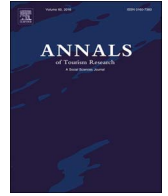


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Tourism transition in peripheral rural areas: Theories, issues and strategies



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between “rural peripherality” and “tourism transition” to describe the ongoing transformations within the tourist supply in rural areas, highlighting the importance these concepts are acquiring in both the theoretical debate and the formation of policies. Based on the classification of peripheral areas provided by the Italian Strategy for Inner Areas, the authors have undertaken a detailed statistical analysis at the municipality level, considering tourism as an important driver of socio-economical change. A model of governance based on “transition management” is put forward as a practical tool to guide these processes. A case study conducted through participatory action-research offered the opportunity to overcome existing governance practices and experiment with more adaptive methods to manage the transition.

Introduction

Aims of the study

The direct observation of some critical concerns at the municipality level in Italian peripheral rural areas led the authors to reflect upon both the theoretical paradigms and the possible strategies for supporting and overcoming some of the problems that confront local tourist development processes nowadays, such as: innovation and change, territorial governance, stakeholder collaboration, networking, and policy-making. The central question of the research design (Creswell, 2009) is then to explore whether the tourist offer in peripheral rural areas addresses a specific need that differentiates it from mainstream tourism and therefore requires alternative management policies.

On a broad theoretical level, the paper develops a critical analysis of the role contemporary tourism can play in peripheral rural contexts as a driver of change, particularly in terms of revitalisation and enhancement of countryside capital (Garrod, Wornell, & Youell, 2006). Special attention is paid to the particular conditions these processes require in order to be successfully realised. If, on the one hand, demand for non-popular-destinations in general (and for rural areas specifically) increasingly involves new tourist practices (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Urry, 1995), then, on the other, it is necessary to provide a renewed offer based on a wider and more efficient range of services (Hummelbrunner & Miglbauer, 1994) that are able to meet new tourists' expectations (Fiorello & Bo, 2012).

One of the main themes the authors have analysed is the territorial polarisation that occurred in terms of tourist development during the last few decades.

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Like other socio-economic phenomena, tourism organisation and marketing have been interpreted and managed according to a hierarchical “core-periphery” model (Britton, 1981; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013; Lai & Li, 2012; Murphy & Andressen, 1988). Tourist flows, facilities and services have been concentrated in a few ganglion centres that have operated like attractive poles (Corigliano, Viganò, & Mottironi, 2015). According to the dependency theory developed in the 1960s and 70s (Britton, 1981), for example, the relation between core and periphery—as well as between urban and rural areas—may involve the stronger resorts or metropolitan areas (the cores) exploiting the weaker, which have often emerged as “pleasure peripheries” (Brown & Hall, 2000; Turner & Ash, 1975). Trading patterns have often been imposed that benefit the central powers. When this happens, tourist revenue generated at the periphery is seen as a means of reinforcing the business based in more developed, stronger areas. In several peripheral areas, tourist models have often resulted in enclave tourist resorts becoming connected with external capital rather than integrated in local economies (for example in Northern Europe: see Kauppila, Saarinen, & Leinonen, 2009).

In other places where investment in tourism has been absent (as in some rural areas of the Italian Apennines), the disappearance of the principal economic locally based activity—mainly agriculture—due to changes in food production, eventually caused demographic decline and abandonment. The concomitant decrease and aging of the population have often culminated in a critical situation where innovation has been prevented by poor exchange between socio-economic actors. Thus, these areas have usually been characterised by a low level of autonomy in planning capability. With poor access to and from markets, they have been largely absent from travel itineraries, apart from a small trickle of independent tourists.

Aside from its geographical location, therefore, the meaning of the term “periphery” itself has carried social, political and economic implications, often becoming a synonym for marginalisation, economic disadvantage, lack of technological infrastructure and political weakness.

In order to better understand the Italian context of the case study to be presented, some statistical data related to the tourist offer in peripheral areas have been analysed with reference to the framework proposed by the National Strategy of Inner Areas (NSIA), which has been experimenting since 2012. The classification of the municipalities used by the NSIA has been applied to analyse the dynamics of the tourist offer in the peripheries; specifically, how it has developed in different geographical locations, the extent to which it has diversified according to the various accommodation facilities, and how it has handled the prevailing negative demographic dynamics.

Peripheries and the transition to new rural tourist products

As Hummelbrunner and Miglbauer (1994) had already pointed out in the 90s, new cultural trends are re-orienting tourists' choices. These trends include: (a) a growing environmental awareness; (b) individualisation and an openness to new experiences; (c) an emergent appeal for highly original and tailor-made travel experiences; and (d) a growing desire to participate in and to be integrated within a local life-style. New tourist practices have affirmed the presence of these trends within the contemporary market and rural tourism has transformed into a complex, multi-faceted business covering a series of niche activities and thereby becoming an umbrella term (rather than a tightly defined phenomenon) with multiple market appeal (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015). These types of product not only include agritourism but also wellness tourism, activity tourism, mountain biking and hiking, cultural and heritage tourism, food and wine tourism, and environmentally friendly activities. Tourists appear particularly attracted to differentiation and the search for distinctiveness (Baudrillard, 1974; Bourdieu, 1979) embodied by the countryside context and the pursuit of in-depth experiential value (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), to authenticity (Lindholm, 2008; Salvatore, 2006), to slowness (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Salvatore, 2013), and to responsibility (Goodwin & Francis, 2003).

A new complexity is therefore appearing that offers peripheral rural areas the chance to reconsider their position in positive terms. The very same attributes that were previously considered to be disadvantageous are now being valued as new opportunities (Brown & Hall, 2000). Isolation and remoteness have come to represent peace and distinctiveness, rurality is considered to be a way of getting in touch with nature, and traditional lifestyles are the basis of a heritage experience.

As a result of all these changes, the relation between rural peripheral areas and tourism points towards a twofold perspective: firstly, the important change rurality itself has been undergoing (Garrod et al., 2006; Hoggart & Paniagua, 2001); and secondly, the downgrading of “mass tourism” and the related emergence of the new tourist practices (Fiorello & Bo, 2012), which are particularly sensitive to a “sense of place” (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015).

These transformations are closely related to each other and are captured by the authors with the theoretical concept of “tourism transition”. It is taken for granted that each transition comprises processes of co-evolution involving changes in stakeholders' needs and wants, in institutions, as well as in culture and practices (Kemp, Loorbach, & Rotmans, 2007). By “tourism transition” in this paper it is meant: (a) firstly, a cultural transformation of the rural peripheries from places of dependency from places of abandonment to ones of symbolic consumption (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015); (b) secondly, a paradigm shift related to a divergent conceptualisation of remoteness based on environmental, cultural and societal quality of life, rather than on marginality; (c) thirdly, a meaningful re-organisation of the tourist supply shifted towards common tourist products (Fiorello & Bo, 2012) that are the outcome of a new planning model focusing on “community-based” tourism (Jones, 2005).

All these conditions allow us to go beyond the stereotypical idea of the periphery as a “marginal area” and to re-consider its intrinsic attractive force in terms of tourist interest. Facing the challenge of becoming increasingly attractive tourist destinations, peripheries may now try to assert their agency (Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013). This means seizing the development opportunities presented by tourist flows more independently, favouring the re-activation of local resources in innovative ways, and potentially even triggering an escape from the crisis of traditional economics. An approach centred on agency offers the ability to overcome the determinism suggested by the concept of dependency because it acknowledges that local actors possess the ability to free themselves

from their structural constraints and to influence their own circumstances. As reflexive subjects, they are capable of developing their own views and selecting their own actions in order to take strategic advantage of the opportunities they encounter.

This makes necessary new approaches to tourist planning and management that aim to reorganise tourist supply within the overall territorial system, by paying particular attention to the activation of local components such as landscape (Chiodo, Finocchio, & Sotte, 2009; Carneiro, Lima, & Silva, 2015) and territorial identity (Kneafsey, 2000). The consequence of these changes is that tourism products are no longer related to the offer of a single resort or accommodation facility. They emerge instead from the destination as a whole, resulting from a combination of services and different assets. Each tourist product is then a “territorial product”, which envisages the development of tourism as neither a series of individual, free standing enterprises or as businesses that are part of national brands, but as a new form of territorial destination related to partnership concepts. This means the role of “network of relations” takes on a central importance, not only between the public and the private sectors, but also among all the economic actors, including citizens, as well as between local residents and travellers (Corigliano et al., 2015).

New tourist phenomena in peripheral rural areas, therefore, are set to become important drivers of change because they may favour a “proactive conservation of landscape” (Salvatore, 2015) as a replacement for abandonment due to the co-evolution among conservation, landscape making, active citizenship, and the tourist economy. Aside from these opportunities, though, there are several threats to be focused on. The increasing pace of change means it is not always easy for operators to address the challenges they are presented with. If local rural communities want to address this transition effectively, they ought to apply specific ways of thinking and doing based on a precise model of governance oriented towards sustainable development. “Transition management” (Kemp et al., 2007) appears to be particularly appropriate. It is a multi-level form of governance that steers processes of co-evolution using visions and work groups as the basis of learning and adaptation cycles. It may help rural communities to transform themselves in a gradual reflexive way through guided processes based on the interaction between all involved actors (institutions, citizens, cultural and tourist operators, farmers etc.). Such processes can be set in motion by utilising innovative bottom-up strategies in a more strategic way to coordinate different levels of governance while fostering self-organisation and self-sustainability. A “transition arena” may be created when a long-accepted situation loses its appeal and invites stakeholders to look outside the regular political short-term cycle for more innovative solutions that might emerge as the result of new coalitions and consensus building.

Statistical data and open issues in the Italian policies for peripheral areas

Peripheries in the Italian strategy for inner areas

In Italy, the above cited NSIA has recently tackled the issue of peripheral areas with an original and comprehensive approach based on a strategy currently being implemented at a national level and supported by an ambitious set of policies. The NSIA is promoted by the Department for the Economic Development and Cohesion—part of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Italian Government—within the framework of the EU cohesion policies 2014–2020. It is also supported by national funds.

Thanks to this strategy, the focus of territorial cohesion policies has moved from inter-regional differences towards gaps and relations in and between sub-regional levels. Furthermore, local actors’ involvement has become a key factor in implementation (Mantino & Lucatelli, 2016).

The spatial organisation of the Italian territory is heterogenic, polycentric and characterised by a network of medium-sized urban municipalities at the regional or sub-regional level that assume—individually or jointly—the role of centres of service provision, with the other areas (the inner ones) orbiting them with varying degrees of peripherality (Lucatelli, 2015). Therefore, within the NSIA, the concept of peripheries is closely associated with that of inner areas.

In recent years, these areas have received increasing academic and political attention all over Europe (Espon Geospecs, 2013; Noguera & Copus, 2016; OECD, 2013). Nevertheless, the debate is still far from setting out in clear terms the indicators that would best define peripherality and from reaching a common and shared understanding of the concept. The main conceptual differences concern the role of spatial characteristics, on the one hand, and socio-economic issues, on the other. According to the latter approach in particular, peripheries are recognised by a shrinkage, including both a demographic decline and the disappearance of the main local economic activities due to a lack of social, economic, institutional and cultural networks.

Both physical accessibility to services of general interest and socio-economic issues are incorporated in the Italian strategy. The definition of an “inner area” (as a synonym of periphery) refers to the opportunities for its citizens’ to access the essential services of education, healthcare and transport within specific lengths of time. Nevertheless, the ultimate aim of the strategy is to address socio-economic concerns such as population decrease and aging, a progressive reduction in the utilisation of human, natural and economic resources, and a diminution in quantity and quality of public and private-collective services.

Inner areas are classified at a municipality level as either an “intermediate”, a “peripheral” or an “ultra-peripheral” area, consistent with the travel time to the service centre providing essential services such as an exhaustive range of secondary schools; at least one first level DEA (Emergency and Reception Department) hospital; and at least one “silver-type” railway station. The municipalities at a travel-distance of up to 20 min from the centres are classified as “belt” areas. All the other municipalities are classified as “inner areas”, with the following differentiation: “intermediate” areas are from 20 to 40 min away; “peripheral” areas, from 40 to 75 min; “ultra-peripheral” areas, over 75 min (DPS, 2013; Barca, Casavola, & Lucatelli, 2014). For the purposes of the present research, only peripheral and ultra-peripheral municipalities have been considered. The choice related to the use of accessibility indicators as the main methodological tool to describe peripherality – instead of indicators based on population size – inevitably leads to a heterogeneity in the size of municipalities included in the same category.

The strategy follows a double track approach: on one hand, it entails the reorganisation of essential service provision and on the

other, it entails the promotion of development projects based on local resources that require the involvement of local actors.

Within this framework, tourism is recognised as playing a strategic role for both theoretical and empirical reasons.

From a theoretical point of view, tourism is commonly considered to be a significant driver in the development of marginal areas and is seen as the most accessible instrument both for activating underutilised local resources without any strong infrastructural investment as well as creating service employment that may be attractive for young people (Muller & Jansson, 2007).

Actually, the complexity of a transition can limit the potential of tourism to economically empower local communities, which often lack market orientation, cooperation, competences, networks and entrepreneurial commitment. In recent years, many studies have elaborated more efficient strategies for addressing the critical aspects of tourism development in marginal areas, and most of them have focused on the importance of “community-based” models (see Fiorello & Bo, 2012; Jones, 2005; Reid, Mair, & George, 2004). Goodwin and Santilli (2009) state that while many projects have been taken on, there has been too little monitoring, with the result that the actual benefits of this approach remain largely unquantified. However, despite there being no demonstrable benefit, the general ideas continued to appear particularly attractive.

From an empirical point of view, tourism represents an important economic activity in numerous Italian inner areas and has been chosen as the key factor for the activation of territorial resources (Pezzi, 2016). This choice is particularly paramount considering that—thanks to NSIA—the national government can directly commit its funds and time to collaborative projects, thus playing an important role in tourism planning and management in rural peripheral areas through the assistance it provides to both local institutions and private enterprises. This seems to present the right conditions for the realisation of a model of local development based on the concept of Community Benefit Tourism Initiative (Simpson, 2008) as a tool for promoting social exchange and for enhancing countryside assets while providing economic benefits.

Peripheral municipalities and tourist offer: A statistical framework

Our data analysis has considered the dynamics of demographic and tourist aspects in Italian peripheral and ultra-peripheral municipalities, as classified by the NSIA.

The objective has been to highlight the emerging of new character of the territorial tourist supply in line with the tourism transition previously described and to relate it to some indicators representing the demographic and socio-economic situation.

One of the aspects considered in the Strategy is that the periphery is often associated with demographic decline and the reduction of economic activities.

A total of 1884 municipalities were analysed, 1526 of which belong to the peripheral areas and 358 to the ultra-peripheral. In overall terms, they represent 23% of Italian municipalities, have a population of about 4.6 million people, and an average of 2438 inhabitants per municipality. The period considered is the time interval 2002–13, due to the availability of a complete set of data on tourist offer from the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) for all Italian municipalities.

For such municipalities, the long-term evolution of the tourist accommodation offer was analysed, considering the number and typology of accommodation and beds. The tourist offer, measured by the number of beds in regulated establishments, can be considered as a proxy for the importance of tourism at the municipal level, both territorially as well as in economic and social terms (Sarrión-Gavilán, Benítez-Márquez, & Mora-Rangel, 2015). Some socio-demographic aspects were further considered in the data analysis, such as the population trends (natural growth and net migration), the percentage of elderly population, the number of employed persons in total and in the tourist sector.

These variables were further subjected to a cluster analysis which was applied to the group of ultra-peripheral municipalities with the aim of identifying sub-groups with similar dynamics, paying particular attention to the above mentioned indicators.

Table 1 shows a summary of the main characteristics concerning demographic variables and tourist offer in the considered municipalities.

Demographic dynamics show average negative trends. The population growth rate is negative, with the net migration rate unable to compensate for the natural one. Two thirds of the municipalities are affected by a decrease in population, which is higher than 10% in about one out of three and higher than 20% in about one out of ten.

On the other hand, the tourist accommodation offer grows both in the number of establishments and beds, as well as in the number of municipalities providing accommodation establishments. In order to compare the municipalities data beyond their population size, some standardised indexes have been used, such as the Defert tourist function index and the Tourism density index. Both of them are the basic indicators of tourism intensity used by the Italian National Observatory of Tourism (<http://www.ontit.it>). The former index (tourist function)—calculated as the ratio between beds and inhabitants—is a basic indicator for the level of tourist offer whereas the latter (tourism density)—calculated as the number of tourist beds per square kilometer—can be considered as a proxy indicator of the pressure of tourism on the environment (Sarrión-Gavilán et al., 2015).

As shown in Table 1, the value of the tourist function index is much higher than the national average (0.08) and, in the period considered, it increased both for ultra-peripheral (from 0.38 to 0.41) and peripheral (from 0.16 to 0.18) municipalities.

Also the percentage of the persons employed in the tourist sector is higher when compared to the Italian average (8%).

A diversification in the typologies of accommodation establishments is observed, with a strong growth of “non-hotel” establishments such as agritourism and bed and breakfasts (B&Bs). These typologies increased from 10 to 24% of the total in ultra-peripheral areas and from 9 to 26% in peripheral ones. Beyond their contribution to the tourist offer diversification, agritourism and B&Bs play an important role in the socio-economic systems of peripheral areas, allowing the inhabitants to reach more adequate income levels, usually in the presence of other marginal economical activities. In fact, both typologies are considered to be a support for other income activities. As established by the definition of agritourism in the Italian legislation, earnings provided to the farmer

Table 1
Characteristics of peripheral and ultra-peripheral municipalities. Year 2013.

Municipality classification	Peripheral	Ultra-peripheral
No. Municipalities	1526	358
<i>Population</i>		
Total Population (inhabitants)	3,673,958	919,300
Population per municipality (means)	2408	2568
Population growth rate 2002/2013 (%)	-1.8	-1.1
Persons over 65 years (%) (census data 2011)	22.4	21.3
Natural population growth rate 2002/2013 (%)	-3.4	-2.1
Net migration rate 2002/2013 (%)	3.1	4.5
<i>Tourist offer</i>		
Tourist function index (beds per inhabitant)	0.18	0.41
Variation in Tourist function 2002/2013 (%)	1.9	3.2
Tourism density (beds per sq. km.)	9.0	17.3
Variation in no. beds 2002/2013 (%)	10.0	7.4
Variation in no. accommodation establishments 2002/2013 (%)	15.0	27.2
Alternative accommodation establishments: B&B, Agritourism (% of the total)	25.7	24.1
Municipalities with beds 2002 (%)	68	73
Municipalities with beds 2013 (%)	88	87
Employed persons (enterprises)/Population (%)	18.4	19.5
Employed persons in the tourist sector/Total employed (%)	13.1	21.6

Source: Author's elaboration of ISTAT data.

by agritourist activity cannot be higher than earnings provided by agricultural ones. Also, B&Bs are classified as non-professional tourist activities and a limit on the number of bedrooms per establishment is enforced.

Furthermore, comparing the population growth rate with the variation of the tourist intensity indices, it appears that almost half of the peripheral areas (44% of ultra-peripheral municipalities and 46% of peripheral ones) have witnessed a simultaneous population decrease and an increase in the number of beds in regulated tourist establishments.

Fig. 1 presents the demographic trends for the period 2002–2013, and the tourist function index for 2013 of Italian peripheral and ultra-peripheral municipalities. According to various authors, a tourist function index of more than 0.40 indicates a predominantly tourist municipality; a value between 0.10 and 0.40 indicates municipalities with important but not predominant tourist activity; whereas an index lower than 0.10, indicates that there is little or no tourist activity (Borzyszkowski, Marczak, & Zarębski, 2016).

Ultra-peripheral municipalities: A cluster analysis

For a deeper analysis of the emerging evidence of tourist and demographic dynamics, a cluster analysis was applied to the 358 municipalities classified as ultra-peripheral, with the aim of verifying the existence of groups with similar characteristics and issues

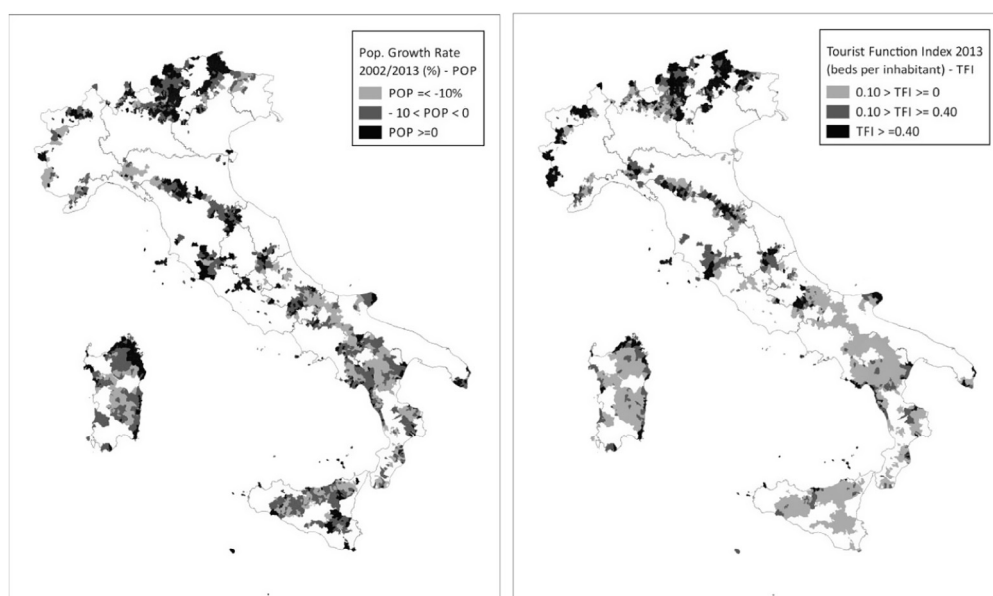


Fig. 1. Peripheral and ultra-peripheral municipalities: Population growth rate and tourist function index.

Table 2
Ultra-peripheral municipalities clusters (means).

Indicator	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Total
No. Municipalities	100	27	100	131	358
Population (average)	3950	2446	2888	1294	2568
Population growth rate 2002/2013 (%)	9.5	2.2	−4.6	−15.9	−1.1
Persons over 65 years (%) (census data 2011)	17.9	19.3	22.2	27.9	21.2
Natural population growth rate 2002/2013 (%)	1.9	0.4	−3.1	−8.3	−2.1
Net migration rate 2002/2013 (%)	14.0	7.7	0.2	−7.1	4.5
Employed persons (enterprises)/Population (%) – 2013	23.9	38.5	15.1	9.6	19.5
Tourist function index (beds per inhabitant) – 2013	0.48	2.11	0.12	0.06	0.41

Source: Author's elaboration of ISTAT data.

with respect to demographic and tourist dynamics. The municipality of Civitella Alfedena, which was the site of the case study analysed in this paper, is itself ultra-peripheral.

Among the variables considered for describing the municipalities and presented above, six of them demonstrated the best capability for classification. They are: population growth rate, tourist function index (beds per inhabitant), percentage of elderly people, natural growth rate, net migration rate, number of employed persons in enterprises over the population.

A two-step clustering method was applied in this study (Gorton, Douarin, Davidova, & Latruff, 2008)—computed using IBM SPSS Statistics—adopting the squared Euclidean distance algorithm for the case processing. A four-cluster solution showed the most distinctive profile (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998), and was thus the solution retained in this study. The four clusters were identified as possessing a good measure of cohesion and separation, with a silhouette coefficient of 0.60 (Rousseeuw, 1987). Table 2 presents the variables analysed for the four profiles.

The quality of this result is confirmed by comparing the mean value of all the variables of the data-set, not only of those used as inputs in the cluster analysis, and describing the four segments, that is the four homogenous groups of the municipalities analysed. The main characteristics of the clusters are summarised in Table 3.

Fig. 2 presents the geographical distribution of the ultra-peripheral municipalities, divided into the four clusters.

Cluster 1 (100 municipalities). Peripheries with positive demographic trends: This cluster includes municipalities of the coastal areas and islands with population higher than the average of the sample and small tourist localities in mountain areas. The population increases both in natural and migration rates and the percentage of elderly people is lower compared both to the other clusters and to the national average. The attractiveness of these areas is also confirmed by the percentage of employed persons, which is above average. Tourism is quite developed, with a high tourist function index (0.48). The offer is based on hotels (62% of total beds). There has been an increase both in the number of accommodation establishments and in beds.

Cluster 2 (27 municipalities). Small municipalities with high tourist specialisation: The municipalities belonging to this cluster are smaller than those in cluster 1, and are mainly located in the mountainous areas of Northern Italy and in the coastal areas of the South. The most evident characteristic of this cluster is a high specialisation in tourism. The tourist function index is 2.11 (more than two beds per inhabitant) and more than 40% of the total workers operate in the tourist sector. The attractiveness of these areas is also demonstrated by the very high percentage of employed persons over the total population (38.5%), much higher than the national average. The tourist system seems to have reached a stage of maturity because there has been no increase in the number of beds. The population is also rather stable.

Cluster 3 (100 municipalities). Municipalities with negative demographic trends and poor tourist offer, but with the emergence of new typologies of accommodation establishments: The municipalities belonging to this cluster show a decreasing population (−4.6%)

Table 3
Profile of ultra-peripheral municipalities clusters, according to tourist variables (means). Year 2013.

Indicator	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Total
Variation in tourist function 2002/2013 (%)	2.3	−1.3	10.1	51.1	8.6
Tourism density (beds per sq. km.) – 2013	34.2	67.9	4.8	1.5	17.3
Variation in no. accommodation establishments 2002/2013 (%)	22.6	28.3	92.0	4.0	27.2
Alternative accommodation establishments: B&B, Agritourism (%)	28.0	7.6	41.3	37.5	24.1
Municipalities with beds (%) – 2002	89.0	96.3	73.0	57.3	73.5
Municipalities with beds (%) – 2013	95.0	100.0	88.0	77.1	86.9
Employed persons in the tourist sector/Total employed (%)	22.9	40.2	11.6	11.9	21.6
Variation in no. of beds 2002/2013 (%)	12.0	0.9	4.9	27.1	7.4
Variation Hotel beds (%)	28.9	13.8	10.8	18.7	22.6
Variation Open-Air Establishments beds (%)	−20.7	−12.5	−19.1	23.9	−15.8
Variation Apartments beds (%)	20.6	44.4	101.3	−13.6	30.7
Variation Agritourism beds (%)	83.0	118.7	111.8	115.0	95.0
Variation B&B beds (%)	850.7	461.8	1341.6	996.4	857.1

Source: Author's elaboration of ISTAT data.

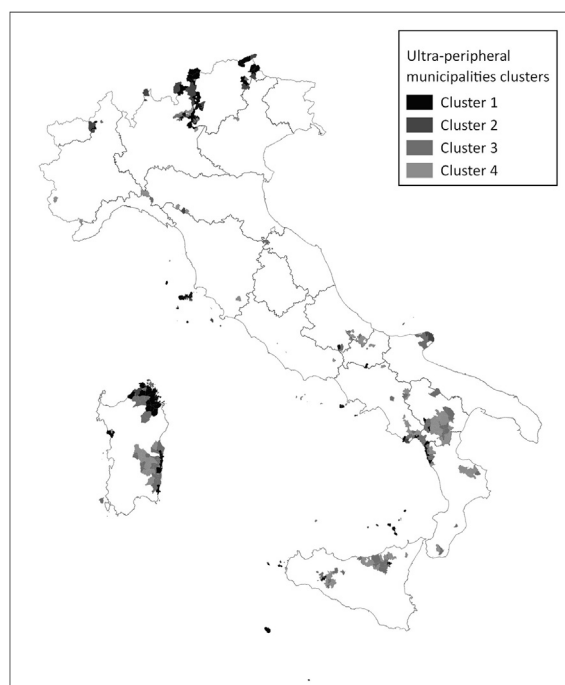


Fig. 2. Ultra-peripheral municipalities clusters.

because negative natural population growth rates are not compensated by positive migration rates. The percentage of employed persons is lower than the sample average both in total and in the tourist sector, and the tourist function index is low (0.12). Nevertheless, an increase in the number of establishments and beds is observed, with high growth rates in non-hotel establishments (agritourism, B&Bs, holiday apartments).

Cluster 4 (121 municipalities). Small municipalities in demographic decline and with low employment: These villages are much smaller than the sample average (1294 inhabitants on average), with a strong population decrease, always lower than -10% , but with peaks lower than -30% . Both natural and migration population growth rates are negative. These municipalities are mainly located in Southern Italy, while the few that are located in Northern Italy show a higher tourism intensity, but a de-structured demography due to the tiny populations and the aging of the population caused by long-term emigration. The tourist function index is also very low (0.06), even if it has increased in the considered period. The non-hotel establishments prevail, with a high weight of agritourism and B&Bs (37.5% of the total) —often the only types of accommodation available. Even though starting from a very low base, the number of beds has grown significantly (27%).

This cluster analysis affords a better understanding and specification of some important differences among ultra-peripheral municipalities. These discriminations are mainly based on the relation between demographic trends and the role played by tourism in the local economy. Two groups of municipalities (clusters 1 and 2) have a prominent tourist economy and positive demographic trends, whereas the groups of municipalities showing negative demographic trends (clusters 3 and 4) are associated with lower tourism intensity. These latter groups are particularly interesting in terms of transition because, despite an underdeveloped tourist system and continuing depopulation, they feature the highest growth rates in beds and establishments, especially for alternative accommodation establishments, like agritourism and B&Bs.

Some differences also emerge in the clusters characterised by high tourist intensity: in the first group (cluster 1)—registering the best demographic performances—tourism seems to represent a significant industry in the local economy, whereas in the second group (cluster 2) one-sided economies based on tourism are represented. The approaches to tourism planning and the role of tourism in local development can differ significantly between the two groups (Kauppila et al., 2009).

In overall terms, the analysis highlights clear changes within the tourist systems that are leading to the mentioned transition, and the role of tourism as a factor in local community development seems to be confirmed.

Restructuring the tourist supply: Considerations from a case study

Transition management as a means for tourist supply reorganisation and territorial revitalisation

As a result of the reflections that both our theoretical and statistical data may stimulate, it can be useful to focus on the issues related to the reorganisation and management of the new tourist supply by considering transition management as the most appropriate approach to manage the change. In this essay, it is argued that the extent to which peripheral rural areas are effective in

shifting tourist flows and in revitalizing territories is strongly dependent on the strategies local communities and their multiple stakeholders opt for within a planning model fostering community-based tourism.

Within the proposed approach, the most critical issue has always been stakeholder collaboration. Even though scholars have often referred to it as the most compelling means of tourist development (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999), it is still difficult to manage appropriately and productively (McComb, Boyd, & Boluk, 2016; Monroe, Plate, & Oxarart, 2013).

To organise and manage tourist development through collaboration means primarily to invite the host community to undergo a sort of “collective covenant” (Magnaghi, 2012) through which each participating actor has to find their own reason of convenience and thereby contribute to the production of territorial and landscape added value. It is widely recognised that the collective sharing of responsibilities is the main prerequisite for any successful local development project. Only through collective involvement can citizens become the stimulus that enacts change, and then carry on their right of active citizenship (Kemp et al., 2007). Achieving such propitious conditions, however, presents a number of obstacles, mostly related to stakeholders’ lack of motivation and commitment. These obstacles are some of the elements that have actually called into question the real success of community-based tourism (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016). It is often very hard to stimulate real and effective participation, and it is even harder to find local leaders who are prepared to assume the initial cost of change and to take charge of the whole process in some way. Nevertheless, each path to innovation is held in the hands of those few who accept the risk of change and who initiate and promote new actions in order to activate the required social capital (Jones, 2005).

For these reasons, participation (as well as the collaboration derived) can be considered an “intermediate process” with a dynamic lying midway between spontaneity and planned. When missing, it ought to be built and stimulated ad hoc, but at the same time, it should arise as organically as possible. As stated by the principles of participatory action research (Fals-Borda, 1984, 2001; Minardi & Cifiello, 2005), both institutions and action-researchers may play an important role in this process, encouraging and promoting interactive participation on one hand, and presenting the objective of achieving self-activated involvement as the main goal on the other (Reid et al., 2004). Participation may simply mean meeting and engaging in dialogue and debate at the beginning, but eventually it should turn into a real process of decision-making. Looking at the failure resulting in most attempts made to promote collaborative partnerships, McComb et al. (2016) highlight the complexity of each step involved, with particular reference to (1) the identification of legitimate stakeholders; (2) stakeholder participation; and (3) effective collaboration. For the process to work, each of the three sides requires careful attention. It might not be enough to identify the legitimate stakeholders. They also need to be provided with the requisite level of common knowledge before they can fully participate in the decision-making and collaborative process. Therefore, all these aspects may be more usefully considered as objectives of intermediate processes rather than as a set of initial conditions.

The case study introduced here was conducted by acknowledging all these critical points and by paying particular attention to the intermediate steps. In order to achieve this important goal, some strategies suggested by the transition management have been adopted, such as problem structuring and vision development; agenda building and networking; project building and product implementation (Kemp et al., 2007).

The project “Agenda Civitella Alfedena” in the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise

The project “Agenda Civitella Alfedena” was taken over by the authors in a fairly popular tourist destination, the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (the oldest protected area in Italy), in the period 2012–2015. It was run according to the participatory action-research methodology, on the basis of a case study research design (Creswell 2009; Stake 1995; Yin 2013). It pursued the twofold aim of (1) exploring the existing tourist system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information; and (2) supporting a social reorganisation of the tourist supply in order to innovate and address the market changes concerning rural peripheries. In other words, it was used to analyse as well as to influence the transition towards new forms of tourism. Many of the insights that have been analysed in this paper so far originally came to light while following this research path.

Civitella Alfedena is a small municipality of about 300 inhabitants located in a mountainous area of the Abruzzo region in Southern-Central Italy. As mentioned above, according to the NSIA classification, the municipality is an ultra-peripheral area. According to the proposed clustering, it belongs to cluster 1: “Peripheries with positive demographic trends”.

The Civitella Alfedena tourist vocation developed successfully in the 1970s when it became a paradigmatic case and an example of best practice in the field of ecotourism in Italy. It was one of the first experiences demonstrating that environmental protection could favour long-term wealth for local populations.

Statistical data seem to confirm the relevance of the tourist sector for the socio-economic development of the municipality. Despite its small dimensions, the high percentage of aged persons (21.1% of residents are over 65 years according to census data) and a negative natural growth rate in the period 2002–2013 (–7.5%) Civitella Alfedena pulled new residents (the net migration rate was 15.4%) and showed a high tourist function index (1.11) as well as a high percentage of employed in the tourist sector (43.1% in 2013).

In the same duration, some changes in the tourist supply are observed, such as an increase in the number of accommodation establishments (62.5%), a diversification of new accommodation types (B&Bs), and the involvement of new operators.

Beside the evolution of the tourist supply structure, important social innovations are still required as the local system does not appear ready to manage the transition required by the changes in tourist practices. Its pioneering operators are now beginning to retire and the small and family owned ventures, which invested in the field due to the initial popularity with tourists, need support to address the new market challenges through a planned renewal action. Faced with this unsettled situation, the mayor proposed an

experimental research project which aimed to lead the socio-economic local actors towards a new shared vision based on contemporary ecotourism features. That was possible but required fostering participation in a process of analysis and re-organisation of the local tourist system. Thus, the place has turned into a “transition arena” where both municipality and Park had a key role as formal institutions in the activation of this process of change following a goal-oriented modulation. The National Park, in particular, was invested with the role of connecting this process with the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

The authors were invited to promote and support several actions designed to enable dialogue among the stakeholders in favour of a community-based development. The empirical work aimed to test the more efficient strategies to develop new “territorial tourist products”, that is new services and packages not limited to the offer of one single tourist company, but instead proposed by a group of cooperating operators, each involved in a different field of hospitality. Therefore, the research was carried out according to a principle of “internal validity” (Yin, 2013) as the theoretical issues somehow guided the whole actions plan and finally led towards a situation different from the initial one (that is, to a change).

According to the “transition management” model, as well as to case study methodology (Soy, 1997), the project developed different states of play which were organised into three levels (Kemp et al., 2007).

During the first stage (strategic level) the researchers and the operators went through a problem structuring that led to a better understanding of the original situation. This was obtained through the collection of different kinds of data such as:

- statistical secondary data of the tourist fluxes in recent years, to be shared with local stakeholders;
- direct surveys appraising tourists’ satisfaction with the services and hospitality (important mainly for mapping criticalities);
- mapping of the operators’ specific learning needs, on the basis of which focused workshops were organised;

The second stage (tactical level) was carried out on the basis of the Open Space Technology (Owen, 2008), according to which some technical tables were organised with local operators in order to develop a proposal for the reorganisation and innovation of the overall tourist supply, aiming both to explore and improve the existing services (appraised in the surveys) as well as to develop new integrated products. Integration was particularly important, ensuring the collaboration between the various economic actors (mountain guides, environmental educators, farmers, accommodation establishments managers, restaurants owners, cultural operators, etc.). During this phase, a key accomplishment was the development of a shared vision. By working collaboratively, the operators involved developed their idea of a plausible and coherent future as a base upon which to project new strategies for the territory as a whole. This allowed them to reflect upon the real problems/criticalities they have to address.

During the third stage (the operational level), the operators—with external support from the researchers—organised themselves into informal but stable working sub-groups with the aim of building a territorial agenda based on new cooperation projects. In order to make the supply more coherent, a “Declaration of Intentions” was submitted by the participants, fostering the specific objective of strengthening both territorial identity and the quality of services. The National Park also played an important role at this stage, taking part in the meetings as well as attempting to forge synergy between the various economic and social actors.

Conclusions

The tourism transition—characterised by the shift from traditional economy and/or from mass tourism to new forms of locally based tourism—represents an important opportunity for peripheral areas as well as a difficult challenge to be addressed.

The re-conceptualisation of remoteness on one side and of rural peripheries on the other requires new approaches aimed at a reorganisation of the tourist supply more responsive to the emotional dimension of new tourist practices and the related “sense of place”. The issues of tourism development in rural peripheral areas therefore creates the need to explore new strategies of territorial planning that are able to overcome single operator’s offers and to foster community-based tourism.

The statistical data related to Italian inner areas in the last few years show the growth and diversification of tourist accommodation both in type of establishment and in number of beds, as well as an increasing number of rural municipalities developing such accommodation. The Italian strategy for inner areas recognises the crucial role of tourism in the re-activation of territorial resources by stressing the role of local communities within it.

A deeper statistical analysis based on clusters also shows that differences are important and that, besides municipalities with positive demographic trends and a strong orientation towards tourism, there are some groups that, despite a weak tourist system, have recorded a growth in alternative accommodation establishments such as B&Bs and agritourism. In these latter groups, the mentioned growth is in countertrend with demographic dynamics, which have witnessed a steep decrease in population. A clear transition is on-going, which may lead peripheral areas towards a new conceptualisation beyond the idea of marginality.

Therefore, a new approach centred on the concept of agency is proposed in which local actors are considered capable of activating their freedom from structural constraints and influencing change. Within this theoretical framework, the transition management is meant as a multi-level governance model that may help rural communities to transform themselves in a gradual reflexive way. Its guided processes should lead to the interaction among all the involved local actors (institutions, citizens, cultural and tourist operators, farmers) and to a shared vision that can be considered an innovative strategy that coordinates different levels of governance while fostering self-organisation and self-sustainability.

The case study undertaken in Civitella Alfedena resulted in plenty of insights that any policy aiming at the revitalisation of fragile areas may want to consider. One of these concerns the focus on “intermediate processes”. Between the development of a common vision and formulating the concrete actions to be taken, there is a long series of difficulties that can become real barriers for local

development. These problems are mostly related to stakeholders' cultural capital, knowledge, experience and trust. That is why, while getting involved in the participatory planning, local actors were encouraged to experiment with mutual learning aimed at increasing their level of trust and at improving their planning and management skills. In other words, a "transition arena" was opened up in order to address innovation within their hospitality system through participation.

Finally, the good news is that peripheries have never before been the object of interest for national policies and that both tourist perception and tourist supply reorganisation are now shifting towards a transition. The analysis carried out here reveals that the effectiveness of these policies and the transition towards a new paradigm is contingent upon peripheries' ability to pose themselves as subjects, that is as agents of their own change.

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