di rigenerare i territori. I concetti popolari di rigenerazione e di economia circolare derivano proprio dall'agricoltura rigenerativa, con l'obiettivo di permettere alle risorse locali di rigenerarsi tra i vari cicli produttivi.

Un'altra riflessione necessaria riguarda lo spreco alimentare. Il grande problema globale non è la mancanza di accesso al cibo, ma lo spreco alimentare. Produciamo più di quanto consumiamo, mentre molte persone, non solo nei Paesi del Sud del mondo, soffrono la fame. Ciò riflette la grave disuguaglianza nel quadro della produzione e della ridistribuzione del cibo. Le economie occidentali basano la loro accumulazione di capitale sull'estrazione di materie prime dal mondo rurale. Un esempio emblematico è il fatto che l'elettrificazione nei Paesi occidentali si basa sull'estrazione del litio nei Paesi dell'America Latina o del cobalto e del coltan in Africa. Le economie e i Paesi del blocco euro-atlantico sono passati dall'esportare "civiltà", esportare "democrazia" e ora esportare "crisi" per risolvere le proprie crisi endemiche. Mentre si parla di giusta transizione, i Paesi del Sud globale pagano i costi dello stile di vita dei Paesi del blocco euro-atlantico. E, in termini di turismo, vale la pena di riflettere su concetti quali la mobilità equa. Così, quando si parla di rilancio delle economie rurali, dobbiamo ricordare che esse continuano a pagare i costi delle economie estrattive nei contesti urbani.

Quindi, in base a quello che ha detto, forse questa multifunzionalità delle piccole imprese agricole di cui ho parlato prima, oltre al turismo, dovrebbe concentrarsi su altri tipi di attività orientate alla rigenerazione, al sociale, alla comunità...

Se pensiamo al modello capitalistico neoliberale che ha iniziato a consolidarsi nelle economie occidentali negli anni '70 e '80, una delle letture principali è il passaggio a una società di individui. Ciò è stato esemplificato dalla visione di Margaret Thatcher di una società composta da individui e dalle loro famiglie. "Non c'è alternativa", esclamò. In questo senso, l'idea del comune, della rigenerazione e del comunitarismo si contrappone alla nozione neoliberale secondo cui la libertà individuale finisce dove inizia la libertà degli altri. In realtà, la nostra libertà dipende dagli altri e dal ruolo che gli altri svolgono nella società. Siamo liberi grazie agli altri. Pertanto, dobbiamo invertire questa tendenza all'individualismo verso una nuova riaffermazione del comunitarismo.

DOMANDA: *Prima abbiamo parlato di diverse iniziative, spesso top-down, che cercano di rivitalizzare le aree interne e il mondo rurale attraverso la promozione di prodotti turistici legati alle diverse risorse di questi territori. Oltre a quelle già citate, è a conoscenza di altre politiche turistiche che condividono questi obiettivi? E, se esistono, potrebbe citare anche alcune iniziative dal basso verso l'alto?*

RISPOSTA: È difficile pensare a pratiche di questo tipo nel contesto europeo. Tuttavia, esistono molti esempi in America Latina. La rete BATUC nello Stato di Baia (Brasile), dove è stato attivato un modello di turismo comunitario legato alla produzione rurale intorno alle popolazioni indigene e quilombola. Altre proposte di successo per questo tipo di turismo si trovano in Paesi come l'Ecuador, come nel caso della comunità di Agua Blanca. In generale, a livello rurale, è stato più conveniente organizzare questi modelli attraverso l'organizzazione comunitaria. Allo stesso modo, i progetti turistici che hanno proposto itinerari gastronomici in aree di produzione agricola sono stati in grado di integrare diversi attori ai territori, diversificandone l'economia e ottenendo maggiore visibilità grazie al turismo. Senza dubbio, questa diversificazione dell'economia rurale attraverso la creazione di prodotti turistici legati alle attività produttive agricole sono stati modelli di successo per riattivare l'economia rurale, soprattutto in alcuni periodi dell'anno. Nei contesti urbani, anche se non direttamente legati al settore turistico, esistono alternative ai modelli egemonici del settore della distribuzione che rappresentano nuovi modus operandi. In Spagna, ad esempio, si è cercato di rispondere ai modelli GAFAM basati sulla governance algoritmica per quanto riguarda il settore della distribuzione. Il modello del cooperativismo nel contesto urbano ha visto proposte come Mensakas e Mercedes a Barcellona che sono esempi di successo di regimi di lavoro più equi, parità di genere e mobilità decarbonizzata. Per ripensare i modelli economici estrattivi, il cooperativismo nel contesto urbano e il comunitarismo in ambito rurale hanno dato vita a esempi di successo che sarebbe importante osservare e monitorare.

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The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of a light blue logo. The logo consists of a stylized, blocky letter 'f' with a small circle to its right. Below the 'f' and the circle, the words 'fuori' and 'luogo' are written in a small, sans-serif font, separated by a space.

FUORI LUOGO CONTRIBUTIONS

From Sharing Economy to Sharing Cities Networks: Collaborative/Collective (Re)Actions of Cities to Urban Platformization²

Introduction

The sharing economy (also known as the collaborative platform economy) is used as a floating signifier for interactions among dispersed groups of people supported by digital platforms that enable them to exchange (matching supply and demand), share and collaborate in the consumption and production of labour and activities by leveraging capital goods and assets. It is a rapidly and exponentially growing phenomenon which has attracted a great deal of interest; it has become a top priority for governments around the globe (Voytenko Palgan, 2021; Codagnone et al., 2016; Hernández Bataller, 2014), since its development and impact mainly occurs in cities (Gurran et al., 2020; McLaren & Agyeman, 2015).

The paper addresses the evolution of the sharing economy in relation to cities, and the (re)actions of cities to the phenomenon. To provide a robust theoretical foundation, it is imperative to delve deeper into the role of urban governance in shaping cities' responses to the sharing economy phenomenon. Urban governance structures play indeed a pivotal role in regulating and managing the complexities of the sharing economy within urban contexts, influencing the strategies and actions undertaken by city governments (Andreotti, 2019).

The article opens by reflecting on the spread of the phenomenon in the urban context, highlighting how the narratives have changed over time, followed by an examination of local governments' involvement. In the last decade, cities themselves have begun to reflect on the topic, and since Seoul Sharing City in 2012, the number of so-called sharing cities has increased. Today, hundreds of sharing cities are engaging with the topic, trying to minimize negative impact, maximize positive outcomes and fuel the rebuilding of communities through sharing. Interest has become so intense that, from a single-city ("within-city") approach, we began to observe the emergence of a multi-city ("between-cities") approach: hundreds of cities worldwide that are already exchanging best practices and policy solutions, and joining forces in sharing cities coalitions.

Nevertheless, research in the field of the sharing economy has predominantly focused on the single-city approach, leaving a significant gap in the literature regarding comprehensive comparisons of cities coalitions. While studies by van der Eijnden (2017), Bernardi & Diamantini (2018), and Zvolška et al. (2018) have contributed valuable insights, they primarily examine individual cities' responses to the phenomenon, thus highlighting the need for a broader comparative approach. To address this gap, this study aims to provide a comprehensive comparison of cities coalitions, focusing on five distinct case studies selected based on their level of city government involvement, specific internal programs, and their relevance to the research questions, ensuring a diverse representation of cities networks engaged with the issue of the sharing economy.

We argue that the emerging coalitions of cities that we have observed, even when they share common values and reflections on the topic, have diverse conceptions, act differently, and promote diverse collective/collaborative actions between cities. We proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of cities networks are appearing in the international panorama over time in response to the spread of digital platforms?

RQ2: How are the different sharing cities coalitions organizing themselves? What are their main features, governance models, goals, tools and forms of collaboration?

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From our analysis, we identified three types of cities networks regarding the stage of evolution over time: (1) “forerunners”, (2) “dealing with”, and (3) “newcomers”. The present study focuses on the category of “dealing with”: networks currently focusing on the issue, as opposed to those just beginning to approach the phenomenon (the “newcomers”), or those pioneer networks that were the first to respond to the issue (the “forerunners”). Three reasons support the decision to focus on this group of cities networks. Firstly, this category represents a crucial stage in the evolution of cities’ responses to the sharing economy phenomenon, indicating a level of maturity and commitment to finding solutions within the urban context. Secondly, by examining networks that were actively grappling with the issues associated with the sharing economy during the period studied, the research can provide timely insights into the strategies and approaches adopted by cities, facilitating a dynamic analysis of contemporary urban governance practices. Lastly, focusing on the “dealing with” group enables a comparative analysis of cities networks that are at similar stages of development and facing common challenges, enhancing the study’s robustness and generalizability while providing practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners involved in urban governance and sharing economy initiatives.

The “dealing with” analysis is based on five case studies: Sharing Cities Alliance, Sharing Cities Action, European Cities Network on Short Term Rental, Sharing Cities Sweden, and Sharing Economy Association Japan. Analysis of these networks spans until 2020³ and allowed us to identify four different types of approach: (1) consultancy, (2) action, (3) testing, and (4) nudging. The study closes with some reflections about the potentialities of each approach type in terms of collective/collaborative actions in the transformation of contemporary society, and raises a number of questions for future research.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 The spread of the sharing economy in the urban context

In 2009, the emerging narrative about the sharing economy was one of hope and enthusiasm for an alternative economic model that would “save the planet” (among others, Matofska & Sheinwald, 2019), reinforce community ties (Böckera & Meelen, 2017; Hamari et al., 2015; Botsman & Roger, 2010), put resources back into circulation (Harmaala, 2015; Heinrichs, 2013), promote access over ownership (Martin, 2016; Light, 2015; Grassmuck, 2012), and thus reduce consumption overall (Ala-Mantila et al., 2016; de Leeuw & Gössling, 2016). Ten years on, some of the original allure seems to have been lost, and platforms genuinely able to mitigate consumption or build community ties are rare.

The focus of consumption is convenience, price and transactional efficiency; meanwhile, community is increasingly interpreted as a commodity. In terms of a production model, the variety of platforms differs significantly in size, scope, and level of professionalization (Andreotti et al., 2017). Existing models (Fuster Morell et al., 2020) vary from more profit-oriented, “netarchical” and “extractive” practices (Bauwens & Kostakis, 2016) to more community-oriented, generative and transformative solutions (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). Several tools have emerged to help differentiate and classify sharing economy platforms. Among these is the “Procommons collaborative economy analytical star framework” proposed by Fuster Morell and Espelt (2018, 2019) which, unlike other tools, incorporates socio-economic, environmental, political, technological and even gender dimensions of sustainability. On this basis, only under particular conditions can the general phenomenon be considered sharing, collaborative and commons-oriented or platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2016). Among the successful alternative solutions and genuinely sharing models, Fuster Morell (2018) includes open commons, platform cooperativism, decen-

3 The data and information presented regarding the 5 city networks extend up to the year 2020.

tralized organizations based on social economy and open knowledge (e.g., Fairmondo), as well as sharing practices that are growing offline without relying on digital platforms (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015)⁴.

To provide a more balanced view, it is essential to acknowledge that while the sharing economy initially promised to strengthen community ties and promote sustainable consumption, its trajectory has revealed significant challenges and potential downsides within urban contexts. Some digital platforms with a capitalist ethos (Srnicsek, 2016; Kenney & Zysman, 2016) are opening up new spaces for discrimination and generating new inequalities (Slee, 2015; Srnicsek, 2016). Among these are the labour exploitation generated by food delivery (e.g., Foodora), ride-hailing (e.g., Uber), and short-term contract or freelance work platforms (e.g., TaskRabbit); or the impacts of short-term rentals platforms (e.g., Airbnb) on housing shortages and neighbourhood identity, and the gentrification, Disneyfication and hotelization (Lee 2016) that threatens historic centres with social desertification (Semi, 2015). Nonetheless, other experiences are demonstrating their capacity to act as levers for the re-building and stabilization of communities, fostering local and sustainable economic development (Stokes et al., 2014). An awareness of the nuances that run between the "corporate model" and the "community model" becomes fundamental (Sanchez Vergara et al., 2021) especially for policymakers. Cities should actively engage in addressing the challenges posed by sharing platforms either through regulatory measures, collaborative initiatives, or policy interventions. Failure to address these issues may result in further exacerbation of urban inequalities and social fragmentation.

1.2 "Within" to "between": from one to a hundred cities showing interest

Cities, densely-populated spaces with a profusion of digital and physical connections, are the ideal place for sharing practices to develop (Agyeman et al., 2013). However changes in society, such as the emergence of the platform economy, require robust urban governance structures (Andreotti, 2019), where cities have the opportunity to promote practices based on making, doing and sharing to engage residents in communities of practice that strengthen a shared identity (Benkler, 2019)⁵. They can manage the dynamic interaction between technology, ideology and institutions, acting as service providers or as a democratic community. Being a *sharing city* recalls the ability of a city to offer the lived experience of socially-embedded production and meaningful participatory democracy (Benkler, 2019).

The first two cities to officially describe themselves as sharing cities were Seoul in 2012 (Bernardi & Diamantini, 2017) and Amsterdam in 2015 (Mont et al., 2019). Both cities set out with the goal of using the opportunities offered by the sharing economy in the fields of sustainability, social cohesion and the economy. In a short time, the number of sharing cities has grown (San Francisco, Milan, New York, Vienna, etc.) despite the controversies generated by the confusion around the topic, the lack of a single common definition, and the adoption of the term by platforms that are not genuinely sharing oriented (Codagnone et al., 2016). Cities reacted to the phenomenon in different ways, according to the potentialities described by the predominant discourse, and the impending impact of digital platforms on urban contexts. Some cities tried to restrict sharing economy organizations with regulations or bans; others remained neutral, adopting a "wait and see" strategy; still others encouraged and supported the efforts of sharing economy organizations. A systematic examination of what cities are doing to "contain" the risks and endorse the benefits generated by sharing-oriented platforms allows us to map municipal governance practices and assist city governments in the management and integration of the sharing economy in their urban tissue. Interesting works in this regard include those by Voytenko Palgan (2019), who expanded previous analyses on cities' approaches to the sharing economy; Bernardi and

4 Agyeman and McLaren refer to a "sharing paradigm", in which *sharing* is intended as a tool to create a more socially just, environmentally sustainable, inclusive, fair and innovative society, and is not related solely to the generation of profit.

5 <https://www.barcelona.cat/metropolis/en/contents/imagined-community-practice-community>

Diamantini (2017), who produced a preliminary identification of hybrid forms of governance, distinguishing them into more “centralized” and more “widespread” models; Pais and Salice (2017), who identified three roles of government, as regulator, investor and facilitator; Zvolska *et al.* (2018), who described four roles of government, as regulator, provider through funding and infrastructures, enabler through collaboration and communication, and consumer; and, finally, McCormick and Leire (2019), who defined five principal mechanisms through which the sharing economy is regulated by local government: regulating (through laws, taxes, bans and policies), self-governing, providing, enabling and collaborating.

More than 50 cities have taken part in the three Sharing City Summits (Amsterdam 2016, New York 2017, Barcelona 2018), displaying the varied current panorama of approaches, attitudes and practices. Despite their different strategies and methods, they testify to the need to promote sustainable urbanization (Ochoa *et al.*, 2018) and a novel general attitude of governing cities oriented towards the promotion of a sustainable, participative, innovative political economic model. What Benkler (2019) defines as a *public-commons partnership model* is based on four core elements: (1) participation and transparency between government and citizens; (2) trust in citizens; (3) active collaboration between public institutions and commons-based communities of practices; (4), respectful and supportive cooperation among people as proactive and collective actors. In this model, Benkler recognizes a socially-embedded production dimension based on trust, cooperation and productive achievement among the participants. The merge between these participative processes and online collaborative platforms, together with continuous learning relations within the commons-based communities of practice, allows local governments to offer a more engaged experience of citizenship. At the same time, local businesses can benefit from collaboration with public institutions and commons-based practices.

1.3 Between cities: the emergence of sharing cities coalitions

Experimenting, collaborating and sharing among cities with diverse models, political approaches, experiences and technical solutions, inside dedicated cities networks, is recognized to be a more profitable way to tackle the challenges and benefit from the opportunities of the sharing economy (Benkler, 2019). One recognized positive element is the power of the network to give cities more authority over sharing economy platforms and greater administrative control. Scaling up from a single-city approach to a network of cities can help create a framework to support common collaborative action among cities and build upon common strategies, and a valuable resource to communicate common views and ensure that platforms and other institutions take into consideration the roles played by cities’ and their perspectives on the platforms’ activities. This also means that local governments involved in the new emerging coalitions of cities perceive the more traditional cities networks as unable to respond to their needs when it comes to digital platforms, since they are providing no effective support or response in the short- and medium-term (Malè, 2019). It can also mean that the short-term actions of cities networks can “complement the medium- to long-term advocacy initiatives of major representative networks, which are aimed at the formal recognition of cities within the global governance system, but which have so far largely failed to promote actual policy or structural changes in this system” (Fernández de Losada & Abdullah, 2019, p.13).

In this framework of evolution from a single-city to a multi-city approach, the following section presents the current landscape of the sharing cities coalition. As anticipated, the literature to date has presented empirical analysis mainly focused on single cases or comparison among single cities (among others, van der Eijnden, 2017; Bernardi & Diamantini, 2018, Zvolska *et al.*, 2018; Vidal & Fuster Morell, 2018). In this study, however, we propose to scale up by analysing and comparing sharing cities coalitions for the first time.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is grounded in the principles of qualitative research and involved three main stages: identification, classification, and in-depth qualitative analysis (Yin, 2004) of existing city networks related to the sharing economy. To ensure the credibility and depth of the findings, a case comparison analysis was conducted, which adopted a qualitative approach to facilitate comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the data (Howe, 2004; Stake, 2010). Five cases were identified; they focus specifically on sharing, are based on city government involvement, and represent the five major city networks (in terms of level of activity reliability): 1. Sharing Cities Alliance (SCAlliance), launched jointly by the city of Amsterdam and ShareNL; 2. Sharing Cities Action (SCAction), promoted by the city of Barcelona in collaboration with the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya; 3. European Cities Network on Short Term Holiday Rental (ECNSTHR), led by the city of Amsterdam; 4. Sharing Cities Sweden (SCSweden), launched by the Swedish central government; 5. Sharing Economy Association Japan (SEAJ), promoted by a not-for-profit NGO.

The inclusion of diverse case studies, selected based on criteria such as city government involvement and activity reliability, contributes to the robustness and generalizability of the findings, allowing for a nuanced analysis of sharing cities networks on a global scale. In particular, the decision to include the Sharing Economy Association Japan (SEAJ) warrants clarification: other similar networks exist, such as the Sharing Economy Association Korea, Sharing Economy UK, or the European Sharing Economy Coalition; however, the Japanese association is the only one to have a specific internal programme involving city councils, while all the others are aimed at freelancers and sharing organizations.

Furthermore, the involvement of “expert voices” networks such as Shareable and Ouishare as “forerunners” adds depth to the analysis, offering historical perspectives and insights into the evolution of sharing networks and their impact on urban development. .

To address the complexity of the research subject and ensure a comprehensive understanding, a triangulation of methods was employed, as suggested by Della Porta & Keating (2008): literature review on the evolution of the phenomenon and local government perspectives; identification and classification of emerging sharing cities coalitions to identify networks for case studies; desk research and analysis of institutional and official materials related to the case studies; participant observation during the 2018 Sharing Cities Summit, the 2019 Sharing Cities Sweden Summit, and the 2019 Sharing Cities Encounter. In addition, eleven semi-structured interviews with representatives of the case studies and members of the “expert voices” networks have been conducted. One network representative and one policy maker from SCAlliance, SCAction, SCSweden and ECNSTHR, were also interviewed. Shareable, Ouishare and SEAJ were represented by a single interviewee each. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling thanks to the authors’ existing contacts with relevant organisations. The interviews were conducted from May to November 2019 on Skype, except for the representatives of SCAction, Gothenburg city, OuiShare and the ECNSTHR, interviewed face-to-face. The analysis was performed with the assistance of NVivo software. The methodological approach also prioritized gender balance in the selection of interviewees, ensuring diverse perspectives and enhancing the validity of the research findings (gender balance was present for SCAction and SCSweden, where one of the two interviewees in each case was a woman).

3. Case Study Analysis

3.1 Towards the creation of the Sharing Cities Alliance

The Sharing Cities Summit held in Barcelona in 2018 is just one example of the need for cities to gather and discuss sharing economy issues. Since the Seoul Sharing City in 2012, the number of

cities encounters on the topic have multiplied. Some of them have more significantly marked the story of the “sharing cities coalitions”.

The first of these was the Sharing City Roundtable⁶ (at the time, the “Amsterdam Sharing Cities Summit”), organized by the Government of Amsterdam⁷ and ShareNL in May 2016 with mayors from another twelve cities including Paris, Copenhagen, Barcelona, New York City and Seoul. ShareNL⁸ is an organization established in 2013 to promote knowledge and collective awareness of the sharing economy; it advises and supports start-ups, organizations, corporations, governments and individuals, and is one of the architects of the “Amsterdam Sharing City” project. This event was an occasion for cities to jointly reflect on how cities can make themselves stronger by sharing information, best practices and knowledge. The main concerns addressed were related to the normative dimension, since digital platforms tend not to fit in the traditional legislative framework (Smorto, 2015). A draft of five principles regarding digital platforms emerged: 1. social security contributions, plus fair pay and at least the minimum wage for employees; 2. safety (fire and food safety must be addressed); 3. sustainability (the business activity should respect the environment); 4. inclusiveness (there should be no age, technological or other barriers to participation); 5. data sharing is needed to prevent and combat illegal activities.

A cities coalition based on shared values and goals, the Sharing Cities Alliance (our first case study), was also created during this summit. The second summit was held in New York in 2017⁹ and hosted 22 cities across thirteen countries and four continents. During this summit, the birth of the Sharing Cities Alliance was made official and the five principles were implemented. The main mission of the Alliance is to be a good practices exchange and collaboration platform to address the challenges of the digital decade. In the words of the founders, “we provide all partners with a collective memory and access to each other’s materials and experiences”. The Alliance co-organizes summits, facilitates online seminars, shares highlights in a monthly online magazine, works one-on-one with leading urban professionals, and collects materials, research and policies in a comprehensive digital database (Alex).

Both summit editions (2016 and 2017) represented an important space for collaboration between city representatives, experts, entrepreneurs and researchers, and the opportunity to share best practices, public policies, legislation, and research.

3.2 The emergence of a Sharing Cities Task Force

The third edition, a four days summit held in Barcelona in 2018¹⁰ simultaneously to the Smart City Expo World Congress, was organized by Barcelona City Council, with the Dimmons research group of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and the support of the city of Amsterdam, New York City, BarCola¹¹, Sharing Cities Alliance and Shareable. It constituted the largest cities encounter to date on the sharing economy, attended by 50 cities from all continents. The main focus was on boosting tangible commons outcomes and collaboration measures, including the co-creation of a set of common principles to reach a joint declaration; the collaboration between cities on regulation and negotiation with large platforms that generate disruptive impacts in the city; the definition of criteria to distinguish between platforms; the promotion of policies for in-

6 More information is available here:

http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SC_Adam_2016.pdf.

7 Represented by Vice Mayor Kajsa Ollongren.

8 For more information, see <https://www.sharenl.nl/>.

9 By Alicia Glen, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development of New York City.

10 More information on the Barcelona Summit is available here:

<http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/sharing-cities-summit/2018-barcelona/>

11 BarCola is a node on collaborative economy and peer production based on the commons in Barcelona. It analyses and evaluates the situation of the model oriented to common goods within the collaborative economy in the context of Barcelona, maps cases of collaborative economy and common goods models, develops recommendations for public policy planning in that field, improves dialogue between social and solidarity economy and production oriented to common goods.

clusive platform models, beneficial to the general common interest; the knowledge policies and a common data-sharing platform between cities.

The summit was thus the occasion to co-finalize, present and sign a *Declaration of Common Principles and Commitments for Sharing Cities*¹², resulting from the principles defined during the two previous summits. The Declaration is composed of ten principles¹³ and aims to be a framework to support collaborative actions between cities, build upon common strategies and provide a valuable resource for communicating cities' common views. The principles are inspirational (Bernardi, 2018) and not legally binding; they represent a symbolic message delivered globally about cities' general approach towards platforms and the sharing economy. They propose an action plan and a coordination strategy among cities in order to gain negotiation power with digital platforms and engage in joint actions regarding national and supranational decisions and regulations.

The Declaration was signed by A Coruña, Amsterdam, Athens, Atlanta, Barcelona, Bethlehem, Bologna, Bordeaux, Buenos Aires, Gothenburg, Grenoble, Kobe, Lisbon, Madrid, Milan, Montreal, Montreuil, Muscat, New York, Paris, Reykjavík, San Francisco, Santiago de Compostela, São Paulo, Seoul, Taipei, Terrassa, Torino, Toronto, Umea, Valencia, Vienna and Vitoria-Gasteiz. Other cities are currently in the process of validating the Declaration: Bristol, Eindhoven, The Hague, Malmö, Melbourne, Prague, Rijswijk, Singapore and Stockholm.

The Declaration embodies the starting point of the Sharing Cities Action Task Force, or Sharing Cities Action (our second case study). It is the result of the Barcelona City Council and the Dimmons research group's combined endeavour to establish a task force office to support the Declaration, foster collaboration between cities and develop concrete actions to address the challenges and opportunities posed by the platform economy.

In November 2019, Sharing Cities Action organized a Sharing Cities Encounter during the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona to maintain communication between the sharing cities, provide updates about the activities, research and initiatives implemented, restore the willingness of cities to collaborate, and together define the 2020 Action Plan (Bernardi, 2019). The encounter brought together 30 city representatives and 150 actors from the international sharing ecosystem of business platforms, civic society, networks, experts, activists and research centres. The participants also included representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Committee of Regions and Cities. The Sharing Cities Alliance and Sharing Cities Sweden (see below) also attended. Among the outcomes of the 2018 - 2019 period there are the expansion of the network from 50 to 85 cities from 36 countries; the cooperation on the European Cities Network Short Term Holiday Rental; the contributions from cities to the Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) on the platform economy; the publication of the report¹⁴ "An Overview of Public Policies of the Sharing Economy by Cities" (an analysis of cities' conceptions and approaches regarding the definition of the sharing economy, its challenges and opportunities, criteria used to differentiate platforms, and cities' main goals and policy interventions). In addition, the Corporate European Observatory (CEO) collaborated in the launch of a report on platform lobbying in Europe ("Über-influential? How the Gig Economy's Lobbyists Undermine Social and Workers' Rights"¹⁵); Murray Cox, founder of InsideAirbnb, collaborated on the study *Data Strategies for Cities to Facilitate Negotiation with Platforms*,

12 The Declaration can be read here: <http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sharing-Cities-Declaration-1.pdf>.

13 Three additional principles were added to the seven to come out of the NY Summit: (1) differentiation between platform models; (2) defence of the sovereignty of cities; and (3) public support policies for collaborative platforms that have a positive impact.

14 The report is available here: <http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/REPORT-SHARING-CITIES-SUMMIT-2018.pdf>.

15 The report is available here: <https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/%C3%9Cber-influential%20web.pdf>.

During the meeting, the city of Seoul announced its intention to build on the previous summits' experience to organize the Sharing Cities Summit 2020. The Summit was held online in November 2020, and attended by representatives of the main sharing networks to discuss how cities are reacting to COVID-19 from a sharing perspective. During the online summit, participants stressed the importance of operating as a network, since the current challenges are too difficult for any city to face alone.

3.3 The European Cities Network on Short Term Holiday Rentals (ECNSTHR)

In Europe, another distinct type of city network has surfaced, encompassing cities grappling with the surge of short-term holiday rentals, which services pose significant challenges, notably by driving up housing costs and impeding access to affordable housing options. Cities are reacting differently: some with hostility, others with a laxer response. Either way, negotiations and agreements have failed to resolve major problems, and platforms are seeking centralized top-down positions in the EU to bypass local governments. According to Haar (2018) and Tansey and Haar (2019), platforms have entered the lobbying ecosystem in Brussels mainly through the European Holiday Home Association (EHHA) founded in 2013, whose website boasts a short-term rental industry with a capacity of 20 million beds and a yearly turnover of 80 billion euros. These numbers pushed the EU parliament to promote the 2017 resolution "European Agenda for the collaborative economy", stating that "tourism sector home-sharing represents an excellent use of resources", and affirming that the EU "is concerned about the risk of fragmentation of the single market" and "condemns, in this regard, the regulations being imposed by some public authorities, which seek to restrict the supply of tourist accommodation via the collaborative economy." In 2016 and 2017, the EHHA has presented formal complaints against EU cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels and Paris, for violating EU laws.

The European Cities Network on Short Term Holiday Rental (ECNSTHR) emerged in that context. The need for cities to form themselves into a collective actor arises from the fact that, in the EU framework, cities can only aspire to be "agenda setters" with little impact on the policy-making processes (Vidal, 2019). The promoters of the initiative have been the cities of Barcelona and Amsterdam, with their Brussels offices playing a leading role. The network incorporates ten EU national capitals and London, and a further eleven major cities in EU Member States, adding up to a total of 22 European cities working together on the short-term rental issue with a special focus on regulation. These cities are Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Bologna, Bordeaux, Brussels, Cologne, Florence, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Krakow, London, Milan, Munich, Paris, Porto, Prague, Utrecht, Valencia, Vienna and Warsaw. They all signed a position paper¹⁶ appealing for improved EU legislation of short-term holiday rentals platforms, since the current legislation makes it difficult for city administrations to take effective measures against globally operating short-term rental companies. European cities are teaming up to improve the regulation of short-term holiday rental platforms with a joint position from which they are calling for a new Digital Single Market legislative framework that will oblige holiday rental platforms to share relevant data with city administrations. Three main demands have been issued: (1) platforms must share relevant data with local government administrations to enforce the law; (2) ads for national/local holiday properties must include a valid registration number, and platforms must remove any ads that fail to comply with this condition; (3) platforms must comply with and enforce national and local legislation, meaning they would be responsible for non-compliance with the local and national legislation of the Member State in which they operate as well as the state in which they are legally based (Dimitrova, 2020). In the opinion of the ECNSTHR representative interviewed for this study, platforms should cooperate with registration schemes, not obstruct enforcement, cooperate with social housing companies, and make their hosts pay taxes.

¹⁶ The position paper is available here: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROPEAN_CITIES_ALLIANCE_ON_SHORT_TERM_RENTALS_final.pdf.

3.4 Sharing Cities Sweden: a national programme to connect cities

In parallel, the Sharing Cities Sweden programme¹⁷ emerged, a national initiative developed under the large umbrella of the Swedish programme Viable Cities, a strategic innovation programme for smart and sustainable cities, led by KTH Royal Institute of Technology, to achieve climate-neutral cities by 2030¹⁸.

Sharing Cities Sweden is dedicated to exploring the potential of the sharing economy as a means to tackle environmental concerns, mitigate energy consumption, and enhance social innovation and sustainability within urban contexts. The initiative focuses on establishing pioneering test beds across Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Umeå, fostering collaboration on a national and global scale while facilitating the exchange of insights derived from shared experiences in urban settings. The network comprises a diverse array of stakeholders from both the private and public sectors, academia, and civil society. Lund University assumes a pivotal role as the primary facilitator and coordinator of the network, overseeing its evaluation processes.

Sharing Cities Sweden's test beds are designed according to the key factors of urban living labs: well-defined context; experimentation with new solutions, technologies and policies; collaboration among different stakeholders; clear leadership and ownership; systematic evaluation. The sharing services developed in the test beds relate to (1) utilization of spaces (premises, housing, green infrastructure, shared public space, etc.), and (2) utilization of goods and services (tools, clothing, toys, handicrafts, etc.). Transport and mobility are included to a certain extent.

Within the programme, the network is also developing a toolkit with the twofold aim of helping city governments to evaluate sharing policies and improve their understanding of the role of cities; and helping sharing organizations to evaluate their level of sustainability and shareability in economic/social/environmental terms. The toolkit will define sharing sustainability indicators for measuring the impact and added value of sharing services and scoring the sharing organizations.

Lastly, the network has developed a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), available free of charge, offering a collection of diverse short films and key short readings on sharing cities, in addition to interactive forums and a practical assignment to create an online learning community. It provides a diversity of key examples of the emerging sharing economy in cities.

In October 2019, the Sweden coalition organized the Sharing Cities Sweden Summit, inviting all the actors in the Swedish ecosystem to reflect on the first results of the test beds and explore the role of sharing cities in advancing sustainable development goals.

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the network started organizing online events to report on the test beds' progress. Worthy of particular note among the various initiatives is the collaboration with the Sharing Cities Alliance to co-organize a virtual roundtable, "Sharing Cities: Shaping Tomorrow", for the purpose of sharing insights and ideas on the future of sharing in cities and communities. The initiative gathered over 40 people from Sweden, the Netherlands, and across Europe and the world.

3.5 The Sharing Economy Association Japan: connecting cities while creating an ecosystem

Moving to the other side of the world, we find the Sharing Economy Association Japan (SEAJ). In Asia, concern about the sharing economy is also growing and, given the position of Seoul as a clear forerunner in this field (Fedorenko, 2017), other Asian cities have begun to reflect on the subject. Seoul itself has tried to build a network with other Korean cities, launching the "Joint Declaration on Sharing Urban Policy for Sustainable Urban Development" in 2016. The goal was to expand the sharing of human and material resources and information; provide joint support for shared businesses and organizations; seek city-level measures to improve related laws and

¹⁷ More detailed information is available here: <https://www.sharingcities.se/>.

¹⁸ For more information, see <https://viablecities.com/en/home/>.

systems; and strengthen cooperation with overseas city governments¹⁹ (Bernardi, 2016). However, to date the network has not taken off and there is no news of possible initiatives and activities, despite the fact that the city of Seoul is involved in both Sharing Cities Action and the Sharing Cities Alliance, of which it was one of the first signatories. In Japan, on the other hand, a network of cities is being created with the will to build and strengthen the national sharing ecosystem. The SEAJ adopts mainly a business approach, and its 280 members include a number of so-called “unicorns” such as Airbnb.

The extremely valuable contribution of the SEAJ, and the reason for its inclusion in our analysis, is that it envisages a special programme which connects cities and relies on the support of city councils to strengthen the ecosystem. The associations’ partners include the Economic Promotion Centre for the Japanese Government and 26 city councils, in addition to sharing organizations and businesses.

The Sharing City Approval Mark is one of the cities-related activities through which sharing cities in Japan are established. To obtain the mark, the city is required to host a sharing business: cities that utilize sharing economy services to tackle regional issues are considered sharing cities. Another valuable initiative is the Sharing City Lab, a school for learning about the sharing economy and the role cities can play in it. To date, the lab offers thirteen online learning videos.

3.6 “Forerunners” and “newcomers” among the sharing cities coalitions

Finally, we reflect on the roles played by the so-called “forerunners” (e.g., Shareable and Ouishare), considered the “expert voices”, and “newcomers”, traditional networks of cities just beginning to address the phenomenon.

Shareable is a non-profit news, action and connection hub for the sharing transformation, interpreted as an emerging bottom-up movement for the solution of the greatest challenges facing contemporary society. It can be considered the first association to genuinely initiate reflection on “sharing”. Currently, it provides a range of services including consultations, presentations, workshops, editorial projects, online promotions, event support, and research. In 2013, it launched the first “Sharing Cities Network”: fifty cities around the world began mapping their shared resources in the first Shareable annual #MapJam²⁰, with the goal of connecting local sharing activists in cities around the world for mutual support and movement building²¹. However, in contrast to the coalitions examined in our case studies, Shareable is a cities network arising out of civil society, as opposed to city councils.

Ouishare²² is an international organization launched in 2012 to connect people, accelerate projects for systemic change, and transform the world through sharing, technology and open, collaborative and horizontal businesses. With more than 60 connectors in 20 cities throughout Europe, Latin and North America, and the Middle East, it has organized more than 300 events, including ten international conferences, and published nine research studies. Ouishare mainly experiments with social models based on collaboration, openness and fairness. The network is not cities-based, but made up of freelancers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. Nevertheless, the organization has been one of the first to question the sharing economy and how communities can take advantage of it, connecting both practitioners and local governments.

Both Shareable and Ouishare are non-governmental networks, though some city councils may participate alongside civic society, freelancers and economic actors.

19 The cities involved were SiHeung-Shi and JeonJu-Shi, as well as the Elementary Local Self Governments - *gu* - of Gwangsan-Gu, Seodaemun-Gu, Seongdong-Gu, Seongbuk-Gu, EunPyung-Gu.

20 The #MapJam is a decentralized event, in collaboration with Ouishare and other partners, to simultaneously map shared resources in cities around the world: <https://www.shareable.net/we-gathered-we-mapped-we-shared-a-mapjam-follow-up/>

21 For more information, see <http://commonstransition.org/portfolio/sharing-cities-network/>.

22 See opensource.ouishare.net.

With respect to “newcomers” such as Eurocities, Metropolis, and UCLG, these are characterized by authority, strong internal relations among the members, and a recently-acquired interest in the sharing economy. According to Vidal (2019), these networks struggle to arrive at a unified position and strategy due to the variety and heterogeneity of their members, as well as the lack of continuity in the political cycles of cities. The emergence of new sharing cities coalitions confirms and suggests the inability of the traditional cities’ networks to effectively support local governments in the sharing field. Nonetheless, they are trying to initiate reflection, as in the case of Eurocities, which has recently incorporated sharing into its agenda.

4. Discussion: collective/collaborative (re)action of cities to the sharing economy

Although the five sharing cities coalitions share common values, the analysis of institutional material, and the information obtained through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, highlights a number of peculiarities. The information is organized in three categories: (I) *Basic features*, (II) *Governance model*, and (III) *Goals, tools and collaboration*.

4.1 Basic features

The following table summarizes the main basic features, showing the different nature of the five case studies and how they differ from one another in terms of level of operation, number of cities involved, coalition promoter, and internal sustainability:

Table 1. Level of operation, number of cities and promoter of the four networks

	SCAlliance	SCAction	ECNSTHR	SCSweden	SEAJ
Level	International	International	International	National	National
Cities	16	85	22	4	26 (of 280 total members)
Promoter	Foundation	City council + University	City council	Central government	Not-for-profit NGO
Sustainability	Fee	No fee - UOC and city council support	No fee - city council involvement	Central government and city council involvement	Fee (not for cities)

In terms of sustainability, some networks are self-sufficient and others, such as SCAlliance and the SEAJ, rely on a membership fee. SCAlliance proposes three different types of memberships that enable access to different services. Fee-based membership/partnership highlights the more consultative nature of this network. The SEAJ also proposes a fee-based membership/partnership with different levels of access, but it is interesting to note that the local governments involved are not required to pay a fee. SCAction receives funding from Barcelona City Council and the UOC. Members of the ECNSTHR are not required to pay a fee. SCSweden receives funding from the Swedish central government, though each of the cities invests its own resources in developing the project locally (city councils allocate funds to sharing activities).

4.2 Governance model

From the main nodes and the actors involved, we can detect a different organization for networks with a national base and those with an international base.

Table 2. Crucial nodes and actors involved in the four networks

	Crucial nodes	Actors involved
SCAlliance	Foundation (ShareNL) as promoter and coordinator Amsterdam City Council as main partner and reference city	Cities and policymakers Local stakeholders from the member city
SCAction	University (Dimmons research group) as coordinator Barcelona City Council as promoter and reference city	Cities Sharing organizations and local stakeholders from the member cities
ECNSTHR	Amsterdam City Council and its Brussels office in a leading role	Cities
SCSweden	National government as promoter (Lund) University as facilitator and coordinator of the network, as well as evaluator. 4 city councils: Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå	Businesses Public sector Academia Civil society All local stakeholders are invited to participate
SEAJ	Not-for-profit NGO (Sharing Economy Association Japan) as promoter and facilitator	Sharing organizations and businesses (mayor players included) Economic Promotion Centre of the Japanese Government City councils (every city has a Sharing Economy Committee)

While SCAlliance is promoted as a foundation that receives funding from Amsterdam City Council, SCAction is promoted by Barcelona City Council, and supported and coordinated by a cognitive actor, the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, through the Dimmons research group of the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute. In the case of SCAlliance, the actors involved are mainly cities with, occasionally, local stakeholders from these cities. In the case of SCAction, the main actors involved are cities together with local stakeholders from those cities, since this network perceives the whole ecosystem linked to a city as important. The ECNSTHR is promoted by and composed of city councils or metropolitan areas.

With respect to national networks, the Swedish network is promoted by the central government as part of the Viable Cities national programme, but the facilitator/coordinator, also responsible for evaluation, is a cognitive actor, Lund University; the four municipalities involved in the project are also active and crucial nodes. All stakeholders within the ecosystem are invited to participate, meaning that businesses, the public sector, academia and civil society are involved. In the Japanese experience, the promoter and coordinator is a not-for-profit NGO; the main actors involved are sharing organizations and businesses (including major players such as Airbnb), the Economic Promotion Centre of the Japanese Government and selected city councils (every city has a Sharing Economy Committee).

4.3 Goals, tools and collaborations

Having examined the goals declared by the five networks during the interviews (Table 3), we can highlight some first considerations. First, SCAlliance aims to enable all partner cities to continuously unlock the opportunities and address the challenges of the sharing and platform economy, providing a collective memory as well as access to each other's materials and experiences.

Connection and exchange are key aspects. In the founder’s words, “By working together, each city administration is better able to work with and for its citizens”.

SCAction aims to promote common action between cities in order to defend the sovereignty of cities against the power of large platforms. In view of the asymmetric power/information relation between big platforms and single cities, the coalition aims to inform and empower cities to engage in critical collective actions and joint lobbying. In addition, the coalition works to promote collaborative actions in support of responsible platform models. The main goals are to assert and ensure city sovereignty; promote socio-economic development; collaborate on regulation and negotiation with platforms; defend and adapt labour and digital rights and public innovation; and define platform differentiation criteria and promote platforms with a positive impact. The ECNSTHR is oriented towards the normative dimension of the sharing economy and is focused on the short-term holiday rental market. Cities in this network seek to jointly address the challenges posed by this kind of platform and have a stronger voice at EU level, and they want data and greater cooperation from platforms.

SCSweden is more oriented towards sustainability and its main goal is to develop world-leading test beds for the sharing economy in the four cities involved in the initiative for the purpose of developing sharing services and digital solutions as an alternative to unicorn companies, and putting Sweden on the map as a country that actively and critically engages with the sharing economy in cities.

The Japanese coalition is more focused on the creation of the country’s sharing economy ecosystem. It aims to overcome the generalized lack of trust and encourage people to use shared services and resources, activating new economic behaviour, as well as to create the ecosystem, intensify the platform environment for business operators, and consolidate the protection system for platform users.

Table 3. Goals of each sharing cities network

	SCAlliance	SCAction	SCSweden	ECNSTHR	SEAJ
Goal	To be an intermediary for city-to-city collaboration and mutual exchange of information	To foster collaboration among cities to develop concrete actions to deal with challenges and opportunities of the platform economy	To develop world-leading test beds for the sharing economy in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå to promote city sustainability	To have a joint voice at EU with regard to legislation to regulate short-term holiday rental platforms	To build the Japanese SE environment and match organizations to it; promote the use of sharing economy services; consolidate legal protection measures

With respect to the *tools* that mark each coalition, we detected a rich adoption of what can be considered technical supports. SCAlliance, for instance, created ALEX, the alliance’s lexicon: a searchable, continuously evolving database featuring a comprehensive collection of the most up-to-date research, reports, case studies, policies, regulations, and market developments in the sharing economy. ALEX gathers all the information on SCAlliance core activities in one place and is curated by the Alliance team. The available resources are crowdsourced from its members, and are available exclusively for paying members/partners of SCAlliance.

SCAction relies on the “analytical star framework” (see section 3) developed by the Dimmons research group; on the Declaration approved during the 2018 Sharing Cities Summit in Barcelona by all the 50 cities that attended; and on a number of studies conducted by Dimmons. SCAction has also developed co-creation materials free to download under a Creative Commons 4.0 licence. These include Dotmocracy canvases for feedback on policy proposals and short-, mid- and long-term action points; canvases and cards for mapping platform economy initiatives worldwide, from a quadruple helix ecosystem perspective (public administration, business, research, and civil society); and canvases and cards for imagining a day in the future of platform

economy (2028), focusing on mobility, housing, leisure, communication, knowledge, education, food, energy, health, gender, shopping, finance, relationships and care. SCAction is also developing an open data commons and visualization resource on sharing cities and the collaborative economy. The database is currently still in a beta version but nevertheless is a valuable tool for public administrators, researchers and entrepreneurs, as well as other stakeholders such as journalists, citizens and civic entities seeking to understand new collaborative economy activities in relation to cities.

The final aspect taken into consideration in this category is cities' belonging to more than one network (*collaborations*). This aspect can be detected for all the networks except the Sharing Economy Association Japan, which involves only Japanese cities not affiliated with the other four networks.

Table 4 Cities' belonging to the four networks (excluded SEJapan) + sign of the Declaration

	SCAlliance	SCAction	ECNSTHR	SCSweden	Declaration signed
Almere		X			
Amsterdam	X	X	X		X
Åstorp		X			
Athens		X	X		X
Atlanta		X			X
Barcelona	X	X	X		X
Berlin		X	X		
Bethlehem		X			X
Bilbao		X			
Bologna		X	X		X
Bordeaux		X	X		X
Brno		X			
Brussels		X	X		
Brussels-Capital Region		X			
Buenos Aires		X			X
Cape Town	X				
Catania Metropolitan City		X			
Cologne		X	X		
Copenhagen	X	X			
A Coruña		X			
Dallas	X				
Debrecen		X			X
El Prat de Llobregat		X			
Fez		X			
Florence		X			
Frankfurt		X			
Ghent	X	X			
Gothenburg	X	X		X	X
Granada		X			
Grenoble		X			X
Helsinki		X			
Izmir		X			
Karlskrona		X			
Karlstad		X			
Kobe		X			X
Krakow		X	X		
Linköping		X			

Lisbon		X			X
London		X	X		
Los Angeles		X			
Madrid		X			X
Malaga		X			
Malmö	X	X		X	
Maribor		X			
Milan		X	X		X
Montelibano		X			
Montreal		X			X
Montreuil		X			
Moscow		X			X
Munich		X	X		
Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies (Thessaloniki Urban area)		X			
Muscat		X			X
Naples		X			
Nice		X			
New York City	X	X			X
Norwich	X				
Palma		X			
Paris		X	X		X
Porto		X	X		
Reykjavík		X			X
Rotterdam		X			
Samsun		X			
San Francisco		X			X
Santiago de Compostela		X			X
São Paulo		X			X
Seoul	X	X			X
Seville		X			
Singapore	X				
Stockholm		X		X	
Sydney		X			
Taipei		X			X
Tallinn		X			
Tartu		X			
Tel Aviv					
Terrassa		X			X
The Hague	X	X			X
Thessaloniki		X			
Toronto	X	X			X
Turin		X			X
Umeå		X		X	
Utrecht		X	X		
Valencia		X	X		X
Vienna		X	X		X
Vilnius		X			
Vitoria		X			X
Warsaw		X	X		
Washington	X	X			
Wroclaw		X			
Zagreb		X			

SCAction counts 85 cities; SCAlliance 16 cities; ECNSTHR 22 cities; SCSweden 4 cities. Amsterdam and Barcelona (in yellow) are part both of SCAction, SCAlliance and the ECNSTHR, demonstrating a strong participatory approach and a clear leading role. In Table 4, cities highlighted in orange are members both of SCAction and the ECNSTHR; cities with no highlighting are members of SCAction exclusively; cities in green highlighting (Copenhagen, Ghent, NYC, Seoul, The Hague, Toronto, Washington) are members both of SCAction and SCAlliance, as are Gothenburg and Malmö, which are also part of SCSweden; while Stockholm and Umeå are members of SCAction and SCSweden, but not of SCAlliance. Note that agreeing to or signing specific documents is not a requirement for involvement in SCAction. Each city's involvement is related to their will to be mutually connected and have a space of common reflection that may become common action. As anticipated, SCAction has developed several activities during the 2018-2019 period, relying on the availability of cities to be involved in research and other studies. The SCAction members are not obliged to sign the Declaration; signing cities are indicated in table 4. The four cities highlighted in blue (Cape Town, Norwich, Dallas and Tel Aviv) are members of SCAlliance exclusively, and joined the alliance in 2019. About ECNSTHR, Florence, Frankfurt, Helsinki and Prague are members of this network exclusively. Note that none of the Swedish cities is a member of the ECNSTHR. The following Venn diagram offers a visual summary which attempts to clarify the identity, affiliations and intersections between four of the five coalitions (the Japanese coalition is not included). Note that the choice to be part of one coalition or another, or to more than one, is related to the goals and approaches adopted by each network.

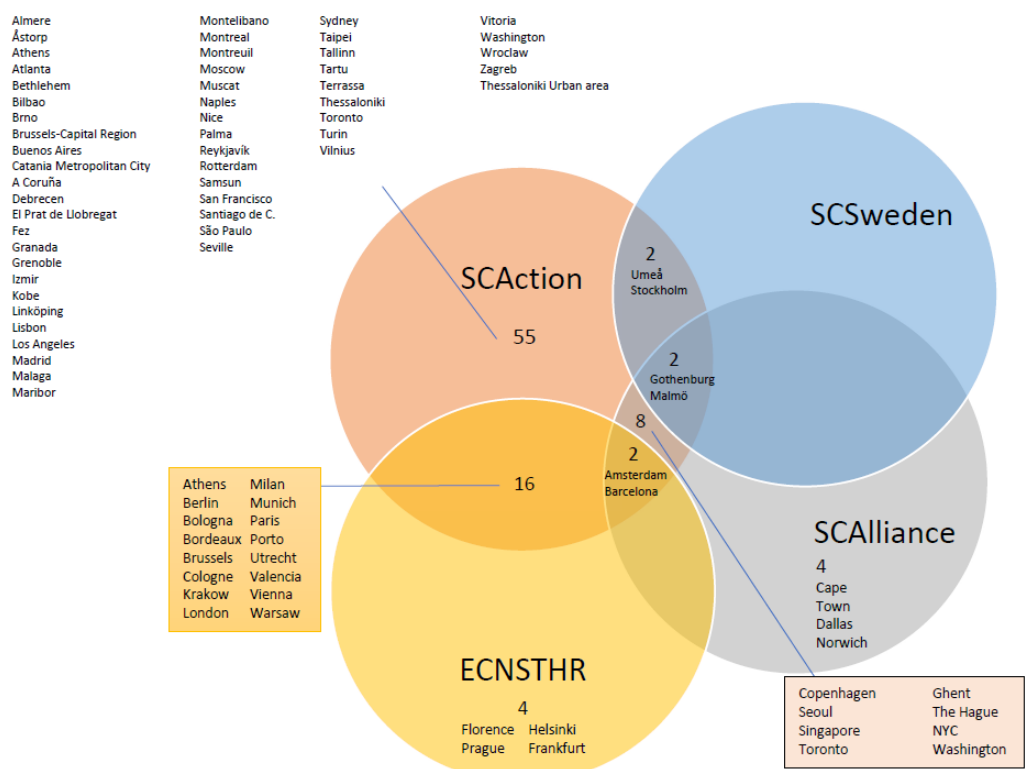


Figure 1. Cities' distribution between SCAlliance, SCAction, the ECNSTHR and SCSweden. Source: Authors' own.

4.4 Different approaches: four modes

From the analysis we can see that different city network approaches/(re)actions emerge: as shown in Table 5, in all the coalitions the “cities connection” is obviously a key element, but then every coalition defines a diverse mode of organization, based on its own background, goals and tools.

Table 5. Approaches of the five cities coalitions

Mode	Key features	Coalition	Description
Consultancy	Knowledge exchange Consultancy services Cities connection	SCAlliance	SCAlliance serves as a consultancy hub facilitating knowledge exchange and connection among cities. It offers consultancy services and acts as a proactive connector since its inception in 2016. Through ShareNL, it provides a platform for mutual knowledge exchange, organizing encounters like the Sharing Cities Summit, and offering specific advice and consultancy services.
Action	Collective and collaborative actions Lobbying power EU-legislation improvement Cities connection	SCAction	SCAction and ECNSTHR are action-oriented coalitions focusing on supporting collective and collaborative actions implemented by cities collectively. SCAction works to address challenges and implement concrete actions, such as advocating for platform regulation.
Action	Collective action towards EU-legislation improvement Lobbying power Cities connection	ECNSTHR	ECNSTHR collectively seeks improved EU legislation on short-term holiday rental platforms, leveraging the lobbying power of a group of cities, notably influencing legislative initiatives at the EU level.
Testing	Development of fair sharing services Sustainability-oriented ecosystem Experimentation Cities connection	SCSweden	SCSweden is focused on creating a local ecosystem promoting fair sharing services oriented towards sustainability. It utilizes urban living labs and test beds to experiment with schemes and solutions. Lund University facilitates and coordinates the network, responsible for evaluation.
Nudging	Creation of national sharing economy ecosystem Commercial focus Collaboration with corporate players Cities connection	SEAJ	SEAJ aims to create a national sharing economy ecosystem, primarily focusing on commercial aspects and forming alliances with corporate players. While cities are involved, the primary focus is on fostering the commercial aspect of the sharing economy rather than collaboration among cities.

At this point we can advance a number of observations. The first relates to the national or international dimension of the network, in that networks with a national dimension express *the need to allow the sharing economy ecosystem to emerge, as a lever for improving citizens' quality of life*. However, some contradictions emerged: while SCSweden is indeed working towards the development of fair sharing services oriented towards sustainability and promoting alternatives to the big platform models, SEAJ includes unicorn companies alongside social sharing enterprises and not-for-profit and community-based services; while SCSweden aims to promote collaboration among cities, for SEAJ the sharing cities project is just a part of a mainly trade-oriented programme.

The networks with an international dimension are not seeking to strengthen the ecosystem, rather, they are *working on the exchange of knowledge and the creation of connection and collaboration among cities*: SCAlliance mainly connects cities by offering a space for mutual knowledge and exchange, creating encounter opportunities, such as the Sharing Cities Summit, and offers specific advice and consultancy services; SCAction is more oriented towards co-creating an action plan and pushing for concrete collective collaborative actions among the cities; The ECNSTHR aims to connect cities to have a joint impact at EU level on legislation that regulates the short-term holiday rental platforms.

In addition it should be underlined that SCAlliance was an outcome of the 2nd Sharing Cities Summit; since then, it has established specific tools such as the magazine and the ALEX lexicon, and still offers consultancy through ShareNL.

On the contrary, SCAction was an outcome of the 3rd Sharing Cities Summit; its aim was to connect cities and implement the Declaration, offering tools designed before its creation. The initiative has also worked to new researches on the latest hot topics for cities. For example it has contributed to the Opinion of the European Committee of the Region (CoR) on platform economy, and to the publication of the report on public policies adopted in seventeen member cities; it has contributed to the launch of the report on platform lobbying in Europe and to the study conducted with Murray Cox on data strategies for cities to facilitate negotiation with platforms. It has also given its support to the European Cities Network with respect to short-term holiday rentals. The main focus for the 2018-2019 period has been on challenges and cities reactions (i.e. negotiate or regulate).

Lastly, the ECNSTHR has pushed the EU, via the mayors in its network, to define a new legislative framework for platforms offering short-term holiday rentals.

According to our case studies, we observe that each city coalition is built over a diverse sharing cities framework. Each one has different views in terms of diagnosis of the state of the sharing economy and its challenges and opportunities, and their criticism or support of the diverse SE models (e.g., "corporate" versus "socially- and community-based"). Their positions on gender equality and sharing economy gender performance are also diverse, and in terms of gender organizational performance, only one of the five coalitions (SCAction) has a woman in a leadership position.

Our coalitions of cities are very close to what Malè (2019) calls a "proactive cities front": emerging forms of city networking that are effective in bringing local issues to global governance. These have specific features observable in our case studies, such as a flexible and light structure, a shared political willingness to upscale local problems, and engaging in short-term actions that can complement the medium- and long-term advocacy initiatives of major representative networks.

In the literature related to cities networks, Cardama (2019) affirms that city networks should include, not only local and regional governments and their networks, but also urban stakeholders from the private sector, as it is the case with SCAlliance and SEAJ, and from the knowledge/cognitive sector, as is the case with SCSweden and SCAction. Indeed, more synergistic and complementary ways of operating can be formulated only by involving the full diversity of actors engaged in city networking (quadruple helix). The sharing cities networks in our study seem to be aware of the importance of multi-stakeholder governance and the involvement of all the relevant local actors. In the case of the ECNSTRH, only city councils are involved, given the network's goal of lobbying the EU for a new legislative framework for short-term holiday rental platforms, but clearly their joint action adds value to their strategy.

Roca (2019) believes that networks also need to move beyond the advocacy narrative of traditional municipalism towards more technical discourse capable of demonstrating the actual capacity of local governments to tackle global challenges by defining better indicators and other instruments of public policy. In this regard, SCAction makes available a number of useful tools (the analytical framework star, the toolkit, the Declaration) and demonstrates the ability to shape and conduct specific research. SCSweden also has a toolkit and is working on sharing sustainable indicators.

The interviews highlighted the advantages of city network membership, such as the engagement for open common reflections and the exchange of expertise, the access to consultancy and to information on the state of the art of the sharing economy and platform features, the ability to reach the critical mass needed to acquire international legitimacy, visibility and strength, the empowerment for collective action, as well as a sufficient influence for lobbying the EU or other actors and joint connection with platforms and definition of negotiation actions.

At the same time, our interviewees indicated a number of stumbling blocks typical of cities networks, such as the dispersion of energy / diffusion of effort; the lack of complementary collaboration and coordination between networks (de la Varga, 2019); some problems of communication; the lack of effective answers to challenges posed by the sharing economy (inability to provide solutions, strategies and effective actions that prompt transformations); or the reproduction of imbalances between north and south; the adoption of solutions that are more symbolic than effective and the promotion of a marketing product.

Summarizing, the analysis allows us to categorize our networks according to their type of action/ reaction to the sharing economy, identifying four different modes: *consultancy*, *action*, *testing*, *nudging*.

Consultancy is exemplified by SCAlliance, which offers a consultancy service to cities, with the undeniable value of having driven connection among cities since its first meeting in Amsterdam in 2016, working through ShareNL in a proactive way and as a connector.

Action is exemplified by SCAction, which is oriented towards supporting collective and collaborative actions designed and implemented by cities collectively. Suitable also for the ECNSTRH, which is collectively seeking improved EU-legislation of short-term holiday rental platforms. The lobbying power of a group of cities in relation to platforms or supra-institutions is greater than that of a single city.

Testing is exemplified by SCSweden, which is creating a local ecosystem based on a sharing economy oriented towards sustainability, adopting schemes tested in urban living labs using the test bed tool. The programme is funded and validated by the support of a cognitive actor, such as a university.

Nudging is exemplified by the SEAJ, which is trying to create a national sharing economy ecosystem, in alliance with corporate players. The involvement of cities is noteworthy even if the focus is mainly on the commercial aspect rather than the collaboration among cities. This mode also applies to SCAction, which is acting as a nudging actor in promoting the collective and collaborative action of cities working together.

As a final observation, if we consider SCAlliance and SCAction alone, we can detect a contraposition between one approach based on paid consultancy and another based on an attempt to be a connector of cities that fosters the development of concrete collective actions.

Conclusion and further steps

The paper begins with a presentation of the sharing economy in the urban context and the main reactions among cities, but offers the advantage of switching from a single-city ("within-city") approach to a multi-city ("between-cities") approach. The study has the added value of not being limited to the comparison of a set of single cities, as is usually found in the literature (van der Eijnden, 2017; Bernardi & Diamantini, 2018; Zvolaska et al., 2018; Vidal & Fuster Morell, 2018). To the best of the authors' knowledge, for the first time in the literature, the paper focuses on the wider framework of the sharing cities coalitions attempting to create links between cities and compares some of the main coalitions. It illustrates the international relations and action and collaboration between cities by identifying the current sharing cities coalitions, presenting their genesis, features, governance models, goals, tools and type of collaboration, and demonstrating that they can be very diverse in their policy decisions, strategies and approaches.

Shifting from a single-city to a multi-city approach, the study provides valuable insights into the diverse nature of these networks and their collaborative collective (re)action to the sharing economy. In particular, in replying to the research questions, the study has identified in the international panorama four categories of coalitions: consultative, collaborative collective ac-

tion-oriented, testing sustainable solutions and nudging. It has emerged that each sharing cities coalition 1. exhibits distinct features (such as level of operation, number of cities involved, promoter and sustainability model), 2. has different governance models, with some coordinated by foundations or NGOs (e.g., SCAlliance, SEAJ) and others led by city councils or governments (e.g., SCAction, SCSweden), and 3. also goals, tools and collaboration vary.



Figure 2 Summarizing table of the four modes emerged

SCAlliance aims to operate as an intermediary for city-to-city collaboration and the mutual exchange of information; it is consultative in nature, charges a fee, and relies on connection and exchange, exemplifying what we call a *consultative* mode of (re)action. SCAction aims to foster collaboration among cities to develop concrete actions to address the challenges and opportunities of the sharing economy, and seeks responsible platform models, and collaboration in regulation and negotiation with platforms; it charges no fee, and embodies an *action* mode of (re)action. The ECNSTHR falls into the same *action* category, since it is a coalition oriented towards the normative dimension of the sharing economy that seeks a better legal framework for the regulation of short-term holiday rental platforms. SCSweden is more sustainability oriented and its main goal is to develop world-leading test beds for the sharing economy in four cities; it exemplifies the so-called *testing* mode. Finally, the Japanese coalition is more focused on the creation of the country's sharing economy ecosystem, intensifying the platform environment for business operators while simultaneously involving cities; it embodies what we call the *nudging* mode.

From the study also emerge the attempts made by coalitions to involve other types of stakeholders, and create adequate tools to address the challenges posed by the phenomenon. In addition, the national networks seem better able to conduct ecosystem work than the international ones. The cities currently involved in these coalitions are growing in number, and in many cases they are also affiliating with more than one coalition. In particular, Amsterdam and Barcelona, in the European context at least, are playing a strong leading role and pushing for the creation of trade unions to empower cities.

The COVID-19 crisis and the associated increase in the use of platforms is exacerbating the importance of this type of collective action among cities, as demonstrated by the online Seoul Summit of November 2020, which called for even greater connection and collaborative action between cities.

Nevertheless, after the pandemic these coalitions have slow down their activities or reoriented them. SCAlliance is now working with the goal to empowers city governments and urban professionals to better govern in the digital age. SCAction has not seen further developments since the virtual meeting in 2020 hosted by the city of Seoul. The ECNSTHR has continued to operate actively to advocate for legislative action on tackling illegal short-term rentals. Mayors, deputy mayors, and other city officials from EU cities (such as Barcelona, Bologna, Brussels, Arezzo, Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Lyon, Porto, Florence), as well as dozens of Members of the European

Parliament (MEPs) and Eurocities, signed a letter in 2022 demanding action to a European Commission perceived as abandoning the project of a legislative initiative to regulate short-term rentals; recently (2024), the European Parliament passed the long-awaited regulation requiring platforms to share data. The SCSweden was linked to a national project lasting four years, initiated in 2017 and concluded in 2021. Over the course of four years, it developed and published various reports and outputs that summarized the activities and findings from different initiatives within the overall program, including the test-beds and strategic projects. Finally, the SEAJapan remained active until 2019, hosting an annual summit, but currently there appear to be no recent activities.

Concluding the study contributes to the growing body of literature on cities networks and the sharing economy, providing valuable insights for policymakers, city officials, and practitioners seeking to enhance their engagement with digital platforms and promote sustainable urban development through collaborative actions and knowledge sharing.

Moving forward, future research should delve deeper into the traditional cities networks and their efforts to address the sharing economy, how they perceive it, their power to address critical issues in this field, and the types of relationship they could have with the emerging sharing cities networks. It would also be interesting exploring the reconfiguration created in the general ecosystem of cities networks by the new emerging sharing cities coalitions, by the multiplication and diversification of the actors involved in international city networking (Losada & Abdullah, 2019), and by the large-scale investment of private capital and interests that are creating competitive dynamics. Further analysis on the overlapping and multiple affiliations among networks and participants is required too. Lastly, it should be considered the evolving dynamics of these coalitions post-COVID-19, particularly regarding their response to digitalization and the shifting landscape of urban challenges.

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From Sharing to Business: Urban and Social Dynamics of Airbnb in Naples²

Introduction

The centrality of space and place has always been taken for granted in Geography and Regional Sciences. In the broader Social Sciences, attention to the spatial (and spatio-temporal) dimensions of phenomena is much less evident, although, since the early 1990s, it has been experiencing a sort of renaissance. For example, in recent years, an increasing number of social scientists have adopted the use of technologies and new methodologies for spatial analysis, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS), remote sensing, and spatial statistics (Longley *et al.*, 2010; Janelle and Goodchild, 2011; Steinberg and Steinberg, 2006; Nyerges, Couclelis, and McMaster, 2011). This combination of social spatial analysis and technological innovation has led to the adoption of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) since the late 1990s, a tool that integrates various data forms to offer a nuanced understanding of urban phenomena (Corbisiero, Napoletano, 2023). Furthermore, greater attention is being paid to position and spatial interaction within theoretical frameworks. However, much still has to be done before full integration of the spatial perspective in both theory and methodology of Social Sciences can be achieved.

This study aims to analyze the Airbnb phenomenon in the city of Naples, focusing on the spatial distribution of listings and their socioeconomic impacts. The choice to investigate this topic stems from the limited scholarly literature on the spatial dynamics of Airbnb, particularly regarding its diffusion across the Neapolitan territory. In the absence of specific studies addressing the distribution of Airbnb in Naples, this research seeks to shed light on the platform's impact in this urban context. The expansion of Airbnb, a digital platform for tourist accommodation, has been a central focus in the sociological analysis of tourism for several years. Reflections in this field have often followed two critical strands. The first examines the platform's impact on local economies, particularly in the tourism sector. It critiques the opacity of Airbnb's market mechanisms and data transparency, highlighting concerns around the autonomy hosts have to set prices and select guests, which can lead to unfair competition.

The second approach focuses on the broader ambiguities of the sharing economy. While marketed as community-oriented, this economic model often conceals neo-liberal motivations and enables positional rents. In Italy, these challenges are especially pronounced in historic urban centers, where housing traditionally used by residents has been repurposed for tourism, leading to issues such as de-residentialization, governance challenges, and market imbalances. Most scholars agree that, the greatest challenges are found in the availability of reliable and complete data about the housing units listed on the website. On one hand, there have been scientific and reliable studies conducted by experts from various sectors, driven by data activism, which will be further discussed. For example, platforms like *insideairbnb.com* and *tomslee.net* collect and provide open-source data. On the other hand, there are platforms such as *Airdna* that gather data for purely commercial purposes. The specifics of these sources and their implications will be explored in detail in the 'Data Collection' section. This research, therefore, aims to thoroughly examine the spatial distribution of Airbnb listings in Naples and the socioeconomic implications of this phenomenon, helping to bridge the existing knowledge gap in the literature and providing a solid foundation for future studies and urban policies.

Following this introduction, the paper is structured into several key sections. Firstly, the theoretical framework underpinning the study is outlined, discussing the relevant literature and con-

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ceptual models that inform our understanding of the sharing economy and its impacts on urban spaces. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the research methods used, including data sources and analytical techniques, which provide the foundation for our empirical investigation. The results section then presents the findings of our spatial and socioeconomic analysis, highlighting how Airbnb has influenced the urban landscape of Naples. Each section builds on the previous to provide a comprehensive understanding of Airbnb's integration into the fabric of Naples and its broader implications for urban policy and planning. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings, offering recommendations for policymakers and suggesting directions for future research.

1. Urban and Socioeconomic Dynamics in the Sharing Economy

The sharing economy, or collaborative economy, is an emerging economic model based on the sharing of private resources, both material (such as apartments, cars, bicycles) and immaterial (services, time, and labor). This approach promotes more conscious forms of consumption, based on reuse and access rather than ownership (Felson and Spaeth, 1978). The broader adoption of this model reflects significant shifts in socio-economic behaviors, where digital platforms facilitate the exchange of goods and services, reducing the need for direct ownership. While this can lead to a more efficient use of resources, it also raises concerns about the long-term sustainability and social impacts, such as the exacerbation of economic inequalities and the under-regulation of labor markets.

This trend is part of a larger movement towards tertiarization, where economies are increasingly dominated by the service sector, encompassing everything from on-demand technology services to creative and digital enterprises. These platforms not only transform how services are delivered but also create new opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic participation (Kenney and Zysman, 2016).

In this context of shifting economic paradigms, Airbnb has emerged as a standout example of how digital platforms can reshape traditional industries. Founded in 2007, Airbnb quickly acquired a dominant position in the short-term rental market, offering users the opportunity to rent private spaces worldwide. The platform's success demonstrates the potential of the sharing economy to disrupt established market norms and create new forms of economic and social value.

The expansion of Airbnb has significantly altered urban dynamics and heightened social tensions. In many European cities, the surge in Airbnb listings is linked to declining quarterly revenues for traditional hotel facilities, demonstrating a tangible impact on the conventional tourism sector (Zervas *et al.*, 2017). This competitive pressure has not only reduced hotel rates but also raised questions regarding the economic sustainability of traditional hotels (Medeiros *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, Airbnb's growth has intensified strains on the residential real estate market, accelerating processes of touristification and gentrification. However, the rise of short-term rental platforms, including Airbnb, has primarily contributed to the disappearance of essential services and local businesses such as grocery stores, hardware shops, and tailors in historic city centers, like Naples, making way for businesses that cater more to tourists, such as bars and restaurants (Corbisiero, 2022). These changes threaten the authenticity and local identity of neighborhoods (Gil and Sequera, 2020), with Airbnb introducing new revenue streams that widen rent gaps in culturally sought-after areas, thereby impacting rental housing availability and exacerbating gentrification concerns (Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018). Furthermore, the increasing professionalization of Airbnb hosts reflects a shift towards commercial gentrification, with the platform playing a pivotal role in driving these urban transformations (Bosma and van Doorn, 2022). Regulatory responses to these dynamics have been varied and complex. Cities find themselves balancing the economic benefits derived from Airbnb with the need to protect the residential

and social fabric. For example, some cities have imposed strict limits on the duration of short-term rentals and implemented policies to mitigate the negative effects on the availability of residential housing (Nieuwland and Van Melik, 2020). These policies vary widely, with some cities adopting stringent regulations while others prefer more permissive approaches (Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2019).

The impacts of Airbnb, while being a global phenomenon, are strongly localized and variable, reflecting the geographical and cultural specifics of the cities in which it operates. For instance, the study by Serrano *et al.* (2020) identifies different groups of European cities based on the degree of professionalization of Airbnb, demonstrating how local contexts can shape the market dynamics of the platform. This variability suggests that political solutions and urban governance strategies need to be equally adapted and sensitive to local contexts. Understanding how different cities respond to similar economic and social challenges can provide valuable insights for policymakers and future studies on the impact of the sharing economy on modern urban planning.

A crucial aspect of Airbnb's impact is the change in the housing market. According to recent studies, the increase in Airbnb listings has led to a reduction in the supply of housing for long-term rentals, contributing to rising rent prices and reducing the availability of affordable housing (García-López *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the concentration of Airbnb listings in city centers has caused a phenomenon of museification and commercial gentrification, replacing proximity services with tourist-oriented activities (Rolando, 2018). These changes have also been observed in other global cities, as evidenced by a study on Airbnb listing prices in Beijing, China. This research reveals complex, multi-level, and spatially varied relationships between specific listing attributes and their pricing. The study identifies that functional attributes—such as the size of the accommodation, its location, the availability of amenities, and the quality of the furnishings—are the most crucial determinants of pricing (Zhao *et al.*, 2023). Finally, the growth of sharing economy platforms like Airbnb has transformed not only the short-term rental market but also the urban and social context of cities. This phenomenon requires thorough and ongoing analysis to fully understand the benefits and challenges posed by these new economic models and to develop public policies that can mitigate the negative effects and maximize the positive ones. Integrating tools such as GIS and spatial analysis techniques can offer new perspectives for studying the impact of Airbnb and developing more effective urban management strategies (Nyerges *et al.*, 2011).

In Italy, the proliferation of Airbnb has sparked significant debates about urban tourism and housing (Angioletti *et al.*, 2024). Cities like Rome, Venice, and Florence have experienced a dramatic transformation in their housing markets and urban cultures. The influx of tourists, facilitated by platforms like Airbnb, has led to concerns about the loss of local character and the displacement of long-term residents. These challenges underline the urgent need for tailored public policies that balance tourism growth with community and cultural preservation. The Italian experience underscores the importance of adaptive regulatory frameworks that can address both local concerns and the dynamics of global platforms.

2. Data Collection

In the framework of my research on the Airbnb phenomenon in the city of Naples, the careful selection of data sources was a fundamental operation to ensure the quality and relevance of the information analyzed. Given the wide availability of platforms that collect data on Airbnb, I examined several options, such as tomslee.net, Airdna, and insideairbnb.com, assessing each for its relevance and specific utility in the Neapolitan context.

Platform	Data Period	Used	Reason for Choice/Exclusion	Notes
Tomslee.net	Data up to 2016	No	Lack of specific data for Naples	Provides a global overview but lacks local details for Naples
Airdna	Naples from 2018 - Ongoing data	No	Paywall contradicts open access principle	Rich in detailed information, not used due to access principle
Inside Airbnb	Ongoing data	Yes	Commitment to transparency and open data sharing	Main source for spatial analysis in Naples, updated data
LADEST Data	2015-2016	Yes	Free access and relevant for the period	Secondary data to complement initial analysis

Figure 1: Data source selection for Naples Airbnb Study

Tomslee.net, active since 2013, offers a global view of the Airbnb phenomenon through data collected in an open-source manner. However, despite its general usefulness, the platform did not have specific data for Naples, which limited its applicability for my study focused on this city. On the other hand, Airdna, known for being one of the most detailed and up-to-date databases on the market, operates on a business model that requires payment for data access. This approach contradicts the principle of open access that I uphold in my research, which is why I chose not to use Airdna despite the richness of information it offers. Consequently, the choice fell on insideairbnb.com, a platform distinguished by its commitment to increasing transparency and facilitating public debate through open data sharing. Founded in 2014 by Murray Cox, Inside Airbnb provides detailed and mapped data on available accommodations, which have proven to be essential for conducting an in-depth spatial analysis of Airbnb accommodations in Naples from 2018 to 2023. These data were used to examine recent trends and assess the impact of the phenomenon on the urban and social fabric of the city. To cover the previous period, specifically the biennium 2015-2016, I had access to data provided by the LADEST laboratory from the University of Siena. Although secondary, these data offered an initial overview of the growth of Airbnb in Naples, thus enriching the understanding of the preliminary phases of the platform's expansion. The absence of data for 2017, while representing a gap in the timeline, did not prevent conducting a comprehensive and significant analysis of the phenomenon as a whole. This methodical and selective approach to data collection allowed me to build a robust and detailed analysis, shedding light on the dynamics of Airbnb in Naples and providing important insights for future studies and urban policies.

3. Methodology

This research explores the Airbnb phenomenon in Naples with a particular focus on the types of accommodations offered, analyzing both the temporal and spatial evolution of the listings up to 2023. Through the use of geographic and statistical analysis methodologies, the study aims to outline how Airbnb's dynamics have developed within the urban fabric of Naples, influencing various socio-economic aspects of the city. Initially, the research focuses on classifying the accommodations available on Airbnb, observing how different types of rooms—entire homes, private rooms, or shared spaces—are distributed and vary over time. This preliminary step allows not only an understanding of Airbnb's offering structure but it also provides insights into how it reflects or influences the local real estate market. Subsequently, attention shifts to the temporal and spatial analysis of the listings. Using data updated to 2023, the research examines trends in the growth or decline in the number of listings and how these are distributed across different neighborhoods of Naples. The goal is to identify

areas of high density and correlate them with urban variables such as proximity to centers of interest or transportation infrastructure, for instance to the Line 1 metro.

A distinctive element of this study is the use of detailed cartography to visualize and analyze the spatial distribution of Airbnb listings. These maps not only show where accommodations are most concentrated but also how prices vary in relation to geographical location. Furthermore, the interaction between the presence of listings and proximity to metro stations is explored, using buffer zones to determine if and how proximity to public transport influences the density of listings.

This phase of mapping and spatial analysis provides the foundation for a broader discussion on the implications of Airbnb for the urban and social fabric of Naples, offering insights for future urban policies and regulatory strategies.

4. Results

Airbnb was established in 2007 as a tool of the sharing economy, but by 2015, from the data on the types of rooms available in Naples, it is evident that it had transformed into something else. In the city of Naples, as of September 2023, there are a total of 10,385 listings, 66.30% of which are for entire homes. This implies that “zero land consumption [...] is negated, as it does not involve sharing the same space but rather implies a displacement of the population” (Rolando, 2018, p. 137).

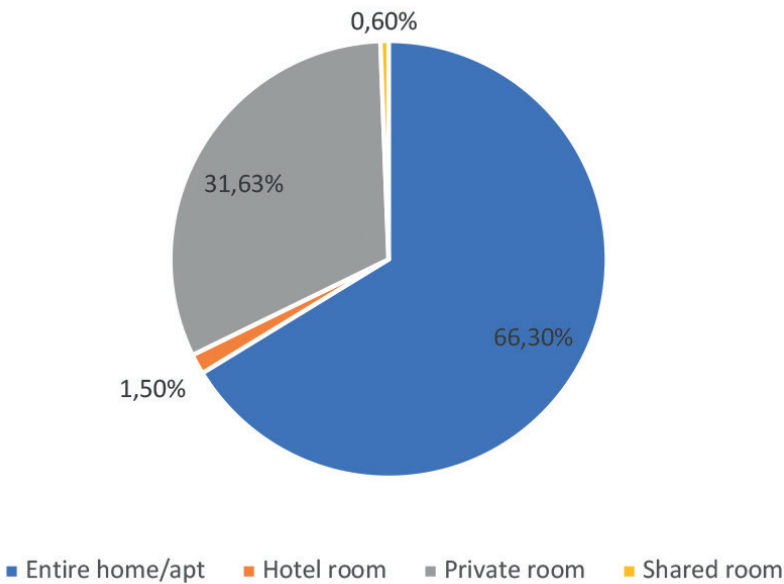


Figure 2 Typology of Rooms - Source: insidairbnb own reproduction

From this, it can be suggested that the Airbnb platform may not fully align with the principles of the sharing economy. The host becomes an entrepreneur: they manage the rental of second homes as a hotel business, they take care of their image as a real brand, and of the details of the furnishings according to a globalized aesthetic.

Having introduced the topic and demonstrated that Airbnb can no longer be considered a sharing economy platform, the study will focus on the evolution and description of the Airbnb phenomenon in Naples over the period from 2015 to 2023. The data for the years 2015 and

2016 were processed by the Ladest Laboratory of the Department of Political Sciences from the University of Siena. Unfortunately, I was unable to recover the data for the year 2017 as it was not included in the Ladest research and is not available on the Insideairbnb platform. Indeed, data on the distribution of Airbnb listings in Naples on the aforementioned platform are only available starting from June 2018. Although data for 2017 is missing, this time frame was chosen for this analysis because the biennium 2015-2016 represents one of the major growth phases of the phenomenon.

Initially, I would like to focus on the temporal evolution of the absolute value of the properties rented on Airbnb in Naples.

	Listings	Entire Home	% of Entire Home	Rate of growth (%) Listings	Rate of growth (%) Entire Home
2015	1271	681	54	N/A	N/A
2016	4058	2300	57	219,27	237
2017	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2018	6532	3950	60	60	71
2019	8051	3950	60	23	22
2020	8038	4863	60	- 0,1	0,2
2021	7961	4686	61	- 0,9	- 3,6
2022	7520	4759	63	- 5,5	1,5
2023	10385	6884	66,30	38	44

Figure 3 Rate of Growth - Source: Ladest; Insideairbnb

From the data analysis, a significant and continuous growth of Airbnb in Naples emerges, despite fluctuations in the short-term rental market context. The biennium 2015-2016 recorded an exponential increase with a growth rate of 219.27% in the total number of listings and of 237% in listings of entire homes, signaling a change in the nature of the platform towards a more intensive use of entire homes. From 2016 to 2019, the overall growth was 83%, with the percentage of entire apartments in the total listings stabilizing around 60%. The year 2022 saw a slight contraction of 5.5% in the total number of listings, influenced by market saturation, increasing regulatory attempts, and the residual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, 2023 marked a vigorous recovery with a 38% increase in the total number of listings and 44% in listings of entire homes. This recovery can be attributed to the platform’s resilience and an effective adaptation to varying market conditions, with an increasing percentage of entire homes reflecting a preference for accommodation options that offer more privacy and autonomy. The percentage of entire homes has steadily grown, reaching 66.3% in 2023, indicating a transformation of the platform’s use towards a model that more closely resembles the hotel industry. This trend could have significant implications for the urban and social structure of Naples, influencing the distribution of housing and potentially exacerbating phenomena such as gentrification and touris-tification. Concurrently, tourist flows in Naples have shown an ascending trend over the years, further supporting the growth of Airbnb. This increase in visitors has contributed to strengthening the demand for short-term accommodation, making the platform an increasingly relevant component of the local economy. This extended and detailed timeline provides a clear picture of the evolution of Airbnb in Naples, showing how the platform has been able to adapt and grow despite challenges, and continues to be an influential player in the city’s touristic and real estate landscape.

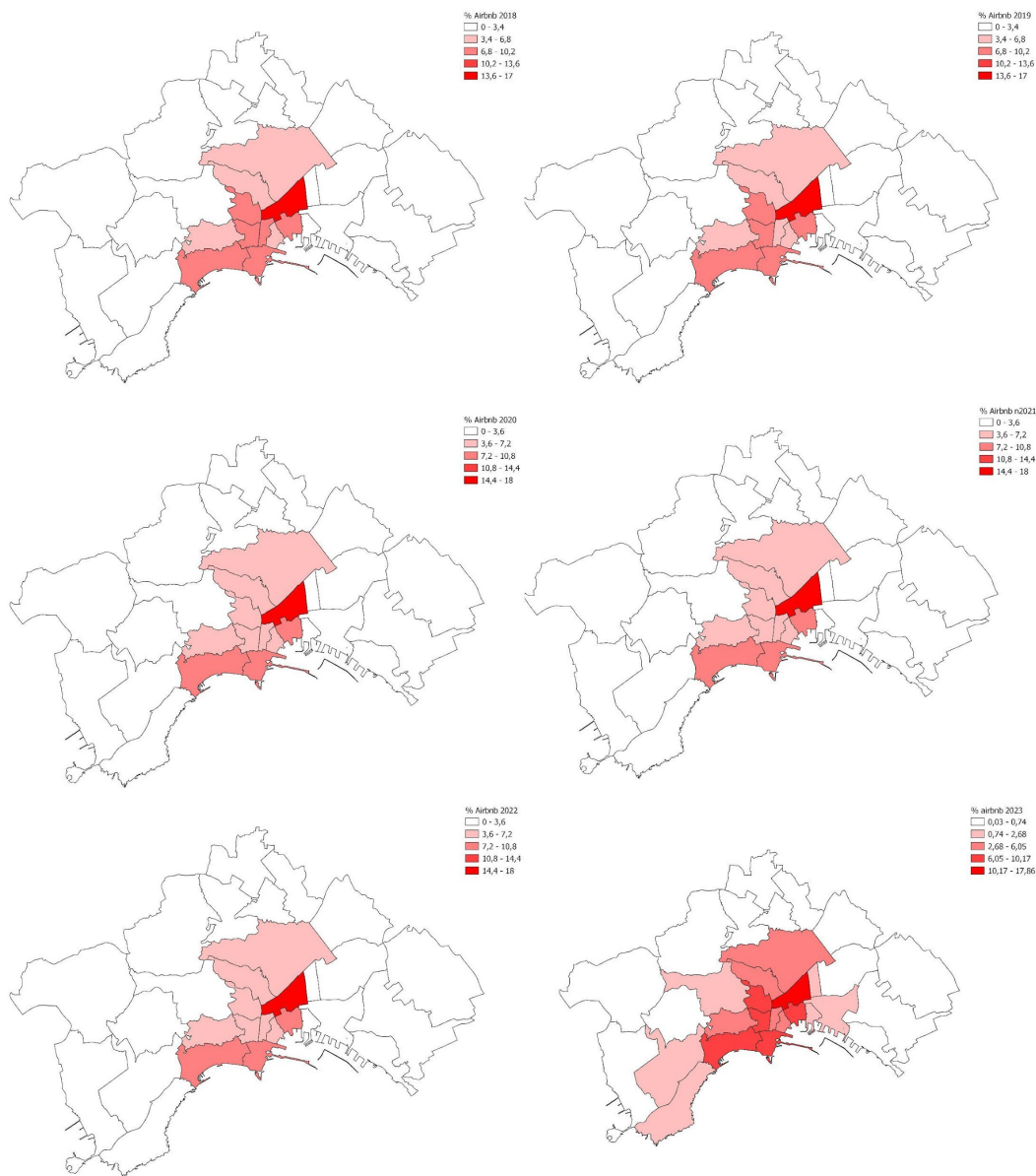


Figure 4 Comparing Airbnb ad Distribution 2018-2023 - Source: insideairbnb own reproduction³

If we look at the map and consider the previous discussion about its temporal evolution, it is easy to discern that the distribution of the phenomenon in Naples is virtually static. Observing the subsequent maps, it is noticeable that the presence of listings is primarily concentrated in two focus areas.

In the city of Naples, the phenomenon of Airbnb has predominantly affected the Centro Antico and the Chiaia district, as cartographically represented in the map by calculating the percentage of listings on the platform for each neighborhood in 2023.

3 All cartographic representations of density such as Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 in this document are generated using the Jenks Natural Breaks classification method. This method is selected for its effectiveness in revealing natural groupings within the data by minimizing the variance within each class and maximizing the variance between classes. This approach ensures a more intuitive and meaningful visual representation of the spatial variations in Airbnb listings.

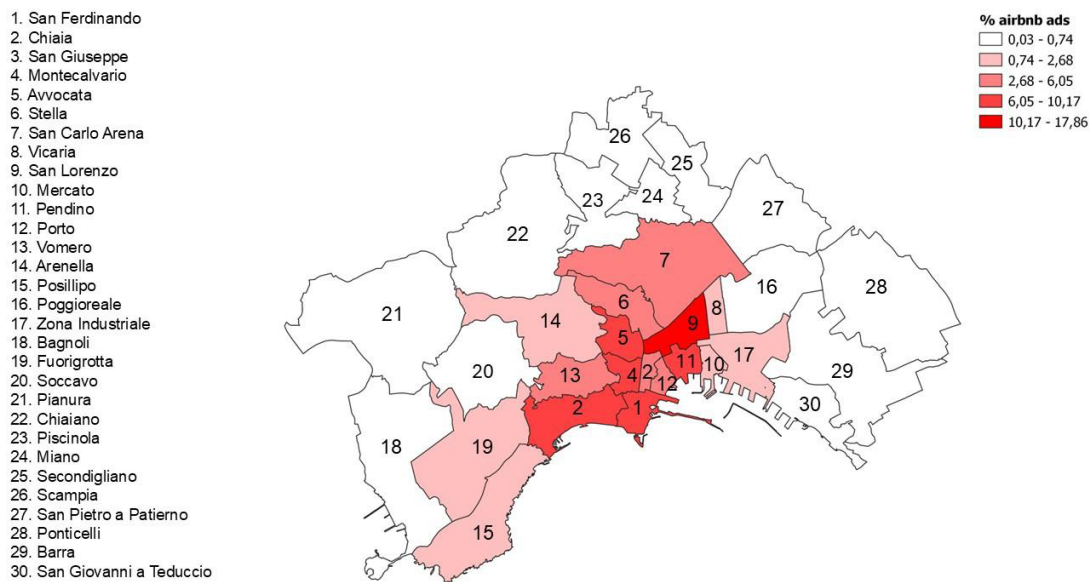


Figure 5 Percentage Distribution of Airbnb Listings - Source: insideairbnb own reproduction

It is straightforward to see from the map that the neighborhood with the highest concentration of listings, at 17.01%, is the San Lorenzo district, undoubtedly due to the high presence of historical monuments, religious sites, and cultural interest points, including churches or religious buildings (141), museums or galleries (9), archaeological sites (21), villas, or buildings of historical interest (12).

Another notable concentration of listings, amounting to 9.87%, is recorded in the Chiaia district, due to the scenic beauty and the area's reputation as a center for nightlife and shopping, as well as the presence of restaurants and pizzerias, cocktail bars, and high-fashion stores.

After representing the distribution of Airbnb listings by calculating the percentage of listings per neighborhood, the aforementioned distribution was analyzed using a different analytical technique. Among the various potentials of GIS techniques, the representation of concentrations of a particular property in the urban territory stands out. In the GIS context, the Kernel technique (KDE, Kernel Density Estimation) is a statistical method that allows the estimation of a continuous or discrete variable within a predefined radius, depending on the distance of the known point from which the intensity is estimated. The KDE (Kernel Density Estimation) was applied to analyze the concentration of Airbnb listings in Naples, using QGIS software. The function utilizes a radius of 10 millimeters and generates a continuous surface representing the density of points. The visualization quality was set to 'Best' to ensure accurate representation of the data. The KDE technique allows for the estimation of densities within a predefined radius, identifying areas of higher or lower concentration of listings. This method is particularly useful for urban studies, as it provides a clear visual representation of spatial phenomena and their intensity (Silverman, 2018). The statistical technique, in other words, provides the so-called heatmap, a visually impactful map that immediately allows one to recognize the estimated concentration of a certain property in space. Concentration maps are useful tools for identifying the density of points that represent a certain phenomenon, for example, they can be used to see the concentration of buildings, commercial activities, criminal acts, or car accidents, etc.

Observing the following figure, it is noted that the highest concentration of listings clusters around the area of the Duomo of Naples. Additionally, a significant, though lesser, concentration is recorded in the Chiaia district. The results of the analysis conducted using the Kernel technique

correspond to those from the analysis calculating the percentage of listings for each neighborhood in the total listings.

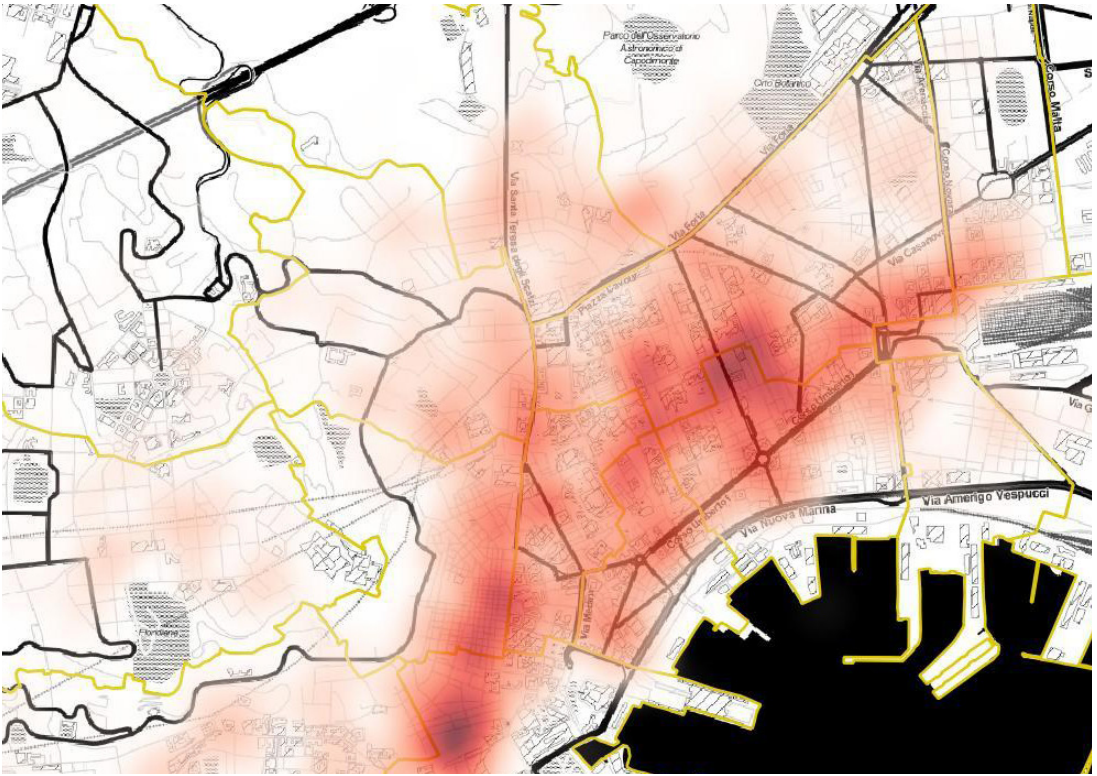


Figure 6 Estimated Kernel Density Offers Airbnb Rooms in Naples

The table summarizes the trend of the average nightly rental price for Airbnb accommodations in Naples from 2018 to 2023, also showing the annual percentage changes in prices. The data show a significant growth trend, especially in recent years.

	Average price	Price Increase Percentage
2018	67,75	N/A
2019	68,88	1,6
2020	73,8	7,1
2021	73,8	0
2022	84	13,8
2023	110,74	31

Figure 7 Average Nightly Rental Prices and Yearly Price Increase Percentages for Airbnb Accommodations in Naples from 2018 to 2023 - Source: insideairbnb

From 2018 to 2023, the average price per night has increased considerably. In 2018, the average price was €67.75, while in 2023 it rose to €110.74, marking a total increase of 63.5%. This increase can be attributed to various factors, including an increase in tourist demand, the professionalization of hosts on Airbnb, and the growing popularity of the platform.

The year 2019 saw a slight increase of 1.6% compared to 2018, indicating initial price stability. However, in 2020, the average price increased by 7.1%, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on the global tourism sector. This increase may reflect a shift in demand towards accommodations that offer higher levels of privacy and security compared to traditional hotels.

2021 maintained the same average price as 2020, highlighting stabilization after the pandemic year. In 2022, there was a more substantial growth of 13.8%, suggesting a recovery in tourism and greater competitiveness in the short-term rental market.

The most significant increase occurred in 2023, with a 31% increase from the previous year. This strong increase may be due to the post-pandemic economic recovery, the return of international tourism, and the stabilization of Airbnb operations. The peak average price of €110.74 reflects a strongly growing tourist demand and a greater availability of high-quality accommodations.

The analysis of the average nightly rental prices, based on the data presented in the cartography, reveals further details about the distribution of prices in various neighborhoods of Naples.

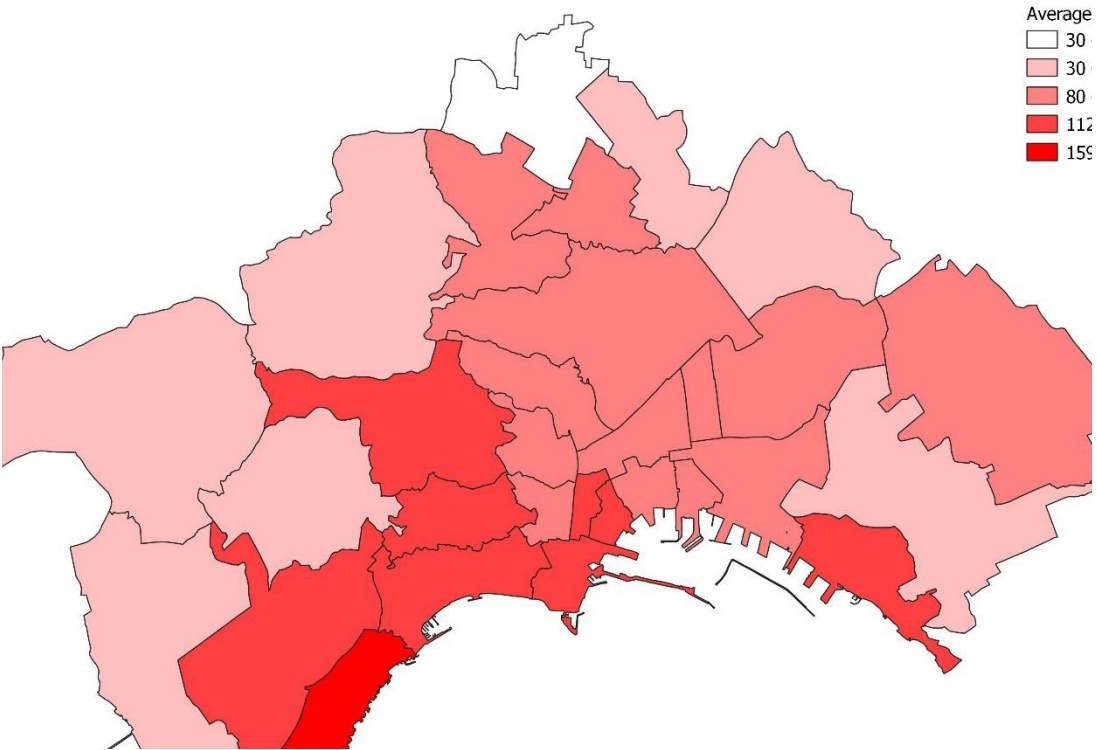


Figure 8 Average Price Distribution Airbnb Listings - Source: Insideairbnb own reproduction

From the data analysis, it emerges that the neighborhoods with the highest average prices are Posillipo (€235.15), Chiaia (€147.21), and Arenella (€147.16). These neighborhoods are known for their appeal, scenic beauty, presence of high-fashion stores, restaurants, and a vibrant nightlife, making them preferred destinations for tourists willing to pay more to stay in prestigious areas. In contrast, neighborhoods like Chiaiano (€77.50) and Pendino (€84.11) show significantly lower average prices. These areas may be less touristy or offer fewer luxury services, thus attracting a different segment of clientele, more oriented towards saving.

The concentration of Airbnb listings in central and prestigious neighborhoods like Posillipo, Chiaia, and Arenella reflects their appeal due to the combination of natural beauty, cultural at-

tractions, and modern conveniences. This price distribution illustrates the impact of location on Airbnb rental prices, where neighborhoods with greater tourist appeal and better services often have higher prices, whereas less central and less touristy areas tend to offer more affordable accommodation options.

While this pricing trend may suggest potential pressures on local residents, further analysis would be required to fully assess the impact on housing affordability. Without specific data on local housing market values, it remains speculative to conclude definitively how Airbnb affects long-term residential costs in these neighborhoods. This situation highlights the need for comprehensive studies that include various factors influencing housing markets, to better understand the broader economic impacts of short-term rental platforms like Airbnb.

The variation in average prices among neighborhoods underscores the importance of location in determining Airbnb rental prices. Neighborhoods with greater tourist appeal and better services tend to have higher prices, while less central and less touristy areas offer more affordable accommodation options.

The distribution of average nightly rental prices across different neighborhoods in Naples reflects the dynamics of the short-term rental market influenced by the presence of Airbnb. The increase in average prices, particularly in the most sought-after neighborhoods, highlights the growing tourist demand and the importance of location in determining rental values. While this analysis suggests that Airbnb may be contributing to transformations within the urban real estate market, attributing these changes to gentrification requires a more detailed examination. Proper assessment of gentrification should include data on resident population dynamics, such as any loss or growth of inhabitants and changes in the social class of the residents. Research indicates that Airbnb introduces a new rent gap in culturally desirable neighborhoods, impacting resident population and social class by facilitating gentrification (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Similarly, studies in Lisbon show that Airbnb's proliferation contributes to the commodification of housing, increasing property values and rents, and affecting housing affordability for local residents (Lestegás *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, without comprehensive data on these aspects, conclusions about the socioeconomic transformation and gentrification in Naples remain tentative.

The cartography below highlights a remarkably varied distribution of Airbnb listings in relation to the presence of subway stations in Naples. Despite the initial intent of the 1995 Art Stations project to integrate art and urban functionality, improving metropolitan transport and encouraging the redevelopment of urban areas, the impact on the Airbnb phenomenon appears to be limited. In particular, the buffer zones created around the stops of metro line 1, with a radius of 250 meters, suggest that the presence of Airbnb listings is not significantly influenced in peripheral areas. This could be due to lower tourist demand in these zones, a limited presence of attractions or amenities, or a less developed infrastructure for short-term rentals. While the enhancement of public transport aims to improve accessibility, it seems insufficient on its own to significantly shift tourist demand toward peripheral areas. This analysis, while focused on metro line 1, raises questions about the broader impact of other metro lines in the city. For a comprehensive understanding of how public transport influences Airbnb distribution across Naples, future studies should consider the effects of all metro lines, not just line 1. Additionally, this detailed spatial analysis demonstrates the importance of spatializing data to reveal nuanced urban dynamics and interactions, emphasizing its value in urban planning and policy-making.



Figure 9 impact of Metro Stations on Airbnb Listing Distribution in Naples: Buffer Zone Analysis - Source: Insideairbnb; Open Street Maps own reproduction

The cartography thus serves to emphasize how attempts to transform the urban fabric through public transport and art need to be accompanied by broader strategies to significantly influence the Airbnb phenomenon and mitigate the effects of gentrification and socioeconomic transformation in Naples. The increase in rental prices in central neighborhoods compared to peripheral ones reflects a growing gap that may require targeted political interventions to balance housing and tourism opportunities across the city. Such an expanded analysis could provide critical insights into the spatial dynamics of tourism and accommodation, potentially guiding more effective urban planning and policy responses.

Conclusions

Touristification is a widely spread phenomenon in many Italian cities, including Naples, where many consider it inevitable. It is essential to regulate tourism to use it as a response to the economic crisis, minimizing negative impacts on local communities. In this context, the importance of spatial data becomes crucial, providing local administrators with the necessary tools to precisely identify the most affected areas and to develop targeted intervention policies. Detailed mapping of areas with a high concentration of Airbnb listings, for example, can help better direct resources and strategies towards areas that require more regulation or support. The concentration of Airbnb listings in the historic center has generated waves of excessive tourism, with a consequent increase in packaging volumes, a decrease in the quality of life for residents, and a reduction in urban security. Although Airbnb has exacerbated this phenomenon, the process of touristification of the city center was already underway before the platform's arrival. The pro-

gressive transformation of private apartments into nodes of the global tourism network creates an increasingly fragmented spatial array, combining globally connected portions of the city with geographically contiguous but unconnected spaces (Romano *et al.*, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has made these phenomena more evident and has reduced the prospects for an immediate major paradigm shift towards more sustainable forms of tourism. Therefore, local administrations are called upon to regulate this phenomenon with territorial planning that promotes a sustainable distribution of tourist flows, also directing them towards neighborhoods and peripheral areas. Urban regeneration interventions aimed at preserving and restoring territorial beauty, supported by the planning and development of public and private transport systems, can facilitate a more balanced distribution of tourist flows that involve the entire metropolitan area. The professionalization of hosts on Airbnb can be seen through the lens of commercial gentrification, with Airbnb playing a significant role in driving gentrification through its platform. These actions would not only alleviate pressure on central areas but also stimulate economic and social development in areas less exposed to mass tourism, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable urban development vision. However, there are limitations in the current research that need to be addressed in future studies. The analysis could be expanded by including a more detailed comparison with the local real estate market to assess the direct impact of Airbnb on housing prices and by examining more closely the effect of proximity to public transport infrastructure in order to provide new insights into urban dynamics. These future developments in research could provide a more solid foundation for urban policies and a better understanding of the complex interactions between tourism, housing, and city infrastructure.

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