

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND CARRYING CAPACITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA
FOCUS ON SICILY**

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Abstract

Tourism plays more and more an important role in a Country's general economy, in some cases it significantly contributes to local development representing the main source of income for residents. The importance of this sector has been widely recognized and in recent years we assisted as well to a new interpretation of the tourist phenomenon in a sustainable key.

This study offers the theoretical basis on this topic, following the most important milestones of the development and evolution of this concept, describing the initiatives taking place in the Mediterranean area, finally focusing on Sicily because of its insularity.

Tourism carrying capacity is defined as "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction" (WTO, 1981). Even if this concept seems to be quite clear, at least from theoretical point of view, its practical application is not that easy. In fact this is not a defined instrument, a neutral and independent one, able to give defined rules of behaviour to tourist operators. Therefore this concept should be used with care, always bearing in mind that it deals with an hard balance between variables expressed in quantitative terms (like demographic analysis or stocks evaluations) and qualitative indicators (such as the individual self-realization or the theoretical definition of "landscape"). The measurement of tourist pressure on the environment using these factors is a quite complex task.

Our research uses simpler indicators, which assess the impact exerted by tourism on environment by considering both the receptive structures existing in a defined area (*supply approach*) and the tourist fluxes converging on it (*demand approach*). These indices provide an objective measurement of pressure and tourist density, because they use real data: presences, beds, population, territorial extension.

The analysis has been referred to the Mediterranean area, which is quite relevant because of its strong tourist connotation and its political implications that in recent years have been reflected on european policies as well as on regional policies of Sicily region.

The research demonstrates that the areas mostly interested by tourist pressure are the coastal zones. This is the case for Sicily as well. Despite the richness and variety of its tourist offer, the region is mainly perceived as "sun, sand and sea".

In order to change this perception, the tourist system should encourage the local "talents" (intended as landscape and human resources) in all their variety and specificity, in order to distribute tourist fluxes in every seasons of the year, involving internal areas of the island. This would avoid concentration in the coastal areas. A new cultural and managerial model should be created: an innovative one, able to break with the traditional logic oriented to incremental development, turning towards a qualitative improvement of the offer. The most adequate solution could be the adoption of an environmental marketing strategy aimed to protect the most vulnerable sites and to re-qualifying the tourism orientating tourist fluxes towards "eco-touristic" structures, such as agri-tourism and bed and breakfast.

Key words: Tourism, Sustainability, Sicily, Mediterranean area

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a particular attention has been given to the relationship between tourism and environment. If the *homo faber* was traditionally recognized as the polluter by definition, last years demonstrated that also the so called *homo ludens* can be responsible for environmental damage; it came out a general consciousness that tourism, as well as the other economical activities can determinate negative impacts on environment.

An excessive and non-controlled development of tourism could alter the environmental equilibrium, leading to a degrade and a depletion of natural resources. The phenomenon of seasonality and therefore the concentration of touristic fluxes in a specific period of the year, weigh upon waste production, water and energy disposal, atmospheric and marine pollution, and determines an over-sizing of tourist facilities that risk to remain void during several months of the year.

Everywhere mass-tourism determined space occupancy ad natural eco-systems' devastation, creating among other diseases, the quotidianity and the chaos that people want to leave apart while being on a vacation.

Why, right in the tourist sector, the theme of environmental preservation reveals to be felt as more and more urgent? The answer is quite simple: environment constitutes the inner value, the ground on which the tourist activity is built. Tourism is probably the economic sector that mostly uses environmental resources as a "capital". Tourism sector's dynamicity, tourists' satisfaction and eco-system's protection are strictly linked variables, right because, while on the one hand environment constitutes for tourist industry a primary resource, on the other hand tourism itself represents for the environment a chance of valorization and protection.

A tourism policy that does not take into account environment variable is going to fail. In the delicate relationship between tourism and environment a vicious circle can start between the attraction that destinations exert on tourists, environmental degrade connected with excessive tourist levels and the repulsion feelings that tourist fluxes manifest for degraded destinations. The pure logic of low-cost resources' exploitation determines an un-avoidable feed-back effect which voids any economic benefit impoverishing at the same time natural patrimony. This is why the idea of applying the sustainability concept also in tourism sector is taking always more interest.

First official formulation of sustainable tourism may be found in Manila Declaration (1980) and in the agreement between World Tourism Organization (WTO) and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), which was followed by the WTO's definition of sustainable tourism as a tourism "leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. Sustainable tourism products are those which are operated in harmony with the local environment, community, and cultures, so that these become the permanent beneficiaries and not the victims of tourism development". This definition has been structured on the basis of the sustainable development definition contained in the famous Brundtland Report. As it may be noticed, the definition above is based on three pillars, namely social, environmental and economic sustainability.

The image proposed by Paul Schmidt is evocative. He writes: "Imagine a territorial container characterized by certain tourist's assets, infrastructures and services, which contains two populations, one sedentary and the other one migrant, in competition for the same infrastructures and the same services. Tourism can be defined sustainable if the expectations and the needs of residents are compatible with those of the tourists and if this compatibility, forced dynamic, is not achieved at the expense of the quality of the container like often happens" (P. Schmidt di Friedberg 1997).

To finish with, the Charter for sustainable tourism, elaborated during the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism held in Lanzarote in 1995, reads as follows: "Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities".

Also in these definitions the presence of the three dimensions is evidenced: environmental, economic and social.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

One of the instruments that can be used in order to measure the tourist phenomenon is the *tourism carrying capacity*, that indicates “the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors’ satisfaction” (WTO 1981).

Even if this concept seems to be quite clear, at least from theoretical point of view, its practical application is not that easy. In fact this is not a defined instrument, a neutral and independent one, able to give defined rules of behaviour to tourist operators. Therefore this concept should be used with care, always bearing in mind that it deals with an hard balance between variables expressed in quantitative terms (like demographic analysis or stocks evaluations) and qualitative indicators (such as the individual self-realization or the theoretical definition of “landscape”) (Borzini 1999, pp. 190-191).

The measurement of tourist pressure on the environment using these factors is a quite complex task. Our research uses simpler indicators, that assess the impact exerted by tourism on environment by considering both the receptive structures existing in a defined area (*supply approach*) and the tourist fluxes converging on it (*demand approach*). These indices provide an objective measurement of pressure and tourist density, because they use real data: presences, beds, population, territorial extension.

In particular for the demand approach, we applied two indices of tourist pressure: the first one, comparing the number of the presences to the territorial surface of the interested area, is expressed in terms of people per sq. km; the second one is the rate of dynamic tourist function of Defert conceived as the relationship between the tourist presences recorded in one year in a territory and the local population, multiplied by the number of days of the year (Innocenti 1996). The result is then multiplied by 1,000 to have the measure of how many presences are registered each 1,000 residents.

As for the supply approach, we used two indices: the tourist density index, which comparing the number of bed-places to the interested territorial surface, gives the measure of how many structures insist on every sq km and the rate structural tourist function, which comparing the number of bed-places to the number of residents, expresses the measure of how the population of a specific area is devoted to tourist activity.

TOURISM AS AN AGGREGATING FACTOR OF THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

Tourism that in the Mediterranean area represents the perfect trinomial of “sun, sea and culture” has a strategic importance in economic dynamics of the countries of the basin.

Despite it can be hard to talk about a Mediterranean industry, a Mediterranean service sector or more generally about a Mediterranean economy, it is generally easy to talk about a Mediterranean tourism.

Tourism is a relatively unifying activity that tends with joining Mediterranean countries into a new economic dimension and that can be offered as an instrument of socio-economic cohesion and as a factor of cultural integration among peoples. Besides the benefits that this implies, in terms of regional stability and of general security, the tourism industry is able to encourage dialogue and cooperation and to activate effective mutual favourable synergies of regional development for the two sides of the basin. This unifying function can be preserved only by the development of models able to maintain and guarantee identity, authenticity and quality of the tourist offer, both regarding common social aspects among Mediterranean peoples and the peculiar characteristics of each culture reseeding in a specific area.

The cultural dimension of tourism is certainly linked to the Mediterranean. The area has centres of a great past and present cultural vitality and boasts a rich historical and artistic heritage, which is substantiated also in popular traditions, artistic production and contemporary architecture. The region also has environmental and landscape resources of a great appeal and attraction that together with its cultural potential represent an important and diversified supply which until now has not been proposed in an adequate way.

The process of massification of tourism development, which was produced in the Mediterranean since the sixties, was based mostly on climatic offer. This generated serious economic, cultural and environmental imbalances. However, since the nineties, the topics of environmental protection and native cultures' preservation began to take place also in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The sustainable tourism became one of the most debated topics in round tables as well as in official and unofficial documents of the MED area.¹

TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

The Mediterranean basin is the main tourist attraction in the world. In 2005, it received 251 million international tourist arrivals, representing the 31% of global international tourism and generated 158 million of receipts. Future scenarios indicate that in 2025, approximately 637 million tourists (foreign and domestic) are expected to visit the region, 50% of which in coastal zones (Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, 2008).

Taking advantage of the extraordinary geo-climatic unit, the tourist industry was able to create a Mediterranean circularity that, like we will see, touches almost all the coastal countries. This circularity, however, is not uniformly distributed on the three edges of the basin. This produces an alarming imbalance in the ratio "resources/use", especially in the northern edge.

The EU Mediterranean countries absorb 79% of tourist arrivals and 77% of receipts (Graphs 1 and 2). The three most visited countries (France, Spain and Italy) belong to the EU and together add up to 69% of arrivals. With the exception of Turkey standing at the fourth place in the list of the most attractive Mediterranean destinations, other countries of the south and east sides occupy the lower positions. Among the EU countries, Slovenia and the islands of Cyprus and Malta show a modest tourist attraction with a number of visitors that does not exceed 2,5 million (Graph 3).

Nevertheless, this study of the impact tourism showed for the two Mediterranean islands very high levels of tourist pressure both referring to their surface as well as referring to their population. Malta counts with 23,623 tourist presences for sq km and 50 tourist presences every 1,000 residents; Cyprus with 1,615 tourist presences for sq. km and 49 tourist presences every 1,000 residents. These countries are followed by Israel (862 tourist presences/sq. km), Italy (798 tourist presences/sq. km) and Greece (409 tourist presences/sq. km) as for the pressure exercised from tourists in relation with countries' surface, while the data relation referred to the population, for the rest of Mediterranean countries, presents regular levels, with a number of tourist presences not exceeding 15 every 1,000 residents (Tab. 1).

SICILY CASE

The analysis at regional level showed that the greater pressure exercised from tourism, in terms of presences in relation both to the surface and to population, can be recorded in the province of Messina, which greatly differs from the others, significantly exceeding the average value of the island. Following Messina stand the provinces of Palermo, Siracusa, Ragusa and Trapani that show pressure values above the regional average. The remaining provinces report lower values even below the regional average (Tab. 2).

¹ *Promoters for initiatives supporting sustainability in tourism come from the political and institutional world, from the associations and unions as well as from private operators. Among the several initiatives surely deserve to be remembered the "Mediterranean NGO's Declaration on Sustainable Tourism and the Participation of Civil Society" (Sant Feliu de Guixols, Spain, 1998), the "Ten Green Commandments for to Sustainable Model of Tourism in the Mediterranean" promoted by the European Federation of Green Parties (Ibiza, Spain, 1996), the Euro-Mediterranean Conferences of Foreign Ministers, the "Calvia Declaration on Tourism and Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean Tourism and Sustainable Development", the "Mediterranean action plan" on Tourism and Sustainable development (Malta, 1999) and the "Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development" (Barcelona, 2005) promoted by the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD).*

The values for tourist districts highlighted the primacy of Giardini Naxos both in relation to the surface and to population, with seriously worrying levels of tourist impact. Just a little detached follows Taormina, and then Cefalù, the Eolie Islands and Acireale, all of them standing too far above the regional average (Tab. 2).

Referring to the supply side, it is clear that, at the provincial level, the tourist density is low in the whole region, with some reality as Caltanissetta and Enna, where supply is not relevant at all and others such as Messina where is more elevated, but does not reach excessive levels.

As for the structural tourism function rate, it is still the province of Messina to lead the others with its 48 bed-places per 1,000 residents, a data that denotes a certain emphasis given on the tourism sector. The provinces of Ragusa, Siracusa and Palermo are placed above the regional average. The remaining provinces, in particular the ones of Enna and Caltanissetta, are placed on lower values evidencing the insufficient incidence of the tourism sector on their local economy (Tab. 3).

Another very important aspect to be estimated in order to make a careful analysis of the carrying capacity of a tourist destination is the phenomenon of the seasonality. We used a monthly seasonality index that calculates the percentage incidence of total presences for every month. This is how we can evaluate and measure the concentration of tourist flows.

Sicily, thanks to its favourable climatic conditions, has a longer tourist season. In fact, besides the three summer months (June, July and August) that are traditionally the ones in which the tourist demand is concentrated anywhere, in Sicily also the months of April, May, September and October show a good incidence of presences, definitely on an higher average than the one recorded in Italy. This long warm period from April to October concentrates an 84.5% of the presences on the island, a data that exceeds national value (79.3%) by five base points. The typical summer season from June to August, instead, absorbs in Sicily 47.3% of the total presences while it rise up to 50.1% in Italy (Tab. 4).

Therefore the island as a whole does not particularly suffer of the seasonality problem neither of the one of tourist concentration which never reaches excessive levels. The seasonal adjustment, strategy based on a more balanced distribution of the travellers' flows throughout the whole year, remains however one of the most important objectives to be reached, especially for the most typical tourist destinations such as coastal areas that, affected by a seaside tourism, are more susceptible than the others to a high concentration of tourists in the hot season. The application of seasonal adjustment, which has also economic and social implications and a positive impact on employment, is one of the steps needed for a sustainable tourism development.

SOFT TOURISM: AGRI-TOURISM AND BED AND BREAKFAST, A VIABLE SOLUTION?

In terms of tourist offer, one of the possible solutions identified by the Region of Sicily, in order to reach a softer tourist use which might have a lower impact on environment, is to focus on "eco-touristic" receptive structures, such as agri-tourism and bed and breakfast.

Let's see what might be the advantages of this type of structures, if brought back into a coherent framework of a serious balanced and integrated planning.

Firstly, these activities produce a minimal impact on the territory, since they develop on existing structures where the tourism activity becomes only supplementary and subordinate to the main one. Moreover, the modest structural dimensions and the small number of bed-places ensure the maintenance of low concentrations of tourists. Finally, because of their flexibility, these structures do not suffer of the phenomenon of seasonality, a problem usually perceived by traditional tourist structures, because hospitality is only a secondary activity: costs afforded by a traditional receptive structure to offer the service even in the seasons with a lower affluence, in this kind of structures, are likely to be reduced to zero.

To these environmental and economic considerations should be added the cultural value that these structures possess. The importance of the social value that they hold, in fact, cannot be neglected. The tourist who uses these facilities enters in contact with the local context, tasting customs, habits and traditions; he has the opportunity to know immediately and directly the local culture and its authentic characters.

The agri-tourism, in particular, is a response to a demand for alternative tourism that finds in the contact with the nature its main characteristic. The tourist who lives deep inside the frenetic rhythms of the city perceives a need to "disconnect" from his daily reality to find relax and rest, recovering his own connection with country life, learning more about rhythms and activities that take place in it. In a wider perspective, the value of the agri-tourism lies in its ability to provide an answer to a typical problem of the agricultural sector: its marginality. In the most marginal areas, the agri-tourism, shapes itself as an activity integrated to the rural one, this can facilitate the permanence of agricultural producers in rural areas helping to refrain the exodus from countries to cities. Therefore, the social function of agri-tourism will be to operate on a territorial and environmental re-qualification, as well as for the recovery and the restoration of the rural patrimony maintaining and preserving traditions of the rural world in its several aspects of handicraft, gastronomy and folklore. These are the fundamental motivations that led the Region of Sicily to create a wide legislation on this matter. One of the basic requirements foreseen by the national framework law on agri-tourism (730/85) and included also in the regional legislation is the absolutely "complementary" character of the agri-tourism activity referred to the agricultural one, which must remain the main one important in countryside (Bellencin Meneghel 1991, p. 33). A pure speculative use of agri-tourism, in fact, would only divert the meaning and the purpose the agri-tourism was called for.

Sicily has been the last region in Italy to adopt a specific legislation on the subject. The regional law n.25 of the 9 June 1994 recapitulates the general purpose and scope of national legislation. Specifically, it sets in a maximum of thirty the number of available bed-places and in ten the number of rooms. The art.2 identifies as agri-tourist activity besides the receptive activity, also the provision of meals, the sale of agricultural products and the organization of recreational, cultural and sporting activities such as horse riding, fishing, swimming and tennis. Data supplied by the Region of Sicily demonstrates that the greater number of structures is concentrated in the provinces of Messina and Palermo, which together represent nearly one half of the agri-tourist activity supply on the island. Other provinces are following, with a number of structures comprised between the 49 of Siracusa and the 20 of Agrigento. Last remains Caltanissetta with only 7 agri-tourism on its territory in 2005 (Tab. 5).

Concerning bed and breakfast, at a first glance it may seem simple to define its activity, as the name itself suggests the components of the offer. However, it would be reductive to dwell only on the tangible aspects, omitting those that characterize this particular formula. In fact, it is the human factor that distinguishes the overnight stay at a bed and breakfast that allows tourists to perceive its typical aspects of "home hospitality": the simplicity and genuineness of the offer as well as its "home feeling". The bed and breakfast formula also gives to tourists probably the most direct knowledge of the place. The tourist has the opportunity to know the territory where the structure is situated, directly from the point of view of their owner-residents. In fact, from them might come suggestions that allow guests to know and join more authentic contexts.

The first experiences of bed and breakfast in Italy date back to the mid-nineties. But the lack of legislation discouraged this new formula of accommodation. Since 1997, the situation changed because it was recognized by law.² In all regional regulations a common element that concerns the real core of the offer may be recognized: the binding supplying of lodging and breakfast services.

Sicily regulated the sector by the regional law n. 32/2000 successively modified with law n. 4 of 16th of April 2003.

This last one has increased the maximum number of rooms (from 3 to 5) and the maximum number of

2 The first region to legislate on this matter was Lazio, followed by other regions, with the exception of the Toscana and of the Independent province of Bolzano that chose not to practice this type of accommodation because it was not considered as to be relevant to local culture and tradition of hospitality.

bed-places (from 12 to 20). Moreover, it has been repealed a part of the paragraph that entrusted to the province the task to establish the minimal and maximum applicable rates for bed and breakfast. Now the price system is free.

In this region, in recent years, there has been a real boom of the bed and breakfast. In 2005, in particular, 268 new exercises were created, with a relative increment of 36% (Regione Siciliana, 2005). The presence of the bed and breakfast is much more widespread and capillary, with respect to the agri-tourism structures' one. It covers all the Sicilian territory, but especially the province of Catania and Ragusa (Tab. 5)

CONCLUSIONS

It is certainly not easy to briefly summarize the research results. It emerges, in fact, a multiform and varied reality that does not allow unidirectional and homogeneous interpretation.

The analysis to regional level demonstrates that also the Sicily, as all those regions in which tourism covers a fundamental economic role, needs a cultural-receptive system, able to reducing the anthropic impact practised on the territory from the flow of the travellers and from the investments foreseen on the sector. In order to achieve such a result it is necessary to rethink the regional tourist system, to define a new managerial and cultural model, able to break with the logic of traditional strategies aiming to a quantitative development more than to a qualitative one.

The main idea is focused on so-called seasonal adjustment of the tourist offer, a strategy based on the distribution of the flow of tourists along the entire solar year and as much spread as possible on the whole territory. The research demonstrates that the areas mostly interested by tourist pressure are the coastal zones. The comparison between the Sicilian provinces has shown that the coast of Messina is the one with the highest pressure from tourism: Taormina, Giardini Naxos and the Eolie Islands have a very high concentration of tourists, especially during the summer and in relation to the surface and in relation to population. The province of Messina conquers the supremacy also regarding to the offer, given the large number of accommodation facilities that insist on the area.

Therefore, it may be confirmed that the coasts are still a strong element of attraction. This is the case for Sicily as well. Despite the richness and variety of its tourist offer, the region is mainly perceived as "sun, sand and sea".

In order to change this perception, the tourist system should encourage the local "talents" (intended as landscape and human resources) in all their variety and specificity, in order to distribute tourist fluxes in every seasons of the year, involving internal areas of the island. This would avoid concentration in the coastal areas.

The diffused recognition of the importance of the environment is likely to become the authentic and durable valorisation of the huge environmental, historical, archaeological, monumental, artistic and anthropological patrimony that makes of the island a tourist destination, unique in the world still able to resist to the competition of the banally consumerist tourism in their majority part already consumed or on their way to consumption.

But how can we intervene on the excess of tourist concentration and on saturation of tourist demand? The most adequate solution could be the adoption of an environmental marketing strategy aimed to protect the most vulnerable sites and to re-qualifying tourism orientating tourist fluxes towards "eco-touristic" structures, such as agri-tourism and bed and breakfast. The objective is not to promote a "niche" tourism, but to take advantage of all the attractive potentialities of the zone through an endowed system of a diversified entirety of integrated services and inside of which it is still possible to upgrade all usable resources.

The phenomenon of the agri-tourism and the bed and breakfast is a first example of alternative tourism to hotel, one of the possible solutions that allow diversifying the tourist offer. Sicily needs an excellence tourist development, based on quality and uniqueness of its resources. It is necessary, therefore, to privilege models of tourism development that are increasingly in line with the requirements of a sustainable and durable growth. The essential condition is the maximum involvement of the parties as to create a union of purpose toward the achievement of a sustainable economic mechanism. The goal is to create preventive measures to avoid late response to environmental emergencies.

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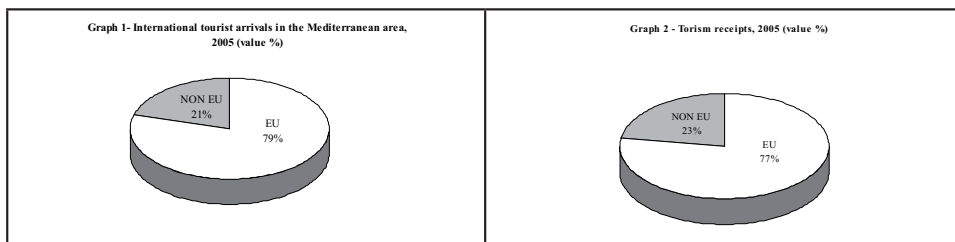
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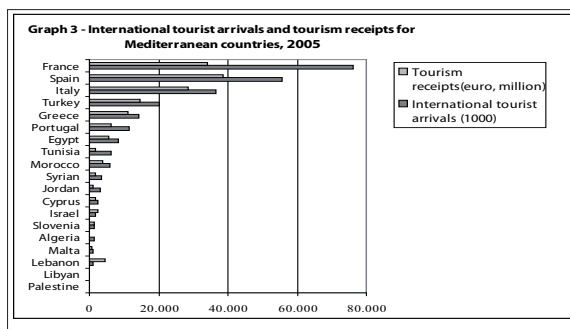
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APPENDIX



Source: our elaboration on UNWTO data



Source: our elaboration on UNWTO data

Tab. 1 - Tourist pressure indices in the Mediterranean area by country of destination, 2005

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION	SURFACE (Kmq)	POPULATION (1000)	PRESENCES PER KMQ	PRESENCES PER 1000 RESIDENTS
NON EU Mediterranean countries				
Algeria	2.381.741	3.285	2	0,4
Egypt	1.001.450	77.154	92	3,3
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	
Morocco	446.550	30.495	34	1,4
Tunisia	163.610	9.878	222	10,1
Palestine	...	3.762
Israel	22.145	6.692	862	7,8
Jordan	92.300	5.566	60	2,7
Lebanon	10.452	4.082
Syrian Arab Republic	185.180	19.121	49	1,3
Turkey	783.562	71.169
EU Mediterranean countries				
Cyprus	9.250	836	1.615	49,0
France	675.417	61.013	293	8,9
Greece	131.940	11.064	409	13,4
Italy	301.338	58.645	798	11,2
Malta	316	403	23.623	50,7
Portugal	92.391	10.547	384	9,2
Slovenia	20.273	2.001	245	6,8
Spain	504.645	43.060	303	9,7

Source: our elaboration on EUROSTAT data

Tab. 2 - Tourist pressure indices in Sicily by province and locality of destination, 2005

PROVINCES AND LOCALITIES OF DESTINATION	SURFACE (Kmq)	POPULATION	PRESENCES PER KMQ	PRESENCES PER 1000 RESIDENTS
AGRIGENTO	3.042	457.039	343	6,2
Agrigento	245	59.111	1.589	18,0
Sciacca	191	40.868	2.252	28,8
CALTANISSETTA	2.128	274.001	62	1,3
Caltanissetta	420	60.519	139	2,6
Gela	277	77.245	181	1,8
CATANIA	3.552	1.075.657	494	4,4
Acireale	40	52.490	9.832	20,5
Caltagirone	383	39.314	110	2,9
Catania e Acicastello	190	322.201	4.133	6,7
Nicolosi	42	6.745	1.159	19,8
ENNA	2.562	174.199	41	1,6

Enna	357	28.312	82	2,8
Piazza Armerina	303	20.768	122	4,9
MESSINA	3.247	655.640	1.217	16,5
Capo d'Orlando	15	12.951	4.957	15,7
Giardini Naxos	5	9.378	181.342	264,9
Isole Eolie	115	13.106	3.555	85,5
Messina	211	246.323	1.774	4,2
Milazzo	24	32.586	4.572	9,2
Patti	50	13.361	1.987	20,4
Taormina	13	10.967	74.697	242,6
PALERMO	4.992	1.239.808	667	7,3
Cefalù	66	13.716	10.257	135,2
Palermo e Monreale	688	706.039	1.836	4,9
RAGUSA	1.614	308.103	548	7,8
Ragusa	442	71.969	1.154	19,4
SIRACUSA	2.109	398.330	560	8,1
Siracusa	204	122.972	3.361	15,3
TRAPANI	2.461	434.435	553	8,5
Erice	47	28.887	2.295	10,2
Trapani	272	70.872	358	3,8
Sicily	25.707	5.017.212	535	7,5

Source: our elaboration on data from ISTAT and Osservatorio turistico della Regione Siciliana

Tab. 3 – Tourist density index and touristic function rate, 2005

PROVINCES	BED-PLACES PER KMQ	BED-PLACES PER 1000 RESIDENTS
Agrigento	3,5	23,2
Caltanissetta	0,8	6,5
Catania	4,7	15,4
Enna	0,8	12,3
Messina	9,7	48,2
Palermo	6,3	25,2
Ragusa	6,0	31,2
Siracusa	5,1	27,2
Trapani	3,3	19,0
Sicily	4,8	24,4

Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data

Tab. 4 – Incidence % of the total presences for month, 2005

MONTH	DESTINATION	
	Sicily	Italy
January	2,2	4,2
February	2,5	4,2
March	4,7	5,4
April	7,2	5,2
May	9,3	7,6
June	11,6	11,6
July	14,6	17,5
August	21,1	21,0
September	13,0	10,5
October	7,7	5,8
November	3,3	3,2
December	2,8	3,7
YEAR	100,0	100,0

Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data

Tab. 5 – Agritourism structures and bed and breakfast in Sicily, 2005

PROVINCES	AGRITOURISM STRUCTURES	BED AND BREAKFAST
Agrigento	20	47
Caltanissetta	7	14
Catania	47	201
Enna	21	38
Messina	86	140
Palermo	60	154
Ragusa	20	167
Siracusa	49	133
Trapani	31	118
Sicily	341	1012

Source: Osservatorio turistico della Regione Siciliana

Rural Tourism

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“BORGO PANTANO”, AN IRT PROJECT FOR SICILY BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION TECHNOLOGIES^{1*}

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Abstract

Since the second post-war, the recent history of Sicily has been characterised by a continuous depletion of the natural and historical Mediterranean landscape due to the unauthorized building often controlled by the expansion of the Mafia. Such trend was even more systematic along the coast, in the maritime villages and in the inland regions, where the new building, the uncontrolled development and the asphalt works have disfigured the landscape and wiped out important testimonies of the past.

So rather than the traditional tourism directed to bathing areas, minor islands and art towns, the new forms of Integrated Relational Tourism (IRT) are the most compromised. Indeed, in the rural areas the historical landscape, as well as the territorial memory, has been modified often due to the migratory phenomena of the last sixty years. Nevertheless, a significant part of the coastal and rural landscape of the island has been saved by the radical transformations of the 20th century: a large part of it is indeed still undamaged and constitutes a substantial resource for Sicily. For instance, lots of rural villages, abandoned since the post-war, are fairly restorable. However, only some of them are coming back to life thanks to the devotion and perseverance of few men who are carrying out projects of sustainable tourist development.

Among these projects one of the most important is focused on *Borgo Pantano*, a rural village of the Tyrrhenian-Peloritan region, harmonically integrated in a quite intact agrarian landscape. The area is characterised by a cultivation mosaic of olive-grove, vineyard, orange-groove and several kinds of orchards. The hamlet, which lies in the administrative division of Rometta, dates back to the Fifteenth century and comprises about forty houses. The church, located in the centre of the village, is dedicated to Our Lady of Grace. It is a meaningful example of rural architecture and one of the oldest of the whole district. The last inhabitants left Pantano in the Sixties. From then the village has been abandoned for decades till a descendant of one of the old inhabitants decided to fulfil a dream: bringing Pantano back to life.

So far the project has been promoted by the society “Incanti & Memorie” in partnership with the Observatory of Economic and Tourist Development in the Tyrrhenian Area (OSETT). The village has been added to the MOTRIS list, as the project is already being carried out. “Incanti & Memorie” shares the IRT aims of economic

¹ *Although this paper is the outcome of a joint research project carried out by the three authors, the introduction and the first paragraph were written by Alessandro Arangio, paragraphs 2, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 by Daniele Mento, paragraphs 2.4 and 3 by Gaetano Ortolano, who also developed the cartographic elaborations.

re-territorialisation, social recontextualization of regions and recomposition of cultural identities. Moreover, Borgo Pantano was the first project in Sicily to subscribe a Protocol of Ethics for the restoration of the village, it was proposed to be registered in the Sicilian Region's REI (Register for Immaterial Heritage), and has been subject for three graduation thesis. Progetto Pantano aims to recover not only the buildings but also the traditional culture of the village. The purpose is in fact to recover as much as possible the existing elements in order to restore the village to its original appearance and its ancient productive, agricultural, cultural and religious functions. In order to reach this aim, a trans-disciplinary study has been carried out in the present paper, focused on the historical and geographical aspects and the analysis of the agro-environmental resources. A Geographic Information System (GIS) project has been correlated to the manifold aspects characterising the history and culture of this territory. The final endeavour is to fulfil the restoration of the old houses as tourist accommodation, recovering at the same time the typical production of the village, so protecting the tangible and intangible values nowadays put at risk by the globalization process.

Key words: Rural Tourism, Sicily, sustainable development, GIS

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and globalization: the return to travel and the defence of cultural roots

Providing a definition of tourism is not easy. Unless it can be accompanied by a qualifying attribute (such as bathing, cultural, religious, etc.), the concept is too vague and dispersive. In fact, the different features of tourism are combined with the idea of a population moving from their habitual place, for different reasons and periods that are not too short. Nevertheless, until a century ago, there was a very precise idea of tourism, it was a moment of cultural enrichment, something that often lasted several months and was considered, by the ruling classes in Europe, as a crucial phase of an individual's educational process. In its highest form, it was called the "Grand Tour". Tourism was no longer the journey towards the unknown, as it was for Homer's Ulysses and the Fifteenth-century explorers, but a journey towards the exotic: it was a moment of understanding of the world and its diversity, but more than this it was the rediscovery of being, a moment of self-definition. From the second half of the Twentieth century, with the phenomenon of "the masses", tourism lost its deepest meaning. Tourists no longer travelled to discover but to confirm those exotic environments, advertised in brochures and offered by tour operators in packages, without losing the comforts and habits of daily life. Discovery turned into fiction, just as reality, after all, as required by the post-modern logic theorized by contemporary authors such as Augé, Baudrillard and Bauman. Certainly, we cannot say that it was a sustainable tourism and that it did not leave scars on the ground. The big leisure and entertainment companies contributed to destroy coastal structures, compromise landscapes, promote illegal building and modify the economic and social structure, the traditions and cultural values that make up the world's mosaic. Of course, this was, and is, globalization, its harmful effects, from which we try to defend ourselves, forcing a change, creating a limit to unsustainable practices, in "dark times" – to quote Hannah Arendt, but "fortunately" only in terms of economic recession – in which humanity is living, in this early Twenty-first century.

We need to aim at an economic re-territorialization. This means reconnecting production activities with places, bringing out the local individuality, ensuring that the economic dynamics are not exclusively handled by the external centres of political and economic power. Man is now starting to realize the abuses committed in the recent past. In his soul, he has always nourished a sense of transgression, a sense of guilt over the loss of Eden, the end of natural status and the birth of civilization. This sense of guilt has gradually been growing since the industrial revolution, because the impact of human activity on the environment, on the natural and anthropic landscapes has been really quite devastating. A reconciliation between man and nature, the great mother (Demeter or Isis in the ancient Mediterranean culture), is needed, as well as the rediscovery of cultural roots that, if not managed properly, are likely to be eradicated by globalization.

PANTANO PROJECT BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The 1950's marked a net division in Sicilian history. The failure of the Agrarian Reform and the beginning of the industrialization program in the southern regions, supported by the *Cassa di Sviluppo per il Mezzogiorno*, opened the doors to profound changes and upturned the urban hierarchy, in Sicily and other Southern regions of Italy. In twenty years the appearance of the South has drastically changed. As Giuseppe Giarrizzo reminds us, rather than migration to Northern Italy and Europe, it is the internal migration that rewrites the island's geography (Giarrizzo, 1989). The inland mountainous areas were suddenly abandoned, while many coastal centres reported a population growth that had never occurred in Sicily before. On the island, much more than for the rest of Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, the presence of substantial urban-demographic concentrations along the coasts is already a historical, long-term, characteristic. However, in those years, the weight of Palermo, Catania and Messina grew even further. Again in the coastal regions, the industrialization policy also created new centres. In Priolo-Augusta, Gela, Milazzo and Termini Imerese, the development poles attracted the population and emptied the inland areas. Perhaps, the most important example in Sicily is Siracusa, where in three decades – from 1950 to 1980 – the population grew from seventy thousand to one hundred and twenty thousand. But Gela, Augusta, Milazzo and Barcellona were facing a hardly manageable demographic emergency, as well. At the same time, mass tourism led to illegal building, the gradual cementing of coasts, while in the three main centres of the island, mafia and speculation were erecting one building after another. In Palermo building was not only restricted to peripheral areas: the Viale Libertà bore the brunt, having lost many of its valuable mansions, replaced by modern high-rise blocks of flats. Messina grows chaotically, without any town planning criteria, without any logic, torrents are buried and, at the cost of public safety, earthquake safety rules are ignored. Meanwhile, the cement culture spreads for emulation, even in the inland areas, the small towns in demographic decline are no longer safe. There is a Sicily that is disappearing, Leonardo Sciascia writes, "under the television aerials, the cars, the paroxysmal consumerism, the rural exodus, the disarmament of sulphur mines". Only a few are safe (Sciascia, 1982, introduction).

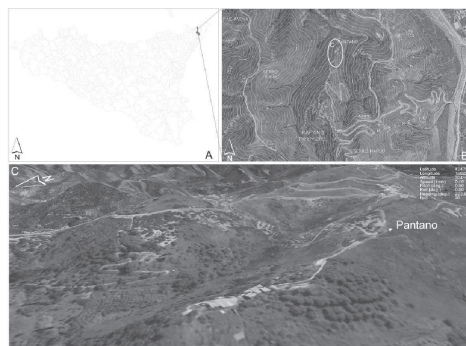


Figure 1: Location of Borgo Pantano.

A) Location of Rometta city limit; B) Orographic features; C) Virtual 3D visualisation.

Among the victims of depopulation, there is also Pantano, a small rural village in the Tirreno-peloritana area (Fig.1). Only a victim of abandonment and certainly not of overbuilding, if we consider that it was the absence of humans that has preserved Pantano from the disasters caused by "Sicilian modernity".

This splendid rural archaeological example lies in Rometta (Fig.1A), a town in the province of Messina. Built on a Peloritani mountain depression, about 300 meters above sea level, Pantano can be found among the villages of Rapano, Filari and Scarcelli (Fig.1B). Its origins date back to the Fifteenth century, thus before the age of establishment that is, perhaps, another hinge moment in Sicilian history together with the recent events we have talked about. In fact, between 1573 and 1714, 113 new villages centres were born on the Island with the Viceroy's permission (the well-known "licentia populandi"). In less than a century, the towns doubled from 170 to 340. In 1693, the earthquake in Val di Noto gave further impetus to this period of territorial reorganization. With their perfect geometric plans – as modern standards imposed – the new centres started to stud the island, drawing new urban networks, establishing new hierarchies. So, in addition to the morphology of the area, that holds Pantano in a depression, thanks also to these events, the village never experienced a significant population growth, that would have upset the system and the architecture. With a Sicilian population increasing from 550,000 according to the 1505 census to 1,020,792 in the 1583 one, the Sixteenth century explosion would find an outlet in the recently founded centres, which the barons would then promote in the whole region (Ligresti, 2002). Therefore, it is probably due to the emergence of these new poles that the village has managed to keep its "Y-shaped" urban planning intact as well as its typical medieval rural housing scheme (Figs.1C; 2).

However, in spite of its small size, Pantano did not play a subordinate role in the political and economic dynamics of the Tirreno-peloritano territory. It was perfectly integrated in an urban system of small rural centres interacting with each other. It is demonstrated by the fact, for example, that, built in the Sixteenth century and dedicated to Our Lady of Grace, the village church precedes the San Domenico church, situated in the overwhelming Rapano village and built after 1604. Therefore, before the latter date, the little Pantano church was supposed to be the only place of worship in the district. Furthermore, even though the village has always been self-sufficient, with its own food and agriculture production, its economic relationship with the neighbouring towns has always been considerable.

The village was continuously inhabited until the early Sixties of the last century, when the demographic changes caused the site to be gradually abandoned. The industrial centre of Milazzo-Villafranca catalysed a demographic flow towards the coast and, with less than 77 people, Pantano was finally abandoned. This depopulation caused the end of production, business and life, but paradoxically ended up by preserving the village, making it an exceptional case of rural archaeology in Sicily. Today, Pantano is exactly as it was in the Sixties. Certainly the state of abandonment led to the building heritage decay, but not one sack of concrete nor one gram of asphalt have been poured onto Pantano. The absolute absence of man has saved the village from the horrors that have, elsewhere, spoiled the Sicilian landscape.

Pantano has about forty houses, spread around the renovated church and its small square. The architectural building style is very poor but dignified. Actually, today the village is no longer abandoned. A company called "Incanti & Memorie" has bought all the buildings in the village, with the aim of bringing a rigorous upgrading project to a close. The initiatives connected with Pantano started in 1994, since then, already registered in the MOTRIS plan, the village has been the subject of various studies led by the University of Reggio Calabria – Department of Architecture. Another protagonist is the OSETT, that along with "Incanti & Memorie" is supervising the cultural aspects of the project. Moreover, for some years, OSETT has been promoting interesting initiatives – such as "The roots of memory" – of which, every year, Pantano, with its remarkable scenery, plays an important role. Providing a total investment of more than four million euros (supported partly by public and partly by private funds), the recovery plan for the village is a painstaking and unusual work in a "difficult" context such as Sicily. Starting from a careful and detailed study of materials, building techniques, farming organization, village land, water and tradition management, the goal set by this project is a full and rigorous upgrading of Pantano.

Everything must be faithfully reconstructed: even the Pantano last inhabitants *'nciuri*² will be recovered and will define the new toponymy.

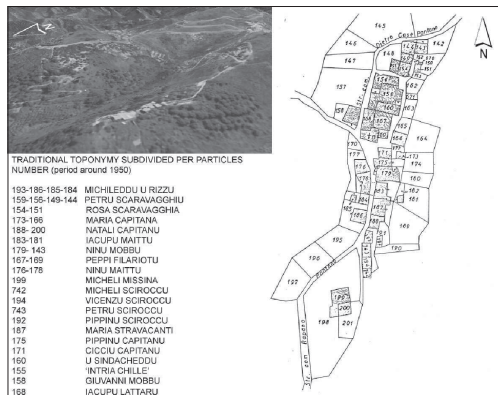


Figure 2: Toponymy of Borgo Pantano.

The ethical aspects will not be left out either. As regards this, on the 26th of January 2006, the City Council in Rometta approved the Protocol of Ethics, that establishes the guidelines that should be enforced in the recovery activities of the village. Moreover, there is a pending Charter of Ecology and Ethics, that is a program where the principles of social and economic sustainability are established to regulate the village operation, after the recovery ends. The final goal is to create a model of alternative accommodation. Staying in Pantano, in a typical Mediterranean rural landscape, travellers will be able to escape from a world that globalization has distorted, renew those roots that modernization has cut off, recover a sober and dignified way of living that now seems to be the only one possible, in order to cope with the difficulties, bred by the international economic crisis. The typical, traditional dishes of the country will be reproduced, the temporary guests can take part in traditional activities of the village and, most importantly, satisfy their need for community. It doesn't matter if he is German, French or Piedmontese, the reconciliation with nature will take place anyway. In that case, it won't be a return to his roots, but a return to the discovery, to the satisfaction of the inner human need to wonder at the world.

A final comment concerns the management of Pantano. In a region where the development patterns have always been imposed from above, where the power elites have been able to turn to their favour the consequences of every political change, where the power (not only the political or institutional power) has been wielded with the utmost violence since ancient times, Sicilian people gave themselves up to the insight of a compulsory inaction, a vain evolutionism – subject of a relevant literature produced by the regional culture. Similar initiatives need to be encouraged and supported not only for the content value and quality, but because they rise in the territory and for the territory and could be an example to emulate, to light a path of local development. Only by rediscovering our origins, emphasizing our differences, we can return to live free, as Socrates said in Plato's *Phaedo*, referring to the Mediterranean, such as frogs and ants – with mutual differences – around our pond.

² Epithet, by now fallen into disuse, used in the past in Sicily to qualify and identify a person or a family, sometimes in an abusive sense.



Figure 3: Characteristic places of the Village:

A) Our Lady of Grace church (Particle B)

B) Example of cistern (Particles 200-193-188-183-179-175-167-154-155-149-144-168-186)

C) Dammus (Particles 183 and 187); D) Millstone (XVI SEC) (Particle 184); E) Nurse's Tower (Particle 154).

BORGO PANTANO: AN EXAMPLE FOR AGRO-ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Of the 40 buildings forming the village's heritage only 10% show a fairly good condition of preservation. The Church is constituted by a central and symmetrical hall and by an annexed body. Inside, the choir is placed upon the entrance wall. Here the children used to gather to sing the Sunday hymns. The furnishing is simple and devoid of stylistic references. The holy furnishings and the only valuable picture, dating back to 1730, have been stolen.

Typical of the village's houses are the cisterns (Fig.3B) and the ovens for the baking of bread. Elements related to past dominations are not missing: an example of it is the *dammus* (Fig.3C) of Muslim origin. The village was also provided with a collective millstone (Fig.3D) where the wine-pressing usually took place. The grape harvest was an aggregation feast: many hands were needed and the workers used to gather for lunch. The women cooked 'u *sugu* and 'u *piscistoccu â ghiotta*³ while *Cinniredda*, the itinerant musician, used to sing and play the accordion.

The working activities were always accompanied by songs, which performed the important task of easing the hard work. The *capuani*⁴ were a typically feminine repertoire, related to the working environment of the *ghiummi*⁵, groups of six-seven women entrusted to the carrying of goods. A characteristic element of this song was 'u *riiddu*⁶ of women coming from Saponara and Scarcelli, loaded with straw and hay.

³ Dialect expression meaning a typical dish whose main ingredient is stockfish.

⁴ Folk songs.

⁵ Local dialectal word.

⁶ Local dialectal word denoting the singing of a wren.

The most typical element in the village is however the Nurse's Tower (Fig.3E). The network of *baiulas*, dating to the XIII century, held up at that time the administrative system. Justice was applied by a judge, who usually was the lord of Rometta. The bailiff had the duty to solve issues related to the agricultural activities, especially those related to the cultivation of corn, linen and silk. As about this last activity, it is to be remembered that Rometta's silk market was very renowned in the area. It was connected with a small local entrepreneurial class headed by the Bosurgi family.

Customs and eating habits of the residents

Studying the eating habits and the consumption per person of Borgo Pantano's inhabitants it has emerged how, in the 1950-1960 decade, their diet was mainly based on vegetables. Cereals were the chief nourishment (Fig.4 and Tab.1). With an average value per year of 181 kg per capita they constituted 54% of food consumption, legumes and vegetables came second (27%), followed by fruit (11%), meat and its derivatives (7%), and finally fish (nearly only stockfish) (1%). All families at the village used to breed chickens, which guaranteed the production of eggs.

Among legumes, broad beans, beans and peas were the most consumed. Among vegetables the favourite were potatoes, onions, tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and artichokes. As for fruit, prickly pears, plums, cherries, apples, pears, pomegranates and grapes. Cultivation, especially the arboreal one, was based on the use of cultivars and local accessions, which today are at risk of extinction because of the widespread abandonment of the fields and the introduction of hybrids.

Tab.1 - Pantano's residents alimentary consume per person (average data from the decade 1950-1960).*

Food/culture	consume (kg/year)	tot village consume (kg/year)	tot village consume (q)
wheat	165,0	12705,0	127,05
maize	16,0	1232,0	12,32
citrus	6,6	508,2	5,08
vegetables (legumes, eggplants, etc)	60,0	4620,0	46,20
fresh fruit	30,0	2310,0	23,10
potatoes	20,0	1540,0	15,40
tomatoes	12,5	962,5	9,63
oil	5,0	385,0	3,85
wine	109,5	8431,5	84,32
cheese and ricotta**	3,0	231,0	2,31
milk	36,5	2810,5	28,11
other fat (lard)	0,5	38,5	0,39
goat meat	2,0	154,0	1,54
bovine meat	2,0	154,0	1,54
pork meat	5,0	385,0	3,85
chicken and rabbit meat	6,0	462,0	4,62
fish	1,0	77,0	0,77
stockfish	4,0	308,0	3,08
eggs (n.)	48,0	3696,0	36,96
Water for feeding	730,0	56210,0	562,00
Water for domestic use (20 l/day)	7.300,0	562.100,0	5.62

* data obtained through the elaboration of information given by ancient people of the area, estimated, and derived from bibliographic sources.

** necessary about 15 l of milk to make 1 kg of cheese and ricotta.

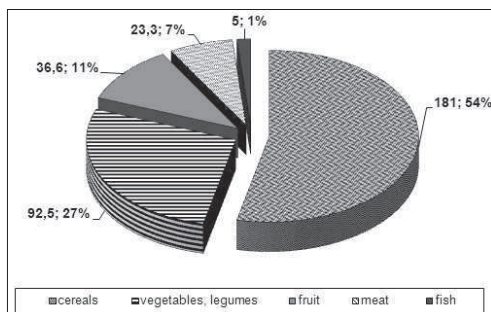


Figure 4: Pantano's residents food consumption per person (average data from 1950-1960 decade).

Farming and agricultural production

After the Second World War the agricultural productions of the village guaranteed sustenance to its 77 residents. In order to purpose the construction of a natural laboratory able to rebuild up the Pantano's traditional food system, a study on the agricultural productions has been carried out. This study took as a reference a surface of nearly nineteen ha (18,7852 ha) neighbouring the village, where the residents predominantly performed their agricultural activities during the 1950-1960 decade.

The present elaboration (Tab. 2 and Fig.5) shows that on this area the practised agricultural cultivations were the arboreal seeding (39%), the seeding (16%), the olive (16%), the arboreal vineyard and the vineyard (respectively 9% and 8% of the surface), the pasture (4%), the cane thicket (4%) and the prickly pear (less than 1%) (Fig.6).

The arboreal seeding was composed of herbaceous cultivations (corn, horticultural or leguminous such as broad bean, bean and pea) together with arboreal cultivations (grapevine, plum, cherry, medlar, pear, apple, apricot, mulberry and almond).

The seedings were made of corn cultivations and in small part of maize. In the arboreal vineyard the grapevine trees were joined with fruit trees. The cane thicket was of primary importance because the canes were employed as support for the horticultural cultivations and to build partitions and ceilings for the houses. The cattle's feeding was guaranteed by areas destined to pasture and by the forage (mostly *sulla*).

Tab.2 – Agricultural area farmed by Pantano's residents, cultivations and their related productions.

Cultivation	Cultivated surface mq	Average production q./ha	Total production (q)
Citrus orchard	7.280	126,00	91,73
Cane thicket*	6.820	210,00	143,22
Prickly pear	267	126,00	3,36
Pasture	7.530	28,00	21,08
Seeding	30.954	18,20	56,34
Arboreal seeding	73.672	43,20	318,28
Olive grove	29.569	12,95	38,29
Vineyard	15.290	42,00	64,22
Arboreal vineyard	16.470	75,96	125,11
tot	187.852		

* estimated production

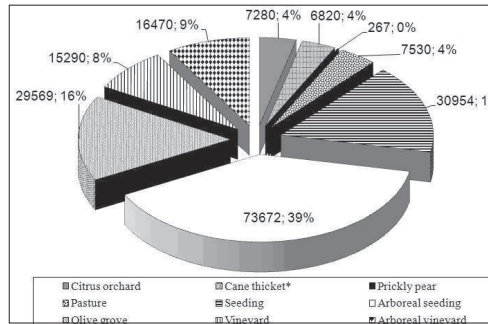


Figure 5: Cultivations' division on the farmed surface near the village (data in m2 and %).



Figure 6: Use of the soil map

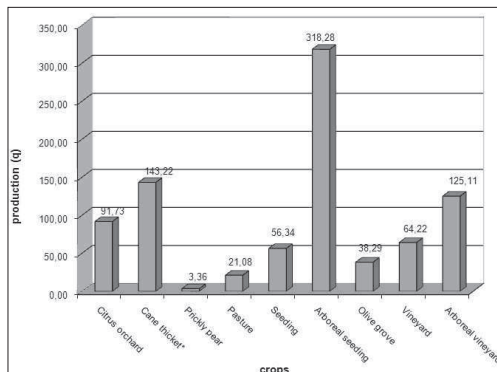


Figure 7: Quantity of production obtained from the farmed surface near the village, differentiated by cultivation.

Food requirements

Considering data related to the consumption per capita and the areas farmed by Pantano's residents, we could further analyze and elaborate. We particularly want to highlight what was the necessary surface to satisfy the village's food requirements, and clarify whether the agricultural area was adequate to guarantee the production needed.

Comparing the villagers' food expenditure (in the considered period of time) and the average productions of the cultivations we got the value in ha of the surface necessary to supply food to Pantano's residents (tab. 3). This calculation shows that to cover the food requirement of 127.05 quintals of wheat, they needed a farmed surface of nearly 7 ha. Also, about 4.5 ha of grapevine surface, 2 ha of olive grove, 0.6 ha of vegetable garden and some hundred metres of citrus orchard, tomatoes, potatoes and corn were needed (tab. 3).

About the meat and its derivatives (tab. 4), the latest testimonies tell us that the breeding was mainly based on small animals and pigs. The village also owned two milkers, one of which was destined to the production of fresh milk, collected every morning by the Saponara milkman, 'u lattaru. The other one's milk instead was destined to the production of ricotta and cheese and sold in the surrounding villages. Moreover, the village had five sows, 25 goats, about 300 small animals and five calves fed stalling in the huts near the farmed fields. These calves, once fattened, were sold at Spadafora's fair.

So, the animal consistency in the village was of about ten units adult bovine (UBA). This calculation shows that the cattle load of about two UBA/ha was inadequate for the forage needs of the area. The residents, in fact, got the missing forage from a neighbouring area called 'a valanca (the ravine), where no other cultivation was possible.

Analyzing the water expenditure for alimentary use it was verified that this came from the numerous wells of the village. Water for domestic use instead was collected from the roofs through waterspouts and then gathered in brick underground cisterns. Part of the water came from the near wells and from springs. Multiplying the value of the roofs' surface for a coefficient of average outflow of the sloping roof (0.85), for the quantity in millimetres of average annual rain (about 800) and for a coefficient of 0.9 related to the losses that happen during the gathering (in cistern) we obtain a value of 293 m³ of water gathered from the roofs. It's interesting to observe how this is approximately the volume of rain water collected from roofs, and covers more than 50% of the water requirement for domestic use⁷.

The number of cisterns where water was gathered was initially 32. It means that almost every house had its own water supply. In addition to the cisterns, there were two public wells of spring water, which were also used as meeting points by the villagers. Of course the common problems in managing the local resources made this community very cohesive.

Summarizing, data related to the farmed surface necessary to the residents' food requirement show that they needed a surface of about fifteen ha, with five ha destined to pasture or forage. This means a surface approximately similar to the examined one. Furthermore, analyzing this survey's results it can be observed that the expenditure of natural resources was low and adequate to the regeneration ability of the renewable resources. Maximizing the efficiency in the use of resources also meant that eco-sustainable building techniques were applied. An example of this are the already mentioned systems for the gathering of rain waters, but also the terracing and the canalization works present along the village's slopes. The terraced landscapes, built to gain cultivable land from the slopes, protected the versants from hydrogeological hazard. Nature and man were then settled as a harmonic one. The drains for the gathering of water, called *saje*, were used to collect the meteoric waters and lead them to the near creeks. The resident was forced to keep clean the *saja* to avoid its occlusion and the consequent potential landslides and damages to his neighbours' parcels.

The importance of water in this area wasn't only related to its subsistence function for man and agriculture.

⁷ The expenditure of water for domestic use, based on bibliographical data and direct testimonies, was about 20 l/day per person.

For many centuries water was the essential propelling factor for the cereals' crushing system, through the complex network of water mills (now crumbling) diffused in the neighbouring area.

Food/cultivation	Tot village expenditure (q)	Average production q/ha	Necessary surface (ha)
wheat	127,05	18,20	6,9808
maize	12,32	200,0	0,0616
citrus	5,08	126,00	0,0403
vegetables (legumes, eggplants, etc)	46,20	73,85	0,6256
Fresh fruits	23,10	101,89	0,2267
potatoes	15,40	210,00	0,0733
tomatoes	9,63	210,00	0,0458
Olive oil	3,85	2,00	1,9250
wine	84,32	18,00	4,6842
			Tot 14,6633

Tab.3 – Average production of cultivations and surface necessary to food requirements.

Food/culture	Tot village expenditure (q)	Necessary surf (ha), cattle
Cheese and ricotta	2,31	n.1 milker and 25 goats
milk	28,11	pigs
Other fats (lard)	0,39	about 25 goats
Goat meat	1,54	1 calf
Bovine meat	1,54	5 swines
Pork meat	3,85	
Chicken and rabbit	4,62	about 310 hens, chickens and rabbits
Fish	0,77	bought
stockfish	3,08	bought
eggs (n.)	36,96	about 100 chickens guaranteed the production
Water for alimentary use	56,00	Springs and wells
Water for domestic use (20 l per day)	562,00	293 mc from roofs gathering
Pasture/forage necessary for the animals' feeding (about 10 UBA)		269 mc from springs and wells Considering a charge of 2 UBA/ha about 5 ha of pasture/forage are necessary

Tab.4 – Surfaces and cattle necessary to satisfy meat and derivatives' requirement and the water for alimentary use requirement.

Ecological footprint calculation

The above data can be used to calculate the food ecological footprint of Pantano in the 1950-1960 decade. The ecological footprint is a measure of human demand on the Earth's ecosystems. It compares human demand with planet Earth's ecological capacity to regenerate. This index, nowadays, shows as the Western Countries, as well as the Emergent ones, in order to maintain their present lifestyle, use ecological services two or three times as fast as their territories can renew them. This alarming state could become irreversible and for this reason new patterns of development, based on energy conservation, as well as on renewable energy, are required. Borgo Pantano could become a natural laboratory to experience a new lifestyle, where human needs are satisfied harmonically with nature.

In order to calculate the ecological footprint in the 1950-1960 decade, regarding vegetables consumption, the third column data of Tab. 3 have to be subdivided per 77 (the number of inhabitants). Differently, to calculate the hypothetic amount of productive land needed to produce meat, milk and derivatives required, we have to make use of several conversion factors available from literature data. Yielded results have to be added together (Tab. 5), so as to obtain the amount of land required for food resources.

The final result is 0.8652 (Tab. 5) that, if compared with the national index (1.78 ha/p), suggests to us the IRT development project of Borgo Pantano should be widely sustainable.

Tab.5 – *Alimentary ecological footprint*

Food/cultivation	average expenditure per person (Kg)	Necessary surface per person (ha)	
wheat	165		0.09
maize	16		0.0008
citrus	6.60		0.0003
vegetables (legumes, eggplants, etc.)	6.0		0.0008
Fresh fruits	30		0.003
potatoes	20		0.0009
tomatoes	12.50		0.006
Olive oil	5.0		0.023
wine	109.5		0.06
		Literature conversion factor	
Cheese and ricotta	3	0.007	0.021
milk	36	0.0007	0.0252
Other fats (lard)	0.5	0.006	0.003
Goat meat	2	0.003	0.006
Bovine meat	2	0.017	0.034
Pork meat	5	0.006	0.03
Chicken and rabbit	6	0.003	0.0018
Fish	1	0.041	0.041
stockfish	4	0.041	0.164
eggs (n.)	48	0.007	0.336
		Total	0.8652

(Tab. 5), so as to obtain the amount of land required for food resources.

The final result is 0.8652 (Tab. 5) that, if compared with the national index (1.78 ha/p), suggests to us the IRT development project of Borgo Pantano should be widely sustainable.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

In the present paper we have expounded a model of Integrated Relational Tourism, which is taking shape from the restoration plan of an abandoned rural village in north-eastern Sicily. It is based on a trans-disciplinary study, focused on the historical and geographical aspects and the analysis of the agro-environmental resources. All this has been integrated into the initial development of a Geographic Information System (GIS), which will be able to strengthen the thesis expounded in this paper.

The restoration project of Borgo Pantano could actually represent a natural laboratory to investigate different aspects of the IRT theory. The high quality of the project and the ethical principles of "Incanti & Memorie" are the basis of this development model, which could become a replicable model at Euro-Mediterranean level.

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TRADITIONAL RURAL LANDSCAPES IN ITALY BETWEEN CONSERVATION AND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT

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To Prof. Leonardo Urbani

Before addressing the topic of my speech, I would like to pay homage to Leo Urbani's fruitful insight by briefly remarking on Integrated Relational Tourism. Thanks to that insight, we have gathered here today from numerous countries of the world.

In 2005, I was asked to write about cultural tourism for the XV Report on Italian Tourism, and there I underscored two different elements. On the one hand, the difficulties in defining and measuring a phenomenon - which transcends its own borders and reaches a dimension where it becomes virtually confused with the experience of tourism as a whole (following MacCannell's lesson) - logically led me to cross out the adjective "cultural", a useless pleonasm at that point. On the other hand, the careless and persuasive use of the term "cultural tourism" - in communication in the sector, media, politics and small talk, more in general - led to the emergence of one of those clichés capable of generating consensus and agreement, also in highly polymorphous contexts, due to the cultural origin of the subjects involved.

In the conclusions of my paper I stressed how the continuous and dogmatic reference to cultural tourism expresses the widespread necessity to experience the ancestral need for movement and knowledge of the other in a different way. And that need has been met somehow by tourism in developed societies, although it seems belittling to us today, since, instead of being merely observers - even distant sometimes - we would rather be participating witnesses of the lives of people around us, of their world, values, history.

Hence, the vagueness of the term cultural tourism seemed to me the inevitable price to be paid to establish a healthy and positive relationship with people and places, showing respect for their past but with a particular interest in their future at the same time, while being however concerned with numerous questions on how such a virtuous project can be implemented within the strict rules of profit.

Thanks to the kind invitation of the organizers of the Master Course on Relational Tourism, I came to learn of the cultural project behind the complex organization and operational objectives of the Course itself. Furthermore, the cultural climate is very close to my experience as a researcher who has built his identity as scholar over three decades by investigating the complex anthropological and territorial reality of peasant cultures.

I have many doubts that the Integrated Relational Tourism can be clearly defined, as it is based on a non-standardised supply as opposed to what has been provided by tourism so far. I sensed the same fertile excitement that has guided me over recent years in identifying tourism pathways capable of giving a voice to communities. Although rich in history, they have been left on the margins of development and closed in small worlds that have managed to safeguard the ancestral values that our hyper-technological post-industrial societies are in strong need of.

The revival of a research tradition

During the Seventies, when we, young researchers, looked to the peasant world - during its dramatic transitional stage to modernity - we were called to preserve the signs of a civilization dating back thousands of years, by collecting documents illustrating every aspect of the territory and memory of a culture that had been mostly transmitted orally. Nowadays, the development prospects of the rural world - which is, at the same time, the perpetrator and victim of hybrid modernization - are the expression of a new political and cultural project based precisely on cultural/relational tourism. This project does not rely on the contrast between the peasant and mainstream cultures, but on the retrieval of the common values of mankind, which are essential to build a fairer world, one that is more respectful of environmental values.

Against the backdrop of the hopes linked to that project lies the reality of Italian agriculture that has lost more than 20.4% of its farmed surface -from more than 15 million hectares to less than 12- between 1990 and 2005.

Among the causes of this phenomenon are urbanization, which has also affected land of high agricultural value, and the progressive marginalization of more peripheral agricultural areas where the ageing of farmers goes hand in hand with a reduction in the profit margins on crops.

In many areas of Italy – with a high number of small family-run farms with strong roots in the local community – European Union agricultural policy has resulted in agricultural practices being abandoned in rather vulnerable territories, where the long-term presence of farmers had helped in protecting the environment and reducing land instability. As a matter of fact, at the beginning, that policy rather favoured farms, crops and territories that were oriented to global markets, where a high degree of technological innovation was likely to be achieved.

At the same time, in the most developed areas, the devastating effects of farming techniques that were all but environment-friendly were emerging (pollution of waterbeds and air, and progressive loss of fertility of over-exploited soils).

In Italy, the *Bel Paese* where agriculture has produced excellent productive spaces for the community from its lands for thousands of years, thanks to a ceaseless effort to reclaim environments which were often unsuited to agricultural practices, the legacy of a millennial civilization is disappearing, along with farming methods that are no longer considered cost-effective. If, at the same time, we think about some of the most recent transformations of our best agricultural practices due to international economic choices, it is fair to say that the coming years will be critical for the whole agricultural sector.

Fortunately, the alignment of domestic market prices with those of the global market has slowly made it necessary to identify new economic advantages capable of making Italian – and European - agricultural products competitive again as opposed to those of countries with lower production costs. This should be achieved through respect for the environment, but at the same time the expectations of consumers who are increasingly inclined to use top-quality food products should be met.

It is highly revealing, then, how the most recent market strategies are in line with the latest political planning of the European Union, which is aimed at setting up new development processes to the benefit of the rural world. As a matter of fact, planning has been devised to enhance the value of the social, economic and cultural resources of local rural areas – with full respect for compatibility - so that the most marginalised territories can achieve new economic advantages.

Among the new development strategies, economic and structural resources play the same crucial role as the entire cultural, tangible and intangible heritage (local milieu) typical of local rural areas, as they prove the development potentials of a territory of which local communities are the concrete expression. Accordingly, local milieus represent the new economic heritage, which can suitably accompany and support the implementation of all planning related to the integrated and sustainable development of rural areas, if its sustainability potentials are consolidated.

A cultural heritage expressed in both tangible and intangible forms still survives in some of those tiny agricultural areas that are least affected by modernization. This heritage is perhaps most immediately felt and communicated in those esthetic features that have long characterized rural environments, which may differ widely, but which are united by their deep-rooted history and strong ties between the local community and a nature which is culturalized to the extent that it becomes a monument to the brilliance and sheer perseverance of our communities.

Following the recent revival of the concept of landscape, we can now deal with the question of our marginalised agricultural areas using a holistic approach, so that both scientific thought and planning activities are combined in a single space of action, though articulated into different levels: from the pedologic and lithologic characteristics of the places to the agricultural and hydraulic techniques, to the socio-cultural features of rural populations, and to the production and food traditions rooted in cults and rites that still infuse rural life today.

Therefore I found myself on the field again in recent years, I went back to visit and study the contexts of our marginal – sometimes heroic - agriculture, to collect documents and review the features of the small rural contexts of Sicily, my land. Over the past decade, although those contexts have not been left untouched by transformations, they have regained a positive self-representation resulting from the bottom-up approach of development policies, new international situations, deep changes in agricultural policies. And, above all, there is a revival of interest of the city towards the countryside and the woods, a return to nature and its values that is often more mythical than tangible.

The Presidency of Sicily Region and the 'Fare Ambiente' Association have funded a study project, investigating the priority systems of the historical-rural landscape in Sicily and, in particular, the relationship between rural landscapes and traditional agricultural practices. The project that I coordinate expresses – together with other projects that are in the pipeline in Sicily - a change of direction not only in the political world, but also in academic circles, which show a fresh approach to the subject thanks to an increased interest in the themes of development of rural communities.

The new snares of aesthetization

Increasingly, there are calls for measures to be taken to stop the process of degradation of the rural world as we mentioned before. One has only to think of the efforts of the *World Heritage Convention* in dealing with landscape systems that are heavily shaped by human activities, whilst, on the other hand, the FAO acknowledges the importance of traditional agricultural practices –which are protected by the project GIAHS (Globally Important Ingenious Agricultural Heritage Systems) - for the future of human food stocks.

One sign of hope comes from the signing of the European Landscape Convention - ratified by Italy under law n. 14/2006-, which paves the way for the idea of multi-functionality in agriculture especially with reference to policies on environmental sustainability. Said law has been largely incorporated in the Rural Development Plans included in the new 2007/2013 planning period.

However conservation policies cannot avoid being development policies at the same time, aiming not only at projects for the well-being of the wider population, but also for the well-being of those living in rural areas, who quite naturally want to develop plans for their own future.

It soon becomes evident that the most viable opportunities are linked to tourism and the productive sectors, which can benefit from it. Over the last two decades, new types of sustainable tourism have emerged which are sensitive to local values and the sustainable use of cultural spaces and dimensions. Such tourism is a necessary starting point for uniting conservation and development.

It is to be highlighted, however, that the data we have regards only the use of park areas and nature reserves, which, by statute, are set up to identify territories of prominent nature value. And while their use for productive purposes must be strictly regulated, they can be made available for low-impact use (as explained by the recent theories about green and sustainable tourism and other related types).

Those territories often include rural and mountain communities with a high demographic value in Italy, and one cannot neglect the fact that the conflicts on the use of spaces have not fully settled, even if positive results have often stemmed from the utilization of substantial resources for the development of 'low-impact' activities to be integrated into virtuous economic lines of activity and combined with protection requirements.

However, it becomes harder to think about these issues when you try to combine all the agricultural and rural areas in this picture, with all their remarkable historical, cultural and landscape heritage to be preserved.

These contexts are extremely diversified from a territorial and socio-economic point of view, and they lack of those factors of appeal for tourism capable of ensuring their possible future revival.

Our current efforts are therefore focused on producing a catalogue of our agricultural areas of remarkable importance in relation to technological-productive and cultural traditions.

It is crucial, at the same time, that legislative initiatives be taken to redress the balance between the will to safeguard those characteristics and the fair claims of local populations for true development.

The ongoing research I mentioned before revealed how the profit margins of many agricultural practices are below any economic threshold in marginal areas and how the ageing of farmers - in the absence of generational turnover - will soon bring about the complete disappearance of any human presence in territories that can stir some interest only if they are looked at with an aesthetising approach.

The risk is that their attractive landscape values become a sort of golden dress on an agonising body. Both the urban culture - which expresses a deep yearning for and imagines worlds of mythical escape - and Western culture must take responsibility for their choices towards the countries of that forgotten agricultural third world, where the countryside is just synonymous with poverty.

Returning to the situation of the Sicilian rural world, we are confronted with the problem of how to ensure continuity to the existence of environments that can only be rescued from their inevitable disappearance through constant human intervention.

Without guardians, such an extraordinary reality of peasant traditions seems bound to be displayed to great effect in special museums, which today are glamorously called 'landscape museums'. It seems it has been forgotten, though, that the landscape cannot survive without peasants in a country like ours. And if these landscapes are inhabited, who can deny these communities the right to consider their future also in terms of innovation, that same innovation that has made them become contemporary in the course of history?

Our time is one of identities, of the comeback on the global stage - or first appearance - of subjectivities that have been forgotten or flattened by the creeping ethnocentrism of the Western world, which has succeeded in acknowledging the cultural dignity of the other, but has done little to make such acknowledgement concrete and operational.

We live in a time when subjectivities are willing to measure themselves against the world, but outside of well-established models; it is a time of 'plurals' against the absoluteness of 'singulars'; not the mass but individuals, not culture but cultures, not us and others, but all together and everywhere as pilgrims in pursuit of something capable of uniting us while cherishing our own self.

Our time needs powerful mediators enabling us to make it through this transition without traumas, helping us to bridge the gap between one world and the other, without experiencing the emptiness for the loss of those solid points of reference our certainties are rooted in. It is the time of research, and isn't tourism the never-ending quest for something different that can give us not only ephemeral sensations, but also values for us to strengthen our vocation for what is human?

We are confident that the powerful ethical drive behind a fresh concept of tourism - involving rural and marginal areas and having a strong relational component - will drive and support us for the epoch-making challenge ahead of us.

FROM AGRICULTURAL TO TOURIST PRODUCTION

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Abstract

This contribution starts off from taking account of the crisis in the agricultural sector. This sector has been “trivialised” by erroneous policies and market rules. However, at present the trend is changing: “demand for environment” is increasing, as well as the attempt of taking actions and policies favouring sustainable development. At the same time, notwithstanding the different meanings attached to the concept of sustainability, a wave of revaluation of rural areas is rising: the countryside is now considered as a source of local cultural values. Its exploitation as a tourist attraction, which is progressively taking off, is to be considered in this context.

Natural and cultural assets are acknowledged to be “tourist environment”, namely they are considered as a primary component of local promotion and development. This arises some relevant issues. Under this interpretation, the relationship between environment and tourism appears to be simultaneously conflicting and cooperative: natural and cultural assets are part of growth determinants and, at the same time, the growth tourism generates has a negative impact on them, sometimes even significant. Such an impact is not limited to the “use” tourists make of the attracting assets, but it is amplified in the valorisation process: in fact, this process tends to realise structures, infrastructures and services in the most sensitive areas, in order to improve their attractiveness. Rural landscape rightfully belongs to natural and cultural wealth to be preserved and enhanced for it contributes to reflecting the identity of local communities; it is imbued values and traditional know-now passed on from a generation to another: it may be claimed that it is the result of habits and knowledge. Facing the abandoning of fields and rural villages, in the light of what we have just mentioned, it seems vital to rescue the agricultural dimension of the landscape with a view to defending what remains of the traditional and identifying characters of the territory.

In this regard, new models of tourism can pave the way to the improvement of local architectural heritage and infrastructure. Furthermore, they can also favour the upgrading of the agricultural techniques towards higher qualitative standards. Vice versa, a multifunctional concept of “countryside” can play a significant role in making agriculture produce environmental externalities favouring the tourist sector.

Globalisation allows transnational actors to condition local development, which causes marked social and cultural changes. In this context, traditional policies and planning are hampered. This contribution also aims at exploring the potential of a shared process to move to a form of tourism grounded on the agricultural component of the countryside, highlighting that the inclusion of different stakeholders in the process cannot be put off. Moreover, such inclusion must not be considered as an anonym consensus building based on inertia: it needs to be a continuous self-feeding learning process constituting the cornerstone of a new planning method.

Key words: tourism, agriculture, local identity, multifunctionality, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

In recent years large part of tourist operators have been inevitably confronted with changes and diversification occurring in their sectors: in fact, an increasing number of tourists are looking for more sophisticated

ways of spending their free time, coupling luxury goods, and thereby enjoyment opportunities, with relax, well-being and local products. Unfortunately, nowadays the traditional productive role of agriculture is steadily and progressively ebbing away. On the other hand, much needed attention to environmental problems is arising. This trend obliges everybody operating in the tourist sector, be they professionals or technicians, to take over responsibilities they have so far neglected, and, at the same time, to work out novel immediate plans of actions. In this sense, the falling of the overproductive model requires alternatives enabling agricultural firms to operate profitably and in an environmentally sustainable way: a new investment model taking into account the specificities of local areas and cultures.

Here emerges a new type of awareness concerning the original specific character of the countryside, notwithstanding the plurality of phenomenologies and contexts. This new kind of awareness may be regarded as more pragmatic because the changes to be dealt with in the future are taken as inevitable; it is certainly more "philosophical", meaning that it has to do with a specific way of thinking of globality and market rigidities. In Europe, in particular, this awareness takes different forms; some linked to traditional institutions, others stemming from local experiences – the latter forms usually involve a large number of citizens. At the communitarian level great emphasis has been laid on supporting and enhancing agriculture as a multifunctional producer of positive environmental and landscape externalities, and, more generally, as a supplier of "public goods". Consequently, farmers have been abandoning traditional agricultural production in favour of organic farming and of direct selling of their product on their fields (this form of retail selling is bound to change the relationship between producers and buyers improving mutual awareness). At the same time, farmers have created and improved hosting facilities with a view to farm holidays and hicking in protected areas, in order to respond to the "demand for landscape" of people escaping from the cities. In such a way the accessibility to the countryside, its knowledge, both historical and environmental, and its aware fruition are improved.

It is useful here to specify that the contents of this paper refer mostly to the Italian context and experience.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The landscape, intended as open territory, is an issue that requires urgent tackling on the part of territorial sciences not only with reference to the safeguard of the environmental quality, but also with regard to the self-sustainability of the development models.

The integration of the environmental (ecosystemic) dimension with the economic (agricultural and food) dimension and cultural (historical, rural and social) dimension provides a new framework for the interpretation of the dynamics of the landscape. Moreover, it points out the need for new approaches to territorial planning: a significant change in the focus and the attitude towards the possible roles of agriculture and rural areas in general is essential.

So far no relevant action has been taken to contrast the constant impoverishment of the countryside, both in farming terms and in cultural terms. This is the result of the monoculture, which, in turn, has provoked the "monotonisation", or as would currently be said "globalisation", of the landscape. Furthermore, despite the soil nature and the local bioclimatic characteristics, technical progress has made it possible to grow species extraneous to the territorial contexts: consequently, agricultural productivity is no longer seasonal, but annual – products are no longer present on the market following seasonal cycles, but all the year round. In 1976 already, G. Samonà had the intuition that «the chief underlying problem in agriculture [was to be found] in the transformation of the prevailing production methods in order to respond to the economic, agronomic and ecologic demands, following an orientation towards the general needs of regional and national agriculture and economics»¹. This involutinal tendency of agriculture has not stopped so far, and it continues to bring about scourges difficult to remedy: water pollution; wasteful

soil exploitation; ecologic fragmentation hindering the setting, the survival and the evolution of animal and vegetal species; the impoverishment of the alimentary regime, due to the reduction in the number of food varieties grown and the loss of ancient *cultivar*. The concept of the agricultural landscape also has changed: from the concept of an environment characterised by biodiversity and considered as a synonym of life, to the concept of an environment more favourable to machines than to human beings, serving the market rather than society as a whole.

On the other hand, the idea that agriculture contributes to reflect local identity is more and more widely accepted: similarly to folklore (in its broadest meaning) and craftsmanship, agriculture reflects traditional values and know-how passed on from a generation to another. Not only are traditional local varieties the result ensuing from an adaptive response to environmental pressure, but also the cultural product deriving partially from a selection activity farmers have undertaken in order to privilege some peculiarities (for example, the shape, or the resistance, or the food quality, or the productivity) and to disregard other characteristics; partially from taming achieved through cultivation practices often socialised and shared in the local environment. Varieties, populations and clones from agricultural species may be defined as *traditional* whenever they have been in place continuously for generations in a particular area and whenever, in that particular area, they are known by name. They are passed on from a generation to the next as a result of family or communitarian customs. In fact, it is the passing on from a generation to the next which makes sense of the qualification of "traditional"². With regard to this aspect, the diffusion of a given cultivation and whether it has been adopted for two or more generations is immaterial: the existence of a specific name referring to it and its acknowledgement at the community level constitute in itself a piece of evidence of the local bound and of a relation made up of memory and identity.

In light of what just mentioned, it is, therefore, vital to rescue the agricultural and rural aspect of countryside in order to defend local traditions and values not yet erased by the vile interests of a handful of people. Moreover, small centres whose economy largely depends on agriculture have been seeing their population decline and age in that young people prefer to move to towns. This has two implications: firstly, younger generation do not fully replace older generations and consequently manpower is likely to exhaust; secondly, the manpower exhaustion is made up for by hiring other workers usually immigrants often underpaid.

The safeguard, also by means of norms and rules, and the consequent enhancement of rural areas thus become the first steps to be taken to preserve the countryside, that is to retain dwellers, to ensure high quality agricultural production, to prevent rural architecture from dilapidation and so forth. At the same time, they promote the countryside. This path, which has remained virtually not beaten so far, may constitute an incentive to the substitution of simplified agricultural systems (monoculture is a case in point) and meant for mass production (industrial-like plants such as greenhouses), with more complex systems. As is clear in many parts around the world, the latter systems are more "self-sustainable": in other terms, they require fewer inputs.

Reconverting the countryside into more complex agricultural ecosystems has a twofolded goal: to reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment, and to increase biodiversity. Such reconversion goes hand in glove with another tendency which has been taking off in recent years: the so-called *naturalistic tourism*. The "demand for environment" is on the increase. A larger and larger number of people feel the need of rediscovering cultural values and nature: for this purpose they choose areas other than towns, and rural areas in particular. Furthermore, nowadays the way in which tourists and hikers approach this quest for culture and nature is totally new: they try to establish relations with the context. In other terms, interaction characterises this form of tourism: to acquire knowledge has become a synonym for "friendship with " and "confidence about" the territory and local people. Visitors' attitude has also been changing: contrary to old forms of tourism, which were of a contemplative nature, modern tourism is more active, as a result of the interaction described above. This requires a change in paradigm as far as the intervention in the tourist

sector is concerned: it must account for the fact the concept of *tourist resource* has evolved. In this sense, combining all rural resources, spanning from agricultural products to ancient pathways, may trigger off virtuous processes conducive to self-sustainable development.

In the pursuit of this goal, rural villages, country houses and farms can play an important role: they constitute an opportunity to assign or restore new functions to buildings and to the territory, which can bring about opportunities for further development. Although rural villages are virtually all deserted nowadays, they used to be self-sufficient: they used to attract farmers and their families and to contribute to their welfare. Moreover, rural villages are usually located in fertile areas (whether naturally fertile or fertile as a result of drainage is immaterial) far from town centres. Consequently, they were built as modern small villages are: there was the school, the post office, the police station, the church and so forth. In brief, the main services making farmers' life comfortable were guaranteed. With a view to landscape planning, rural villages constitute the nodes of a dense network. We could call them "geographies of values", that is bits of the historical, architectural and natural wealth of the area, which contribute to the determination of the appearance of the territory and its *genius loci*³.

Although most of rural areas have been or are being abandoned, nothing could prevent them from acting as the cradle of future development. In the last fifteen years in Italy regional planning has focused on a twofolded objective: on the one hand, to extend nature reserves and parks, on the other hand, to support local historical traditions and folklore. This, however, is insufficient to strengthen the offer for tourists, which needs to be enhanced in other ways: it is not necessary to resort to completely new values or resources; what is necessary is to "re-invent" values and resources that already give the area its structure⁴. Furthermore, local development may also stem from new synergies deriving from the interaction of the tourist sector with the agricultural sector. In this perspective, farming can represent a further segment of tourist market: it is different enough from other forms of tourism that it can contribute to diversifying its supply and satisfy specific demands nobody have responded to so far. At the same time, tourism can improve the farming sector by causing the revival of local traditions, which were fading away, and enhancing qualitative standards.

Many studies and initiatives have been carried on to promote local values and qualitative standards. An offstanding one is to arrange "agricultural parks". These are areas dedicated to preserving and enhancing traditional traits of agricultural environment and landscape as well as their natural, semi-natural and traditional values. These goals are achieved by safeguarding, improving and enhancing all activities connected with farming and forestry for they are tightly linked to restoring the natural and aesthetic potential of the countryside, and allowing its educational, cultural and scientific fruition and recreation. Besides, the attempt to preserve the traditional appearance of rural areas prevents people from spoiling the environment. This is strengthened by the evidence that nowadays agriculture is no longer an activity producing primary goods, but also a sustainable activity from an ecological point of view. Moreover, tourism has discovered homesteads, hamlets and farm-houses; at this point, agricultural industry aims straight to high-quality typical products (spanning from Pachino tomatoes to Borbona beans, Castelluccio lentils, Navelli saffron, Alba truffles, Reggio Calabria bergamots). On the other hand, stock-farming has taken an opposite direction abandoning meadowlands and pastures and being concentrated – not only functionally - in few cowsheds. As explained above, the struggle for efficiency and for time and cost reduction has eradicated biological rhythms and cycles both with regard to vegetable and animal species. In this context the concept of *multifunctionality* plays a prominent role. Multifunctionality means the collection of contributions which the agricultural sector can give to the total social and economic welfare, and which society acknowledges as deriving from agriculture. Such contributions can either be on the product side, like biofuel, or on the service provision side, like tourist and recreational activities, pedagogic and educational activities, and reviving rural values. In order for multifunctionality to work in rural context, be they periurban or not, it is crucial that public authorities recognise farming's contribution

to total welfare and that a sufficient amount of resources is dedicated to the implementation of these policies so as to give stimulus and support to innovation in agriculture. For example, agricultural products can be characterised and differentiated, production techniques can be improved in order to produce top-quality products, and so on. This is also the approach European Community has embraced: contrary to the past, current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) appears to promote agricultural differentiation both in terms of variety and in terms cultivation techniques⁵. With regard to the innovative policies introducing multifunctional agriculture in Italy, it is worth mentioning the act for “the modernisation in the agricultural sector” issued in 2001. This explicitly recognises the important role of externality producer farming has and puts forward forms of contracts and statutes which can be adopted to acknowledge the relevance of farmers and farming.

The most recent CAP reforms are clear to have acquired full awareness of the ecological, ethic, aesthetic and economic value of environmental equilibria and of the territory as the object in itself for future development in that any form of sectoral intervention appears to be inadequate. Besides, CAP current interventions and provisions seem to aim at checking the risks I have mentioned above, by strengthening the measures in the structural funds and directly involving local communities. The very rediscovery of the value of the environmental and cultural wealth particular to the single regions is carried out through incentive plans and measures which are designed at international level, as far as European countries are concerned, and are implemented at local level by means of the so-called *Rural Development Plans*, which every region adopts within any Member State. Therefore, we are witnessing the renaissance of a concept of environment which goes beyond present and immediate needs and, with an international perspective, looks to the safeguard of natural resources and potential as well as farmers’ and consumers’ health. A new space-time relation has been born a new season for agriculture has begun. The primary sector is now undergoing a profound revolution: it has understood the problems connected to sustainability and is moving towards a new phase which was unknown to operators from just one generation ago. There emerge the need of operating being aware of the past, and the worry for future generations: this is a season which forces the new CAP to deal with globalisation and regionalisation⁶. Actually, the targets regional, national and international agricultural policies aim at have already changed radically. After forty years during which incentives were given to the competitive quantity production, the tendency is now to aim at high quality. After years of reforms supporting the farm production sector and farms, the territory has been rediscovered, the concerns related to its complexity as a whole are taken into account and the relevance of structural funds is increasing. This implies that a new epoch for agriculture has begun, characterised by the rediscovery of its function as the warrantor of sustainable development and territorial enhancement. This implies, lastly, that nowadays it is vital to refer to rural development sustainability also in terms of intervention policies on primary sector.

In order for these targets to be attained, it is essential that the local community nurtures the development programme. In fact, it must be the pivot of the whole process. It is the local community as a whole which freely accepts to realise a system for hosting and taking care of tourists, for them to enjoy fully of the rural atmosphere. This process requires all-over participation, and is essentially grounded in a bottom-up project. When these conditions are met, the outcome is successful: more and more evidence of a positive trend is found in the increasing number of entrepreneurial activities and in the participation level of local communities in enhancing the service supply in rural areas. In such a way, not only is the local community the promoter, but also it is active as a protagonist in the development of sustainable and socially responsible tourism on its territory, precisely as responsible tourism is defined by the *Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile* (AITR).

It is clear from these considerations that it is urgent to implement functional policies with broad and specific objectives. Such policies need to aim at a plurality of issues: actively preserving countryside resources (the architectural and historical heritage and natural and naturalistic wealth); restoring and

enhancing quality of degraded areas, preserving the soil and promoting tourism, recreational, cultural and educational activities in order to trigger a virtuous process ending up increasing the service supply of rural areas. Actions aiming at actively preserving the countryside may be to give incentives to farmers to commit to higher quality crops, possibly by means of the introduction of a specific label signalling superior quality; to safeguard cultural (either physical or not) and biological differences; to preserve the historical agricultural texture and to restore existing infrastructure and facilities connected to it; to guarantee enough support structures to hosting services, and research and educational activities. Within these macropolicies aiming at preserving and restoring the countryside, action can be taken to tackle specific problems: for example, to check or eliminate polluting factors (degrading air, water, etc.), to requalify areas spoilt by human activities (mines, dumps, etc.). As far as the activities aiming at the fruition of the countryside, they span from finding new marketing strategies to promote the territory, the support to local entrepreneurship, the organisation of systems promoting the fruition of the landscape, training operators, guides and so forth. In Italy, for instance, the so-called "wine routes" show how it is possible to enhance the appeal of the territory, starting from natural resources and guaranteeing hospitality to tourists, although they are by no mean the highest target to aim at.

This development model requires that programmes be shared by all the relevant members belonging to the community. At the same time, it is crucial that they indicate beforehand what scenarios they want to pursue and which the vocation of each area is – obviously this depends on the natural characteristics of the territory. Such vocations can be recreational activities, environment safeguard, preserving natural resources and ecological connectivity. After this stage, these programmes must spell out their financial aspect: where resources are taken from. Lastly but not least importantly, stakeholders must be determined: they are the essential ingredient to implement any strategy of sustainable development.

¹ Samonà G. (1976), *La città in estensione: conferenza tenuta presso la Facoltà di Architettura di Palermo il 25 maggio 1976*, STASS, Palermo, p. 4.

² Aversa D. (2003), *L'agricoltura tra identità locale e globalizzazione*, Aracne, Roma, p. 44.

³ Corna Pellegrini G. (2004), *Geografia dei valori culturali: modelli e studi*, Carocci, Roma, p. 25.

⁴ Mac Cannell D. (1974), *The Tourist: a new Theory of the Leisure Class*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, p. 79.

⁵ Grillotti Di Giacomo M.G. (2003), "La riscoperta del territorio e della geografia nella più recente evoluzione della Politica Agricola Comunitaria", in *Bollettino Società Geografica Italiana*, s. XII, v. VIII, Società Geografica Italiana, Roma, pp. 627-646.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

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**CRUCIAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR CLUSTERS IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL TOURISM:
LESSONS FROM THE GREEK EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract

The tourism industry is characterised by a highly competitive global market. An increasingly predominant mode of organisation of a thematic destination comprises a network or cluster of tourism-related businesses (Lazzeretti & Petrillo 2006). Research suggests that networks and clusters can provide a framework for small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) - which do not possess either the resources or organizational capabilities to survive on their own - with opportunities to operate in this competitive environment. One of the most exciting developments in tourism in the 1990s was the development of new forms of partnership based on shared participation in the tourism management and marketing processes at destinations (Middleton 2002). The challenges facing tourism businesses in rural areas have long been recognised, among others by Wilson et. al. 2001, Hall 2005, Sharpley 2005. The significant role that proactive partnership between public and private sectors can play has been stressed by several authors (e.g. Middleton 2002); and for many years, these partnerships were a favoured method of addressing the problems faced by SMTEs in a highly competitive market. More recently, however, attention has focused on the contribution of clusters/networks as a means of generating positive economies for tourism businesses and regional competitiveness (Porter 1998, Poon 2002). The literature suggests that clusters and networks are efficient management and marketing tools. They are becoming increasingly important as destinations and regions seek to increase still further their share of the tourism market. The linkages within the private sector are important because of the nature of the overall tourism product, which is an amalgam of multiple services/products supplied by a range of businesses. The more mature the market the greater the incentive for individual actors at destinations to seek the benefits of partnership or alliance synergy.

A review of the literature on the contribution of clusters to tourism destination management and marketing is followed by two case studies of rural tourism-related projects in Greece. The 'Land of Psiloritis' is a geographical cluster in Crete and 'Wine Roads of Northern Greece' is a thematic and geographical cluster. These case studies focus on the main management and marketing issues. The paper concludes by identifying the factors crucial to the success of these rural tourism business clusters and networks, and provides recommendations for local planners and destination managers to enable them to successfully operate such alliances.

Key words: Clusters & Networks; Rural tourism; Crucial Success Factors; Greece; Case study.

INTRODUCTION

The global market does not longer involve single businesses, but it rather consists of geographical or

thematic destinations composed by a network or cluster of tourism related operations (Lazzeretti & Petrillo 2006). Research suggests that clusters can be used as framework providing small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) with opportunities to operate in a competitive tourism environment. The most exciting development in tourism in the 1990s is new forms of partnerships which are based on shared participation in the tourism management and marketing processes at destinations (Middleton 2002). The challenges facing tourism businesses in rural areas have long been recognised (among others Wilson et al. 2001, Sharpley 2005). For many years the proactive partnerships between public and private sectors were a favoured method of addressing the problems faced by SMTEs. More recently, however, attention has been increasingly focused on the contribution of clusters as a means of generating positive economies for tourism businesses and regional competitiveness (Porter 1998, Poon 2002). Clusters and networks are becoming increasingly important as destinations are becoming more competitive in the tourism market for a market share. The linkages within the private sector are important because of the nature of overall tourism products which are an amalgam of multiple components supplied by a range of businesses. The purpose of this paper is to explore the factors associated with the success of clusters in the context of rural tourism. The paper commences with a brief review of the literature and is followed by a discussion of two rural tourism-related projects in Greece. The paper concludes by identifying the factors crucial to the success of rural tourism business clusters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism is a highly diverse and fragmented industry; this statement also stands for rural tourism which is generally regarded as including a wide variety of tourist accommodation, activities, events, festivities, sports and recreation, all being developed in an area characterised as being rural. It might be suggested that rural tourism is a concept which includes all tourist activity in rural areas (Soteriades & Varvaressos 2002). It should be noted that the definition of rural tourism must be from a visitor's experiential perspective. The 'experience' of rural destination is definitely more important than specific attractions and products. The challenge for rural tourism businesses is to produce the right product at the high level of quality sought by this clientele, and to market it professionally. Thus, rural tourism is, simultaneously a form of consumer behaviour and strategy by which destinations develop and market rural-related attractions and imagery. A cluster is simply a collection of businesses or industries within a particular region that are interconnected by their products, their markets and other businesses with which they interact. Porter defines clusters as 'geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (for example, universities and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also co-operate' (Porter 1998, 197). A cluster is a progressive form of business network, which has strong business objectives focusing on improving sales and profits (European Commission 2003). In essence, clusters are characterised by a variety of participants and involve commitment by members to a set of common goals. Clusters and networks are vital for regional development increasing the performance, innovative capacity and local businesses' critical mass.

Clusters and Networks in tourism industry: are said to involve several benefits including economies of scale; a focus on cooperation and innovation; increased synergies and productivity; knowledge transfer; joint marketing; increased competitiveness. All these create opportunities for synergy and mutual reinforcement to achieve the main aim of a destination that is a rewarding holiday experience for its visitors (Michael 2003, Poon 2002, Saxena 2005). Research indicates that network building is a major new source of competitive advantage and an essential regional and global management requirement. Recent studies (e.g. Hall 2005, Michael 2003, Novelli et al. 2006, Saxena 2005, Tinsley & Lynch 2007) address in more depth the implications of clusters and networks formations in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Michael (2003) highlights the importance of the 'structure' and focuses on the 'creation of economic and social

opportunities in small communities through the development of clusters of complementary firms that can collectively deliver a bundle of attributes to make up a specialised regional product' (Michael 2003, 3). Hence, clusters are considered as being efficient management and marketing tools for rural destinations. These tools however, must be used in appropriate manner in order to contribute at achieving sustainable tourism development and related business objectives (Kokkonen & Tuohino 2007, Tinsley & Lynch 2007). It has been stressed that there is no logical alternative to the development of local partnership. Considering that through a cluster, a group of SMEs can compete globally by co-operating locally; networks and clusters in tourism have experienced a dramatic growth, bringing several benefits (Saxena 2005). The purpose of tourism clusters is to highlight the availability of certain activities in one destination or region and to get SMEs that would normally work in isolation to co-operate and build a successful tourism product in the locality. It is exactly because of this fragmentation that all actors taking part in the value-chain should deal with issues such as integration, collaboration, networking of their activities (Poon 2002). Nowadays tourists desire and expect a series of services that allows multiple options and a package offering opportunities of 'experiences'. The destination's value-chain is thus reflected in all its elements. This approach requires cooperation and networking between the key components. Lemmetyinen & Go (2009) suggested that the development of tourism business networks might be considered as a system in which every participant contribute with its own capabilities. The authors suggested that the coordination of cooperative activities in tourism business clusters is identified as a prerequisite for enhancing the value-creation process and building the brand-identity process across the cluster. Another study (Kokkonen & Tuohino 2007) analysed SMTEs innovation processes and networking dynamics. It was confirmed that innovation in SMTE networks was a synthetic process consisting of product, process and resource innovation.

Tourism clusters' contribution: The valuable contribution of tourism clusters has been investigated and stressed in several contexts. Firstly, in regional and virtual networking, and in destination marketing (Soteriades & Avgeli 2007). ICTs support the effectiveness of business networks and encourage closer collaboration (Buhalis 2005). The Internet allows the creation of virtual enterprises in which ICTs provide the linkages, especially networks for micro-businesses. It is suggested that SMTEs benefit from increased information flow through regional networking, to enhance market visibility, global positioning, and strategic leverage (Hitz et al. 2006). The development of the tourism portal www.purenz.com is a good example of the multilateral alliances and cooperative effort required in order to market New Zealand as a tourism destination (Bhat 2004). Secondly, literature on event management has acknowledged the importance of building relationships with other actors within the context of event tourism (e.g. Getz et al. 2007) and convention tourism (Bernini 2009). The case study of Lismore in Australia (Mackellar 2006) demonstrates that festival activities and events allowed local growers and interstate visitors to discover new interconnections between gastronomy and other economic industries. It has been suggested that in a network having stable, long-term, and trustworthy relationships the operational uncertainty decreases and, consequently, the internal efficiency increase. Wine tourism is another context that has been cited as an example of successful development of clusters (e.g. Hall 2005). According to Getz and Brown (2006) collaboration is needed to facilitate the wine tourism experience, involving destination marketing/management organizations, the wine and tourism industries, cultural and other recreational suppliers. Finally, a cluster in spa & health tourism has been investigated by Novelli et al. (2006). The UK 'Healthy Lifestyle Tourism Cluster' experience was employed to analyse the process and the implication of cluster development in tourism. Their study suggested that the development of clusters should not be seen as a simple and spontaneous process due to the nature of businesses involved, but as a very complex process linked to strong stakeholder collaboration.

Clusters' activities: Given that tourists are seeking a rewarding holiday experience, effort should be put into identifying the opportunities for synergy and mutual reinforcement. The success of a destination in terms of tourists' satisfaction is a function of several interdependent components.

Therefore, activities of clusters are implemented into two main areas: (i) Management: clustering contributes to enhance collaboration; develop local knowledge of tourism; knowledge management and knowledge-sharing activities; share expertise; innovate; and monitor the results achieved; (ii) Marketing: All variables marketing mix and communication tools, e.g. product development and formulation (value-chain and innovation); market research; market segmentation; branding; promotion; and relationship marketing would be positively influenced by the synergy created through coordinating them within one management team (Fyall & Garrod 2005). The contribution of ICTs to the above businesses/destinations activities has been highlighted by various authors (e.g. Buhalis 2005, Hitz et al. 2006). Electronic business networks have the potential to unite local stakeholders within a local / regional network to address various problems.

During 90s and this decade clustering and networking projects have been performed all over Europe. Within this context, a number of initiatives have been undertaken and projects have been conducted in the field of rural tourism in Greece. These projects are mainly aiming at enhancing competitiveness and supporting efficiency of rural tourism business. Following a brief discussion of the study's methodology, two of these projects are analysed in this paper in order to explore and highlight the factors contributing to the successful operations of such projects.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The research employed a collective/multiple case study methodology. A case study is an empirical inquiry that 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (Yin 1984, 23). Relevant data are gathered through the use of multiple sources including observations, interviews and narrative reports (Yin 2003). The objective of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the success factors of clusters. It is based primarily on documentary evidence derived from a number of sources, including soft and hard copies of informational reports, private papers, visual documents, and promotional material of rural business clusters. Documentary data to borrow a phrase from Hammersley & Atkinson (1995, 173) provide 'a rich vein for analysis'. Moreover data was collected through semi-structured interviews with four coordinators of business clusters.

The research examined two projects, the rationale being that this should produce insights into what is 'good practice' in clusters of tourism enterprises. Current knowledge in this area is either incomplete or shallow (Soteriades & Varvaressos 2002). Hopefully, however, the two cases studies discussed in this paper will contribute to our understanding of the factors involved in the success of tourism business clusters.

A Case Study: Two Projects:

Past studies show that many rural communities have to compete with the increasing number of regions that try to enter the tourism market, making the identification of a unique portfolio of indoor and outdoor activities the only way forward. It is suggested that the best way to stay competitive is through the reinforcement of existing networks and the formation of clusters in which knowledge, expertise and entrepreneurial ideas are exchanged in order to build a sustainable rural tourism portfolio (Wilson et al. 2001, Soteriades & Varvaressos 2002). Within this framework, it is very interesting to explore the factors and dimensions of clusters and networks that have been developed in order to draw a number of suggestions for destination managers. For the purposes of this study two clusters are examined: (i) the 'Land of Psiloritis', a geographical cluster in Crete; and (ii) the 'Wine Roads of Northern Greece', a thematic and geographical cluster. The two clusters are examined in terms of the following characteristics: actors, activities, structure and achievements and problems. These are discussed in the following sections.

The 'Land of Psiloritis', a geographical cluster in Crete

Profile: The cluster "Land of Psiloritis" has been created by businesses, bodies and agencies sharing a common aim (www.idinet.gr), namely to preserve, develop and promote the area's special identity, using concerted actions which are focusing on the development and promotion of rural tourism products. The cluster has been established since 2005 with a formal structure as a limited company. Its stakeholders are organizations and enterprises from different industries: rural holiday accommodation, catering, farmers, food producers, trade, cultural agencies. The local action programme of the European Initiative Leader+ contributed a financial back-up, covering particular operational expenses. The cluster's members are forty four (see Table 1).

Table 1. Partners of cluster 'Land of Psiloritis'

Industry / Activity	Partners	
	Number	Distribution (%)
Restaurants/ Catering	11	25%
Accommodation	12	27.3%
Alternative tourism – Travel agency	1	2.3%
Food and beverage producers/ manufacturers	14	31.7%
Popular art, traditional, handicrafts	5	11.4%
Development and culture agencies	1	2.3%
Total	44	100%

Aim, Objectives and Activities: its main aim is the dedication of a product or service to sustaining quality brand name. This task is achieved through the cooperation of AKOMM (a local development agency), the financial support of Leader+ local programme, and the transfer of know-how and experience via trans-regional collaboration. The accumulated experience within local and interregional networking has enhanced the introduction of shared interests and mutual benefits. Hence, it would be very useful to sustainable development and management of rural tourism businesses. The cluster's objective consists of offering a concrete expression and entrepreneurial form to all productive activities within the area of Psiloritis, by undertaking actions such as: provide technical advice and consulting services to its members; support with the promotion of their local products/services through their participation to exhibitions and trade fairs; clustering with local stakeholders; and implementing pilot and innovative projects and activities. One of the cluster's main outcomes is the local brand name 'Psiloritis Crete'. This is inspired from all the shepherd's houses that a visitor can only meet in Psiloritis area (central mountainous area of Crete). Economic aspects of the brand name actions are (i) to refer to products and services produced and offered within the area; (ii) to enhance local enterprises and agencies to collaborate in order to achieve sustainable development; and (iii) establish inter-linkages between local produce and gastronomy. The cluster's website has become a commercial tool for reaching potential visitors.

Wine Roads of Northern Greece, a thematic and geographical cluster

Background and Profile: This cluster is an interregional partnership between the Wine Producers Association of the Northern Greece Vineyard, local development agencies and a local administration authority (www.wineroads.gr). The Association was set up in 1993 by the name 'Wine Producers Association of the Macedonian Vineyard' as a not-for-profit non-stock corporation by the joint efforts of the 13 members of the Association. In 2002, wineries from Epirus and Thrace joined the Association, and this new alliance was renamed as the 'Wine Producers Association of the Northern Greece Vineyard' with the trade name 'Wine Roads of Northern Greece'. Today, the forty five wineries that have joined forces within the association, have directed part of their corporate activity towards a set of common objectives.

These include:

- Building up the image of the wines of Northern Greece Vineyards, and promoting their products.
- Offering visitors an all-round wine tourism product/experience of vineyards and landscapes of Northern Greece.
- Supporting Northern Greece's cultural heritage, by focusing primarily on grape growing and wine and on local cultural activities.
- Participating in the formulation of general rules governing the relations between growers, wine-makers and wine merchants, with a view to optimising cooperation, improving the quality of both products and services, and consumers' experience.

The cluster is actively involved in activities related to the above objectives. Activities include marking and signposting wine trails for tourists to follow, providing them with information on places of interest. Other activities such as publishing books on local gastronomy, organising gastronomic and cultural events aim at generating more tourist interest. In 2007 the network of the Wine Roads of Northern Greece grew to include selected hotels, restaurants, local produce and outdoor activities businesses. Hence, it has become a cluster, an alliance in order to collectively create a framework for the support of the region's cultural and gastronomic tradition. The project consists of interlinking, on one hand, professionals of accommodation, catering and local producers, and on the other, wineries and vineyards as tourist attractions. It should be noted here that the selection of all partners for joining the cluster is based on specific qualitative criteria indicating a special seal of approval. A synoptic image is shown into Table 2.

Table 2 – Wine roads Cluster's Partners

Industry/ Activity	Number	Distribution %
Wineries	45	26.9
Catering (Restaurants – Cafés)	49	29.4
Accommodation	51	30.5
Local products and handicraft producers	19	11.4
Entertainment and recreational activities	3	1.8
Total	167	100

Aim, Objectives and Activities: The main aim of the cluster is to develop themed rural products in order to attract visitors in Northern Greece. Consequently, it is an initiative seeking to capitalise existing investments for projects already deployed; in other words, to trace new itineraries and to enlarge wine routes developed within the framework of European Initiative Leader II. These themed products interlink wineries and vineyard domains to tourism attractions, as well as to tourism-related business creating an added-value for professionals and rendering the region more attractive to potential visitors. This product concept is known all over the world. In fact, routes of wine are really a series of recommended itineraries selected for the curious traveller interested in visiting this region. Recommended routes to visitors include, Olympian Gods, Epirus, Naoussa, Pella – Goumenissa, Lakes, Thessaloniki, Dionysus, and Khalkidhiki. Trips last three-four days and are flexible in that visitors can design their own holiday itinerary to experience the traditional culture. A trip along the 'Wine Roads' promises the visitor a great experience of wine tasting and culinary delights. Furthermore, through hosting and entertaining promotional events, the cluster plays a leading role in supporting the Northern Greek vineyard.

Results: Achievements and Problems

The formation of clusters is routed in the desire of rural communities to create a more viable set of tourism

opportunities. Benefits resulted from networking include: sharing of ideas, knowledge transfer, skills enhancement, establishing inter-linkages between local produce and gastronomy, and efficient marketing and branding. From a business perspective, the two clusters have produced significant benefits for those SMEs used to working in isolation, which now co-operate with other local businesses.

Their alliances have been generating improved quality of services and enhanced the visibility of SMEs. Furthermore, they have created synergies: commercial collaboration is one of the most obvious outputs, as well as voluntary arrangement of business referrals. Through the cluster, rural operations are encouraged to operate in a progressive form of business network (cluster) in order to work for their own interests (improved sales and profits) and for the visitors/customers benefits (improved product/experience).

From the foregoing analysis it can be seen that the two Greek clusters have the three basic features as identified by Roberts & Hall (2001). Both clusters: (i) have partners who share common objectives and mutual benefits; (ii) create synergy between the partners concerning activities carried out in local and regional level; and (iii) enhance the previous actions. Within this clustering framework, the activities undertaken are into management and marketing (product design and development) fields, and some themed products – wine routes and gastronomic trails - have been developed. These activities are common to the networked areas. One of the main achievements of the examined projects is the introduction of innovative procedures concerning the promotion of rural tourism business, the improvement of supply, capabilities including knowledge transfer; experience and information exchange and joint marketing actions.

However, our study suggests the problems are there. The fragmented nature and predominance of very small tourism enterprises and the weak relational ties between actors makes it difficult for an industry network to be self-supporting. The clusters offer some solutions to some of the immediate needs of the partners, but the difficulty is keeping the members motivated for the long-term objectives - growth and economic benefits. It often seems that the short-term results are valued more than the long-term prospects. Another problem is the retention of skills and the quality of the local supply chain. The local industry is characterised by relative weak and unstable relations. Since the cluster's main aim is to generate businesses and market diversification, the value-chain needs to be established and enriched. Enormous efforts have been made by coordinators to keep members interested by contributing to the cluster activities, which in a way stressed the importance of a joint effort. Lack of leadership and lack of shared commitment and enthusiasm was also evident. One of the key findings of our study is that there is a need for strong leadership in order to strengthen further relational ties between members. Clusters lack research information to set and monitor realistic targets, mostly they do not involve local businesses in the process of setting and achieving agreed targets. Last but not least, the examined clusters do not take full advantage of the tools and possibilities provided by ICTs, mainly the Web 2.0. Clusters have to address the above problems and face the challenges; otherwise they will have dysfunctions resulting in ineffectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS: CRUCIAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study has shown that these local alliances can help in the innovation process of rural tourism businesses, and can contribute to regional development, through the simple results produced by cluster activities. The study's conclusions are twofold. Firstly, two crucial issues and a major challenge suggested by related research have been confirmed: (i) it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach to clustering in order to consistently ensure higher standards of product delivery at destinations and to appeal to ever more demanding customers. This approach effectively enhances the special intrinsic qualities and character of 'place' at a destination, both for its own sake and as a core element of its attractiveness to visitors; (ii) there is also a requirement for efficient management of local clusters (i.e., leadership and clear rules of conduct). Within this framework, a much-improved research effort is needed to provide management information for decision-making in order to achieve desirable marketing outcomes; (iii) the challenge is to create a

customer focus bounded by knowledge management and driven by innovation and personal service. Secondly, the study highlights those factors which influence the effectiveness of clusters at local destination level and in rural tourism contexts. These are: (i) participation of both public and private sectors is essential.

The optimum route to effective management and marketing lies somewhere between the resource responsibility and orientation of the public sector and the asset responsibility and market orientation of the private sector; (ii) a clear cluster structure (relationships and responsibilities of members) is required and a common platform of interests should be developed. There is also a need to consider informal relationships among local stakeholders and partners; (iii) the characteristics of partners, in terms of their expertise and professionalism have important ramifications for the cluster's cohesiveness and the development of shared views; (iv) additionally, shared commitment, collective action, and continuity must be strong features of the cluster; (v) the geographical qualities of the cluster have significant implications for collaboration, harmony and agenda setting in the alliance. It is suggested that a theme (e.g. wine or other distinct local produce, experience quality) may be the driving force to attain improved outcomes. However, it should be stressed that our study encompasses some limitations. The method used is a case study and further testing with other cases would confirm and highlight crucial success factors. The present study tended to describe rural tourism business network's structure and activities. Findings cannot be generalized to any specific project or geographical area. Further investigation is needed to make it more robust. More extensive empirical work is needed to investigate the dimensions and aspects of clusters. Hence, there is a need to understand the dynamics of clusters and to develop appropriate strategies for their management.

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