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Preliminary Considerations on Cultural Tourism in Abruzzo as a Strategic Tool for the Renewal of the Regional Tourist Offerings

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ABSTRACT

Although the number of initiatives of place promotion, the Abruzzo tourism offer remains essentially polarized around two basic segments (the seaside/summer segment and the mountain/snow-based one) and it strongly depends on the proximate tourist demand. Actually the Abruzzo region holds a wider and varied heritage, composed by cultural attractions, historical and architectural resources, wine and food potential and, more generally speaking, a lot heterogeneous environments and landscapes. These resources could respond to the new philosophies of tourism demand, characterised by the experiential motivations of peacefulness, tranquility and soul regeneration in a very close contact with nature. The goal of this study is to evaluate the potential tourism usability of the Abruzzo cultural heritage assessing the levels of the distribution of accommodation facilities and attractiveness. A more aware and integrated tourism offer may produce complementarities both at product and territory levels and may also absorb some critical issues of the regional tourism industry (no awareness of cultural tourism potential, the fragmentation of public policies, the inability to cooperate with a networking mentality).

Keywords: Cultural tourism; Tangible heritage; Cultural itineraries; Integration; Abruzzo

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Nonostante le tante iniziative attivate negli ultimi anni nell'ambito della promozione del territorio, l'offerta turistica abruzzese resta fondamentalmente polarizzata intorno ai segmenti turistici di base (balneare-estivo e montano-invernale) e fortemente dipendente dalla domanda turistica di prossimità. In realtà, l'Abruzzo detiene un patrimonio assai più ampio e variegato, composto da attrattori culturali, risorse storico-architettoniche, potenzialità enogastronomiche e più genericamente da una dotazione ambientale e paesaggistica che meglio potrebbe rispondere alle nuove esigenze della domanda turistica alimentata da motivazioni esperienziali e dai caratteri di tranquillità e rigenerazione personale a contatto con la natura.

Obiettivo del presente lavoro è valutare le potenzialità del patrimonio culturale abruzzese nella sua reale fruibilità turistica al fine di ragionare intorno ad un modello di sviluppo turistico più unitario costruito sulla base di una offerta turistica integrata, capace di produrre complementarità di territori e di prodotti e di riassorbire alcune vulnerabilità proprie del settore quali la mancanza di consapevolezza del potenziale turistico, la limitata continuità delle scelte pubbliche, l'incapacità di fare rete e di scommettere su una offerta completa, sostenibile e competitiva.

Keywords: Turismo culturale; Patrimonio tangibile; Itinerari culturali; Integrazione; Abruzzo

Introduction¹

Whatever the almost too facile tourism/culture conceptual identification – since the proto-tourism period – cultural tourism has gradually taken on meanings and cross-disciplinary content in response to the more complex and multi-faceted motivations behind tourist demand (Fuschi, 2007).

The wide cultural motivations, potentially linked to all tourism experiences, have caused a multiplicity of interpretations that are still trying to taxonomise what could be (or not) considered cultural tourism and also showing the complexity of a growing phenomenon in its heterogeneous definitions (Fuschi, 2007), especially considering the rise of the cultural economy (Cerquetti, 2010; Du Gay & Pryke, 2002; Terkenli, 2002).

Thus the many definitions of cultural tourism range from a narrow interpretation which identifies it with visiting and using tangible heritage – both immovable (monuments, buildings and historic sites) and movable (museum exhibits, libraries, newspaper collections and history archives) – to a wider interpretation which encompasses the sphere of broader cultural events of an intangible nature (art events, popular traditions, food and wine production, handicrafts).

Moreover overall trends in motivations behind cultural tourism from its more orthodox forms towards more dynamic and participatory forms of cultural consumption are intellectually corroborated by the interpretation of the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1985),² while on the national scale the forerunners of this conceptual change can be detected in Law 84/1990 which widened the concept of cultural heritage to encompass all “elements making up the nation’s cultural identity” (article 1, paragraph 3).

In a broader perspective, cultural tourism, definable in a first approximation as the “movement of people attracted by human resources, i.e. by enduring results of man’s ingenuity, tangible or intangible, whose uniqueness or rarity effectively sum up the characteristics of a society, a people, an institution or a community” (Castiello, 2004, p. 45), is also linked to local development in terms of planning and management (Fusco Girard & Nijkamp, 2009; Smith, 2006). As observed by Smith (2006, p. 56):

there are a number of benefits that may be derived from [cultural] tourism provided that is managed properly. These (...) may include the creation of employment, the receipt of foreign exchange, the expansion of other economic sectors and infrastructural developments. In environmental and socio-cultural terms, tourism development can provide stimulus and funding for conservation, and the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions.

In this sense every approach to a conceptualization should encompass the complexity of the phenomenon, facing issues such as the place rarity or authenticity (Getz, 1994; Herbert, 1995; O’Meara, 2000), the feelings of identity and belonging (Plog, 1974), the need of safeguarding and protecting the cultural heritage attractions (Morelli, 2003).

The goal of this study is to offer a preliminar understanding of the current state and the potentiality of Abruzzo’s cultural tourism in a strongly polarized tourist system, also as a base for further local development opportunities.

The work is structured as follows: after a brief literature review about the concept of cultural tourism and the overview of the case study setting, the paper will present the regional cultural heritage (in particular, tangible and immovable). After that, adopting a descriptive and exploratory method and according to the “territorialista” school, the current attractiveness of nine cultural itineraries is analyzed. Implications for tourism and local development are discussed.

1. The “sticky” conceptualization of cultural tourism: a short literature review

Although cultural tourism is widely recognised as a growing phenomenon (Richards, 1996) and also one of the earliest typologies of tourism (Mikos & Rohrscheidt, 2008), there is not a universally valid and agreed definition of it (Sigala & Leslie, 2005; Smith, 2006). For its conceptualization the international and Italian literature focused on the tourist motivations and/or on the nature of attractions: these alternative views represents the extremes of an ideal continuum which tried to encompass the multifaceted dimensions of the phenomenon (Fuschi, 2007).

For example the World Tourism Organization (1985, p. 331) stated that cultural tourism “includes movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and other cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art or pilgrimages” while, for Lohmann (1999, p. 63, in Mikos von Rohrscheidt, 2008):

the concept of cultural tourism comprises all journeys taken by people who temporarily leave their place of residence mainly in order to get informed, encounter and/or experience tangible and/or intangible assets of high as well as daily culture of the visited area.

In the same vein, Silberberg (1995, p. 24) observed that cultural tourism is “the visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution”. In Italy, Bagnoli (2010, p. 78) asserted that cultural motivations are a kind of alibi that almost all tourists use to justify themselves and to the society their need for escapism while Innocenti (2007), classifying cultural tourism among the typical forms of tourism, remembered that the cultural tourism’s definition depends on the tourist’s *forma mentis*.

Basing on the “objective” cultural nature of attractions, Becker (1993, p. 8 cited by Mikos von Rohrscheidt, 2008) pointed out that:

cultural tourism uses buildings, relics and customs within specific landscapes, locations and facilities, in order to show cultural, social and economic development of a given territory to visitors by regularly providing them with access to touring options on offer, guiding services on location, opportunities for sightseeing and specific information materials.

In strictu sensu this conceptualization might partially overlaps the heritage tourism's definition (Timothy & Boyd; 2003; Zeppel & Hall, 1992).

Table 1: Main typologies of cultural tourism attractions

Typology	Example of attractions
Heritage sites	Archelological sites, whole towns, monuments, museums
Performing arts venues	Theatres, concert halls, cultural centres
Visual arts	Galleries, sculpture parks, photography museums, architecture
Festivals and special events	Music festivals, sporting events, carnivals
Religious sites	Cathedrals, temples, pilgrimage destinations, spiritual retreats
Rural environments	Villages, farms, national parks, ecomuseums
Indigenous communities and traditions	Tribal people, ethnic groups, minority cultures
Arts and crafts	Textiles, pottery, painting, sculpture
Language	Learning or practice
Gastronomy	Wine tasting, food sampling, cookery courses
Industry and commerce	Factory visits, mines, breweries and distilleries, canal trips
Modern popular culture	Pop music, shopping, fashion, media, design, technology
Special interest activities	Painting, photography, weaving

Source: Smith (2006)

One of the most holistic definitions of cultural tourism remains the one attributed to Richards (1996). The author provided a twofold conceptualization: on the one hand (the so called conceptual definition) cultural tourism is “the movement of persons to cultural manifestation away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs” (Richards, 1996, p. 24); on the other hand (the technical definition) cultural tourism corresponds to “all movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as museums, heritage sites, artistic performances and festivals outside their normal place of residence” (*Ibid.*). Similarly, Hall & Zeppel (1990, p. 87) posited that:

cultural tourism is an experience based on being involved in and stimulated by theatre performances, visual arts and festivals. On the other hand tourism narrowed down to cultural heritage is connected with visiting selected landscapes, historical places, buildings and landmarks – here the experience occurs via searching for contact with nature and sense of unity with the history of the visited site.

It is crucial to highlight that, whichever perspective is adopted, the definition of cultural tourism still remains “sticky” for its ontological and controversial linkages with the concepts of culture³ and cultural heritage.⁴

2. The setting of the study: historical aspects and current trends of tourism in Abruzzo (Italy)

Tourism took root in Abruzzo, in its competitive dimension, only after World War II (the 1970s), as for the whole of the 19th century the image of the region was crystallised by travel literature which characterised the area as a “frightening and hostile space”.⁵ The first cautious signs of tourism were already visible in the early twentieth century, however, (the first seaside resort was opened in Francavilla al Mare in 1873) corresponding to the region’s two specific morphological environments – coast and mountains – in line with the tourist regionalisation put forward by Toschi (1967).⁶

Moreover, the highest peaks of the Apennine chain (Gran Sasso and Maiella) with their snowy peaks, on the one hand, and a low, sandy coastal strip, on the other, made the region particularly well-suited to neighbourhood tourism (Rome, Naples) of a family type, and also gave it the strongly dual character it still has today, organised and polarised into specific geographical areas. The first systematic studies (Anonimo, 1934; De Santis, 1975; Fondi, 1970; Landini, 1973; Riccardi, 1957; Ridolfi, 1972), basing on the accommodation structures and on foreign tourist flows, significantly confirmed the attractiveness of the wide and sandy beaches and of the winter sport and mountain destinations.

According to the Tourism Statistical Observatory of the Abruzzo Region,⁷ tourism flows in Abruzzo have certainly registered a growth in tourist numbers in absolute terms (1.5 million visitors and seven million overnight stays in 2013) but in relative terms it occupied an entirely marginal position, ranking only third from last nationally. There are 2,400 hotels and other accommodation structures with around 50,000 beds available. But tourist growth has not always gone hand in hand with development, where the region shows marked weaknesses including its powerful polarisation (with seaside tourism accounting for around 60% of tourist arrivals, 70% of tourist overnights and 35% of accommodation⁸ in 2013 in only 19 towns),⁹ highly seasonal character of the tourism demand (June-August) (Cresa, 2014), serious dependence on neighbourhood tourism and low international tourist numbers (just 190,000 foreign tourists accounting for 4% of the total). But first and foremost Abruzzo’s tourist weakness is evident from the region’s inability to organise the various forms of tourism, thus putting off occasions for territorial rebalancing and further growth in the sector (lower seasonal dependence), also from the perspective of the whole region’s sustainable development.

An important turning point – at least in terms of the building of a strong tourist image – took place since the 1990s when the region invested in environmental protection and established itself as Europe's Green Region with a grand total of three national parks and a regional one (Regional Law n. 38, 1996, “Framework law on protected areas of the Abruzzo Region for the Apennine Park of Europe”) with the result, however, of generating a marked lack of correspondence between popular image and actual situation.

The region appears no less open to multiple tourism scenarios (in line with new demand for more “experiential” forms of tourism), at least in terms of image and plans (which have remained, however, for the most part only on paper). The reference is to other types of tourism, which have evident potential in Abruzzo (evaluated by a number of studies, see Cardinale & Ferrari, 2006; Fuschi, 2012; Fuschi & Cavuta, 2004; Fuschi & Di Fabio, 2012; Landini, 2007) starting from natural amenities, food and wine specialties and, especially, history and culture (even if in the so-called “Turismo del Minore”).

3. Cultural heritage, cultural itineraries and current tourism attractiveness in Abruzzo: a descriptive analysis

3.1. Approach and methodology

As previously highlighted, this study aims to understand how the Abruzzo’s cultural heritage might contribute to the exploitation of cultural tourism opportunities and to the renewal of the region’s tourist offer. Cultural heritage is part of the wider territorial heritage, understood as the result of the coevolution between nature and culture, humans and environments (Magnaghi, 2005a). Hence, it can be not only conserved and restored but also valorized to ensure sustainable and durable processes of development for local communities.

Thus, without presumption of absolute concurrence of objectives and methods, the study’s approach might be attributed to the so-called “territorialista” school, founded in Italy in 1980s (Magnaghi, 2005a; 2005b; 2009).

According to the goal of the study and the mentioned approach, we have chosen to take a narrow view of cultural tourism,¹⁰ considering the use of immovable tangible heritage alone. Another aspect further justified the adoption of this limited conceptualization: cultural tourism in Abruzzo has been subjected to only few systemic analysis; thus this work might represent an exploratory attempt to understanding the regional issues of cultural tourism offering a “map” of the state of the art. As acknowledged by many authors (Dematteis, 1995; Magnaghi, 2009), even a mere description and/or a cataloguing of the territorial resources and heritage might contain an implicit project for it. Similarly, the description of the regional endowment of tangible and immovable cultural heritage, the summary of the main regional policies and the examination of the current attractiveness of the cultural itineraries, could address some deeper insights useful in terms of tourism planning in a crystallized scenario.

In methodological terms, we collected a broad and heterogeneous dataset: we used national statistics, data divulged on the regional official website and also data provided by the aforementioned Tourism Statistical Observatory and by the Department for Tourism, Culture and Landscape.

3.2. The regional tangible cultural heritage and its promotion

The Abruzzo region has officially surveyed around 500 significant cultural attractions including hermitages, archaeological sites, castles, Art Nouveau buildings and churches of cultural interest (www.regione.abruzzo.it). The distribution of these resources is anything but homogeneous. The Aquila's area has a higher density of hermitages, archaeological sites and Baroque and Franciscan churches while the Art Nouveau buildings are predominantly in the Pescara and Chieti provinces.

Table 2: Main expressions of immovable tangible cultural heritage by province. Year: 2006

	L'Aquila	Teramo	Pescara	Chieti	Total
Art Nouveau buildings	7	8	34	30	79
Baroque churches	32	11	23	18	84
Franciscan churches	16	13	11	10	50
Medieval churches	30	19	14	4	67
Hermitages	39	14	16	17	86
Archaeological sites	40	15	8	19	82
Castles	23	1	9	11	44
Total	187	81	115	109	492

Source: our elaboration from www.regione.abruzzo.it (last access on 30th September 2016)

Despite the evident richness of cultural heritage, the promotion of cultural tourism at regional level has some critical issues.

In Italy article 117 of the Constitution accorded the State exclusive jurisdiction regarding "safeguarding the environment, the ecosystem and cultural heritage" while "the enhancement of cultural and environmental heritage" and the "promotion and organisation of cultural activities" is the joint responsibility of State and Regions. Regions thus play a crucial role in generating cultural tourism demand by means of specific promotion strategies.

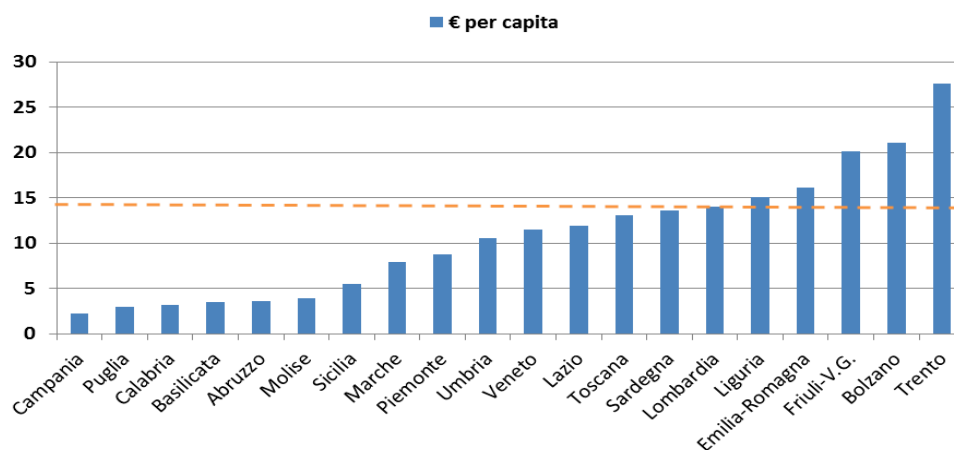


Figure 1: Per capita spending (€) invested in the management of the cultural heritage. Year 2013.

Source: own elaboration of Istat data (BES Report, “Il benessere equo e sostenibile in Italia”)

Together with Campania, Apulia, Calabria and Basilicata, Abruzzo is at the bottom of the heritage management investment scale (around 3.6 Euros per head). Observing these data the gap between Abruzzo and more virtuous regions (Bolzano, Trento, Friuli V.-G.) appear obvious and somehow unbridgeable.

Although the current scarce investments, Abruzzo has enacted a series of initiatives over time (Table 3), very few of which have been put into practice or monitored.

In the year 2000 the Invest Abruzzo marketing plan was drawn up – later put forward again in 2006 with the name Abruzzoshire – with the intention of promoting international investments for the recovery of the region’s historic building heritage. The project, inspired by the success of the so called Chiantishire and funded by the EU plan INTERREG IVC, intended, on the one hand, to preserve and restore its historic hamlets avoiding landscape damage and soil consumption and, on the other, modifying the region’s tourist image to highlight the attractions off the beaten tracks (May, 1996; Maitland & Newman, 2014). Unfortunately, this project was implemented in a fragmented manner.

In the same year a “cultural district” was set up in the Aquila province for the purposes of encouraging the tourist development of marginal areas undergoing depopulation and adopting a more integrated perspective. While still in the implementation phase, however, the project was abandoned as a result of the earthquake in L’Aquila and its crater in April 2009.

In 2005, Cultural Heritage Consortia were provided in legislative terms for the Abruzzo’s provinces with the goal of sponsoring co-ordinated cultural heritage promotion by local bodies and individuals.

The 2010-12 Regional Tourist Plan identified strategic priorities encompassing tourist offer development by promoting the local cultural heritage and identifying Destination Management Companies (hereafter ‘DMCs’) and Product Management Companies (hereafter ‘PMCs’) in order to overcome the fragmentary and non-tourist friendly nature of a tourist offer. More in details, DMCs and PMCs, are associations of both

public and private actors which jointly manage at local or regional level a tourism destination or product.¹¹

Recently the Region has recognised the increasing complexity of an ever more experiential and authenticity oriented tourist demand and therefore implemented a series of further support/promotion initiatives. Among them, were the Master Plan Abruzzo – which sets aside over 50 million Euros for the Tourism and Culture sector - and the HERA Project (Sustainable Tourism Management of Adriatic Heritage)¹² which aimed to develop a collaborative cross-border platform within the Adriatic area for the management and the promotion of a sustainable tourism’s model based on common cultural heritage.

Further significant initiatives have been the introduction in 2015 of a Regional Governance System for the systematic co-ordination of the DMCs and PMCs and tax incentives (the so-called ArtBonus) for donations in favour of restoring the tangible cultural heritage.

A contradictory framework emerges from the state of the art with the absence, at least until very recent times, of continuity and overview, an inability to deal with the complexity of the existing cultural heritage and the fragility of an obsolete tourist system.

Distinctly positive signs, on the other hand, have been provided by local councils joining the “Borghi più belli d’Italia”¹³ (23 hamlets) and “Borghi Autentici d’Italia”¹⁴ (36 hamlets) as expressions of bottom-up and networked valorisation of the cultural tourism potential.

Table 3: Main policies for cultural tourism and cultural heritage. Years: 2000-2016

Name	Main objectives and or actions
Invest Abruzzo & Abruzzoshire	Promotion for private investments in the regional heritage
L’Aquila Cultural District	Integration of the development strategies for marginal areas through the exploitation of cultural heritage and cultural tourism potentialities
Cultural Heritage consortia	Coordination of cultural heritage promotional strategies
DMCs & PMCs	Coordination and integration of the cultural tourism offer
HERA Project	Development of a joint cross-border platform within the Adriatic area for management and promotion of sustainable tourism based on common cultural heritage
ArtBonus	Tax incentive for donations in favour of restoring the tangible cultural heritage

Source: our elaboration from data provided by the Regional Department for Tourism, Culture and Landscape, the official website of the Abruzzo Region (www.regione.abruzzo.it, last access on 30th September 2016) and the official website of HERA (<http://www.heradriatic.eu>, last access on 30th September 2016)

3.3. The attractiveness of the cultural itineraries

As highlighted, the goal of the present study is to gain a preliminar – but perspectival – overview of the current and potential role of cultural tourism in the Abruzzo’s tourism offer. For this purpose we have analysed in detail the nine cultural itineraries identified by the Abruzzo region in 2005 in its guide “Abruzzo Artistic Towns” (Romano, 2005). They represent a useful case for analysing the attractiveness of cultural heritage *per se*: in fact after their design the Region didn’t follow specific promotional strategies in order to foster tourism attractiveness. Furthermore, the destinations included in the itineraries are not aware of being part of them: in a number of official sites there are not traces of these itineraries and therefore no marketing strategies are conceived in a itinerary’s view.

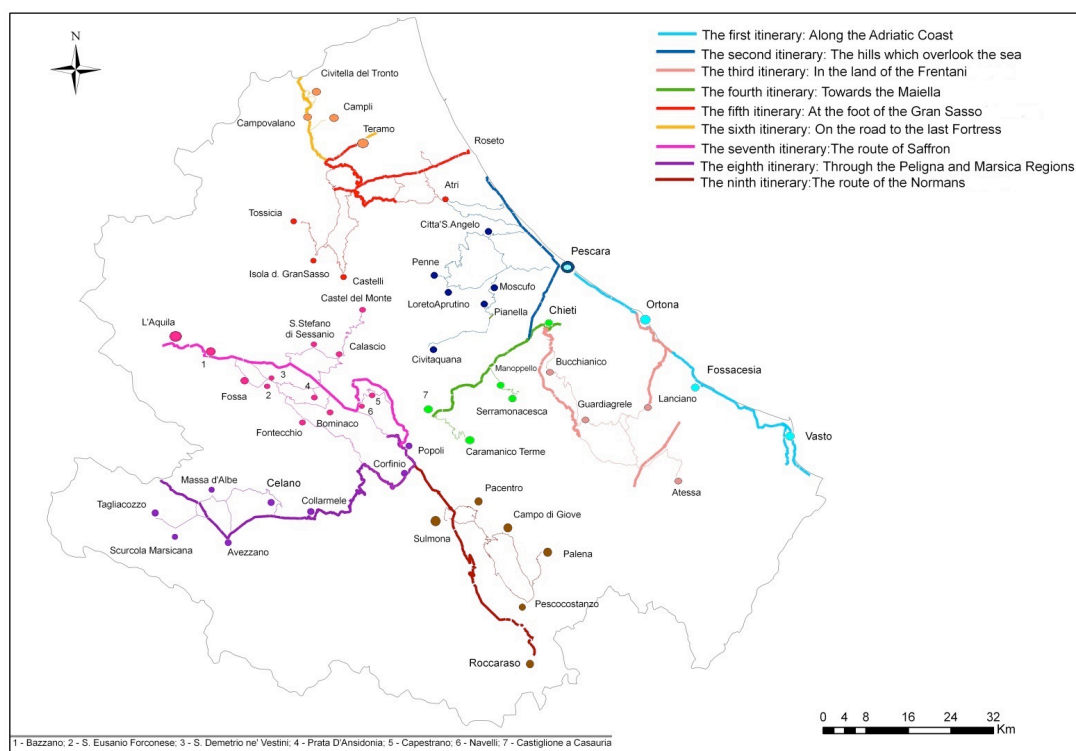


Figure 2: The nine itineraries

Source: elaborated by Paola Mucciante

The available tourist accommodation over these nine itineraries as a whole are 1,027 (just under half of the region’s total) offering more than 30,000 beds (around a third of the region’s total). Around 84% of accommodation facilities are non-hotel (B&Bs, farm holiday buildings, camp sites, etc.). From a distributive point of view the available accommodation is concentrated in the coastal strip: the “Along the Adriatic Coast” itinerary alone accounts for one third of the total of beds – in line with its established seaside tourism profile.

A further significant aspect is the size of the towns involved: the larger the towns en route (Pescara, Chieti, L’Aquila, Teramo) the greater the range of accommodation (both in absolute and bed terms) and the larger the number of hotels as compared to other types of accommodation.

Overall, it can be said that whilst they vary widely, all routes are well-equipped with accommodation.

An analysis of tourist numbers over the nine itineraries is a much more complex matter with non-cultural motivations also coming into play but still requires the multi-dimensional analysis so inherent in tourist demand. That said, no analysis can avoid taking account of the attractions of the great cultural sites on many of these itineraries. In other words, the itineraries encompass other tourist type destinations (especially seaside and snow-based) and thus, whilst on the one hand there is no tourist flow motivational mapping, on the other the interpretation focuses on the territory and on cultural resources and their potential, rather than on motivational aspects as such (Richards, 1996).

Despite the absence of continuity in regional tourist policies, it should be observed that these itineraries have been confirmed as somewhat attractive. According to the official data provided by the regional Tourism Statistical Observatory visitors in 2013 were about 660,000 (less than half of the regional total) while overnight stays were around 2 million (around one third of regional figures). The most attractive itineraries in terms of tourist numbers are: “Along the Adriatic Coast” (29% of visitors of the 9 itineraries) – which encompasses most established seaside destinations –, “The hills which overlook the Sea” (around 20%) and “The route of Saffron” (approx. 11%). The overnight stay average is 2.98 days (as against a regional average of 4.6 days) and varies from 2.5 days on the “The hills which overlook the Sea” route to 3.5 on the “Along the Adriatic Coast”.

From itinerary to itinerary variations are evident. In accordance with accommodation distribution the itineraries which pass through large towns (Chieti, Lanciano, Teramo, Vasto, Pescara) or established tourist destinations register higher arrivals and overnights. Despite this, even those itineraries taking in a dense network of smaller towns entirely marginal to traditional tourist circuits (“The route of Saffron”, “The hills which overlook the Sea”) have shown to be relatively attractive. Probably, areas succeed in any case in attracting a certain cultural tourism thanks to their history, identity, the wealth and variety of their heritage and hardworking individuals and communities.¹⁵

The attractiveness to foreign tourists would also appear to be especially important: foreign tourist arrivals and overnights are both two percentage points higher than regional averages.

Table 4: Accommodation facilities, beds, tourist arrivals, overnights and occupation rates, by itinerary.¹⁶ Year 2013

	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Tourist arrivals	of which foreigners (%)	Overnights	of which foreigners (%)	Occupation rates
Itinerary I	195	10,931	195,758	17.63	685,314	17.00	17.18%

Itinerary II	167	4,047	157,024	19.10	393,004	25.76	26.61%
Itinerary III	107	1,964	57,759	14.66	152,933	13.71	21.33%
Itinerary IV	92	2,223	52,670	11.90	175,392	10.15	21.62%
Itinerary V	126	1,982	30,409	11.29	88,185	16.45	12.19%
Itinerary VI	57	1,252	26,070	12.32	76,461	16.79	16.73%
Itinerary VII	141	3,202	81,098	14.31	219,812	17.52	18.81%
Itinerary VIII	54	2,271	24,854	14.44	78,847	17.39	9.51%
Itinerary IX	88	2,193	34,828	14.11	99,406	17.92	12.42%
Total itineraries	1,027	30,065	660,470	14.42%	1,969,354	16.97%	17.95%
Abruzzo region totals	2,382	106,706	1,499,980	12.50%	6,908,738	14.13%	17.74%

Source: our elaboration from data provided by the regional Tourism Statistical Observatory

The exploratory perspective adopted, however, requires us to go beyond a straightforward quantitative approach to the itineraries which sees them exclusively as meeting points between cultural heritage, accommodation and attractiveness to a more systemic and territorial interpretation. Whilst not underestimating the importance of the quantitative overview, attempts have been made to add more qualitative and perspective considerations.

The main strength of all the itineraries is the wealth of cultural heritage, sometimes scattered among small towns (Itineraries II, VII, VIII and IX) and sometimes in a few medium-large towns (Itineraries I and VI). Thus if, in the former the wealth of heritage could foster tourist development and potentially help hinder economic marginalisation and depopulation, in the latter the cultural heritage could enrich the pre-existing tourist offer. Furthermore, it is precisely where other forms of tourism exist or are nearby (Itineraries I, IV, VII and IX) that integration and circuit creation opportunities can be activated.

A further strength, visible only on certain itineraries (I, III, IV and VIII) consists in their accessibility, a crucial factor in extending tourist offer and ensuring its territory-wide experience.

Moreover, whilst, as we have seen, this analysis concentrates exclusively on the immovable tangible cultural heritage, it is indispensable to note also that these itineraries encompass the main intangible cultural heritage expressions of the region (the L'Aquila Perdonanza Celestiniana, the Lanciano Mastrogiurato, the Sulmona Giostra Cavalleresca, the Bucchianico Festa dei Banderesi, to cite but a few) which could attract admittedly event-specific tourism if organised into tourism packages.

Lastly it is notable that where history has led to well-defined identities (Itineraries VII and VIII), itineraries could be organised into single product-territories with clarity, which makes easier to promote tourist brands.

There are also weaknesses including, first and foremost, the absence of an itinerary-minded approach. Those working in tourism in the various areas work alone without taking account of the itinerary as a whole and the potential impact of a network vision of the tourism offer.

A second weakness, at regional level, is the discontinuity of tourism policies both cultural and otherwise, a discontinuity which culminates in frequently uncoordinated

action lacking a systemic vision and medium-long term perspective frequently unimplemented as a whole and whose efficacy generally goes unmonitored.

All this is supplemented by the consequences, on the one hand, of urban and suburban sprawl visible in environmental and landscape terms in some of the routes (I and II) and last but not least, the effects of the post-earthquake situation in the itineraries taking in the craters (Itineraries V and VII).

4. Discussion

The territorialist approach is capable of offering some perspectives with regard to the possible forms of local revitalisation and development via its tools, by describing the local cultural resources in order to generate new values and meanings. This approach can thus be a uniquely privileged vantage point in interpreting future tourism scenarios because it is territorially anchored to a multi-dimensional interpretation of phenomena, regarding their economic, social and cultural aspects. In this theoretical perspective, the cultural heritage could be described as a strategic pool of resources for the renewal and the diversification of the regional tourism industry.

On closer examination, tourism industry in Abruzzo shows signs of working immobility which has not followed through on the many and controversial programmes and also highlights a downward trend in the popularity of its traditional segments (particularly, seaside tourism). Thus, within the regional scenario, cultural tourism is a “Turismo del Minore” based on an overall dissemination of the cultural heritage (both tangible and otherwise) by means of a series of policies necessarily agreed locally which could constitute a complementary and/or an alternative tourist offer, enriching the pre-existing one.

Some considerations could represent a useful perspective for the design of future policies and planning in order to valorise the cultural heritage potential.

First and foremost, the cultural tourism segment could perform a complementary role in relation to the traditional forms of tourism of the regional offer, improving their overall variety and quality or extending their natural seasonality. In order to activate this strategy is required a rediscovery of the role played by the inter-territorial relational capital (Camagni, 2009). In addition to offering opportunities for smaller towns, complementary tourism could well represent a new and realistic trajectory with which to relaunch more consolidated tourism areas. The absence of an integration strategy, some environmental vulnerabilities and the progressively more competitive scenario have ultimately weakened the attractiveness of the most popular destinations of the Abruzzo tourism offer.

A second cultural lever for the heritage activation could be an integration strategy. The destinations, which have a well-defined common identity (i.e., Itinerary VII), could form a network of their resources and heritage, by organising their offer through a circuital approach. These “stronger” and richer itineraries could be self-organised into a touristic product, by exploiting their shared potentialities. The pursuit of such a trajectory implies a profound rediscovery and awareness of territorial

identity/identities: each itinerary, acting as subject and object of tourism, could thus promote itself as a territorial brand defined by a full-blown evaluation of its endogenous potential (e.g., food and wine products, local handicrafts, folklore, events, landscape amenities, etc.) and tourist abilities (i.e., the co-existence of internal or external professionalisms).

Lastly, the opportunity to draw up an Abruzzo Culture Tourism Platform may well present itself as one that encompasses all the various cultural tourism destinations and itineraries into a regional scale map, with a long-term vision of communication and promotional initiatives. Mapping the entire cultural heritage endowment (both tangible and intangible) and systematically promoting cultural tourism as alternative and/or complementary segment could allow tourists to better recognize the worth and the value of so called “Turismo del Minore”.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to address some preliminary considerations about the current and potential role of cultural tourism in the whole Abruzzo’s tourism industry.

Paradoxically, even though cultural tourism research has flourished over decades, one of the problem of this field of research remains its conceptualization. In fact, the cultural tourism definition remains “sticky”, varying from a motivational approach to the analysis of the nature of attractions. Hence, after a necessary – but brief – literature review, the progressively development of tourism industry in the regional setting was described. Abruzzo still shows a strongly polarized tourism offer, anchored to the historical destinations which are however revealing signs of decline.

Despite the very low level of investment in the management of cultural heritage, the Region has progressively recognised the increasing complexity of tourist demand and also the richness of its cultural heritage attractions, planning a number of fragmented policies and initiatives. Among these, the Region (Romano, 2005) identified nine cultural itineraries, passing across the main “artistic towns” of the region. Adopting a descriptive and exploratory method and according to a “territorialista” approach, the current attractiveness of nine cultural itineraries was observed. Surprisingly, although the cultural itineraries were not supported over time by promotional strategies, they obtained a relatively good appreciation both in terms of domestic and foreign arrivals and overnights. The occupation rates illustrated the oversizing of accommodation facilities in comparison with the current level of cultural tourism demand. On the other side, this has also revealed the possibility to receive growing flows of tourists. In order to exploit the cultural heritage attractions, some possible prospective considerations were argued also by identifying strengths and weakness of the regional tourism policies.

Two fixed points emerged. Firstly, the fragmented regional tourism planning could represent a strong obstacle in order to develop a sustainable strategy for the cultural heritage’s exploitation for tourism purposes. Clarifying the institutional objectives and

priorities and also implementing plans with regularity might provide a useful road map for all the tour operators.

Secondly, notwithstanding the absence of great investments in the cultural heritage preservation and of continuous promotional strategies, the cultural itineraries stimulated a certain tourism demand. This attractiveness could be enhanced and explored in terms of complementarity and/or integration in order to renew and differentiate the polarized tourism offer.

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¹Whilst the common framework is shared, Marina Fuschi wrote the Introduction and the sections 1 and 2, Valentina Evangelista wrote sections 3 and 4 and the Conclusion. The authors would like to thank Dr. Paola Mucciante for the cartographic elaboration.

² According to which cultural tourism is to be identified with people movements triggered essentially by motives such as travel study or travel to festivals and other events, visits to archaeological sites, churches, museums, castles, historical sites and historic residences. However WTO (1985) has argued that all people movements should ultimately be comprised in its definition because they fulfil the human need for diversity and tend to heighten individual culture and bring with them new knowledge, experiences and encounters.

³ As affirmed by Smith (2006, p. 31) "it is recognised that the concept of culture as almost everything that we are and everything we do is problematic unless we differentiate between the activities that are contained with it".

⁴ In her work Vecco (2010, p. 323) defined cultural heritage as "tangible or intangible expressions of human action which, having acquired a value, need to be protected". In her work the author discussed about the historical, geographical and cultural evolution of the term founding that from a restrictive approach exclusively basing on its tangible nature, nowadays heritage is considered on the basis of its "cultural value, its value of identity and (its) capacity (...) to interact with memory" (*ibid*, p. 34). Similarly, Prentice (1993, p. 36) observed that "essentially in tourism the term heritage has come to mean not only landscapes, natural history, buildings, artefacts, cultural traditions and the like which are literally or metaphorically passed on from one generation to the other, but those among these things which can be portrayed for promotion as tourism products (...) heritage sites should be differentiated in terms of types of heritage: built, natural, and cultural heritage".

⁵ The main causes of these descriptions are the relational and social isolation of the Abruzzo Region – labelled in a number of travels' report as "Land of Brigands" – and the geomorphological features of internal mountain area, characterized both by the greatness and majesty of the peaks and the harshness and "horror" of the plasticity of forms (Massimi, 1999).

⁶ In his seminal work Toschi (1967) identified 22 Italian tourism regions, according to the natural features of tourism destinations and adopting a well grounded landscape approach. He included the Abruzzo tourism destinations in "The beaches Region of Marche and Abruzzo" (n. 14), "The hills and the little mountains Region of Marche and Abruzzo" (n. 13), "The Apennines Region of high mountains" (n. 16).

⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all the data used in this and in the following sections were provided, at the request of the authors, by the Tourism Statistical Observatory and by the regional Department for Tourism, Culture and Landscape.

⁸ The percentage of regional accommodation structures in the 19 coastal tourism towns grows up to 50% if you consider the hotels accommodation typology.

⁹ In Abruzzo about the 70% of accommodation structures are concentrate in little more than 30 towns (19 coastal towns and 12 mountain towns over 305 regional towns) and about the 75%

of tourism flows choose seaside or mountain destinations. More in details, among the mountain destinations the triangle Roccaraso-Rivisondoli-Pescocostanzo and the upland Delle Rocche rack up about 10% of regional accommodation (17% of the hotels), 14% of tourist arrivals and little less than 10% of overnights.

¹⁰ Our future objective is to integrate this taxonomy with a wider ranging analysis which will ultimately consider both movable tangible and intangible heritage.

¹¹ At the moment in Abruzzo there are 13 DMCs and 1 PMC.

¹² HERA is the name of an international project funded between 2007 and 2013 by the IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme and by the European Union. The project involved Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Erzegovina and Albania with the objective “to develop a joint cross-border platform within the Adriatic area for management and promotion of sustainable tourism based on common cultural heritage” (Source: <http://www.heradriatic.eu/>, last access on 27 December 2016). HERA tried to deal with the major problems of all partner countries concerning cultural tourism sector: “the lack of an integrated management & promotion strategy of cultural heritage and insufficient involvement of community actors in cultural heritage promotion & valorisation activities” (Source: <http://www.heradriatic.eu/>, last access on 27 December 2016).

¹³ Spurred by the Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), “Borghi più belli d’Italia” was founded in 2001 with the purposes of valorize, preserve and restore the artistic, historic, cultural and environmental heritage of small villages, often excluded by the tourist destinations’ choices (Source: www.borghipiubelliditalia.it, last access on 27 December 2016).

¹⁴ Founded in 2007, “Borghi autentici d’Italia”, is a national association of villages and local associations (so called Pro-loco) also joined by the Italian Association for Responsible Tourism (AITR). Among its objectives there is the valorization of the cultural heritage through a bottom-up, participatory and networked view of local tourism development trajectories.

¹⁵ Further studies will also need to look into the motivations attracting tourists to Abruzzo on the local scale.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, data about the seasonality are currently unavailable to authors.