Article

Stakeholder Participation in Planning of a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism Destination: The Genoa Integrated Action Plan

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Abstract: The outbreak of COVID-19 confronted the international community with critical health, social, and economic challenges. Travel and tourism were among the hardest affected sectors. In 2020 and 2021 new travel trends emerged, emphasizing local destinations, short distances, and consequently, lower-carbon transportation (proximity tourism). Post-pandemic recovery represents an opportunity to bounce back better by rethinking the sector's economic model for the sake of sustainability and innovation. This paper disseminates the research that led to the structuring of guidelines for a breakthrough and inclusive municipal-level action plan for the promotion of sustainable tourism, as part of the Tourism Friendly Cities project. An operational methodology is discussed here, whereby key stakeholder participation, conceptualized through a sextuple helix model, is the foundation of the planning process. A small-scale action and a qualitative assessment tool of the participatory process are also illustrated. The proposed methodology corroborates the vast positive effects deriving from stakeholder participation in terms of trust, ownership, planning quality, innovativeness and sustainability of interventions. In applying the methodology, although the digital framework was evaluated positively in terms of the number of participants that could be involved, data collection, and confidentiality of activities, the evaluation shows that hybrid modes of participation are more desirable.

Keywords: sustainable tourism; participation; strategic planning

1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 confronted the international community with critical health, social, and economic challenges in 2020. All industrial sectors observed—and still do observe—a strong shock due to the pandemic [1], although travel and tourism are among the sectors most affected [2–4]. Since April 2020, 96% of all worldwide destinations have introduced travel restrictions [5]; global mobility has come to a near halt, leaving tourist destinations empty due to the absence of their main resource: international tourists [6]. The World Tourism Organization [7] determines that international arrivals fell by 73% in 2020. A sudden shift has taken place from a situation of excess tourism to one of no-tourism at all [8]. In 2021, arrivals were up by 5%, although down by 71% compared to 2019 levels [9]. In Italy, international arrivals declined by 61% in 2020; the following year, arrivals and spending remained 58.3% and 52% below 2019 levels, respectively [10]. Tourism has—unsurprisingly—faced a massive economic disruption [11]: according to the World Travel and Tourism Council [12] prospects, the sector lost almost 62 million jobs and USD 4.9 trillion in 2020, with its global contribution to GDP declining by 50.4% year-on-year; in 2021, 18.2 million jobs were gained back—still without closing the gap—and the sector's

contribution to GDP increased by USD 1 trillion. Micro-sized enterprises, own-account workers and informal economy workers are the most affected, with particular impact on equal opportunities for women, youth and migrants in the workforce [13]. The devastating effects of this decline are, then, also to be considered at the level of unused capital and lack of demand for intermediate goods and services, which has a negative upstream effect in many sectors [14].

In 2020, COVID-19 crises prompted new trends of tourism. In Italy, in the summer trimester, domestic tourism showed a preference for mountain destinations and municipalities with a cultural, artistic, historical and landscape vocation, registering, in the latter case, the only increase over 2019 (+6.5 percent) [15]. Data show that the Italians' choice was more oriented toward less usual destinations, presumably less crowded and with a larger amount of non-hotel accommodation (agritourism, open air, etc.) at the expense of the more traditional summer destinations, meaning seaside locations and cities, which are usually characterized by greater crowding. Consistency is found with other studies on Italian territory for which, after a phase of great caution, 90% of Italians gained a progressive confidence in going on holiday; 69% of those interviewed said that the coronavirus had certainly changed their way of travelling [16,17]: "Proximity tourism" was preferred (72%) and more cautious behavior was adopted to reduce the risk of infection: fewer events and museums than last year (67%), preference for little-known and presumably less crowded destinations (59%), and less frequenting of bars and restaurants (58%). In 2021 this trend was confirmed—albeit with a small decline [18]. Given that the recovery is happening fragily and unevenly across countries, with uncertainties due to the economic slowdown, the geopolitical instability and climate change [19,20], nearby destinations could be perceived as less risky. Instead, if a "business as usual" policy prevailed, tourism would generate an increase of 154% in energy consumption, 131% in greenhouse gas emissions, 152% in water consumption and 251% in solid waste disposal by 2050 [21]: the global population cannot afford it.

The post-pandemic recovery should be tackled as an opportunity to be seized to bounce back better, rethinking the touristic sector's economic model [22–24] in the name of sustainability and innovation [25]. To jumpstart the industry in the post-COVID era, the idea of tourism success as a growth trajectory of numerical indicators (e.g., arrivals) must be questioned, by reorienting the sector toward the SDGs [8]. This paper essentially addresses the following research questions: how to explore the environmental, economic, social and safety impacts of tourism at the municipal level [RQ1]? How to promote safe and sustainable tourism at the municipal level [RQ2]? How to act during the COVID-19 pandemic [RQ3]? In doing so, this paper disseminates the research that led to the structuring of guidelines for the drafting of a breakthrough and inclusive municipal-level planning tool which targets revitalizing local tourism—in an innovative and sustainable manner—addressing the major contemporary challenges mentioned above and taking advantage of these and the new trends that come with them. The municipal Integrated Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism takes into account the economic, social, environmental and safety components of tourism by carrying out a wide-raging process with public–private–people participation (4P) where all the stakeholders (local authorities, business sector, NGOs, researchers, local community, and tourists) join the decision-making process from the most embryonic stages, building a climate of co-responsibility. The methodology behind the work is described initially, and then the application to the Genoese study site and its specific results is reported. A small-scale action is also discussed. The methodology stands as an operationally clear framework that can be generalized to other territorial contexts that, although different, equally tackle the challenges imposed by the tourism sector. The research is part of the Tourism Friendly Cities project—funded with URBACT funds (2014–2020 programming)—in which the Municipality of Genoa took on the role of the leading partner.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Planning Tools at the Mediterranean Level and Stakeholders' Participation in Sustainable Tourism Planning

To date, most existing tourism plans are inadequate to face the challenges of contemporaneity, i.e., the recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainties due to the economic slowdown, geopolitical instability and climate change; firstly, these plans often present themselves as mere territorial marketing tools and not as management tools (spatial, resource needs, flows, etc.) and, moreover, they continue to approach the tourism industry exclusively from an economic perspective, despite a growing number of publications in recent years that emphasize the negative impacts of tourism on society and ecosystems [26]. It is important to develop new far-reaching plans in which multilevel and integrative approaches, as well as the participation of all local actors involved—public and private—are strategic orientations to be primarily taken care of [27–29]. Local authorities—given their proximity to the territory—are called to the forefront to take a central role in implementing planning, financing, and evaluation measures [30]. According to Candia and co-workers [31], since 2015 onwards, many Mediterranean countries have drawn up strategies or plans for tourism management based on sustainability, diversification of tourism products, digital innovation, tourism coordination, quality, training and employment, investments, and incentives. However, since layers of regional and local government share the responsibility of boosting tourism, some touristic destinations provided plans at the municipal, metropolitan or departmental level: in France (Paris and Lyon) and Spain (Valencia, Barcelona, Cordoba, etc.) some interesting examples can be investigated. These local strategies try to satisfy the needs of tourists while respecting the interests of local actors; intending to seize local development opportunities, without negatively impacting local actors, spreading the benefits that tourism brings to the whole territory. In Italy, only Venice [32], Ravenna [33] and a few others [34,35] have their own action plans. This lack penalizes many Italian destinations that cannot count on their own coordination plan with regional and national instruments, limiting the accessibility and quality of the tourist experience. It is also true, however, that it is precisely the lack of planning tools at the local level that represents a gap within which to carry out research to promote sustainable and innovative tourism that starts from the participation of all the stakeholders involved.

In the recent twenty years, stakeholder participation has become somewhat of a buzzword; due to its multifaceted nature, there is as yet no single universally accepted definition. The wide variety of processes that can fall under the definition of participation becomes glaringly obvious when studying how participatory processes can be classified, from the metaphor of the ladder [36], the spectrum [37] to the wheel [38]. In broad terms, stakeholder participation might be defined as a construct that refers to all of those processes aimed at decision making, as well as agenda setting and policy making that base their activities on the consultation and involvement of stakeholders, i.e., actors who may have a direct (primary s.) or indirect (secondary s.) influence on the functioning of institutions, their activities, and goals that, retroactively, affect themselves [39]. Individuals, groups, and organizations are given the opportunity to participate in decision making that affects them or in which they have a relevant interest [40]; participation thus weaves a dense network of multiple stakeholders, where value creation and appropriation are not limited to the individuals or constellations of local stakeholders involved but affect the entire ecosystem [41]. Participation is nowadays a mainstream approach for the promotion of human rights [42] and a fundamental part of decision making in Europe and for democracy as a whole [43]. Indeed, The Treaty on European Union [44], art.11, states that wide consultation with stakeholders shall be carried out to ensure that the EU's actions are coherent and transparent.

Stakeholder participation in tourism planning has been discussed since the 1980s, with the publication of Murphy's Community Approach [45]; it was already then clear that mutually beneficial partnerships were essential for touristic destinations and that, although the composition of actors may vary in different contexts, stakeholders undoubtedly have

an impact on tourism destination initiatives. Research states that stakeholder participation is indeed a vital deed for studying and pursuing the SDGs [46] as well as innovative outcomes [47]. Nevertheless, a disproportionate skew towards the environmental aspects of the sector [48] and a near neglect of the social pillar [49] compared to the broader expectations of the triple model of sustainable development can be detected. Participatory approaches are convenient when it comes to dealing with the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, because every group of local actors lives in its own context and, accordingly, in a unique understanding of the three dimensions [50]. Traditional positivist and reductionist "top-down" perspectives—still prevailing in the international landscape—imply that a strategy is almost completely conceived by an authority and is developed by professional staff. On the contrary, participatory approaches refer to purposeful, influential, collaborative processes in which those involved set their own goals and make decisions about their resources in the future, sharing and integrating their individual perspectives and developing ownership and co-responsibility [51]. Therefore, stakeholders are not perceived as recipients of planning initiatives but rather as active participants and drivers of the whole planning process, which is not necessarily linear but is open to recursiveness, depending on new data and information that may emerge during the process itself [52]. According to Pongponrat [53], stakeholder participation refers to collective practices of benefit-sharing on issues that affect the lives of local actors, occurring essentially through the identification of "who" will be involved, in "what" roles, and "how", based on responsibilities identified through the process of decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A broader understanding accompanies the implementation of the sustainable tourism framework of Waligo [54,55] and the guidelines drafted by Brouwer and collaborators [56].

Many tools can sustain stakeholders' identification and characterization, such as: stakeholder mapping, interest vs. influence matrix, orbits of participant, etc. [52,57]. Both Roxas and colleagues [58] and Lestari and co-workers [59] proposed a comprehensive attempt in mapping stakeholders' roles in the tourism sector. The full range of stakeholders in tourism planning and development includes both those who benefit from positive outcomes of tourism and those who experience problems or are concerned that they may experience problems [60]. Traditionally, scientific contributions address a vast pool of actors—communities, government departments, the private sector, the public sector and, in later work, visitors—but surprisingly, considering multiple stakeholders and seeking to identify common ground across stakeholder groups is pretty rare [57]. Repeated inclusion of the "usual suspects" in the participatory process is evident in literature and is an aspect to deal with; this could be due to cognitive blind spots (prevailing perceptions of the same class of actors) or institutional blind spots (processes and practices implemented, protocols and policies that move linearly in favor of a portion of the inhabitants) during engagement. This causes the stakeholder group to be viewed as distinct from the citizenry, pursuing different goals than the population [61]. Leaving no one behind is a key principle of the 2030 Agenda [62] (SDG 17), which aims for more inclusive practices by calling to reach out to under-represented, marginalized, and vulnerable groups. Consistent with this call, the engagement of first-generation immigrants carried out by Khazaei and collaborators [63] represents a relevant example.

Targeted techniques must be selected. They serve to gather and analyze contextual information, and connect the resulting data with innovative ideas, to communicate technical notions to laymen and local knowledge to technicians, to facilitate debate, and to promote territorial change; specific methods also need to be identified for the evaluation of the process in which the actors are involved, in order to return to the working group an overall assessment in terms of: activities carried out, logistical organization of meetings and communication, facilitation, group establishment and degrees of involvement. Some contributions prefer almost low-involvement tools such as questionnaires [64] or interviews [65,66]. Others, on the other hand, propose integrated methodologies that guarantee participants a container within which to meet. Bonzanigo and co-workers [67] adopted the

NetSyMod methodological approach, which is based on, in an earlier stage of operation, the analysis of the phenomenon and the pondering on which local actors to be involved; then later, two workshops with stakeholders for the creation of a shared conceptualization of the phenomenon, simulation of alternative scenarios, the design of a possible decision support system and the analysis of possible solutions. Sisto and colleagues [68] implemented an integrated methodology as follows: a desk study aimed at drafting guidelines exclusively on literature and investigation of the law and planning context; three focus group targeting the enrichment—with stakeholders' viewpoints—and validation of the guidelines. There is no standardized method for choosing the most relevant technique, but rather a pool of factors: the main objectives of the process, the degree of stakeholder involvement, the type of actors (prior knowledge and experience, time, interest, etc.), local cultural and social norms, past events, the project's expected time frame, and the expertise of facilitators shall all be taken into account [69]. The context in place at the time of implementation also contributes, among other factors, to the choice of techniques to be deployed; for instance, the pandemic of COVID-19 and related restrictions are elements that necessarily need to be kept in mind when planning the participatory process. By exploiting ICT as a channel for activating local stakeholders, engaging them and gaining their support [70], there are several e-participation initiatives that demonstrate how geographical boundaries can be transcended. For instance, authors [71] developed an action–research recursive cycle methodology for cultural tourism management which integrates a two-step approach combining ICT tools (e-blogs and e-forums) with blended focus group (face-to-face activities and online discussion). According to Sattler and others [72], most e-participation experience depends on the use of a videoconferencing platform in combination with specific software. It is also possible to adapt original methods designed for in-person delivery, however, the methods need to be more structured and formalized, and sometimes simplified. Web-conferencing platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, etc.) have laid fertile ground for process innovations; they enable rapid exchange of information, as well as best practices and multimedia content, encouraging cooperation at a distance. Remotely, illustrative materials and questionnaires/surveys can be created and shared with participants by tools such as Wooclap, Miro, Genially and Google Forms.

In both participatory and in e-participatory approaches, it can be challenging to deal with different stakeholders in the processes, activities, and decision making that affect their interests and, ultimately, their quality of life. These processes require more time and can be utterly useless if the results are ignored; they can backfire by creating distrust and hostility and can even involve a loss of decision-making control by the authorities. There are many factors that can hinder the participatory process that need to be addressed, such as discrepancies between the declaration of adopting trust-based network approaches and the actual implementation of traditionally power-related behaviors (e.g., provision of information, lobbying and representation of the network towards external stakeholders) [73]; contradictory and conflicting stakeholder standpoints; complex relationships and interdependence with other stakeholders; and different communication styles and networks, among others [74]. Wanner and Probstl-Haider [75] propose and apply in a tourism case study a barriers-to-involvement framework which encompasses operational (lack of information, weak administration, poor coordination and execution, failure to influence), structural (poor legal framework and regulatory constraints, lack of access to resources, lack of expertise and training, high costs), cultural and personal (low capacity of the poor, apathy, low awareness, mistrust and domination by elite, conflicts of interest) barriers. To avoid barriers, participatory research must be clear, operative, and well-planned. However, unfortunately, to date, the literature of the field still appears poorly explored and fragmented [76]; moreover, according to Guo and colleagues [77], the importance of stakeholders is often considered self-evident, yet there is a general lack of public participation and discussion of sustainability in existing programs. Participatory approaches require more intellectual attention, especially regarding innovative and sustainable outcomes. The literature also shows a gap in studies which organically and simultaneously address a vast

range of stakeholders, favoring instead surveys linked to a few categories of local actors; perhaps the Helix Model of Innovation could be applied to the field of sustainable tourism planning to bridge this discrepancy.

2.2. The Helix Model of Innovation

Previous literature has already amply demonstrated the importance of the relationships among governments, universities, and industries in generating knowledge for territorial innovation within models such as the triple helix, as originally devised in 1995 by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff [78,79]. This essentially seeks to describe the close interactions between these three categories of actors and the related collaborative value creation, namely, co-creation and transfer of knowledge, training/education, and financing [80]. The model attempts to address the contemporary context—globalised and characterised by an ever-changing market—in which industry has become increasingly dependent on academic research [81]; in doing so, it prompts for the shift from Mode 1 (university based) to Mode 2 (problem solving) of knowledge production, as defined by Gibbons and colleagues (1994) [82]. In the framework, industries are considered as the driving force for innovation, capable of creating welfare and improving standards of living; governments have a lead role and they create and maintain the ecosystem wherein innovation takes place; universities move away from their self-referential approach to research, whereby innovation is produced as an effect of the search for knowledge, but rather they contextualize knowledge to solve common issues [83,84]. Despite its ground-breaking theoretical and practical value in territorial innovation, some authors state that the triple helix actually focuses rigidly on limited institutional spheres, and its results may tend to promote uneven economic growth among the territories considered [85]. The scientific community has then started to develop increasingly holistic models; what is called "helix system" thinking has resulted in the N-tuple model: firstly, a quadruple helix was proposed, integrating civil society as a crucial actor in innovation processes [86]; subsequently, environmental context was added to develop a sustainability sensitive quintuple helix model [87]. Recently, instead of adding more actors to the model, one contributor proposed the triple helix twins, i.e., a double set of parallel helixes (university–industry–government and university–public–government), aimed at solving sustainability-related problems in tandem with innovation-related ones [88]. These are not unambiguous models, but rather they are continuums within which many frameworks fall; what they have in common is the adoption of Mode 3 of knowledge production (democracy-based knowledge), as well as bringing innovation-related issues closer to the territory by considering external actors/elements with a direct impact on knowledge production: civil society is defined as the user of innovation and its driver [89]; the environment is a factor that must be considered in the territorial development agenda, as it is fundamental to the preservation and survival of humanity [90]. In these models, while governments and industries see their role almost unchanged, that of universities in contemporary times is being debated: universities are required to go one step further than traditional missions. The main focus is on the form of engagement that the university should take regarding the problems of society. Radinger-Peer [91] argues that engagement is a multifaceted phenomenon that is difficult to delimit; it is characterized by at least a dual nature: on the one hand, engagement takes the form of linear and direct knowledge transfer activities; on the other hand, it involves contributions that emerge from formal and informal participation in regional networks, collective action and co-production of knowledge with various actors from multiple contexts. Riviezzo and co-workers [92] propose the concept of the fourth mission, which would be aligned with all actions to promote the social, cultural and economic development of the host community, contributing to the community's perceived quality of life. Universities are then encouraged to perceive themselves as open systems in relation to their environment; in this context, the effectiveness of contributions increases using a whole range of participatory methodologies and techniques, such as Community-Based Research (CBR), deliberative science, bottom-up approaches to citizen
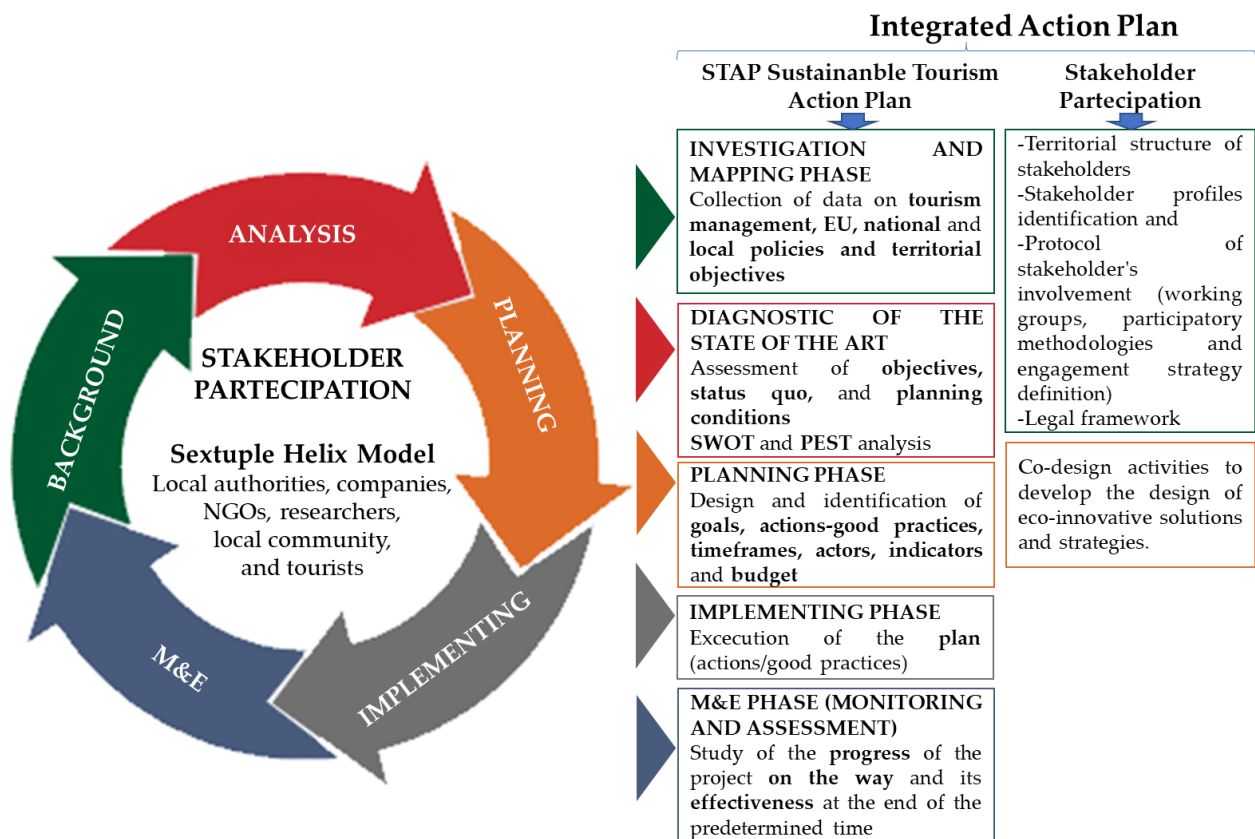
participation in science, participatory technology assessment and citizen science, Decision Theatre and game testing [93].

The helix model has understandably been applied to various scientific topics: circular economy [94], smart cities [95], urban resilience [96], the food sector [97], bioeconomy [98], transportation [99], and mobility [100]. In tourism research, the helix model has unfortunately been mostly neglected, despite its great potential in implementing destination governance policies. Firstly, it could be a model capable of remedying the lack or inefficiency of interdisciplinary tourism planning tools; secondly, it could intervene in poorly balanced inter-stakeholder relations that tend to see an insignificant input of residents in the decision-making process, a dominant position assumed by international tourism operators and by government departments distant from the actual needs of the territory [101]. The missing coercive power in the management of tourist destinations entails that the achievement of competitive advantages must be pursued using solid models—as the helix model—capable of promoting the formation of less formalized networks, based on trust, reciprocity, and inclusive governance [102]. Furthermore, building a territorial partnership regarding sustainable tourism can help in preserving local identity, fostering traditional know-how and bringing together opportunities, emerging markets, consumer behaviour, etc. [103]. However, new configurations of the helix model that deviate from the previously mentioned scientific development trajectory are needed: on the one hand, considering the "innovation" component as an integral part of the entire tourism system means recognizing how the interaction of only one part of the territorial actors in supporting the development of tourism is insufficient [104]; on the other hand, from a urban planning point of view, returning to models that do not speak of subsystems but of actors, with their own consciousness and motivation [88], enhances everyone's contribution.

3. Methodology

This subsection describes the learning-by-doing methodology, which intends to investigate the environmental, economic, social and safety impacts of tourism and then outlines an Integrated Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism at the municipal level. The methodology proposes a highly participative approach whose spiral of phases is derived from a careful analysis of methodologies drawn from the relevant literature, including research about the drafting of a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (STAP) at the local level [105,106], but also from experiences of EU projects and the planning context at the international, national, and local levels. Indeed, consistency can be found with the European Transition pathway for tourism [107] and the Italian Strategic Plan for Tourism Development [108]. Figure 1 reports precisely the phases that intend to lead to the drafting of an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for Sustainable Tourism.

Since the tourism sector can draw on a range of data sources and statistics as a solid basis for public policy making and strategic decision making by private-sector operators, the proposed methodology involves, first of all, researching data of a quantitative nature from the study of sector publications managed by national, European and international institutions [109]. However, the territory is an object of study that is difficult to abstract, hence a one-size-fits-all model does not exist and is not even desirable—and this is the scientific reason why the proposed methodology is defined in the form of very flexible guidelines, rather than a rigid protocol of action. Moreover, quantitative data are often fragmented or insufficient to understanding the true characteristics. The methodology must therefore enrich the investigation with qualitative data from the study of local knowledge, preferences, perceptions, and attitudes of local stakeholders. Stakeholder participation is therefore the method of choice; in accordance with the literature, any sustainable tourism strategy must consider the specific characteristics of the place and include its stakeholders, who should contribute to the processes affecting them [110].

Integrated Action Plan

STAP Sustainanble Tourism Action Plan

Stakeholder Partecipation

INVESTIGATION AND MAPPING PHASE
Collection of data on **tourism management, EU, national** and **local policies and territorial objectives**

DIAGNOSTIC OF THE STATE OF THE ART
Assessment of **objectives, status quo,** and **planning conditions**
SWOT and **PEST** analysis

PLANNING PHASE
Design and identification of **goals, actions-good practices, timeframes, actors, indicators** and **budget**

IMPLEMENTING PHASE
Excecution of the **plan** (actions/good practices)

M&E PHASE (MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT)
Study of the **progress** of the project **on the way** and its **effectiveness** at the end of the predetermined time

-Territorial structure of stakeholders
-Stakeholder profiles identification and
-Protocol of stakeholder's involvement (working groups, participatory methodologies and engagement strategy definition)
-Legal framework

Co-design activities to develop the design of eco-innovative solutions and strategies.

Figure 1. Process aimed at developing the municipal IAP for Sustainable Tourism and the role of stakeholder participation.

Taking on the demands that have emerged in the literature, the methodology proposes a wide-ranging participatory approach which, as can be seen in Figure 2, applies a sextuple helix model of innovation, expanding on what has been proposed by other authors [111–113].

Six classes of actors are to be engaged in different capacities: local authorities, business sector, third sector (NGOs), researchers, local community, and tourists. The engagement method presupposes the integration of different actions, especially the study of stakeholder territorial okstructure, the drafting of stakeholder profiles, the use of gatekeepers such as universities and local authorities, and snowball sampling. Each helix must be characterized by role and power dynamics. Public administrations hold the reins of the process, give direction to the work and meetings, and ensure dialogue with the different levels of government responsible for tourism, such as the region and the state; municipalities are responsible for financing and modifying the urban fabric as a whole and, more specifically in this context of intervention, for all the tourism promotion centres in their area, territorial marketing, social promotion of the destination, and use of tourist tax. It is linear that they assume a leading role in the process. The choices made through participatory methodologies are therefore implemented and shared by the municipality and transmitted to all the offices and activities under its jurisdiction. Universities and research centres, in tandem with offering their expertise from the perspective of innovation, can support municipalities in managing the process, intermediate relationships among the various actors, animate/facilitate participation, systematize information, and disseminate the contents of the process. Research can identify the set of indicators for monitoring and verifying the participatory process and implementations. The tourism sector (companies and third sector) and citizens are called to take part in the working group equally, sharing their local knowledge, expertise, and perceptions, supporting the choice of interventions and their implementation, and guaranteeing greater durability of the project results. Tourists may be involved through quali-quantitative methods of investigation, probing their opinions

with respect to the characteristics—critical and otherwise—of the study area, suggesting specific implementations rooted in knowledge within the national territory and beyond, and relying, therefore, on international experience. Engaging domestic and international tourists means recognizing their role of temporary citizen [105], with all the rights that come with it. All actors share direct responsibility, firstly for the definition, and then for the monitoring and evaluation of the action plan.
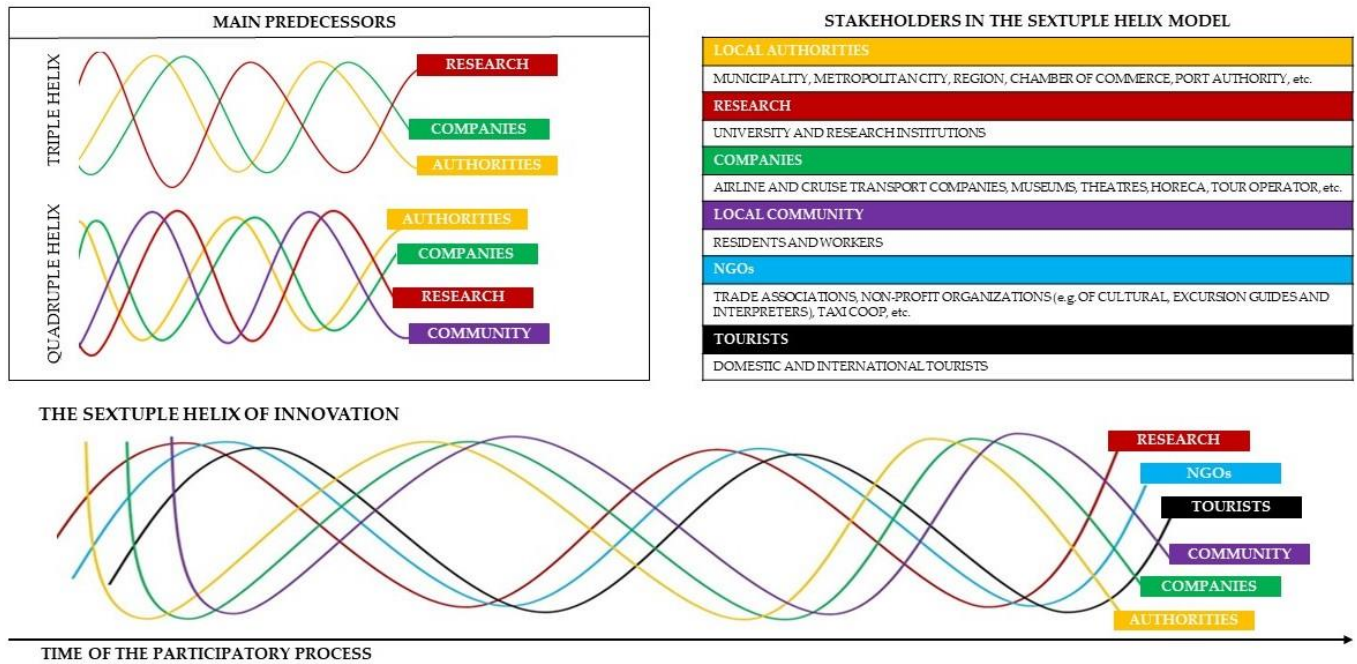
Figure 2. The sextuple helix model proposed by this article and its main theoretical predecessors. The classes of actors that are involved in the participatory process are precisely specified.

The methodology—in developing the protocol of involvement—calls for the almost exclusive use of participatory techniques [114], with the idea of proposing to the actors involved a space for shared thinking and the development of common sense. Some of them could be adapted for e-participation initiatives too. Table 1 proposes a brief review of some of the participatory techniques currently in use by the scientific community.

Table 1. Description of the main participatory techniques.

TECHNIQUES	GOALS	TOPICS	ACTORS *	DURATION	DIRECTION
21st century (E-)town meeting	Advising decision makers, jointly deciding	Binding decisions or feedback on local development and policy	Large group	A one-off meeting	Municipalities, public authorities
Citizen consultation	Advising decision makers, influencing public debates	Concrete local or regional problems and planning	Medium group	Min. four consecutive days	Municipalities, administration, NGOs
Wisdom council	Influencing public debates, consulting, advising decision makers	Concrete local problems and planning	Small group	Two days for each council for about four months	Municipalities, administration
Deliberative polling	Informing, influencing public debates	Various topics of public interest	Large group	Two surveys separated over time	Decision makers
Consensus conference	Influencing public debates, advising decision makers	Controversial issues of public interest	Small group	Three meetings	Public authorities
National Issues Forum	Informing	Dissemination of data on relevant social issues, feedback for decision makers	Small group	One to two days	Municipalities, educational institutions

Table 1. *Cont.*

TECHNIQUES	GOALS	TOPICS	ACTORS *	DURATION	DIRECTION
Planning for Real (PfR)	Influencing public opinion and society, consulting	Concrete local or regional problems and planning	Large group	Multiple assemblies in multiple weeks	Decision makers, administrations, public authorities
Photovoice	Influencing public opinion and society, consulting	Concrete local or regional problems and planning	Small/medium group	Two meetings separated over time by at least one week	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
Scenario workshop	Influencing public opinion and society, advising decision makers	Anticipating future developments and deriving recommendations	Small group	More meetings or assembly for one to three days	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
Fishbowl	Influencing public opinion and society	Suitable for various uses	Small group	A one-off meeting	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
World Café	Influencing public opinion and society	Suitable for various uses	Small/medium group	Multiple rounds of interviews of 20–30 min each	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
De Bono Thinking Hats	Influencing public opinion and society	Collection of ideas and proposals on various topics	Small group	A one-off meeting	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
Critical friend	Advising decision makers	Feedback and advice on various topics	Small group	One day at most	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
Walkshop	Influencing public opinion and society	Local city initiatives, urban landscapes	Small group	Half a day	Administrations, public authorities, NGOs, churches, educational institutions, companies, etc.
Conference and laboratory on the future	Influencing public opinion and society, advising decision makers	Anticipating future developments and deriving recommendations in relation to different topics	Small/medium group	Two to three days	Public authorities, municipalities, NGOs, companies, etc.

* Small group: actors < 50; medium group: 51 < actors < 150; large group: actors > 151.

The participatory process is not a separate phase, but rather a parallel element running through the entire planning process. All the phases presented in Figure 1 are, in fact, to be carried out within the framework of participation. Once the backbone of the process is clear—engagement and involvement protocol—it is time to call everyone to the table and use quantitative, qualitative, and participatory tools at the service of the study area investigation (phase I). The legislative and planning context—at the local, national, and European levels—must be studied with respect to the central theme of the process, and then the main objectives must be systematized at stage zero of the process.

The analysis phase entails making a diagnosis of the state of the art by studying data collected in the previous phase (phase II). In this context, strategic management and planning tools can facilitate the systematization of the analysis. SWOT [115] and PEST [116] analysis are wide-ranging methods to be employed in the construction of both comprehensive and functional strategies concerning the study of factors specific to the system under study, be it a geographical area, an organization, etc. Respectively, they take into consideration Strengths, Weaknesses (internal factors), Opportunities and Threats (external factors); and Political, Economic, Social and Technological factors. They enable the working group to understand how to strategically position themselves with respect to their goals, net of the characteristics of the system in which they are acting, enabling the proper selection and execution of activities such as planning, coordination, monitoring/evaluation, and promotion.

At this point, it is necessary to get into the actual planning phase (phase III). Planning is an ongoing, systematic, and flexible process of rationalizing decisions based on predetermined objectives [117]. It is a future-oriented and strategic decision-making process that aims at directing human actions to desired and mutually agreed directions. Within the tourism sector, planning can be understood as a potential tool for guiding this sector to a

development path that creates benefits and well-being beyond the industry and its core operations [118]. In a such 4P process, every decision must be made within the working group, essentially through the joint study of literature in the field, international and national cases, and the use of participatory methodologies to ignite reflection and boost the group's innovative component. As a cross-cutting sector, IAP must propose a set of actions that can lead to tourism management that is able to consider the main issues intersecting with the field of tourism: mobility, transportation, waste, water resources, energy, etc. Figure 3 gives an example of a table that can be completed in the planning phase of the actions/good practices to be implemented, the actors to be involved, the time and resources required, and the monitoring/evaluation (M&E) indicators.

ACTION/GOOD PRACTICE	PLAYERS	TIMES	RESOURCES	INDICATOR

Figure 3. Technical table describing the planning of actions, actors, timing, and indicators.

Once the planning phase is over, the plan—its strategies and good practices—is ready to be implemented (phase VI).

The final phase (phase V) includes monitoring the plan and evaluating what has been accomplished, aspects that must be designed effectively; this phase is indispensable to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the destinations [119]. Monitoring is conducted throughout the implementation and is directed to collect and analyse, in a constant and systematic way, information on the progress of actions. It provides insights into the relevance and feasibility of the project, the status of achievement of planned objectives, the quality of project management, the future sustainability of the benefits the project is or will be providing, and the actions to be taken. Instead, the evaluation of project achievement returns feedback at the level of project effectiveness with respect to the goal of promoting sustainable tourism at the municipal level. As previously stated, indicator development is a method for M&E; in this frame, stakeholder participation in the identification of proper indicators and indices helps to ensure that M&E processes are successfully implemented, and that the results accepted by stakeholders [120].

4. Application in the Municipality of Genoa: The Integrated Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism

4.1. Study Site: The Municipality of Genoa

The innovation presented in this paper concerns the application of a highly participatory process in planning for a sustainable and competitive tourism destination, confronting recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and other major global challenges. The authors applied this methodology in the Municipality of Genoa.

Genoa is the chief town of the Metropolitan City and the Liguria Region in the northwest of Italy. Between the sea and mountains with its characteristic upside-down π shape, Genoa is a polycentric city due to morphological factors (a coastline approximately 30 km long, with two valleys perpendicular to the coast), the existence of multiple historic centres typical of European cities, around which settlements have grown in successive expansions, and the presence of new hubs related to specific functions (shopping areas, business centres, theme parks, cineplexes, multipurpose halls, sports facilities, etc.) [121,122].

Genoa is a seaport-city by definition: the urban fabric and the maritime trade have always been in close connection, so much so that the port has influenced the development of the city itself and has taken on the role of the main driver of urban sprawl [123]. It has a strategic location overlooking the Mediterranean that makes it an attractive and generative hub of economic activity and employment, with associated consequences for the quality of life and work of the citizenry. Figure 4 proposes a brief data overview of the Municipality of Genoa.

COORDINATES: 44° 24′25.87′N - 8° 56′02.34′E	
SURFACE AREA: 240.29km²	
URBAN GREENERY AND NPAs: 31.25% of TOT	
ALTITUDE: 0-1183m above sea level	
ALTIMETRIC ZONE: 2 (coastal mountain)	
SEISMIC ZONE: 3 (medium-low)	
CLIMATE: Mediterranean zone	
POPULATION DENSITY: 2439.45 units/km²	
DISTRICTS: 9	

Figure 4. Brief overview of the Municipality of Genoa.

Genoa has always been considered an industrial center, with its prolific maritime trade and its traditional steel industry; the city was part of the Milan–Turin–Genoa industrial triangle and it currently remains one of the most important economic centers in Italy. In 1992, on the International Expo Genova '92—Colombo '92—a drastic change of image was prompted by the regeneration of the Old Port and part of the Historic Center, designed by the Genoese architect Renzo Piano. Notably, in 2004, Genoa was the European Capital of Culture and in 2006, Rolli Palaces (Palazzi dei Rolli)—a series of historical buildings located in the city center—was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. For the following years, Genoa experienced a steady growth in tourism: greater than the national average, with an increasing share of visitors attending heritage sites and museums [124]. Tourism became a strategic asset and a factor of sustainable development for its economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. Genoa managed to use its strategic position: it lies between the coast and the mountains of the Ligurian Apennines and extends inland through longitudinal valleys; the nature of the resources and services offered makes the municipality a source of several tourism branches: cultural, historical, and artistic first; food and wine; national and international congresses and weddings; cruises; and even outdoor (boating, sports, swimming, hiking and nature).

Up to the year 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, tourism grew significantly in the Municipality of Genoa, especially in the cruising, conference, and cultural segments. In the municipality, a total of 934,428 arrivals and 1,905,566 days of attendance were recorded in 2019, with a 2.5% increase in arrivals. A sharp setback has been perceived since March 2020: according to the data collected by the Liguria Region Tourist Observatory [125] in 2020, a total of 363,469 arrivals and 916,343 days of attendance were recorded in the municipality, with an acute decrease of 61.1% in arrivals and 51.9% in attendance compared with the previous year. There was a significant drop in both the flow of foreign tourists, by more than 70% in both arrivals and attendance, and the flow of Italians, by 47.3% in arrivals and 34.0% in attendance. Moreover, while for hotel establishments the decline in arrivals exceeded 60.0% and reached 53.1% in attendance, in non-hotel establishments the decline was 62.8% in arrivals and 47.2% in attendance. The spread of COVID-19 has crucially affected developments in the economy and society; the health emergency and the subsequent suspension of operations of entire sectors of production represented a sudden and unprecedented shock to the production of goods and services and, consequently, to the labor market. Given the nature of business and worker support measures (consult [126–128] for further details on interventions for enabling/supporting work suspensions, bestowing compensation, indemnity or relief, strengthening poverty alleviation, and sustaining the unemployed population), the effects of the crisis have manifested themselves more on hours worked than on employment, although the number of people left out of work is considerable: in the Municipality of Genoa, data collected shows a 0.4% decrease in employment, which overall fell from 230,000 in 2019 to 229,000 in 2020,

mainly because of the termination of non-renewed fixed-term contracts and the lack of new hires [121].

As a strategic resource for the case study, tourism has been incorporated within the main territorial urban planning tools. Table 2 offers a brief schematic review of the significant planning tools.

Table 2. How the most significant planning tools approach the topic of tourism.

TOOL	YEAR	LEVEL	THE TOPIC OF TOURISM
Municipal Urban Plan (PUC) [122]	2015	Municipal	(1) increasing attractiveness and launching the image of Genoa through streamlining mobility and public transport and acting on green spaces, infrastructures, commercial, cultural, sports and leisure facilities (2) promoting Genoa as a Smart City
Territorial Plan of Coordination (PTC) [129]	2002	Provincial	(1) enhancing and promoting territorial resources through proper marketing strategies (2) integrated packages, including numerous alternative activities to traditional and top destinations
Strategical Metropolitan Plan (PSM) [130]	2017	Metropolitan	(1) transforming the concept of tourism according to the logic of Agenda 2030 (2) enhancing territorial identities by offering complementary tourism products, developing innovative products and services
Plan for Tourism 2020 [131]	2017	Regional	(1) identifying differentiated tourism products, thus improving the recognizability of Liguria as an integral destination in the markets, transforming the territory into an integrated system that facilitates the tourist in the enjoyment of the vacation.

Table 2 effectively shows how, thus far, there is no sectoral plan at the municipal level and how none of the superordinate plans have a recent perspective that considers all the challenges encountered by the tourism sector in recent years. These are some of the most significant reasons that prompted the Municipality of Genoa to take steps in this direction.

4.2. Participatory Process Implemented

The six helices composing the working group, which in the Tourism Friendly Cities project was called URBACT Local Group (ULG), are pinpointed as: the Municipality of Genoa (especially, the International Affairs Office, the Territorial Marketing, City Promotion and Cultural Activities Office, the Tourism Activities and Marketing Office, the Urban Agenda and Ecological Transition Office), the University of Genoa (the Civil, Chemical and Environmental Engineering Department), relevant representatives of Ligurian tourism companies and NGOs belonging to three different fields (Culture, Food & Accommodation, Mobility), citizens, and domestic and international tourists. Within the Tourism Friendly Cities project, six participatory focus groups and a final meeting were set up from February 2021 to June 2022, mainly aimed at enacting the municipal IAP. In fact, all information contained therein was drawn from meetings with local actors, thus it can be truly documented as a participatory plan shared among key stakeholders. Unless otherwise specified, the data resulting from the process can be consulted in paragraph 3.3. Considering that the participatory process was carried out during the period of the health emergency of the COVID-19 outbreak, it was decided to apply an e-4P process, carrying out focus groups on videoconferencing platform. This technique offers a fairly flexible framework for studying the preferences, values and knowledge pertaining to the topic of interest, and for jointly planning the strategies to be adopted; it can be integrated with other techniques focused on hyper-specific goals. Focus groups could be implemented in person or remotely through the use of videoconferencing platforms in combination with specific software. In the case of

e-participation, typical participative methods could be modified, adapted, and sometimes simplified. Each focus group aimed to analyse the relationship between tourism in Genoa and the pillars of sustainable development: economy, environment, and society. At each focus group the state of the art was assessed, and then reflections made on the action to be taken—both to address the system weaknesses encountered and to properly capitalize on the resources that emerged, in order to outline a catalogue of actions/good practices. Figure 5 represents a schematic summary of the focuses, the actors involved, the methods used, and the respective objectives.

THEME	METHODOLOGIES		GOALS
TOURISM AND SAFETY	**DELIBERATIVE POOL**	ULG How was safety addressed? And how is it addressed nowadays? What to do to ensure safe tourism?	State of the art on safety before and after COVID-19 Catalogue of actions-good practices to **guarantee safety**
	DELIBERATIVE POLL	STUDENTS Thinking as citizens and tourists	State of the art on safety before and after COVID-19
	WORD CLOUD	STUDENTS Thinking as experts	Catalogue of actions-good practices to **guarantee safety**
ENVIRONMENT	**DELIBERATIVE POLL**	ULG What outdoor routes to implement and what activities to promote? What thematic topics to address? What can be the contribution of each individual participant?	Small-scale action: **enhancement of the outdoor offer**
	WORD CLOUD	Any significant experiences with environmental affairs? What actions to include in the IAP?	State of the art on the environmental impacts Catalogue of actions-good practices to **limit environmental impact**
SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE	**DELIBERATIVE POOL**	ULG How do you evaluate the impact of tourism on communities? Are there any positive (or, negative) impact of community involvement in current tourism?	State of the art concerning the involvement of local communities in tourism planning
	ROLE PLAYING	SUBGROUP: How companies/residents deal with tourists? PLENARY: What would be the impacts if local communities were involved in the tourism planning? What if they were not? SUBGROUP: How can local community participation be improved and how would (and would not) citizens like to be involved? PLENARY: How can local communities be involved? In what activities? How would you like to be involved as a citizen?	Catalogue of actions-good practices for effectively **engaging the local community**

Figure 5. *Cont.*

ECONOMY	**QUESTIONNA RIE**	ULG Impact of tourism on the local economy	State of the art on the economic impacts
	SWOT	ULG Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats	
	TOOL/ACTION TABLE	ULG What tool for what action?	Catalogue of good practices to **maximize impact on economy**
CITIES AND RESIDENTS	**PERSPECTIVES IN 120 SECONDS [FISHBOWL]**	PA DIR. How do you see Genoa in five years from now based on the targets you set?	State of the art on territorial goals and projects in place
		PA TECH. What are the projects you are focusing on today and what are the expected impacts?	
		ULG Any insights into sustainable tourism 5 years from now?	
	DELIBERATIVE POLL	EVERYONE Thinking as citizens	Catalogue of actions to promote **tourism starting with the people, preserving local identity and avoiding standardization and cultural/environmental degradation**
TOURISTS	**QUESTIONNAI RE**	ULG Tourism, how will it change?	State of the art on how COVID-19 forced changes in tourists' habits Catalogue of actions-good practices for **boosting tourism revitalization in light of new trends**

Figure 5. Focuses implemented within the Tourism Friendly Cities project.

The first focus—Tourism and Safety—was centered on exploring how tourist destinations have coped with and have been adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic; in particular, it sought to understand how the six helices reacted, changing tourism offerings and attitudes. The ULG was asked to address several open-ended questions about tourism before and during the pandemic through the Wooclap platform and to collectively discuss the answers—analyzed in real time by the software—in the same session. Exceptionally, the students attending the Ruffini School, specializing in "Tourism Technician" (Scuola Ruffini, Specializzazione "Tecnico per il Turismo") in Genoa were engaged to deepen the perspectives of citizens and tourists. They were asked to interact with the Wooclap platform firstly by thinking like tourists (open question), and then by taking on the role of citizens (open question) and even experts (word cloud).

The second focus—Environmental Dimension of Tourism in the City—consisted of two moments. Firstly, the ULG reflected upon the small-scale action to be adopted in the project: in accordance with the new tourism trends resulting from the pandemic, the identification was guided by the idea of enhancing outdoor tourism offerings. Afterwards, the ULG discussed the main impacts of tourism on the environment. Following the viewing of an awareness video, participants commonly reflected on their own experiences in this regard: actions/good practices (word cloud) to be introduced in a plan to limit the environmental impact of tourism were collected and shared in the group through the Wooclap platform.

In the third focus—Social/Governance Impact of Tourism in Local Communities—the state of affairs regarding the impact of tourism on the local community was initially analyzed: participants answered on the Wooclap platform three concise questions (Likert-type scale),

rating on a scale of 1 [low positive] to 5 [high positive] the involvement of local communities, proposed as an indicator of the social impact of tourism. Afterwards, a video was shown to the ULG, and a role-play was conducted with the setting, "Tourists visiting Genoa on a day off". The ULG was previously split in half, with the two subgroups taking on the roles of residents and the touristic industry. For 15 min, the subgroups discussed how the industry/residents are used to behaving towards tourists in Genoa today. Back in the general call, the aspects considered by the two sub-groups were shared and, through the Wooclap platform, a debate was triggered. In the second part, the subgroups gathered again for 15 min and debated how to improve local community involvement while respecting the will of the citizens. Back in the general call, the aspects considered by the two subgroups were shared and, again through the Wooclap platform, a comprehensive list of actions/good practices was drafted.

The fourth focus analyzed the Impacts of Tourism on the Local Economy. Ahead of the focus group, an ad hoc questionnaire was distributed and completed by the ULG; the data collected served to take stock of the impact of tourism on the local economy. A SWOT analysis was collaboratively carried out on the Miro platform. Through the completion of this participatory methodology, it was possible to have a constructive debate about the topic. Then, still on Miro collaborative platform, ULG jointly identified the actions to improve the impact of tourism on local economy: a table tools x actions was used to pursue this objective.

Because fifth focus was centered on the topic of The Perspective of Cities and their Residents, not only was the ULG involved, but also additional management and technical representatives of the public administration (PA). The focus group structure was inspired by the Fishbowl, a method adapted to the context of e-participation as follows: the focus group was organized on Zoom, as were the others; three roundtables were scheduled, each involving diverse stakeholders who offered different slants on the issue: firstly, municipal councilors and PA directors (vision); then PA technicians (operability); and eventually the ULG (lay suggestions). Each actor was asked a question and given a specific time, 120 s (timed by the focus group facilitators), to present their speech. In closing the focus group, the residents' perspective was investigated: the ULG and the additional PA reps were requested to set aside their institutional roles and put on the 'hat' of resident of the municipality. Initially, a visual presentation of what emerged from citizens' perspectives in previous focus groups was shown on the Genially platform. Taking on these considerations, a constructive discussion was initiated and, through the Wooclap platform, actions to be taken were studied.

In the run-up to the sixth focus—the perspective of tourists—the facilitators analyzed the data from the bilingual (Italian and English) questionnaire, "Tourism, how it will change", disseminated through the channels of the Municipality of Genoa, University of Genoa and the ULG, and filled in by tourists (questionnaire available until May 2022). The results were used as discussion material during the meeting and integrated into the IAP. The remainder of the focus group was devoted to the co-design of the final meeting: the ULG members worked jointly on the planning of the project's final meeting: a structured form was filled out in order to identify some key organizational aspects: place, time and duration of the meeting, modalities of participation, tools and methodologies to be applied, and specific purposes.

The final meeting took in place in a municipal hall; it was the only activity conducted in person, which was made possible by the improved public health status. As planned, a World Café was held: the goal was to promote networking and the exchange of resources amongst existing territorial tourism services. Three tables were set up, and each was given a poster on which to affix named post-it notes about what each participant could offer (on one half of the poster), and what each participant would need to receive (on the other half). At first, the ULG got to work in thematic groups; then after 15 min, mixing between the tables was encouraged.

5. Results

5.1. Objectives and Actions/Good Practices Jointly Identified for the Genoa IAP for Sustainabile Tourism

As previously mentioned, to draft the Genoa IAP for Sustainable Tourism, the involvement of all the main local actors (local authorities, business sector, NGOs, researchers, local community, and tourists) was fundamental to give public direction in the design of the objectives and actions in order to promote safer and more sustainable tourism. All the information contained in the IAP was collected from and analyzed within the ULG. What has been deduced from the process is, firstly, an analysis of tourism in the municipality. Figures 6 and 7 contain, respectively, the SWOT and PEST analyses carried out for Genoa within the ULG.

SWOT ANALYSIS		
STRENGTHS	**STRENGTHS EMERGED FROM TO THE PANDEMIC**	**OPPORTUNITIES**
Mediterranean climate and **strategic location** between the mountains and the sea Resources in the hills (green spaces, visiting places, etc.) and along the coast (bathing establishments) **Sites of natural, cultural, historical and artistic interest** **Redevelopment of the Old Port** in 1992 by Renzo Piano Role of **European Capital of Culture** in 2004; Rolli and Strada Nuova **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 2006 Effective advertising campaigns and cultural events Dialect, cultures, traditions (wine and local food specialties) Good range of hotel and non-hotel **accommodations**; many food **services**; conferences and sports **facilities** International **airport and seaport**	**Centrality of tourism** in the local and national **economy** as a feeder of satellite industries and welfare **Partnerships between public and private** entities Management of **overtourism** and distribution of flows Introduction of new destinations and **deseasonalization** Focus on quality rather than quantity Innovation and promotion of new solutions and offerings through the promotion of **digital businesses and new modes of communication** **Improvement and assurance of safety** in the urban context **Incentivizing the use of the free electric shuttle** in the Historic Center, extended to other areas of the city	**Funding and public investment** New waterfront construction and pedestrian areas Infrastructure works north of Genoa (e.g., the Gronda) **PUMS** of the Metropolitan City **Technological improvement and digitization** Organization of **exhibitions and themed events** (Euroflora and Boar Exhibition, Science Festival, etc.) **New products and diversification of tourism offerings** Opportunity to use this fast-growing sector as a strategic factor for **sustainable development** Increased **customer awareness of environmental issues** Growth in demand for **nature and cultural tourism** **Cooperation with other Mediterranean destinations**
WEAKNESSES	**WEAKNESSES EMERGED FROM THE PANDEMIC**	**THREATHS**
Lack of a plan for sustainable tourism at the municipal level Lack of knowledge about the market and customer demands **Seasonality**, reduced **flow management** and concentration of attractions and accommodations in the city center Lack of stakeholder awareness of the impact of the sector **Decay of the Historic Center**, lack of innovative street decór Need **to increase tourist services** (maps, information points, etc.), improve signage of tourist routes, and further protect historical, cultural and artistic heritage Territorial fragility due to overbuilding and hydrogeological risks **Port** as a resource for tourists and goods **Fragility of infrastructure and mobility services** (especially to the hinterland and the Riviera), limited bicycle and pedestrian paths and interchange nodes	**Problems with innovation** (digitalisation, ICTs) Need for a group to define a singular strategy in **managing tourism** and identifying a **global image of Liguria as a destination** **Interruption of advertising campaigns** under way, **cancellation** of bookings and previously planned events and conferences **Negative perception of the urban area**: dirty and unsafe **Reduced transportation and mobility** due to limitations and reduced demand **Fear of contagion and uncertainty**, loss of trust by tourists Scarce and uncoordinated international safety guidelines aim at reducing fear of travel **Financial losses and risk of unemployment**	**Distrust of public-private partnerships** **Reduction in public funding** **Continued growth of the tourism industry and flows** (cruises) with a high concentration in the Historical Center **Environmental impacts** related to human activities **Climate change and natural disasters** Uncontrolled use of land resources, **overbuilding** and difficulties in **waste management** Reduction in the number of residents (especially young people) and aging population Increased criminal activities Prejudice and negative view of the city

Figure 6. SWOT analysis about the tourism industry in Genoa.

PEST ANALYSIS	
POLITICAL	**ECONOMICAL**
Focus on the concept of **sustainability** at international, European, national and local levels **Commitment and support of local authorities** **Lack of a sustainable tourism plan at the municipal level** **Limited funding** **Unfavorable** international **relations** **Terrorism**	**Global economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic** Competitiveness of the "**Made in Italy**" brand in the European and world markets Reduction in product standards due to "**Made in China**". **Few state resources** **Tourists as primary income for many practitioners**; high cost of tourism services Exchange rates
SOCIAL	**TECHNOLOGICAL**
Population reduction and concentration; low birth rates, aging population and loss of young people; Increase in the number of **foreigners** High education levels, good cultural background, professional behavior of practitioners Family situations **Lack of recreational and social activities** (entertainment) **Difficulties in accommodation facilities** (due to the pandemic) Different current interests of tourists **Change in tourist's motivation**	**Technological innovation and digitization** Interactive and exciting experiences Communication development and improved circulation of information Development of mobility technology Augmented reality Internet of Things Visual assistants Big data 5G

Figure 7. PEST analysis about the tourism industry in Genoa.

Through the study and analysis of the context, the ULG identified three macro-objectives to work on in the IAP for Sustainable Tourism, each consisting of one or more goals for which the actions to be implemented, the role of each actor involved, and the resources and timeframes required have been identified. In particular, the involvement of different stakeholders is crucial for the success of the actions: local public authorities (the Municipality of Genoa and the Liguria region), private companies (working in the field of accommodation, catering, culture, and mobility), university members, NGOs and citizens involved, including all who participated during the drawing up of the plan (tourists were also involved in the design by questionnaires). To clarify: the work of the ULG, and the involvement of stakeholders, does not end with the definition of the plan, but continues through and is indispensable to its implementation; in compliance with the relevant national legislation, it is the shared responsibility of the State and the regions to legislate and draw up tourism plans, however, at this time, there are no municipal planning tools related to tourism preceding the Genoa's Integrated Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism.

The three macro-objectives and their respective goals, are as follows: improving sustainability (OB1); improving accommodation (OB2); and renewing the tourist industry (OB3).

First and foremost, the involvement of each stakeholder (OB1.1 stakeholders' awareness and participation)—local public authorities, private companies, university members, NGOs, citizens, and tourists—in the joint designing and implementing of a sustainable tourism in Genoa is a key priority to be attained in a short timeframe. It is necessary to raise awareness of public and private actors and to make them respectful—through active cooperation and participation in specific heterogenic working groups that include different parties—of the impacts and potentials of tourism (centrality of tourism in the local and national economy as a feeder for satellite industries and wellbeing etc.). The focuses are many: the education of residents to become ambassadors of their city; the environmental effects of tourism (air and water pollution, use of land resources and waste management, climate change and natural disasters, continued excessive construction, etc.); the need for health safety and accessibility; the search for economic resilience of tourism businesses and for ongoing training; the push for progress in the field of technology and digitiza-

tion. Through engagement, tourists become indispensable by circulating information in multiple languages and by being called to participate in local sustainable actions (short timeframe). Beware though, as the IAP emphasizes, that stakeholder participation is not just an objective to organize systematic exchanges and sharing between local stakeholders and tourists (long timeframe), but rather an operational and transversal framework in tourism management.

Participatory process has identified the redevelopment of the municipality (OB2.1) as one of the main goals: the purpose is to promote a sustainable and inclusive city, contributing to the enhancement of the quality of life of inhabitants and to the development of tourist offers—attracting more demanding but more profitable visitors. ULG recognized the European 'call for ideas' project (short timeframe) as a pathway for innovation of urban furniture and services to improve reception and quality of life. Actions to be implemented are many: improving signages along tourist routes and promoting local historical, artistic, cultural, and environmental heritage; installing more public lighting; create plastic free areas; and designing equipped green spaces (medium timeframe). The health emergency provided an opportunity to acknowledge the urgency of improving cleanliness and urban decorum with the construction of public toilets, water dispensers, toilets, benches, and recycling bins (medium and long timeframe) to ensure a welcoming city for tourists and, above all, residents. Other actions to aim at are the creation of paper and digital maps of defibrillators, essential services, and tourist information; the arrangement for the presence of medical assistance with ambulances and traffic police in the busiest areas; and the establishment of a coordinated communication network for local services (maps, tourist information offices, packages, available offers, etc.) (medium timeframe).

The ULG has also defined the incentive for the development of sustainable mobility (OB2.2) as an unavoidable goal, aimed at reducing pollution and improving the safety of transportation by adapting to new provisions and innovative processes. Firstly, it is crucial to supporting communication strategies promoting the use of Local Public Transport (TPL), shuttle services (MOA or free electric for residents), and electric vehicles (electric bicycle hire and scooter hire with the expansion of cycling and pedestrian routes along the coast and in the hills), also ensuring the safety of the means of transport from a health standpoint (short timeframe). Subsequently, flows are properly managed through the development of integrated public services between local services (taxis, NCC, buses, etc.) and non-local services (trains, airplanes, ships, etc.), and through properly managing cruise passengers; by increasing vehicles towards the inland and the Riviera; by the creation of large pedestrian areas and limited traffic areas (ZTL); and by the use of apps for tourists (booking the shuttle service, information on transport to and from the city center, etc.) (medium timeframe). In the long timeframe, the IAP advises limiting private traffic. focusing on functional intermodality and interchange car parks.

The IAP also intends to win back demand and to incentivize innovation and digi-talization for the development of tourism (OB3.1), paying more care to communication, providing clear information, and reassuring and finding solutions to increase trust in desti-nations. In that sense, the IAP wants to advertise the territory as safe and enjoyable from all points of view: from hotel bookings and guided tours to local transport. Firstly, the drawing up and constant monitoring of compliance with common health protocols—prepared to realize coordinated and safe action—and the transformation into common practice of the extraordinary safety measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is desirable. It is also necessary to sustain businesses in implementing proper behaviors to guarantee safety and sustainability in operations (highlighting the work already done) and to attract tourists with adequate communication strategies. Marketing programmes that enable the market to recover are inevitable: focusing on tailor-made products and services and incentivizing the domestic market; pushing local digital marketing through the platform and national and international digital ecosystems, both for the B2B target and the B2C target, in order to share information on the excellence of services. Rebranding campaigns that define a proper tourist position and that consolidate Genoa's brand—which mixes sustainability with local

identity/roots—on international markets (with the aim of acquiring new market shares, as well as through participation in international digital events) and the possibility of being enjoyed by both national and international visitors, take place through: a market analysis of data in an inter-functional and predictive way to anticipate the needs of demand and to translate them into new services, offering continuous evolution; and further development of digital activities to ensure easy and safe planned experiences (pre-visit communication, catalogue updates, online ticketing, preview experiences, etc.). It is also crucial to increase efforts towards managing the dynamics of overtourism and contact tracing, planning and flow management, through an improved use of technology for traveling safely and ensuring reliable communication for travelers (short and medium timeframe). In a long timeframe, the IAP wishes for the reinforcement of the partnership network with local public authorities, tourist industry representatives, local communities, universities and private businesses, as well as institutions and other destinations around the Mediterranean; the reinforcement of the relationships between transversal networks with the industry, and the creation of technical work groups with different stakeholders, in order to define strategies and plans, and to create guidelines with common protocols and adequate provisions (improving service, investigating local needs, dealing with criticism and managing changing demand). Very important actions that emerged from the participatory process and that must be carried out within a maximum of 15 years include: the provision of a plan for managing emergencies, e.g., weather alerts, and for informing guests, also in English, in public places.

From the participatory process implemented, it also became evident how creating and promoting new tourist services (OB3.2) is required. This goal is intended to achieve several results: firstly, to increase revenues for the tourism industry by incentivizing longer stays, enticing tourists to return and keeping them in the city for longer periods by disincentivizing "hit-and-run" visits. Local actors also emphasized the urgency of encouraging a slower, safer, more responsible, inclusive, and accessible (in a nutshell: sustainable) tourism. The plan takes advantage of the city's polycentrism to spread tourism over time and space: the IAP calls for encouraging deseasonalization and decongestion of the most crowded areas in favor of those less visited. It is necessary to promote a widespread and all-season tourism, capable of attracting more and more targeted contacts and building relationships with people who are genuinely interested in what Genoa has to offer. In this regard, outdoor experiences make it feasible to increase the involvement of the tourism industry (mobility, accommodation, catering, etc.) and to distribute the economic benefit over the entire area, even the marginal ones, favoring and involving new destinations and cultivating emerging markets. As for the specific actions to be carried out: local actors must initially focus on tailor-made services, giving tourists the chance to independently plan their desired experiences, guaranteeing flexibility in offering customers different time slot options, free cancellation/rescheduling of tickets, etc. Packages (all inclusive), offers, and incentives aimed at all targets to stimulate planning activities and to streamline available local resources must be created. It is also necessary to create a greater network and cohesion, with the establishment of technical working tables with different stakeholders (organizations, businesses, and NGOs) to define projects and actions, and to create guidelines with common protocols and appropriate standards (short timeframe). The revitalization of tourism is a goal to be achieved in the short and medium term: the gradual reopening and diversification of destinations and deseasonalization are targets to be reached within the year. It is necessary to proceed with the events and exhibitions planned in compliance with ministerial provisions and to carry out online activities, mainly involving the local public. In the field of mobility, it is necessary to improve local public transport in terms of health protection, accessibility, and functionality, aiming towards inter-modality. To conclude, in the long term, a more effective management of flows and a reversal of overcrowding (mass tourism, overcrowding) is needed; work must be done to fertilize areas that are not yet particularly prolific in terms of tourism and to guarantee a

spatial distribution over the territory through the planning of alternative tourism products and the creation of plans and technologies (payments, programming, etc.).

5.2. Small Scale Action: PEDEstriBUS Project for Promoting the Historic Aqueduct Route

The participatory process that was put in place identified the relaunch of Genoa's Historic Aqueduct Route as an effective pilot action for promoting sustainable tourism at the municipal level, consistent with the goal of valorizing outdoor offerings and proximity tourism.

Genoa's Historic Aqueduct is an impressive structure, built to supply the city with water at the start of the 1200s and subsequently enlarged and improved through the middle of the 1600s. Today, it is a highly appealing hiking itinerary for both history and nature lovers. The aqueduct was in operation until the middle of the 19th century, and the water continued to reach the neighbourhood of the Old Port as late as 1951. Part of the 40-kilometre length has disappeared with the growth of the city, although several long, level stretches remain that can now be travelled on foot or by bike, amid the homes and gardens of the old villages of the Bisagno valley. The itinerary can be tackled in its entirety or for only part of the way, since numerous ancient roads ("crouze") and paths link the valley to the aqueduct. It is a pedestrian-bus route that can be reached and travelled by means of sustainable mobility (on foot, by bus, and by some of Genoa's historical lifts). This tourist route offers visitors the opportunity to live a sustainable and outdoor experience in discovering Genoa.

Thanks to the methodology devised and to the participatory process within which the ULG was involved, the competences of different local actors were put into the system, creating new infrastructure and services useful for the promotion and enjoyment of a segment of the historical route—from Piazza Manin to the Old Port. This small action prompted the renaming of the route: PEDEstriBUS, to be travelled on foot or by bus. Figure 8 shows the specifications of the route that the ULG jointly worked on.
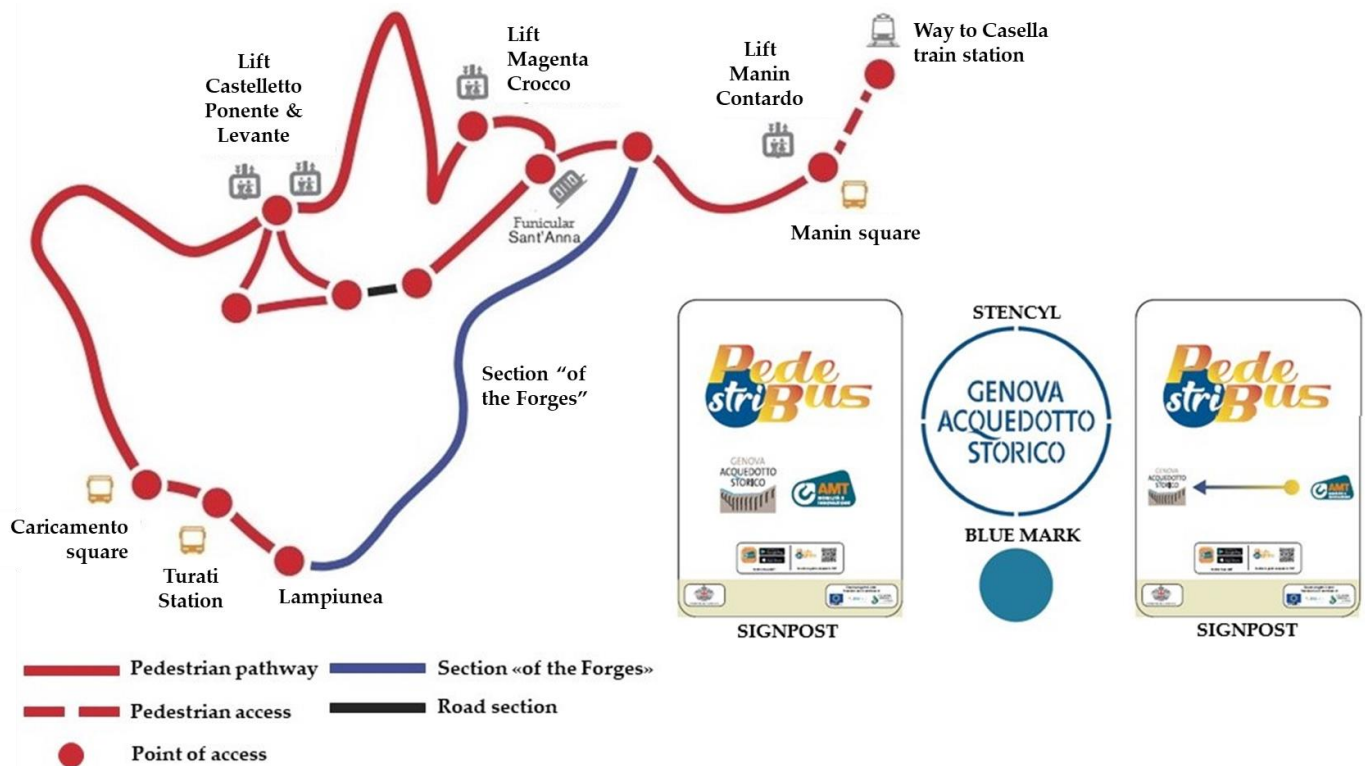
Figure 8. The segment of the Genoese Historic Aqueduct Route that the ULG jointly worked on: hiking references, soft mobility, and graphic representations.

New graphic representations have been developed to enable full integration of the hiking route with the urban transport network (both centrally and peripherally), to make

the experience completely sustainable, at least mobility-wise. Dedicated signposts are being installed at bus stops and historical lift stations by the municipal public transport operator; these are associated with the app of the municipal public transport operator—where to look up bus transit and historical lifts schedules—and a QR code which presents visitors with a very interesting hiking route from both a naturalistic and an historical point of view. Information has been made available onsite and online in several languages (Italian, English and French), as well as other experiences, events and contents promoted by VisitGenoa.it. Stencils painted on the sidewalks to guide tourists from the bus/lift to the historic aqueduct route are also being installed. Official signage is being applied on the hiking route: the blue mark.

5.3. Qualitative Assessment of the Implemented e-4P Process

For methodology's sake, a participatory process self-assessment tool was realized, taking cues from Metaplan. A graphic table was uploaded onto the Miro platform; four indicators were analyzed, each defined by strengths and weaknesses; participants were allowed to speak freely, in this case without a predetermined time limit, rather, the now mature group was left free to self-manage and self-regulate. Participants' speeches were collected and transcribed on virtual post-it notes and pinned to the platform's online whiteboard. Figure 9 shows the judgments of the ULG components.
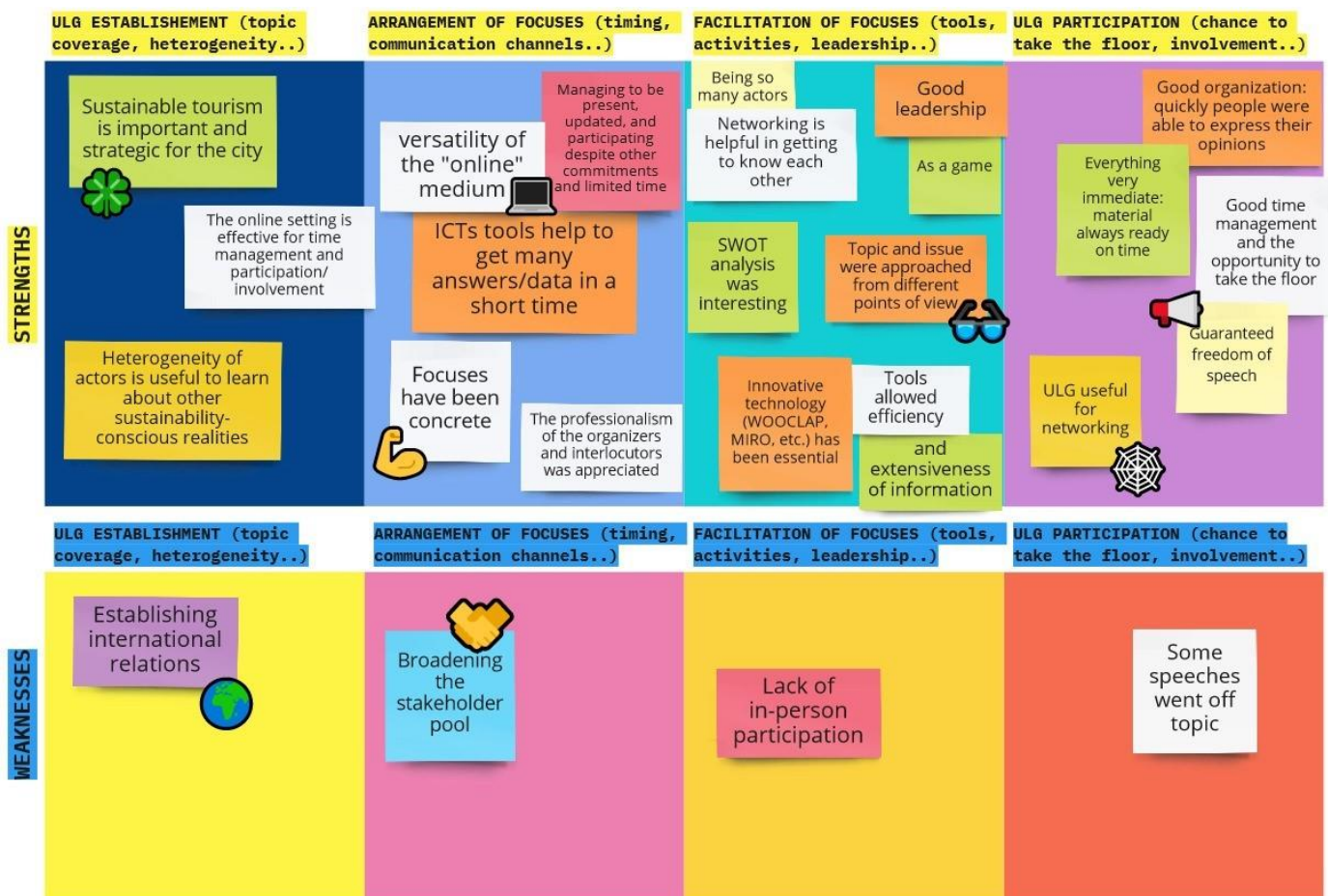
Figure 9. Evaluation of the e-4P process implemented by the ULG.

The activity produced encouraging data. The e-4P process was perceived as highly inclusive: heterogeneity among participants was ensured, and the opportunity to speak was assured for all equally. Networking between different local actors was reported as a good practice to be maintained in the future, as it is fundamental for approaching the topics of interest from different perspectives. The digital framework was evaluated positively by

the ULG; it was pointed out how it allowed effective participation in terms of the number of participants, data collection and concreteness of the activities. E-participation emerged as a sustainable tool both during the pandemic and for the post-COVID era, perhaps to be used according to hybrid applications.

6. Discussion

The paper addresses the need to develop methodologies aimed at building innovative planning tools at the municipal level that embrace multi-level and multi-stakeholder logics. As specified, in the Italian territory, there is a lack of municipal tools for managing tourist destinations, limiting the accessibility and quality of the tourist experience. Moreover, the paper expands the portion of literature relating to the involvement of stakeholders in the tourism sector, strongly understudied, in the awareness that the role of participation is a priority [132] and is necessary in the execution of exquisitely sustainable plans, especially in the tourism sector. Tourism and stakeholder participation are indeed closely intertwined: on the one hand, the whole of society is a fundamental basis for tourism; on the other hand, tourism itself, given its cross-sectoral nature, has a powerful potential to strengthen public–private partnerships and to engage multiple stakeholders to work collaboratively to achieve not only the common goals of the sector, but also all of the SDGs [52]. Thus, given this mutual influence, the paper argues that not to implement a participatory planning process and share benefits among all stakeholders would be counterintuitive.

The paper represents one of the few attempts to unravel the issues of tourist destination governance policies through the application of the helix model. The model demonstrates to clearly conceptualise the relationship between the stakeholders involved, in terms of participants, roles and coordination. If well planned and consistently applied, the model balances the power relations within the working group, in order to prevent there being illegitimately superordinated roles. The methodology also resulted in the foundation of a climate of trust and shared responsibility amongst all actors directed to the definition of the plan, firstly, in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In fact, once the IAP becomes operational, it is expected that the six helices will continue to work together for competitive and sustainable tourism; all stakeholders will play an active role in maintaining jointly identified actions/good practices, monitoring indicators, and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan.

At the level of the participatory process, the work was intensive and constructive. The methodology demonstrates several advantages over non-participatory ones [133,134]: the interweaving of local and scientific-methodological knowledge has fostered social learning and problem-solving related to cognitively complex situations, the creation of strong and lasting networks among various territorial actors which provide access to the resources that stakeholders need to achieve their goals, increased confidence in decision making, and reduced marginalization. From the very beginning, the actors were aware of the urgent need to define an innovative and shared plan for Genoa and to act accordingly. As per Bonzanigo and co-workers [66], economic motivations may have remained at the top of the list in terms of relative importance, however, in this case, local actors also became acutely conscious of the importance of environmental and social indicators. In addition, as revealed in the work of Sisto and colleagues [67], stakeholders also delved into the complexities of sustainable tourism management and helped to identify actions to overcome the barriers that may hinder the full exploitation of the surveyed area. ICTs have emerged as valuable tools to support urban planning: they have promoted open interactions amongst actors, providing opportunities for stakeholders to redefine from time to time, as activities progressed, the terms of the issues addressed [135]; consistent with the work of Phuoc and co-workers (2021) [136], e-participation increased transparency, offered the chance to reduce costs and time, and ultimately made the decision making more participative and accountable. A final consideration: strongly inclusive engagement of this kind makes it even more meaningful to study and anticipate factors that hinder involvement; in this case, not only what is reported by the framework proposed by Wanner and Probstl-Haider [75], but also typical

barriers associated with the use of distance-based methods—unavailability of devices and/or network access in specific portions of the population or territory, low computer literacy of those involved, lack of control by researchers, inequality in opportunities for involvement, etc., were not encountered [137].

The methodology presented in the form of guidelines proved to be effective at the level of intervention planning, mainly due to its flexibility in seeking to adapt to the territory in relation to its changing characteristics. Drawing attention to the methodology rather than to its final (context-specific) outcomes, the process is scalable and adaptable to other administrative realities. Regarding its application, although e-participation has emerged as a sustainable tool both during the pandemic and in the post-COVID era, future contributions applying the presented methodology should focus on hybrid applications, integrating in-person and remote events.

The limitations of the methodology are essentially related to the involvement of local actors and the management of participation, which, when applied to experiences outside the workshop, lead to a very high degree of uncontrollability.

7. Conclusions

The unprecedented multifaced global crises caused by the raging of COVID-19, in tandem with other major challenges imposed by the economic slowdown, geopolitical instability and climate change, has forced the reconsideration of the mainstream tourism model; the post-COVID era appears to be a key moment for rethinking the planning and management thereof, relying on sustainability and innovation as its main levers.

In response to research question 1, the paper proposes to explore the environmental, economic, social and safety impacts of tourism at the municipal level with a wide-ranging 4P process, whereby all stakeholders, including those less represented, participate from scratch in drafting an innovative and participatory municipal planning tool for the promotion of sustainable tourism—the Integrated Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism—aimed at investigating the economic, social, environmental and health impacts of tourism; creating new demand and ensuring the competitiveness of the destination; filling the legislative and planning gaps at the municipal level, regarding the tourism sector planning and management. The URBACT Local Group, which can be replaced by an Urban Local Group, is the place of choice where the six helices can meet and collaborate to identify and promote innovative forms of tourism. The e-4P planning process reported here is not aimed solely at consensus building, but rather at studying the real needs of the beneficiaries, promoting the empowerment of the actors involved, acquiring skills and autonomy [138] and planning resilient strategies [139]. Further research should continue in the identification of all the actors essential to involve in the working group, possibly expanding the helix model and the variety within the ULG, yet enriching the participatory planning tool. Factors hindering and facilitating the involvement of non-tourism companies to become engaged in destination development should be studied as well.

This work contributes to boosting the jumpstart of tourism destinations and promoting safe and sustainable tourism at the municipal level. Addressing research question 2, firstly, three macro-objectives and respective goals and actions/good practices have been identified directly through the involvement of territory, actors to include, times and financial resources required, and indictors of M&E; moreover, a small-scale action has been implemented to take advantage of new trends that have arisen over recent years, in particular, proximity tourism, which emphasizes local destinations, short distances, and low-carbon modes of transportation. Further studies would be necessary to apply this working methodology to different contexts, both from a purely territorial and planning point of view and in consideration of issues other than tourism. ULG and IAP are tools that require further testing, considering their potential for innovative and sustainable spatial planning.

Answering research question 3, the application of the methodology in the healthcare emergency scenario called for solutions to adapt and enrich the methodological toolkit for stakeholder participation: the e-4P process here reported, although it entailed an

intellectual effort to convert facilitation and planning skills, showed strong instrumental value in co-constructing approaches to addressing issues of common concern [140]. Future contributions should try to implement a mixed type of participatory model (remotely and in person) and should try to develop a systematic decision-making system open to all actors, even outside the working group.

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