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Academic Research Paper

A regenerative tourism approach for the development of marginalised areas. Insights from two best practices in Southern Italy.

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Abstract: In recent years, travel habits, needs and desires have been gradually changing and influencing both demand and supply in the tourism industry. Macro-phenomena like the pandemic, the climate change with consequent environmental issues, and the digital turn have been introducing new trends and directions. In this view, the need of addressing tourism towards new itineraries is proving crucial for activating processes of regenerative tourism, which acts as a transformational approach and aims to identify the potential of places to create net positive effects. The focus of the paper is on marginalised areas, specifically on areas with low population density, distant from the main hotspots and endowed with significant environmental assets and cultural heritage. The paper chooses to employ the concept of regenerative tourism for investigating the conditions that foster and sustain the development of these communities. To this aim, the analysis of two Italian best practices is meant to provide a new approach to brand-identity, tourism and local industry in marginalised areas. The case of "Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi" ("Widespread Museum of the 5 Senses") identifies new itineraries and builds new economies in a village in Sicily through the reconnection of the local community with its land. The case of "Sea Working Brindisi" reevaluates a marginalised area as a destination for nomad workers and works for the activation of innovative economies in the South of Italy. The analysis conducted will be based on online material (i.e. website, social media, journal articles) and literature review (when available). Based on this material, the paper will analyse the two cases along the value chain *ecosystem-intuition-design-action-dissemination*. The value chain will help identify the connection of each practice to the territory and to the local community as well as their potential to enhance the tourist attractiveness of the area. The analysis of the two successful cases, explored through the lens of regenerative tourism, has the merit to define the connection between regenerative tourism and the development of marginalised communities, providing directions to realise successful practices in other areas. The acknowledgment of the two cases as contemporary forms of tourism will help foster further practices and outline incentives that enhance tailored projects based on the uniqueness of each place.

Keywords: *regenerative tourism; community resilience; community empowerment; local entrepreneurship; marginalised communities*

JEL Codes: O18; O35; Z32

1. Introduction

Sustainability, creativity, co-creation, immersive experiences are some of the recurring terms in the field of tourism. Meanwhile, tourism practices are evolving fast and in connection with contemporary events which are marked by fast variables (e.g. economic crisis) and slow change variables (e.g. climate change or economic migrations) (Lew, 2013). In this context, new approaches of research in the field and in tourism practices have emerged (Davoudi, 2012), and all encompass a vision that goes beyond the sustainable approach. This paper aims to contribute to the innovation in the field through the analysis of a contemporary model of tourism that promotes the development of marginalised areas, whose potential represents a tool for strengthening the national strategy on tourism and improving their recovery and resilience through collective policy actions (Ottomano Palmisano et al., 2022). To this aim, two case studies were selected in order to present the conditions for the relationship between regenerative tourism and the development of marginalised communities to originate and thrive. The case studies are located in Southern Italy, where inner areas have remarkable and extensive development potential tied to their environmental, economic, and social capital (Barca et al., 2014). The paper adopts a theoretical framework for the exploration, that is regenerative tourism, a recent concept that proves useful to frame the cases. The concept of regenerative tourism was chosen as a framework because it describes practices rather than providing labels. As such, it helps identify and extract key elements and features of the cases in order to promote their replicability, yet taking into account their distinctiveness. To build on the theoretical framework, the paper employs an analytical approach for the analysis of the cases, that is the value chain applied to the creative sector (Santagata, 2009). Findings will resume and develop the conditions for tourism to create regenerative processes in marginalised communities, and will act as a ground for forthcoming practices. The cases will prove that a recovered sense of the identity of places in inner areas creates local empowerment and foster new forms of entrepreneurship, acting as a regenerative force for communities. Based on the findings, the paper will give directions and guidelines for the development of regenerative tourism in marginalised areas.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 From sustainable development to regenerative tourism

The sustainable development paradigm, promoted by the United Nations-led sustainable development agenda, opens the path to various approaches, theorisations and labels. In the tourism sector, sustainable development is commonly read as sustainable tourism, a concept that has been evolving over time since 1988, when the World Tourism Organization offered the first definition: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (Sustainable development | UNWTO, n.d.).

The concept of sustainable tourism is broad. For this reason, new terms and practices have been originating over time, and other definitions have been evolving and further developing the concept of sustainable tourism. The aim of the paper is to investigate the beneficial relation between regenerative tourism and the development of marginalised areas, to find which are the conditions that foster and sustain the relationship. The analysis stands within the broader concept of sustainable tourism, however, it focuses on one branch, that is regenerative tourism. The following part will explain the determination of regenerative tourism as the most appropriate theoretical framework for the analysis of the conditions that generate the social, cultural and economic development.

Regenerative tourism will be here identified as a counterpart of another branch of sustainable tourism, which may seem appropriate for the present analysis, yet carries significant limitations: creative tourism. The concept of creative tourism was first defined by Richards & Raymond as a ‘‘tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken’’ (2000, p.4). Later, the concept was defined by UNESCO as “travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture” (UNESCO, 2006, p.3). Studies have been expanding on the topic, hence following two paths: on the one hand, on the nature of alternative tourism that offers visitors the opportunity to self-develop through participation in creative activities (workshops, courses) that are typical of the place where they are undertaken (Marques & Richards, 2014; Richards, 2017; Bieliková & Palenčíková, 2021). On the other hand, they have been relying on the opportunity to see creative tourism as an extension of cultural tourism that engages local communities to provide interactive, immersive and experiential activities for tourists (Tan et al., 2013; Lee, 2015; Richards, 2020; Amaral & Rodrigues, 2020; Roque, 2022).

Regenerative tourism, as well as creative tourism, has been emerging as a branch of sustainable tourism. However, the two concepts present some significant differences. The term has appeared in discourses around tourism as a niche subject pioneered by three non-Indigenous practitioner groups based in the UK, USA and Chile (Dwyer, 2018; Mang & Reed, 2012; Pollock, 2012; Teruel, 2018), aiming to improve and transform social-ecological systems where tourism practices occur (Hes & Coenen, 2018). Studies on regenerative tourism include (Mang & Haggard, 2016) regenerative agriculture (Regenerative Travel(b), 2020) and regenerative economies (Lovins, 2020; Raworth, 2017), climate change, urbanisation, justice and inequality (Caniglia et al., 2020). Beyond pure conceptualisations of the term, the transformative potential of the regenerative paradigm has been investigated by Bellato et al., (2022). According to them, the concept of regenerative tourism was initially born from practice and then implemented at local or regional levels. Also, two international alliances have emerged: The Global Initiative for Regenerative Tourism was established in Latin America in 2015 (Araneda, 2019), while The Regenerative Travel Alliance was initiated in 2019 (Regenerative Travel, 2020). As opposed to creative tourism, regenerative tourism originated from practice, hence a universal definition is yet to be adopted. Recently, Bellato et al. (2022) have sought to identify the attributes, in order to better define the concept:

> Regenerative tourism is a transformational approach that aims to fulfill the potential of tourism places to flourish and create net positive effects through increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems. Derived from the ecological worldview, it weaves Indigenous and Western science perspectives and knowledge. Tourism systems are regarded as inseparable from nature and obligated to respect Earth’s principles and laws. In addition, regenerative tourism approaches evolve and vary across places over the long term, thereby harmonizing practices with the regeneration of nested living systems (p.9).

Moreover, some authors define regenerative tourism as opposed to sustainable tourism. In brief, “the sustainable tourism regime primarily regards tourism as an industry and tends to prioritise top-down, standardised and compartmentalised interventions. In contrast, regenerative tourism approaches reflect and are co-created within place contexts. Regenerative tourism aligns with living systems to work at local levels and prioritises equitable and inclusive co-creation in multiple domains and harmony with economic development. While both approaches promote the wellbeing of future generations, sustainable tourism strives to minimise social-ecological damage. In contrast, regenerative tourism seeks to create net positive social-ecological systems effects” (p. 10). As such,

its deep interconnection with community resilience becomes evident. Indeed, the resilience planning approach is gradually substituting the more established sustainable development paradigm. In fact, while sustainability actions are limited to maintaining resources above a safe level in order to mitigate or prevent change, a resilience planning approach allows industries and communities to adapt to change by building capacity to return to a desired and previously existing state, requiring different modes of response according to the rate of change (Lew, 2013). As one of the most diffused social practices, tourism is now encompassed within community resilience research. More specifically, community resilience applies to regenerative tourism practices that by definition aim to increase the regenerative capacity of local communities and ecosystems through fulfilling the potential of tourist destinations to thrive and create net effects (Bellato et al., 2022).

In this view, even though both the concepts of creative and regenerative tourism derive from sustainable tourism yet evolving and developing it, the former is formulated on a more theoretical basis, while the latter originate from practice. Moreover, while the former was first formulated in 2000 by Richards & Raymond and later rephrased on contemporary needs and practices, the latter was crafted and implemented for and within contemporary practices. Also, based on their attributes and definitions, the latter deepens, modernises and actualises the former, eventually turning into practice and concrete directions those labels which are typically associated with creative tourism, such as creativity, co-creation, interaction, participation.

2.2 Entrepreneurship defines new itineraries

In contemporary discourses on tourism, "co-production" and "co-creation" are recurring terms that involve the perceived needs of tourists within a mass tourism perception more than a true exchange with the local community (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Binkhorst, 2005; Prebensen et al., 2013; Navarro et al., 2015; Rihova et al. 2018; Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019). This logic implies that tourists are the main actors of an industry replicating the mechanisms of manufacturing standardised production. On the other side, research has been focusing on the need to foster the offering of local products and activities, a practice which is commonly labeled as "tourism social entrepreneurship", a strategy that responds to the call for community-centric tourism development (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019), initiated in its preliminary form of social entrepreneurship by Dees, (1998) and recently employed by non-governmental organisations (Dahles et al., 2020). Tourism social entrepreneurship is intended as a new kind of tourism that capitalises on local resources, knowledge, skills, and social structures (Alvord et al., 2004), making changes in the tourism experience and in the life of host communities (Aquino, 2022). As well as for creative tourism, the label of tourism social entrepreneurship eventually delineates strict boundaries to an idea that proves low application. According to Jørgensen et al. (2021), the existing literature has established that many examples of tourism social entrepreneurship "exist in and for marginalized communities" (Aquino et al., 2018, p. 24), but a limited understanding of marginalised communities has been applied, and the focus has been mostly on the tourism social entrepreneurship in developing countries (i.e. Biddulph, 2018; Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2011; Laeis & Lemke, 2016; Porter et al., 2018; Sigala, 2016; Sloan et al., 2014; Stenvall et al., 2017). Moreover, studies do not make clear who the entrepreneur is, focusing on one actor rather than the community itself (Jørgensen et al., 2021). In this view, Jørgensen et al. analyse two cases of marginalised communities that use tourism as a means for collective action in Denmark, and ask for a more collective perspective on social entrepreneurship in the tourism field (p. 16). The insight of Jørgensen et al. is in fact needed to highlight the multifaceted nature of the employment of entrepreneurship and tourism when intertwined with the development of local communities. The definition must be collective since successful cases of entrepreneurship in marginalised areas differ widely and never lead to a model.

Labels like "tourism social entrepreneurship" represent a self-contradiction in a way that narrows the boundaries of a phenomenon that is supposed to extract the unique values and hallmarks of an area,

with the close involvement of its community. Entrepreneurship as a tool to revalue marginalised areas should consider the involvement of local communities as a first step towards the rediscovery of local uniqueness. In ancient times and middle ages traveling was intended as a deep and extended activity that put voyagers in direct contact with local habits, people, commerce and products (e.g. Odysseus' journey in literature, pilgrimage in traditional practices). Later, the "Grand Tour" paved the way for the emergence of a widespread phenomenon characterizing contemporary mobility: mass tourism. The latter refers to the movement of a large number of people towards popular holiday destinations. This phenomenon goes together with mass consumption and with the use of standardized tourist packages (Poon, 1993). Then, in the second half of the twentieth century, the increase of spending power and personal mobility, the improvement of public transport and infrastructures, and the growing globalisation and internationalisation of societies led to a substantial increase of leisure travel (Bramwell, 2004). Holidays started to be considered as recreational experiences in leisure resorts. Initially, tourist flows came from industrial regions to the seaside destinations in France and UK and to winter resorts in the Alps, but in the post-war period many coastal areas in Spain and Italy have developed tourist infrastructures, followed by other Southern European countries. The range of mass tourism destinations has increased over the years, including North Africa and Middle-Eastern countries. In the last decades, the development of accessible air transport and charter flights have contributed to popularising long-haul destinations, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Maldives, and so on (Naumov & Green, 2015). A further push to mass tourism practices has been favored by the implementation of online reservation systems that made the travellers increasingly autonomous in organising their trips. The rapid development of mass tourism, on the one hand, has favored greater economic accessibility of travel, job creation and increased income as well as foreign exchange earnings. On the other hand, it has brought to the loss of identity and of cultural specificity, and to the overexploitation of natural and cultural resources (Page, 2012; Poon, 1993). These negative impacts have constituted the breeding ground for the emergence of alternative and more sustainable forms of tourism. In this sense, some practices of contemporary tourism are seeking to reestablish a true connection between tourists and the communities. In this view, the concept of regenerative tourism helps identify a sustainable form of tourism that is beyond mass tourism since it does not drain resources and territories, but rather creates net positive effects through increasing the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems (Bellato et al., 2022). Regeneration occurs with transformation, and originates as a bottom-up process, it prioritises inclusive co-creation in multiple domains and in harmony with economic development. Even though regenerative tourism does not define entrepreneurship in detail, it provides a wider and more useful approach to the development of entrepreneurship in connection with tourism in marginalised areas. In this context, practices of valorisation of cultural heritage and preservation of local culture through the development of new forms of entrepreneurship have been analysed. One example based on the enhancement of entrepreneurship in marginal areas is the valorisation of Cultural Routes, as in the case of the via Francigena, where the impact generated by the Routes prove relevant from an economic point of view, but also on a cultural, social and environmental level. Moreover, the analysis of the impacts generated by the route shows a direct correlation between its development and the enhancement of local enterprises (Splendiani et al., 2022).

As the cases analysed in this paper will try to prove, the concept of regenerative tourism in this sort of practices lies in the creation of a circular economy that emerges as a bottom-up process, to the valorisation of local products and the development of local infrastructures and services both for tourists and citizens. In the two cases, the harmonisation of tourism with the community through the creation of new forms of local entrepreneurship proves to be a tool for the regeneration of inner and neglected lands, products and communities.

3. Methodology

Based on the theoretical framework, the paper chooses to employ the concept of regenerative tourism for investigating the conditions that foster and sustain the development of marginalised communities. The concept is employed as a series of practices that serve as a theoretical framework for the analysis of two best practices, the "Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi" ("Widespread Museum of the 5 Senses") in Sciacca, Sicily, and the "Sea Working Brindisi" project in Brindisi, Puglia. These cases were selected because they are located in Southern Italy, a country where the North-South divide has been lasting since country unification because of asymmetries in productive performance (e.g., per capita GDP) (Daniele and Malanima, 2014; Felice, 2019; Iuzzolino et al., 2011). Since the 70s, Italy has been divided into three Italies: the industrialised North, the few industrial districts in the South (medium enterprises operating in isolated industrial districts), and the rest of the Mezzogiorno (Bagnasco, 1977). Since then, events like the stagflation, the progressive structural change from manufacturing to service sectors, and the reductions in public investment for the South from 13% to 8% of the Italian GDP (Daniele & Malanima, 2011) totally halted the development of the South. This was the scenario before the Great Recession of 2007–2008 (Lagravinese, 2015; Petraglia, 2019) and the pandemic crisis (Dosi, Fanti et al., 2020), which further deepened the dilemma of the North-South gap in Italy. Moreover, Southern Italy has been experiencing significant variations as a destination for tourism. According to Mileti et al. (2022), tourist knowledge of Italian regions focuses mainly on Sicily, Tuscany (in the North), and Sardinia. In general, the interest of tourists addresses few, mostly fixed centers. The rate of tourism in Campania, for instance, is concentrated around specific sites such as Pompei, Vesuvius and Capri, yet other parts of the region are little explored. On one side, tourism in Southern Italy has generated economic returns, on the other the growth of tourist infrastructure, such as coastal resorts, has been the subject of uncontrolled planning and development (Inskeep, 1991). Moreover, as mentioned, the distribution of tourism appears rather unbalanced towards a few regions and areas, mostly urban areas or heritage sites.

In this context, we chose to analyse two best practices that, though in different ways, aim to counter these tendencies by broadening the opportunities of cooperation between tourists and the local communities, and enhance the attractiveness and sustainable development of two different areas. The cases of "Museo Diffuso dei Cinque Sensi" in Sciacca and "Sea Working Brindisi" belong to two different regions, Sicily and Puglia. According to the data Mileti et al. (2022) report in their study, Sicily has reached a consistent interest in tourists (54% of the interviewee would choose Sicily as a destination), while Puglia has less recognition (18% of the interviewee would choose Puglia). Even though located in Sicily, Sciacca, the city involved in the first case, has a small population (according to Istat, 39.000 in December 2022) and does not represent a typical tourist destination in Italy, yet presents the features of marginalised areas (Casalini, 2022). On the other hand, the city of Brindisi has a larger population (according to Istat, 87.773 in December 2022), yet it does not represent a typical tourist destination.

The analysis conducted will be based on online material (i.e., official website, official social media pages, the main online press news) and on literature review when available. Although conscious of web-based material's limited reliability, we decided to base our research on the findings that emerged from a variety of online materials for two main reasons. On the one hand, the projects' websites and social media pages allowed us to have an up-to-date idea of the initiatives seen through their own lens, deepening the vision that the projects themselves want to transmit. On the other hand, we decided to use newspaper articles to explore the external perception of the project from multiple sources. Looking for newspaper articles dealing with the two projects has also allowed us to become aware of its degree of dissemination. By combining together the findings from all web-based material used, we were able to build our own value-oriented vision on the two projects. Indeed, the paper will analyse the two cases

along the value chain *ecosystem-intuition-design-action-dissemination*, following Santagata's (2009) theorisation of the creation of value in the creative industry.

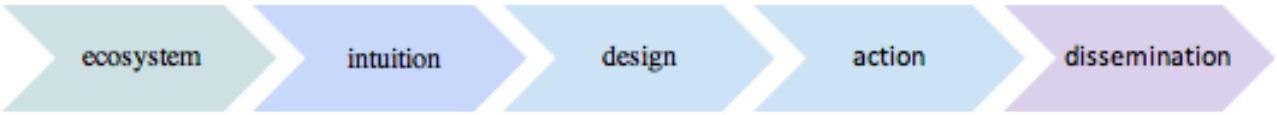


Figure 1 - The value chain *ecosystem-intuition-design-action-dissemination*, built on Santagata's (2009) theorisation of the creation of value in the creative industry. *Source: authors' figure.*

In this case, the value chain will allow us to identify the strong connection of the practices to their territory and local community and, at the same time, its potential to enhance the tourist attractiveness of the destination. The paper will then provide some useful insights that emerge from the analysis and that could be applied to other creative contexts and other destinations with similar features. To this aim, some guidelines will be eventually provided to practitioners and policy makers to develop community-based policies, tailored projects and regenerative tourism practices.

When analysed together, relying on the same theoretical framework and adopting the same value chain, these two case studies constitute a significant example of how very different projects and experiences sharing an interest in the development and regeneration of a community and a territory can open the path for further replications of the value chain in other projects. Indeed, the value chain proposed can be applied to a variety of experiences that, thanks to the combination of a favorable ecosystem, a peculiar intuition, a functional design and action, and a positive dissemination, could be potential value generators.

4. Case studies and empirical findings

4.1. A diffused experience of tourism in Sciacca

The construction of the "Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi" (trad. "Widespread Museum of the 5 Senses") in Sciacca, Sicily, tells the story of an *ecosystem* that is specific to inner areas in Southern Italy: a neglected land, a marginal area of Sicily with a low percentage of tourism (Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi, n.d.). An area that was eventually rehabilitated by its community through an operational cooperation combining many people: different in age, profession, way of thinking and living, working for the future of their land, brought together by the awareness of the great value of the territory, products and traditions making their land unique.

Today, the community works as a cooperative, but the *intuition* began in February 2019 when all the representatives of the "Sciacca produ(A)ttiva" sat around a table, from residents to restaurant owners, from commercial activity managers to craftsmen, from potters to accommodation business managers, from event organizers to cultural operators, from tour guides to museum managers. The purpose was to deal with the emergency of the historic center which in Sciacca, as in many other Italian villages and cities, has been drained of traditional commercial, economic, social and human presence. The entrepreneurs around the table had to tell the element that characterises Sciacca and identifies it among all other cities. Eventually, it became clear that Sciacca has so many identities that it was certainly not possible to choose one in particular.

At that precise moment a project aimed at tourists, residents, entrepreneurs and the entire hinterland of Sciacca was being *designed*: the idea consisted of an open-air museum, displaying all and conceived for all. A project that was meant to enhance Sciacca, its traditions, its historic center, its territory, and to become the brand identity of the city. A magical place, where emotions are perceived with the five senses and where the five entrance doors of the city are transformed into entrance doors to the diffused museum, a museum of experiences, a sensory museum. The streets become the corridors of the museum, the squares become the exhibition halls, the monuments are the

attractions, and the shops, housing facilities and restaurants complete the picture of sensory experiences. And Sciacca retrieves its community.

In March 2019, the *action* began, and the concept of the museum was presented to the city through the description of about two months of work. The concept was ready, and the museum as well, a museum that has always been there for all to see, yet still hidden to be perceived by everybody. Two weeks after the presentation, the vision of a community that takes action and focuses on a new idea of tourism for the sustainable development of its territory, and the mission of a city that aims to become a destination were illustrated at TravelExpo in Sicily, being a huge success. From that moment, the project started to be identified as best practice. On 18 April 2019 the association "Ecomuseo dei 5 Sensi" (trad. "Ecomuseo of the 5 Senses") was established in Sciacca, social media and the website started to share the project, and on May 18, the synergy of all the main characters of the Diffused Museum was tested during the Night of the Museums, an occasion to work on the five senses, involving residents and tourists. It was an evening dedicated to culture and sensory experiences, which turned out to be a huge success with the public who will repeatedly ask to repeat it.

Meanwhile, the *dissemination* began and a collaboration between the Museum and the institutions was signed with two important protocols, one with the Municipality of Sciacca and one with the Regional Tourist Office of Agrigento, and the President of the Sicily Region declared appreciation for the work done in Sciacca. The approval at the local and regional level eventually materialised with the sponsorships received from the Municipality of Sciacca, the Libero Consortium of Agrigento, the Regional Tourism Department and the Sicilian Regional Assembly. During summer, the Museum enriched the quality and quantity of experiences already presented in March, proposing a package of offers related to painting, the processing of Coral, the modeling of Ceramics and Papier-mâché. The 2019/2020 school year began, an opportunity for the Museum to be launched in educational institutions through a project aimed at constructing identity narratives, with the goal to push young people to narrate their land and hallmarks, hence exploiting the imagination and creativity of children and teenagers. Thus originated, over time, the need to support the association with an operating structure that was able to do business, seek funds, support initiatives, interact with investors, and promote with professionalism and competence Sciacca in the world. Therefore, they created the Identity and Beauty Cooperative in January 2020, following the will of an entire community that once again intended to network and focus on new tools and challenges. Today, the Cooperative is made of artisans, traders, accommodation facilities, restaurants, cultural associations, educational and cultural institutions and local boards of residents. Viviana Rizzuto, President and founder, is the community manager, a contemporary role that is extremely useful in the process of valorisation of territories, alongside local administrations. The Cooperative is then managed by a board of directors and a management board. The role of Viviana and the Cooperative is to keep involving the community, the local institutions and entrepreneurs in a process of cooperation and connection for a continuum of ideas, connections and offering of experiences for voyagers (Casalini, 2022). The process of dissemination has been also realised through social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube) and the action of Viviana Rizzuto, who actively engages the community on social media. From the analysis of social media channels, it emerges that the communication is mostly in Italian, hence preventing foreign tourism to include the museum within their itineraries. In general, it would prove interesting to assess the actual increase of tourism in the area, but the general upheaval in tourism trends generated by COVID-19 makes it difficult to measure it.

The analysis of the case on the value chain helps assess the development of the "Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi" as an effort made by its community to keep tourism sustainable through a stable focus on the community needs, on the awareness of the territory's values, and on the valorisation of local traditions for attracting voyagers and temporary citizens. A museum without walls was conceived in order to materialise something that was already there, and to create a brand identity for the community and the passengers. The effort created strong connections, social cohesion and an integrated range of services and activities that ended up increasing the value of the overall supply. Moreover, a certain

level of tourist carrying capacity has been defined and monitored, in order to preserve the territory with its people and generate emotions that go beyond what we understand as modern tourism. In Sciacca, the modern concept of tourism, the massification and commodification, are left behind and replaced with a collective vision that works to create a welcoming, beautiful, usable place for everyone, travelers and residents.

The weakness of the museum stands in the last part of the value chain, that concerns the dissemination. The reason is twofold: on one side, the project is recent hence more developed on the first part of the value chain; on the other side, the tools for communicating a brand's new way of experiencing tourism may suffer from the lack of a traditional and standardised model for building the communication and the diffusion of the project. Future research and forthcoming practices may deepen and develop this part of the chain.

For now, the impact of the Museum can only be supposed for three main reasons. First, regional and provincial data provided at a national (Istat) and regional level (Osservatorio Turistico Regione Sicilia, 2023) have not been updated for the years following the pandemic. The second reason is that the success of a project based on the development of tourism starting in 2020 will need an assessment of tourism flow that does not cover the first years following the pandemic. In this sense, a proper assessment will need to be constructed starting from 2023. The third reason is that both national and regional data consider indicators which need to be updated according to the latest research in the field of sustainable tourism, matching the success of emerging practices in tourism with new criteria measuring economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts (Splendiani et al., 2022).

4.2. A future for the repopulation of neglected areas in Brindisi

A unique seaside city, whose two-thousand-year history is closely linked to its port, the city of Brindisi is home to "Sea Working Brindisi" (Sea Brindisi, n.d.), a project launched by Emma Taveri, Councilor for Tourism of the Municipality of Brindisi, during the pandemic to reposition a marginal area as a destination for nomad workers and for the relocation of companies in the South of Italy. The *ecosystem* in which the project takes place is hence a buzzing port city, also recognised as a Monument of Hospitality and Peace by Unesco and constitutes a crossroads between the sea and the hinterland, soaked in different cultures.

The *intuition* behind this project came to Emma Taveri, a passionate nomad who decided to return to Brindisi during the pandemic, with the objective of bringing a change to her homeland and of making her skills available to the city. For this reason, as an important recognition for her commitment, she received the title of Councilor for Tourism, Territorial Marketing and Creativity in the area where she was implementing her project, which was based on the new needs of the travelers and aimed at making Brindisi more and more a smart, adaptive and attractive destination for new travelers and holiday workers. Among others, the initiative is conceived and promoted by Destination Makers, a consultancy company specialising in destination marketing and management, with the support of a network that includes the Municipality of Brindisi and other institutional entities, businesses and the world of associations. The project aimed at reinforcing the city's identity and at increasing its appeal as a "south working" destination.

As regards the *design*, the project started as a contest named "Sea Working, Win an office on the sea" that gave one person the opportunity to live and work for ten days, from 3 to 13 October 2020, on a sailboat moored in the port and experience recreational and cultural experiences that include kitesurfing courses, tastings and guided tours. Massimiliano Frattoloni, a 26-year-old computer consultant from Lombardia region, was the winner of the contest and was selected out of 764 applications, both from Italy and from foreign countries (including overseas ones). While participating in the programme, he got the chance to immerse in the Brindisi culture, having various experiences outside working hours aimed at increasing productivity and quality of life of the city, such as yoga, horseback riding, tasting of typical products and experiences related to the sea such as surfing, kite

surfing or sailing trips. This is because "Sea Working Brindisi" implies a deep connection with the place people work from. The sea worker can enter a territory from which one has always left, trying to imagine a new future together with the local community where one can decide to return and stay (Brindisi Report, 2020).

Following the initial contest, the project consists in the possibility to apply to the programme through a specific section of the project website (Sea Brindisi, n.d.). Once one gets accepted, he or she receives the "Sea Work & Live" card to get a number of benefits, e.g., special discount in restaurants, gyms, shopping centers, sport courses, and free workspaces. There are three main criteria for selection: the travelers/workers must reside outside the Puglia region, they must be 18 or above and they must be available to move to Brindisi (including its province) for at least one month. The contest, indeed, is part of a larger project that aims to develop smart working in the area. The project captures the city's desire to open up to smart workers and, more precisely, to "south workers". The *action* of the project consists indeed in the involvement of people who are able to work remotely and wish to extend their holidays beyond the usual summer holidays, settling down for a few weeks in areas where the relationship between cost and quality of life is more favorable than in the big cities of the center-north. Smart working tools are thus developed in the area, involving institutions and companies in the co-design of a series of incentives and additional services (such as tax relief, dedicated packages and discounts, creation of co-working hubs) to potential users. In May 2022 Brindisi also participated in the Airbnb call "Live and Work Anywhere" dedicated to smart working destinations, reaching a positive outcome thanks to this project. The objective of the call was to select a small group of smart working destinations at an international level, which Airbnb will promote to travelers from all over the world through a free promotion campaign and the improvement of local services. Through this project, Brindisi became recognised as one of the two Italian Airbnb's top destinations to work remotely (L'Ora di Brindisi, 2022).

The *dissemination* of the project occurred through the main local and national press and through the main social media platforms. All these tools could be further exploited to foster the link with local entrepreneurship, which is crucial and unavoidable, and to seasonally adjust tourism and tourists' presence in the South. The presence of smart workers should in fact have positive implications on the territory because, in addition to generating a direct economic induced, it would trigger a virtuous process of service innovation and bring flows of new residents, even permanent ones in the future, and encourage the return of the "natives" that had previously left for work reasons. It is a potentially beneficial evolution that seeks to ride rather than undergo the social and cultural changes - as well as labor regulations - imposed by Covid 19 (Manager Italia, 2020). The "Sea Working" project is also paving the way for a restored positive exchange between the local population and voyagers, encouraging the latter to stay longer in a certain place, not necessarily in the high season, and giving them the opportunity to work from there.

To sum up, the project aims to build a new culture of hospitality in the city of Brindisi, and to propose it as a privileged destination for digital nomads and for people who travel in "bleisure" mode (i.e. both for vacation and for work), while enhancing structures and tourist services with a view to seasonal adjustment and thus bring new life to the territory. In such a way, the melting cultures deriving from this project would bring a renewed sense of authenticity to the city, also contributing to re-shape its identity, thus enhancing its attractiveness and competitiveness throughout the years and not just in the high season. The main weakness of the project is that no international press article was found about this project, and a few Italian national journals have mentioned it. Moreover, the Facebook page, though updated, does not count on a significant number of followers and interactivity. The Instagram page, instead, is not even active. These gaps highlight how the dissemination tools are not fully contributing to spreading the project inside and outside the area.

As regards the impact of the project on tourist flows in Brindisi, we can make some considerations based on the data collected through Agenzia Regionale del Turismo (Osservatorio di PugliaPromozione, 2022). The report highlights how the arrivals and presences to the province of

Brindisi increased from 2019 to 2022 by 5% and 6%. There is no proof that this increase has been influenced by SeaBrindisi, but there is a certain chance that the latter has contributed to improve the city's reputation as a tourist destination and a livable place. It is also crucial to highlight that in 2022, in the whole Puglia region the number of employees grew by +10% compared to 2019, while the companies involved in the tourism sector increased by +6%. As regards the variation in the population living in Brindisi, it is too early to evaluate the impacts of this project, considering that the most updated data available are related to 2021, and show a decreasing trend (Tuttitalia.it, n.d.).

4.3 Regenerative tourism practices re-establish the identity of places and empower local communities

Some global macro-phenomena are influencing behavioral patterns and consumption habits of tourists, favoring the emergence of new kinds of tourist attractions, as opposed to mass tourism. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated a process, initiated some years before due to the environmental issue and climate change, of gradual shift towards more sustainable ways of traveling **(**Gössling et al., 2020**;** Pang et al., 2013; Pencarelli, 2020). A renewed attention towards the preservation of the environment and of local cultures as well as the revaluation of rural areas and little hamlets is currently taking place. In many cases, however, this shift towards eco-friendly destinations, and the attention towards local communities, is mostly theoretical or put in practice as a niche phenomenon and does not bring any actual benefit to the destination (Bâc, 2014). However, the two best practices analysed demonstrate that some steps forward are being done, even from a practical point of view, in line with the emergence of regenerative tourism literature in the last few years.

The analysis of the two experiences, both taking place in marginalised areas, is framed within a regenerative tourism approach. One of the main features emerging from the analysis is the will of both cases to create a positive impact on the places through the engagement of the local community. This urgency had been already identified by Owen (2007a; 2007b), while describing regenerative tourism. Applying it to ecotourism facilities, the architecture scholar moved from the exclusive focus of ecotourism facilities in the external and natural environment to highlight the need to reinforce the image and the identity of a place also through human cultural artifacts. The traditional ecotourism approach, as Owen states, misses the opportunity to actively engage with the place and to build a regenerative relationship with it. A regenerative tourism approach, instead, would create a positive impact, contributing to reconnect the human with nature and taking into consideration the socio-political dimension, contrarily to the sustainability discourse which is entirely focused on environmentalism. These considerations can be seen as the starting point for the re-establishment of the identity of a place through a major internal and external awareness that comes from regenerative tourism practices such as the experiences of Sciacca and Brindisi.

In the case of the "Museo dei Cinque Sensi" in Sciacca, the local population is involved in a variety of activities that aim to regenerate the area, to contribute to its sustainable development, and to build a stronger sense of community in the city through the creation of networks. Moreover, it aims to strengthen the citizens' sense of belonging to the same territory, history and culture. Once the local inhabitants become aware of the value of their city and of the need to valorise its multiple identities and meanings, Sciacca could indeed acquire a greater tourist attractiveness and reputation. Indeed, the widespread museum actually shapes the new brand identity of the city.

In the case of Brindisi, the "Sea Working" project aims to repopulate a marginalised area by attracting temporary citizens to work and live in the area. To do so, the project is activating a sustainable offer of services in the area, contributing to their regeneration. As a result, Brindisi has been recognised as one of the two Italian Airbnb's top destinations to work remotely.

In general, the identity of places is gradually losing ground, also due to the depopulation of villages which are not considered among the top mainstream destinations. The two projects analysed demonstrate how it is possible to turn the tide by simultaneously fostering community resilience and developing the tourism industry through regenerative tourism practices that see the involvement and

empowerment of the local population. Supporting and involving the local community, in fact, is the only way to foster tourism that, in the future, would become synonymous with cultural growth, economic development and environmental protection (Davolio & Somoza, 2016). In other words, it is important to empower local communities through effective cooperation between tourists, local administrations and the hosting community. To sum up, both projects highlight the need to work on the re-establishment of the identity of marginalised areas working in synergy with the local community, local industries and institutions, in order to make them more attractive both for the local community and for tourists.

5. Limitations of the research, conclusions and guidelines for the development of tourism in marginalised communities

The analysis of the two cases proves that the development (i.e. the creation of infrastructure and services conceived for tourists, such as B&Bs) and enhancement (i.e. selling local products or fostering local services, such as restaurants or gyms, for welcoming nomads) of local entrepreneurship is the key to a new sense of traveling that creates a deeply-rooted connection between hosts and guests. As such, extra charges and high seasonality are replaced by a different economy for places, where tourism is not a draining and unbalanced force, but rather a transformative and enriching experience for the area. The starting point is represented by local actions of consolidation of communities and territories, led by single entrepreneurs and/or local administrations. The actions of consolidation aim at fostering exchanges, connections, circular economies and a sense of a common identity. The whole community must be resolute, self-confident, and visionary in order to invest in their territories, rediscover their traditional hallmarks, and valorise local products and handicraft to rebuild cultural heritage and local identity. Through the creation of a new identity to be communicated and the valorisation of the territory's activities supported by the action of every member of the community, the process of revitalisation of places can be intense and rooted, offering the opportunity for a deep exploration.

Through the analysis, features and tools for the establishment of a renovated form of tourism were identified. The cases of Sciacca and Brindisi do not aim to function as models, but rather to give insights and tools to work towards a more spread and shared redefinition of traveling that deeply and genuinely connects with local communities, fostering the regeneration of local economies. In recent years, travel habits, needs and desires have been gradually changing and influencing both demand and supply in the tourism industry. Macro-phenomena like the pandemic **(**Gössling et al., 2020**)**, the climate change with consequent environmental issues (Pang et al., 2013), and the digital turn (Pencarelli, 2020) have been introducing new trends and directions. Accordingly, the need of addressing tourism towards new itineraries and specifically marginalised areas is becoming crucial for activating processes of regenerative tourism (Bellato et al., 2022), which acts as a transformational approach whose aim is to identify the potential of places to create net positive effects (Bellato et al., 2022). In this regard, the analysis of two best practices in the South of Italy highlighted the need to identify and fulfil the identity of destinations by entirely exploiting the potential of both tourists and local communities' expertise, experience, and local economy. The limitations of the analysis concern the scarcity of existing academic literature on the cases and the almost exclusive reliance on non-scientific journal articles. Moreover, due to the outbreak of the pandemic (especially in the case of Sciacca) and to the fact that the two projects are still in a pioneering phase, a primary analysis based on reliable data has not been developed yet. Thus, the regenerative impact of the projects is not based on empirical measurements and can only be deduced from a theoretical analysis. The table, based on the categories proposed by Bellato et al. (2022) to build the concept of regenerative tourism (2022), provides a summary of the analysis through the lens of our empirical findings:

Table 1. The cases of Sciacca and Bridisi through the lens of regenerative tourism [based on Bellato et al.' categories building the concept (2022)].

Regenerative Tourism	**"Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi", Sciacca (Sicily)**	**"Sea Working Brindisi", Brindisi (Puglia)**
Purpose To build the capacity of support systems for net positive impact and sustainability of social, economic and ecological systems **Potential** Place-based development designed for realising potential	The local population is involved in a variety of activities that aim to regenerate the area, to contribute to its sustainable development, and to build a stronger sense of community in the city through the creation of networks. Moreover, it aims to strengthen the citizens' sense of belonging to the same territory, history and culture. Once the local inhabitants become aware of the value of their city and of the need to valorise its multiple identities, Sciacca could indeed acquire a greater tourist attractiveness and reputation. A museum without walls was conceived in order to materialise something that was already there, and to create a brand identity for the community and the passengers. The effort created strong connections, social cohesion and an integrated range of services and activities that ended up increasing the value of the overall supply.	The project aimed at reinforcing the city's identity and at increasing its appeal as a "south working" destination. It is activating a sustainable offer of services in the area, contributing to their regeneration. The presence of smart workers should have positive implications on the territory because, in addition to generating a direct economic induced, it would trigger a virtuous process of service innovation and bring flows of new residents, even permanent ones in the future, and encourage the return of the "natives" that had previously left for work reasons.
Systems Adopts whole systems, living systems thinking; Social, cultural environmental, economic, political, spiritual and ecological elements are interrelated **Stakeholder Relations** Humans and nature are interconnected and co-evolving, relations based on reciprocity, respecting planetary boundaries	A project that is meant to enhance Sciacca, its traditions, its historic center, its territory and nature, and to become the brand identity of the city. Sciacca is the vision of a community that takes action and focuses on a new idea of tourism for the sustainable development of its territory, and the mission of a city that aims to become a destination.	The project enhances structures and tourist services with a view to seasonal adjustment and thus bring new life to the territory. In such a way, the melting cultures deriving from this project would bring a renewed sense of authenticity to the city, also contributing to re-shape its identity, thus enhancing its attractiveness and competitiveness throughout the years and not just in the high season. Smart working tools are thus developed in the area, involving institutions and companies in the co-design of a series of incentives and additional services (such as tax relief, dedicated packages and discounts, creation of co-working hubs) to potential users.
Change Agents Hosts and local communities are integral agents of change; change comes from interventions at	An area that was eventually rehabilitated by its community through an operational cooperation combining many people: different in age, profession, way of thinking and living, working for the future of their land, brought together by	The "Sea Working" project is also paving the way for a restored positive exchange between the local population and voyagers, encouraging the latter to stay longer in a certain place, not necessarily

the edges of intersecting systems **Power and Colonial Relations** Power and colonial relations transform through including all stakeholders and diverse expertise at multiple levels, including grassroots leadership **Participation and Collaboration** Diverse stakeholders participate & collaborate; community-level focus	the awareness of the great value of the territory, products and traditions making their land unique. A collaboration between the Museum and the institutions was signed with two important protocols, one with the Municipality of Sciacca and one with the Regional Tourist Office of Agrigento, and the President of the Sicily Region declared appreciation for the work done in Sciacca. Today, the Cooperative is made of artisans, traders, accommodation facilities, restaurants, cultural associations, educational and cultural institutions and local boards of residents. Viviana Rizzuto, President and founder, is the community manager, a contemporary role that is extremely useful in the process of valorisation of territories, alongside local administrations. The role of Viviana and the Cooperative is to keep involving the community, the local institutions and entrepreneurs in a process of cooperation and connection for a continuum of ideas, connections and offering of experiences for voyagers.	in the high season, and giving them the opportunity to work from there. The project was launched by Emma Taveri, Councilor for Tourism of the Municipality of Brindisi, during the pandemic to reposition a marginal area as a destination for nomad workers and for the relocation of companies in the South of Italy. Taveri's objective was bringing a change to her homeland and of making her skills available to the city. For this reason, as an important recognition for her commitment, she received the title of Councilor for Tourism, Territorial Marketing and Creativity in the area where she was implementing her project, which was based on the new needs of the travelers and aimed at making Brindisi more and more a smart, adaptive and attractive destination for new travelers and holiday workers. Among others, the initiative is conceived and promoted by Destination Makers, a consultancy company specialising in destination marketing and management, with the support of a network that includes the Municipality of Brindisi and other institutional entities, businesses and the world of associations.

Source: authors' elaboration

Based on the analysis and on the empirical findings, the paper provides guidelines to address future practices in the field of tourism and eventually transform the tourists' approach to travelling. These guidelines identify a general process able to extract specific values and craft innovative and tailored economies. The first stage of the process entails the (re-)creation of local communities, their involvement in well-defined projects that clearly identify the hallmarks of territories rather than copy-pasting others' best practices. After the project has been defined in strong connection with territories and communities, the key is to highlight and communicate to residents those elements retrieving and revaluing local activities, services and products. In this way, projects should be built on a strong circle of people, a devoted community, which is brought together by common traits and pursues a common objective. A further level of involvement is represented by the cooperation among the community, the voyagers and the local institutions. To mobilise communities, to create locally-sourced experiences addressed to people that are still unrelated to the territory represents an opportunity for the enhancement of identity awareness, for the development of situations for exchanging ideas and competences, and for the creation of connections and social cohesion. Once a connected community is established, the value of the overall offer increases through the formation and connection of ideas, and the actions of each individual generate multiple results on the economic and social growth of the territory. For instance, the B&Bs of the Diffused Museum in Sciacca are replacing soap bars with dispensers that are made by local potters who customise them for each room. Besides avoiding the wasting of materials, the B&Bs thus increase the quality of the offer, and the craftsman benefits from the promotion of their products that can be purchased or created by the B&Bs' guests. Everyone supports the other and connections generate ideas (Casalini, 2022). Third point is the seasonal

adjustment of tourism flows through the extension of the journey to a longer period of time, an idea that recalls the ancient and medieval conceptualisation of travelling, when the journey was protracted and not yet classified as leisure. This view, shared by the community and the voyagers, should foster a new sense of exploration, awareness and dialogue, leading to innovative local economies and the development of localised services. The fourth and last phase of the process proves vital for the preservation of territories and communities. The development of "regenerative indicators" thus becomes necessary to assess the economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of the growth resulting from the regenerative project, and to monitor the numbers of tourism carrying capacity, defined by World Tourism Organization as "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction" (UNWTO, 1981, p.4).

The whole process is functional to re-address tourism towards an innovative path that retrieves and extends the original sense of travel. On a practical level, the paper suggests that connecting communities, creating awareness, empowering, and developing small local economies based on entrepreneurship brings value to contemporary societies, and should represent a new model for the whole travel industry rather than being limited to address niche tourism. Only if this process is tailored on territories and eventually accomplished, communities can thrive and voyagers can fully exploit the economic, social and cultural value of travelling, which is represented by its transformative ability.

The paper's ultimate aim is to contribute to studies on regenerative tourism on one side and to enhance a new sense of local entrepreneurship on the other. he study advances the understanding of regenerative tourism development in marginalised areas, starting from its conceptualisation (Dwyer, 2018; Mang & Reed, 2012; Pollock, 2012; Teruel, 2018; Hes & Coenen, 2018; Bellato et al., 2022) and giving directions for its practical implications adopting a value-based approach. Moreover, the study provides a framework for further research in the field of tourism that goes beyond the concept of tourism social entrepreneurship as yet theorised (Biddulph, 2018; Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2011; Laeis & Lemke, 2016; Porter et al., 2018; Sigala, 2016; Sloan et al., 2014; Stenvall et al., 2017; Jørgensen et al., 2021).

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Conflict of interest

None.

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