

After the pandemic. A 4.0 model for the recovery of the Cultural tourism

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Abstract

Tourism has been progressively characterized to an increasingly marked extent by two important transformation processes: one relating to the broader number of subjects who aspire to create a travel experience; the other connected to the increasingly experiential nature of the travel. The current health emergency linked to the spread of the Covid19 virus has deeply modified this trend, which has been increasing over the past twenty years. The need to guarantee the health safe of travellers has today and in the future a first-rate impact not only on the conditions for traveling, but also on the destinations of the trips. The core of the tourist offer even immediately before the pandemic: cities of art, trips organized for groups, stays in large residences and holiday villages, offers of "indoor" places such as museums, churches, royal and noble residences, all of them today are experiencing a profound and unprecedented crisis due to the difficulty of managing significant problems related to safe access. On the other side, the necessary health measures are fostering the increase of a different tourist experience model more oriented towards innovative trends, closely related to cultural and landscape use. Consequently, what today, even rightly, still perceived as an element with a devastating impact for the entire national economic system related to tourism, the same may represent the opportunity to generate a push towards experiential directions underestimated in their potential, despite there are successful practices in almost all top-level European tourism contexts. An opportunity to clear customs especially those territories and those tour operators in inland areas (but not only...), which had already started a process of enhancement initially aimed at a more niche audience, but which could now represent an important strategic resource not only for them, as it would be able to generate significant development in areas often facing depopulation. This paper identifies and discusses the traits that characterize some good practices of slow tourism offered by operators in the Apulian and Lucanian regions, as well as the critical issues that hinder the conditions of recovery, albeit difficult and partial.

1 INTRODUZIONE

In Italy, for long time tourism has lead to economic development for many regional economies. In this scenario, heritage-driven cultural tourism plays an outstanding role, by exploiting the history, art, and culture of territories, Strategic Plan for Tourism, (<https://www.turismo.beniculturali.it/home-piano-strategico-del-turismo>), representing an increasingly focal experience in the lives of an increasing number of people. Starting in the 1960s, it became a mass phenomenon, also characterized by niche cultures and new sensitivities that have been progressively gaining ground, such as the one related to its *slow* and sustainable character, and it has progressively taken on the features of a complex and extremely differentiated phenomenon.

Tourists that are more and more self-directed and able to organize increasing numbers of *Fit (Free Independent Travel)* trips without the mediation of travel agencies, *low cost* flights and multiplied routes in many airports, the birth of *low cost* accommodation facilities, too - including *b&b*'s and, more recently, *house-swapping* specialized agencies - have allowed for inexpensive trips "within reach" of large numbers of people, as evidenced by the increases in the number of travellers and by the emergence of a widespread phenomenon of *over-tourism*, which often interferes with the fragile balance of places, by jeopardizing their environmental and social stability (Christin 2019; Mancuso 2019). Even today, tourist demand continues to generate profound changes in the areas of destination, altering their features and wearing out places.

Such a quantitative change was sided up by a profound quality transformation of the very idea of travel, which has been increasingly understood as a quest for experience, as evidenced by the recent literature on tourism, that focused on themes such as emotions, sensory experience, intangible elements, ethical choices, authenticity, protection of places and sustainability of routes.

An increasingly widespread ecological sensitivity has been gaining ground, which leads towards forms of sustainable tourism that try to reduce the impact on territories, the “ecological footprint” of travel considered like any other product, and that aim at using territories, including urban ones, limiting the negative externalities normally implied by the tourist experience (King & McCarthy Aurifeille, 2019). The UNWTO, retracing the programming political support document developed by UNEP and by UNWTO itself, underlined how sustainable tourism must: a) achieve the optimal use of *environmental resources*, a key element for the development of tourism system(s); b) respect the “social and cultural authenticity” of the communities of reference; c) support long-term sustainable *economic development* processes, which bring social and economic benefits to all the *stakeholders* in the communities of reference.

More and more often, tourists travel complying with a sort of *intellectual project*, looking not only for an escape from everyday spaces, but experiencing travel <<as a de-localization of leisure time with respect to the spaces of ordinary time and its temporary relocalization>> (Savelli 2004, 12), looking for the experiences and emotions that places may induce. The effect of this process of change was one of a growing centrality that the territory and its cultural heritage have taken on as a both current and potential economic resource to invest upon, in view of multilevel and multi-character strategies for the development and growth of the territories themselves.

The potential of the proposed approach finds full confirmation in the latest Federculture Annual Report (2019) which - besides offering a rich and well-structured picture of the cultural system in terms of impacts and value, threats and opportunities, services and actors - highlights the meta-sector value of the “culture system” (from creative enterprises to tourist accommodation opportunities) and the related potential and impact on the Country system, especially in an integrated vision of planning and intervention. The attention to intangible culture, landscapes, hidden corners, typical alleys, food, and the very atmosphere of places meant. Cities, and not only the so-called cities of art, have progressively acquired a new and higher level of attractiveness, not as mere containers of resources, but as attractive places in themselves (Guerisoli & Colleoni 2014; Marra 2006).

The search for the meaning of places, for the emotions they may arouse, for the experiences they may induce, gave a new centrality to the pace of tourism itself. Slowness becomes the key to the possibility of experiencing places. The *new tourist slows the pace down* by taking the time for a glance and for a sensorial immersion that allows for a full experience of the urban habitat and for the discovery of its unusual and unexpected features, living the journey as an opportunity for intimate, cultural, transformative experiences (Amendola 2013; Sgroi 2002). Beyond the low environmental impact, *slow tourism* becomes the form of mobility typical of experiential tourism.

New tourists, guided by their own imaginary of places, go looking for what is *different*, authentic, particular: they become more and more *interstitial* travellers, constantly looking for space and time intervals which are still free within the universe of travelling (Urbain 2003). They are on the lookout for “off-season” destinations, for “micro-deserts”, abandoned countryside, ignored networks, forgotten exoticisms (*Ibidem*), for the hidden corners of cities, for a *lesser* artistic heritage, for what is *besides* classic destinations or for what is classic in those destinations. The imaginary is not a simple reflecting surface but, as many scholars now claim, it is a productive principle of reality. Whether knowingly or not, our experience is filtered by the imaginary. The imaginary of places, either collective or individual, is affected by literary narrations, those deriving from journalistic news and travel magazines, films, and more and more often, from the stories by those who visited those places and who talk about them on social networks through posts and photos. Everything creates that sort of widespread idea of places that heavily influences their level of attractiveness (Aime & Papotti 2012; Avallone 2019; Marra & Ruspini 2010; Menagaldo H. et G., 2007; Salazar 2009; Savelli 2004). Such a growing request for occasions to make experience, of possibilities to live places emotionally, has progressively re-aligned the model of the offer outlined by the various territories to create an imaginary that can represent them, making them desirable and attractive (Aime & Papotti 2012; Bouchard 2014, 2018), and to comply with the wishes of potential tourists. Within these processes of national and international territorial marketing, territories have reacted through the spectacularization of the experience to offer to their “audience”, trying to exploit their more characteristic features, their history, their places, their atmospheres. Identity has become a powerful factor of attraction which is translated not only into events, historical parades, art manifestations, but also into the choices of regeneration of historical centres, in the offer of b&b’s or of widespread hotels innervated through ancient villages or through particularly evocative places. As a consequence, it is not so much the endowment of historical, artistic and architectural heritage of a territory, that has become central, but the territory’s ability to enhance its *cultural and historical heritage*, developing active strategies and policies to manage complexity (Dioguardi 2017) and the exploitation of their own identity and of the memory preserved by places.

2 The years of increase of cultural tourism in Italy

In Italy, the lockdown imposed from the beginning of March 2020 due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted hardly on the tourist and cultural system. The restrictions established by subsequent DPCM issued by Government up to the end of December 2020 seem to portend the risk of a definitive collapse of the sectors, already deeply tested by the first lockdown.

The analysis of the tourist trend of recent years indicated in the Reports drawn up for the years 2017-2019 by the *National Observatory of Tourism* and the *Symbola Foundation* get an idea of the heavy consequences that restrictive measures have had.

The analysis clearly shows that during those years Italy played a leading role, being the fifth most visited country in the world for its attractiveness. Our Peninsula has been one of the most desired destinations by every traveller and boasts a long tradition in all market segments connected with the tourism, among them the culture and cultural heritage sectors (Barbuti, Santamato, 2018). In 2017, the foreign visitors were about 59 million, an increase of 11.8% compared to 2016, and they have spent in Italy 39 million euros (+7.7% compared to 2016)(ONT, 2018).

Tourism also has had significant growth in employment rates in the labour market. According to the *VIII Report* published in 2017 by the *Observatory on the labour market in the tourism sector* (Federalberghi, 2017), in 2015 tourism companies recorded an increase of more than 64.000 persons employed, with a substantially young workforce: almost 70% of the resources, in fact, were less than 40 years old, and they were majority female.

According to the “Io sono Cultura” reports published by the Symbola Foundation (Symbola, 2018, 2019), the cultural heritage system and the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) significantly impacted the growth of the Italian tourism trend, accounting for over a third of the total expenditure. Culture and cultural heritage had a multiplier effect on the overall economy: in 2018, it was equal to 1.77, that is to say, for 1 euro produced by the cultural ecosystem, 1,77 euros are enabled in other sectors. It follows that 95,8 billion euros was the economic value created by the cultural production in that year, 169,6 billion euros was the value produced by the other sectors of the economy, for a total amount of 265,4 billion euros produced.

The entire cultural tourism system was the first beneficiary of this effect, and the CCIs led this increase. The analysis of the cultural heritage contribution to tourism expenditure, assessed by both places and cities of art, and by the expenditure attributable to the productive activities of the CCIs, shows that in 2018 it registered a value of 31.9 billion euros, corresponding to 38.1% of total tourism expenditure, an incidence that fully confirms the value of 2017.

The level of spending enabled by the CCIs system varied both in relation to the demographic size of the municipalities, both according to the type of specialization in tourism: the municipalities classified as cities of art presented a spending of nearly 8.4 billion euro, equal to 26.2% of the national total (in increase compared to 2017) and corresponds to 45.7% of the total tourist spending recorded in the territories.

This situation still was at the end of 2019: in that year, the Italian Cultural Institutions had 55 million visitors, with a value of the production of 365 million euros (Re, Segre, 2020). This increase allowed to believe that our Country embarked virtuous economic growth, leveraging on the synergy of the tourist and cultural sectors for almost 10 years, that represented the real engine of the national economy.

3 Managing a regeneration: a model 4.0 of cultural tourism

How much the lockdown imposed in March 2020 has damaged the entire tourist-cultural ecosystem is evident comparing the above data with those of the contributions written by some experts between May and July 2020 (Symbola, 2020).

Already at the half of March 2020, the closing of all places of culture, and the referral of the major cultural initiatives planned (among the others, the exhibitions on Raffaello planned in different national venues), have caused an economic loss estimated reliably in about 20 million euros per month for the only sector of the national museums (Re, Segre, 2020).

Inevitably, together with the culture sector, tourism sector suffered a heavy setback just at the time of consolidation of the development path recorded in last years. When the lockdown started, the experts agreed that the sectors would have further growth in the coming years, thanks to the expansion of demand, the progressive diversification of the supply, and the management of the free time most versatile thanks to the new balance size between the analogic and digital activities. Just a month later, at the end of March, the hotel nights sold/total nights available rate had already collapsed to -96% (Morea, Trimarchi, Tools for Culture, 2020).

However, the lockdown has also produced in the very short term an inevitable acceleration in user relationships with digitization and digital creativity, that was absolutely unthinkable still in February 2020. The *feed* of those who were obliged to be temporarily buildings were literally invaded by different virtual creations reproducing cultural heritage: an attempt to export the cultural places, cities, landscapes from their physical context on the community desktops, in order to stimulate fruition in travellers before not sufficiently intrigued (Morea, Trimarchi, Tools for Culture, 2020).

This digital interaction, although imposed by the long pause from physical experienced during the closing, has produced unimaginable consequences: even if at a distance, citizens can contemplate the colours of wide landscapes, silent art cities empty of the intrusive human component. A positive shock impacted everyone producing an awakening of emotions, for too long drowned in the miasmas of the urban microclimates to which we are accustomed.

The pandemic emergency is still ongoing, and the recent ministerial decrees have confirmed the restrictive measures, closing archaeological sites, monuments museums, archives, and libraries. So, over the next year, people still will interact with digital creations published online. When the restrictions will be reduced and cultural sites will be reopened, we can assume that users will perceive the integration between analogic and digital as a daily dimension, and no longer an exception.

Art cities, museums, theatres, monuments, libraries shall address the issue of generating value in this new dimension, allowing visitors to become *visit-actors* who can interact with both digital and analogic contexts, moving seamlessly between one and another in every circumstance. They will enjoy by immersive experiences both analogic and digital heritage in small, interesting places, that will be located outside of the normal circuits beaten by the mass flows.

In the post-pandemic future, we can assume that the users will enjoy their tourist and cultural experiences, often in situations of came-back, without sacrificing the augmented *User eXperiences* (UX) that digitization offer, by *living-sites* purged from the mass clamor and the chaotic frenzy. In the near future, the cultural tourism shall confront with the following main dilemma: when we will travel again, how we will know the best way for experiencing the spaces according to a different model, before we will realize that our enthusiasm could start the perverse, unequal and expensive mass-tourism?

Anyway, it cannot be denied that a claustrophobic, and seemingly dead-end total block can turn into an extraordinary opportunity: the transition towards the development of a different tourist and cultural experience model can start, based on the interaction with *living-sites* integrating analogic and digital.

Initially, the territories will be favoured that, already before the pandemic, had activated or enhanced a tourist and cultural offer characterized by slow stretches and usable en-plein-air, valuing heritage few considered comparing to big cultural attractors, but that fully represent the socio-cultural identities which is associated to.

But we think that the *living-site* model is well-scalable in all the places of cultural tourist scattered in our country, especially in the internal areas. This integrated experience promotes the lengthening and expansion of travel in a way that, until before pandemic, seemed unimaginable without *site-specific* stories and imaginative travel diaries. An opportunity for villages in the internal areas (but not only...) that had already started to value their tourist impact, turning initially to a niche audience: today, they can represent a strategic resource for the territories where they place, by generating a induced significant and by reversing the depopulation process in these areas, where it seemed irreversible until recently.

A recent research conducted by the Observatory on Digital Innovation in Tourism of the Polytechnic of Milan (Noci, 2020) outlines the opportunities of a touristic offer based on the model of “no-end tourism”: it would combine narration, permanence and enjoyment of typical products before, during and after the living-site experience, integrating local identities and technologies through a “*national tourist loyalty platform that aims to support the application*”. An advanced loyalty model of both potential and real users: travellers will be *visit-actors* of *living-sites* experiences during which, using tourist services and buying typical products (pre-, during and post-visit), will accumulate “credits” that, if they return, will turn into advantages such as, for example, discounted rates or extra trips.

Smart working, consecrated by the pandemic lockdown as valid work-model having good impact on the business processes of public entities or private companies, may also be included in this cultural-tourist model. The work activities may be outsourced in non-conventional venues, where *visit-actors* will stay not only in the holidays time, but they can stretch and expand their experience living the sites. So, no longer just tourism as a break from work, but innovative *tourist hubs* where travellers can carve out the space for dedicating also to work activities.

It is no coincidence that, in the *Guidelines* published in May 2020 by the UN World Tourism Organization to restart the sector, the keys for tourist recovering are identified in effective communication and investments in *digital transformation* (UNWTO, 2020).

And it is no coincidence that, in June 2020, the Symbola Foundation dedicated to the theme of small communities and slow routes an interesting study, that shows the almost total lack of structured itineraries in the South Italy regions, facing to an imposing network of routes that intercept numerous inland locations in Central and Northern Italy (Symbola, 2020).

So, the recovery must now address the challenge of moving to the South Italy the travelling from the metropolitan and maritime cities towards the internal areas, more selective and less disposed to welcome vague and rowdy. This perspective would retrieve some good practices undertaken prior to the pandemic softly and as a trend of a slow tourism 'craft' and less mass, largely sustainable.

The current change allows one to predict that the approach of tourists to travel, enjoy and interact with the cultural places will become more flexible, because the contexts clogged with crowds shall be avoided both for the rules that, we can presume, will prohibit gatherings for long time, and for the growing *demophobia* by contagion. The *visit-actors* will module their experience in 'blocks' of variable duration living-sites not too far away and possibly not overcrowded (villages, rural areas, basins, landscapes), where they will go with customizable frequency, replacing the anxiety of the collectors of snapshots hourly hit-and-run with an emotional dive in the identity of the territory.

In this perspective, it is essential to actively involve the local communities in the interaction with the tourist and, starting from the several *eco-museums* and cooperatives spread in our territories, and from the micro and small manufacturers that still characterize many of the villages of the inland areas.

4 From focused to widespread tourism. New models of *heritage* enhancement

The Covid-19-related health emergency, which has soon become a true pandemic crisis, has had a profound impact on international economic and social scenarios, affecting harshly the various economic sectors, tourism in particular. The long-dominant, *focused*-tourism-connected models, which had remained such until only a few months ago, have experienced a profound crisis, as they are incompatible with the new safety and distancing requirements imposed by the current pandemic. The type of offer of art cities such as Florence and Venice, of museums and territorial magnets such as the Egyptian museum in Turin or the Vatican museums in Rome, which are characterized by a heritage of high historical, artistic and architectural value but are territorially concentrated, capable of attracting thousands of tourists every day, has become completely inadequate over the span of a few months, and those very same places have become inaccessible by law or deserted by choice.

In such a profoundly-changed scenario, new spaces have been generated for the enhancement of the different models of *widespread tourism* that, enhancing the tangible and intangible heritage so truly *widespread* over the territory, steers the attention back to the specificities and to the identity of places, guarantees the attention to what had been long defined as a lesser historical and artistic heritage, integrates perfectly with the utilization of new digital tools and is compatible with the new health needs and precautions. It is a heritage that for a long time has even been *scattered* within the territories, since only rarely had its census been planned, with the consequence of being exposed to neglect and degradation or, at best, being protected by local safeguarding measures outside a coordinated and structured plan.

In this perspective, the pandemic has worked as a process amplifier and accelerator, either activating or strengthening the choices for the enhancement of this cultural, historical and artistic heritage, which is both tangible and intangible, urban and extra-urban, and which has found a new full leading role.

The change of objects and destinations has corresponded to a change in the ways and times of enjoyment of such a widespread heritage. The various forms of *slow tourism* have gained ground, well beyond the number of those who already practiced this once niche tourism: forms of *slow tourism* such as *urban crossings* - true *narrations* of the sense of places - (Vergunst 2008; Clement 2019), *paths*, historical roads and "absent roads" that maintain an «*absence puissante*», a powerful evocative force (Nicholson 2001), cycling routes, both in cities and in extra-urban spaces. Their characteristics of diffusion in the territories, the possibility of being enjoyed only by small groups, and they often being "en plein air", which had made them an interstitial tourist model compared to the classic mass tourist routes, have now decreed their success and their new and increased level of attractiveness.

In the current pandemic scenario, a sort of competitive advantage has been acquired by those territories that not only possess this type of widespread historical and artistic heritage - a thoroughly widespread condition in Italy- but that have also been able to focus on its enhancement, by developing structural strategic plans already in recent years. Starting from the many historical centres (Albrecht, Magrin 2017; Carrera 2020; Storchi, Armanni 2010; Storchi 2019), many of which meet the requirements of "new tourism", compatible with the norms and constraints called for by health precautions.

Despite a clear-cut change in both the cultural paradigm and *policies*, also the new model of *widespread tourism*, similarly to the previous *focused tourism*, is faced with the need to make long-sighted plans of territorial marketing, which are able to implement attractiveness strategies to enhance territories and propose them for the challenges of both national and international competition, ensuring them with important economic benefits, but also keeping an eye on the social and environmental stability of the same territories: policies capable of enhancing the identity of places, while strengthening the feeling of belonging and accentuating the level of social cohesion. This type of *community building* strategies unifies the world of culture, the social and economic system, the world of research and citizens as a whole, enhancing the tangible and intangible assets that characterize territories (Giani, Iacopino & Castello 2020).

If the traditional tourist model generated a sort of targeted enhancement of some *portions* of cities and territories, where tourist attractions were mostly concentrated, the new model of *widespread* tourism, oriented towards *living-sites* experiences which are foreign to massive flows, and where analog and digital are integrated in dimensions where users are the main *visit-actors*, is in tune with policies of extended enhancement of the territories and of the acknowledgement of their attracting role, determined by their specific characteristics.

At this regard, in the following paragraphs we will describe some good practices for the experimentation of the above-outlined model, from which useful indications and guidelines to expand this model can be drawn.

5 Two multi-sensory experiences for the innovation of cultural tourism

5.1 “Museo diffuso dei 5 sensi” of Sciacca<<https://www.museodiffusosciacca.it/>>

A recently established and promising experimental museum is the *Museo diffuso dei 5 sensi* of Sciacca, near Agrigento, Sicily, born in the spring of 2019. The web communication introjects the users immediately *in medias res* of the experience to live on-site: the same village of Sciacca is the open-air museum managed by the citizens. They are protagonists of self-narrative about their identity told through their activities, interpreters of a communication that immediately immerses the users in the smells, flavours, noises to enjoy in the sunny streets of the village.

The museum provides several digital tools for *visit-actors* interaction: first, the brand “*Sciacca città dei 5 sensi*” on the website that introduces visitors into the variety and richness of available experiences; a proactive social interaction on specialized international platforms, with nine experiences available on the *izi.travel* platform (Izi Travel 2019) and other applications in Augmented Reality; the wide offer of different lab experiences that immerse the visitor in the social, cultural, craft traditions of the territory working together with local people.

The Museum is a well-designed tourist-cultural project, realized and supported by an effective network of entrepreneurs, associations and citizens. In February 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Museum created the Cooperative of the Community *Identità e bellezza*, which includes more than 20 accommodation venues, 18 master ceramists, the consortium *Corallo Sciacca*, more than 40 merchants of the Consortium *Spazio Centro*, managers of cultural sites, museums, several Cultural Associations, a number of local stakeholders active in the slow food.

5.2 Wonder Grottole<<https://www.wondergrottole.it/>>

Grottole is an historical village away 30 Km from Matera. Its existence is almost bimillenary, like most of the internal villages of Basilicata, inhabited since prehistory. By the Roman Empire and during the following centuries, Grottole was crossed by the Via Appia and was an important crossroads in the movement of people and goods from North Italy to Sicily.

However, between the last sixty years of the Twentieth century and the first years of the new millennium, economic regression and loss of job opportunities has led a large part of the inhabitants to migrate to larger cities or abroad for working. An unstoppable phenomenon, which has determined the depopulation: today, the old town of Grottole has only 300 inhabitants, more than 60% is over 70 years old, 629 homes have been abandoned to carelessness and degradation by the owners and the Municipal Administration.

As Legambiente states in its report *Piccolo (e fuori dal) comune. Cosa sta cambiando nell'Italia dei piccoli comuni* (Legambiente, 2016), Grottole shares its situation with other 100 villages located mainly in the internal areas of Basilicata,

In this scenario, Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa represent exceptions being revitalized in recent years by the *Volo dell'Angelo*. Nevertheless, these two villages are not the model to consider as valid paradigm for relaunching the internal areas of Basilicata, as they have chosen to attract mass tourist giving up their elements of characterization and identity.

Instead, the *Wonder Grottole* project has started by the instances above outlined having clear objectives since its design: to involve and bring together people coming from all over the world, offering them an experience of living-site close with the identity of the village.

The life within the old town is emphasized, with the goal to regenerate the abandoned houses and to create a new community combining the local and the global, the material and the immaterial, the past and future linked to the present, reinventing new ways of living that integrate leisure and work time.

This project is a model of Cultural Tourism 4.0 that evolves previous experiences systematizing recovery of the territory, urban regeneration, and creation of new market segments. The tourist is not the transient and passive user of a destination, his experience is not limited to cross hastily the sites without deepening the tastes offered by the local: he becomes the visit-actor protagonist of an immersive and interactive experience, who brings and exchanges skills, values, and identity with the community that hosts him, with its resources, and its citizens.

Thus, *Wonder Grottole* realizes a new conversational tourist dimension, in which the cultural experience is based on being together, fostering relationships, expressing creativity, generating new opportunities and experiencing new productivity: artistic houses, places of conviviality and exchange, workshops. All of this, also valuing the local resources, recovering and revaluing old craft ways and recreating sustainable opportunities.

The impact of the project shows how it has had fully positive effect on users, as it increases the quality of life of both the host community and visitors, generating new economies that has triggered important growth processes.

In 2019, the initiative has caught on the attention of Airbnb: together with the promoters of *Wonder Grottole*, they have created the project *Italian Sabbatical* (<https://italiansabbatical.com/>), launching on the web an international call for applications to live three months in regenerated apartments of the old town, in close connection with the residents. The call started quietly and meant to collect the nominations of a maximum of 5 volunteers, but more than 280,000 people responded in a single month, and because of this impact the media has dedicated to the project over 1500 articles, and the social networks where it was disseminated have got thousands of views.

The 5 selected volunteers arrived in the village at the beginning of June 2019. They were welcomed and immediately nicknamed *Italian Sabbaticals* by the citizens of Grottole, and they remained until the end of August. The browse of the project website shows their enjoyment of this *living-site* experience.

We can conclude that the revitalization of the cultural tourism sector, hardly overwhelmed by the pandemic, is based on the living-site model, that can maintain alive the tourist field in any health, social and cultural situation. A model always sustainable, and able to revitalize territories understated and destined to disappear, guaranteeing, at the same time, the preservation and enhancement of their multiple, authentic identities.

6The construction process of the imaginary and the PIIL Culture plan in Puglia. A case-study

For about twenty years, the Apulian regional administrations, together with the various actors of the tourism sector differently involved in planning processes, have been involved in the process of construction of a sort of "Apulian imaginary". Many are the strong points to count on, given the particular richness of the region in terms of nature, folklore, art, history, innovation. At first, it was not simply a matter of enhancing the tangible and intangible capital of the region, but of creating an idea, an image of the region itself that went beyond simply being a summer tourist destination due to the quality of its sea.

For a long time Puglia "had not existed", being at best identified with Salento, which instead had been enjoying its own national and international recognition for some time. To take up the challenge of a kind of tourism increasingly on the lookout for experiences and emotions, starting in the early 2000s, a difficult process of building the *Puglia brand* has been activated, to allow the region to acquire a good ranking on the various tourist markets. From that moment on, targeted communication policies have been generated in view of a territorial marketing that did not focus on individual objects of attraction, some of which have become UNESCO protected assets - the Trulli of the Itria Valley (1996), Castel del Monte (1996), the Sanctuary of San Michele (2011), Foresta Umbra (2017) - but on the characteristics of the region as a whole.

The "Puglia to wish for" began to have its own visibility and above all to enter shared representation and imaginary, starting from a true narration that had been gradually composing the image of the region through an institutional website and through the activity of sector associations that have been multiplying since the very beginning. A major role in this process was played by cinema, which chose Puglia as an exceptional location for its peculiar brightness, for the extraordinary beauty of its colours and for the magnificent views that make it a natural set. The tight relationship with a great tourist attractor such as cinema has been encouraged also through the establishment of the Apulia Film Commission in 2007, a strategic step in this process, which has been strengthened by the annual organization of BiFest - Bari International Film Festival - in the Apulian capital starting in 2009.

A complex tourism system has been gradually defined which, in recent years, has been connecting public and private entities, also enhancing the ones that are more rooted in the individual territories, in view of promoting the unified image of the regional tourist offer, also through an activity of communication and tourism marketing capable of allowing the development of a regional tourism brand at both a national and at an international level. The first ten years of this important *change of course* have caused tourism to amount for approximately 10% of the Apulian regional economy and bring about a decisive change in the strategic positioning of the region on the international markets.

Absolutely central is the role played by PugliaPromozione (www.pugliaturismo.com/agenzia-regionale-pugliapromozione), the Regional Agency for Tourism, an operational tool for the policies of Regione Puglia - now also an intermediate body - in promoting the unified image of the region, with reference to regional planning and in agreement with the system of Provinces and Municipalities with a view to sustainable, lasting and integrated development.

A major role in the overall project to support, incentivize, organize, promote and communicate the regional tourism offer was played by the "Puglia365" Plan, whose strategic objectives are those of seasonal adjustment, internationalization and qualification of offer and hospitality, and which finds in the Regional Strategic Plan for Culture «another fundamental pillar of the new policies of Regione Puglia toward the construction of an evolving model of development and enhancement of the Territory» (Strategic Document of the Regione Puglia's Culture Plan 2017-2026 presentation, objectives, actions. <http://www.regione.puglia.it>). The project has been supported right from the start, also through important and essential infrastructural investments in (cruise) ports and airports and through the establishment of a Regional Observatory on Tourism.

For Puglia, too, the Covid-19-related health emergency has generated a deep and unpredictable break compared with the tourism dynamics of previous years, inflicting a severe blow to the international *incoming* and *outgoing* system that had been consolidating. To tackle the challenge imposed by the needs of the new tourism and now of this "new normality" whose "expiration date" is not known, Puglia has been able to exploit the peculiarity of a tangible and intangible heritage spread over its territories which, as already stated, is in tune with these new needs. The region has thus been able to carry out an important *branding* activity through communication and strategic actions capable of repositioning the region on the tourism market, confirming its high potential in attractiveness. The strong point of this process was both the offer diversification and the diversification of the territories concerned by that offer, boosting the demand for authenticity, eco-sustainability and slowness, but also for distance and safety, which are the characterizing traits of the new tourist demand. Puglia has been able to present itself as the place where the new demand model satisfies an offer capable of meeting the needs and wishes of tourists, ensuring them with high standards of health safety.

First of all, an extensive and complex communication plan was activated, capable of regenerating and amplifying the attractive imaginary linked to the territory. The communication campaign was shaped through some specific projects such as "Vacanze pugliesi" (Puglia holidays), "Puglia fuori rotta" (Puglia off the path) and "Riparti dalla meraviglia" (Start over from wonder).

The first, mainly meant for a regional audience and broadcasted on regional tv networks, featured Emilio Solfrizzi and Antonio Stornaiolo - the well-known "Toti and Tata" who, born as comedians on local broadcasters, have progressively achieved popularity and appreciation at a national level - that accompanied the traveller in a series of virtual routes crossing the regional territory. The second, promoted online, was a journey to discover the small villages and unexplored heritage of the region. The third, on the other hand, was a sort of travel journal posted on social media, in which Lorenzo Starace, aboard a caravan from the 1980s, wandered around the whole region involving his audience in the various stages of his journey.

The common feature of all three projects was to propose and enhance the widespread Apulian heritage, made up of art, history, traditions, views, small villages, dry stone walls, ancient churches and farms, unveiling them to the public both inside and outside the region, showing how the characteristics of this heritage - spread throughout the territory and enjoyable "en-plein-air" - were in total harmony with current tourist needs. Once again, the imaginary was strengthened on the basis of a "binary code" (Bouchard 2014; 2018) of the attractive factors of the Apulian territory and implicitly of the repulsive factors of the territories of origin. This code governs the construction of the imaginary based on tickling the wish for what is distant and different from one's daily life: the search for the sea or the mountains for those who live in territories that do not have them, the search for silent places surrounded by greenery for those who live in cities, or for uncontaminated and "safe" places for those who think they live in "risk areas".

In addition to the communication actions carried out to tackle the pandemic situation, Puglia was able to count on the enhancement of the strategic actions already prepared within the "Piiil Project. Culture in Puglia" which were already

in full harmony with the wish for authenticity and emotions, but also with the current and stringent needs for safety and distancing. The acronym represents the words Product, Identity, Innovation, Business, Work.

«In line with the Europe 2020 strategy, and in continuity with what has been achieved in recent years, the new regional operational program intends to create a system of “containers” and “contents” to employ as an instrument of intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth. It is a program that aims to protect, exploit and promote the identity of a territory, and therefore its culture (cultural heritage, cultural activities and live and audiovisual entertainment, creativity), in an increasingly innovative way, stimulating growth, employment, competitiveness, social and territorial cohesion” (www.culturainpuglia.it).

6.1 *La “Rete dei Fuochi di Puglia” - The “Network of the Fires of Puglia”* (www.piiilculturapuglia.it/le-rete-dei-fuochi-di-puglia)

Among the initiatives that aim to enhance and promote one of the peculiar traits of the territory is the “Rete dei Fuochi di Puglia”. Currently, there are three main fire rituals that are part of the Network: the Fanòve of Castellana Grotte, the Fòcara of Novoli, and the Fracchie of San Marco in Lamis, to which other realities of the territory will be able to join, in accordance with the Law of the Fires of the Region. For these three realities, the procedure to obtain UNESCO recognition as an intangible heritage of humanity has been initiated.

The Fanòve of Castellana Grotte are a celebration in honour of Maria Santissima della Vetrana. The event takes place every year on the evening of January 11th. The Fanòve are huge piles of wood that burn throughout the Town, about a hundred bonfires scattered from the town centre to the most distant neighbourhood.

The Fòcara is a monumental bonfire made up of vine shoots, its origin dating back to the eighteenth century, though others make it date back to the fifteenth century. It is originated and created from the pruning of vineyards with a growing number of bundles (about 100,000). Its dimensions are between 20 and 22 metres in diameter and as many in height.

Fracchie are large torches of various sizes, the largest touching 10 to 12 metres in length, with an opening having a diameter of about 2 metres. Fracchie serve to illuminate the path of Madonna Addolorata (Our Lady of the Sorrows) from the church that is dedicated to her to the location of celebrations. The origins of this rite date back to the early eighteenth century, when the Church of Addolorata was built, far from the town centre, and over the time the procession of Fracchie has become one of the most evocative rites of the Holy Week.

The common feature of these thoroughly suggestive and exciting rites is that of being rooted in the tradition of places and therefore of offering opportunities for rediscovering the identity of those very places, of occurring outdoors, outside the inhabited settlement and in some cases in the immediate vicinity of rock churches that thus leap anew to the limelight.

6.2 *“Le Strade della Fiaba” – “The Roads of the Fairy-tale”* (www.piiilculturapuglia.it/le-strade-della-fiaba)

Le Strade della Fiaba is a project promoted by the Culture and Tourism Department of Regione Puglia in collaboration with *Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani* and *Teatro Pubblico Pugliese*, coordinated and conceived by Prof. Laura Marchetti, aimed at tracing a cultural itinerary which, starting from customs and traditions and through a sustainable approach, can become an opportunity for development for entire areas of the region.

Each fairy-tale, entrusted to an exceptional reader, is representative of some regional cultural tourist itineraries to which refer both the places in which the fairy-tales are told and those that the stories evoke. The aim of the project «<is to outline a Road of the fairy-tale along which one may perceive what Italo Calvino, a renowned walker and a great collector of fairy-tales, used to call the “local aromas”, that is to say the scenarios, food, customs, knowledge, architectural forms, the traditions of local communities, especially those that seem forgotten, like small villages or peripheral and internal areas ». Fairy-tales were broadcasted via social channels during the first phase of the health emergency, from April, 23rd to May, 2nd.

6.3I *Cammini - The Walks* (www.piiilculturapuglia.it/cammini-e-itinerari-culturali-di-puglia)

In terms of the enhancement of slow and “en plein air” tourism, Puglia has joined the Comitato Nazionale dei Cammini - National Committee of Walks, which is working on the classification and infrastructuring of the main cultural and tourist slow itineraries (spiritual, historical, archaeological, cycle-pedestrian, equestrian, motorbiking, etc.) of our country.

Individual "travelling tourists" are endowed with a sort of credential, a pilgrim's identification document which allows them to be recognized as slow travellers and acquire the right to discounts in affiliated accommodation and refreshment facilities.

On this document, *sigilla* (seals) are affixed at each stage, actual stamps certifying the passage of the traveller at each stage. If a modern traveller has walked at least 100 km, he/she will be entitled to a *testimonium*, a document attesting to the accomplished "pilgrimage" at the end of his/her "adventure in Southern lands".

Walks, an important part of the modern category of slow and green tourism, imply a very peculiar approach to the territory and communities: by "culture of the walk" a real cultural and intellectual approach is meant, that characterizes walking travellers and which involves an attitude of openness and respect towards the communities which have been crossed. In Puglia, committees of volunteers have been established in many stages, with the task of welcoming travellers according to the following engaging approach, <<which is not incorrect to define philosophical>>.

These themes, as well as the activities already carried out to consolidate this orientation, have been key strategic elements in making Puglia a region capable of meeting the pandemic challenge and of making it an opportunity to enhance its territorial, cultural, historical and artistic specificity.

7 CONCLUSIONS

We can certainly assume that the contemporary scenario characterized by pandemic has accentuated the awareness of the opportunities offered to the cultural tourism by the territories (Dijst 2001), in terms of quality, usability, and accessibility both physical and digital of the widespread heritage. In our opinion, the policies for relaunching the sector, today hardly prostrated, should foster the innovative, sustainable model based on slow itineraries and *living-site* immersive experiences, because it is far from the typical practices of mass-tourism. This model not only can guarantee the survival of the sector in any health, social and cultural scenario, but it can also foster the sustainable development of underestimated social and cultural ecosystems otherwise destined to disappear, guaranteeing at the same time the preservation, safeguarding, and enhancement of their authentic cultural identities.

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