

THE VALORISATION OF “SLOW TERRITORIES” THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AND EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM

Enrica PAVIONE

University of Insubria

Via Monte Generoso 71, Varese 21100, Italy

enrica.pavione@uninsubria.it

Roberta PEZZETTI

University of Insubria

Via Monte Generoso 71, Varese 21100, Italy

roberta.pezzetti@uninsubria.it

Abstract. *The paper intends to propose a first analysis on the potential for development of sustainable tourism in the so-called “slow territories”, sometimes little-known contexts that present a significant set of both tangible and intangible resources, often characterized by levels of excellence. Innovative relationships between agricultural and industrial realities, processes of enhancement of typical local products, cultural and landscape heritage represent the hallmarks of these territories, which are grafted on a strong territorial identity based on reciprocity, trust, bonding with the history and local traditions. In this context, the “slow” territories often follow an original development process, by combining local traditions with cultural, social and technical innovation, allowing growth development paths no measurable through traditional indicators of growth. In this framework, the “slow territories” represent not only a model of local development but also a growth trajectory that combines economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental protection, with a view to sustainability. The distinctive characteristics of these territories appear so consistent with the changing characteristics of the tourism market that, especially in recent years, highlights the growth of a substantial segment of demand more aware and attentive to responsible, sustainable and experiential dimensions of the holiday.*

Keywords: *sustainable tourism; slow territories; experiential tourism; local development models.*

Introduction: The territory as a system of resources and relationships

The economic and managerial literature has devoted particular attention to issues related to the development of territorial systems, starting from the contributions of Marshall on industrial districts (Marshall, 1920), up to the network concepts and corporate networks (Rullani, 1996; Staber, 2001), with the goal of understanding the factors capable of promoting the economic development process (Porter, 1985).

From this point of view, the importance that local areas play in determining the characteristics and quality of development is widely recognized. The active role that a territory has in guiding economic development based on the fact that it will build over

time historical, cultural and social factors that are the basis of the models of organization of production and therefore of economic and social change processes of the area itself.

In the light of these considerations, are gaining in importance is the spatial dimension that the temporal of the territory, due to the fact that it is the result of a continuous evolution of resources and actors that, in a certain space, bring into being activities and relationships.

This means that the territory is not statically expressed only in terms of infrastructure resources, but it represents a place where geographical and physical elements are linked to all other factors (social, economic, institutional, etc.), in a dynamic perspective. In addition, the complex network of relationships and interactions between the different entities that make up the territory, interactions that determine the evolution of the territory itself.

This development constitutes the territory as a viable system (Golinelli, 2000), in a tangle of dynamics involving people with a variety of interests often difficult to reconcile. Actors, resources, and activities are independent factors, the nature of which depends on the mutual interactions that develop over time.

From this point of view, the territory can be seen then as a fundamental factor for the development and competitiveness of enterprises, where they originate relations and exchanges of information and knowledge. Beyond the individual contributions expressed from the large literature on the subject, what is relevant is the land given as a set of resources and relationships that involve all the stakeholders, allowing it to settle in the same area resources, experience, and knowledge in a perspective of overall development (Barile, Saviano, Polese & Di Nauta, 2013). It follows that the development potential of a territory are strongly linked to the way in which they manifest concretely the interactions between actors, resources, and activities.

Among the resources of the territory, those materials are the “envelope” of the same territory and could be important elements of differentiation of its offer. They are the result of natural conditions of an area and its evolution over time. Intangible resources, equally important to characterize a territory, derived from evolutionary paths traversed over time by a territory and its actors and are therefore strongly sedimented and hardly replicable and transferable to other contexts. Factors such as the system of common values, lifestyles prevalent, the level of entrepreneurial skills, reputation and the perceived image are peculiar and inherent resources to the territorial system of which they are part (Caffyn, 2012).

The set of tangible and intangible resources configures the quality of the assets in which an area is proposed, and hence its competitiveness depends on. The attractiveness and potential for development of a territory are derived primarily from the way in which these resources are linked and integrated into a unified and coherent vision. From this interaction, it arises what is called the vocation of a territory, very complex concept, which can be expressed because of evolution over time of the tangible and intangible heritage resources and institutional structure, social and economic, production of the same territory.

Confer value to available resources is the process by which one realizes the local development strategy. The resources, in fact, are the pivot on which to rotate the vocation of the territory. In the medium to long term, the vocation can become the basis for the productive specialization of the territory and tends to persist over time when the local community will be identified, resulting in a strong rooting and territorial identity. In other words, the specificity of a place that makes up the territorial vocation has its basis in the strong sense of identity of the local community.

In this sense, the vocation is the starting point for the definition of a territorial development strategy, since it expresses the natural evolution of a territory, the consolidated guidelines of its actors, the peculiarities that may be more attractive. Consequently, the government body in charge to guide the long-term strategy of a territory has the primary task to enhance the wealth of resources, since its vocation. This is to increase the attractiveness and consequently its competitiveness.

Competitiveness which is then to be dependent on several factors: environmental and structural factors, intangible resources such as social capital, trust, and innovativeness, the policies adopted by the institutions and by individual operators, the same behaviors of the actors involved (Buhalis, 2000; Poon, 1993). The competitiveness of a territory also derives from its ability to promote the competitiveness of the actors who are part of. More, in particular, it must be understood as the ability to activate the conditions that allow the same territory to acquire and strengthen the value that it is able to offer to certain categories of subjects. Consequently, it is dependent on its ability to outline a strategy to enhance and enrich the heritage of tangible and intangible resources present in it. It is therefore to outline a virtuous circle in which the competitiveness of a territorial system is manifested in its ability to promote the competitiveness of the actors who are part of it, through the development and enhancement of existing resources and the ability to attract outside resources. At the same time, active actors on a territory are those whose presence and activity on the territory itself favors the evolution according to the chosen development model, thus helping to enrich the heritage of resources.

In the light of these considerations, it is evident that the exploitation of a territory steps through the implementation of coherent project bidding with its vocation and with the opportunities that exist within it or through a change project that, starting from the vocation, grafts innovative elements in offering land.

The peculiarities and prospects for development of the “slow territories”

The sedimentation of resources and specific expertise in a particular territorial reality is the foundation of those which are increasingly being defined “slow” territories or, in some cases, minor territories (Mutti, 1998; Lancerini, 2005; Folorunso & Ojo, 2013). The meaning “slow” or “minor” should not be referred to a situation of delay or backward, or to merely rural provincial areas, but to a development approach away from the traditional model of Fordist growth, oriented primarily to the quality of the territory and lifestyle. It is, in fact, low geographic density areas, which have a significant rural setting, from a business fabric made from quality companies on a territorial basis and an important heritage of tangible and intangible resources (art, food and wine, landscape, etc.). These contexts are not well known, but often contain a

significant heritage of excellence. Their common feature is the high landscape quality that, combined with the local history and traditions, configure these areas as real cultural districts (Dickinson, Lumsdon & Slow, 2011; Caffyn, 2012).

The distinctive features of the landscape, which is one of the elements most qualifying “slow” areas, are linked to a non-quantitative growth in terms of the built environment, but looking for hospitable spaces, away from the spectacular architectural design (Lanzani, 2005). In the model of development of the “slow territories”, which favor the production chain, the landscape becomes the glue for the actions of the different players of the territory and for sectoral policies.

The “slow” territories are not therefore a model of local development, but a growth trajectory that combines economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection (CST, 2009; Pink, 2008), in terms of sustainability. This logic implies a different development model than the one based on production and technical and research accelerated times of different life rhythms, more connected to nature and the environment. Some authors speak, in this regard, the soft economy, to indicate an economy based on knowledge, identity, history, creativity, able to combine social cohesion and competitiveness and to draw strength from the community and from the territories (Ciancullo & Realacci, 2006).

In this perspective, the territory is the central competitive factor, since it is the area that develops and consolidates identity and collective interests, leveraging the widespread responsibility, they can act as an engine of development. In this virtuous growth circuit, the main actors are the industrial manufacturing base of territorially based quality, linked to the land agriculture, the third sector, tourism (Parra, 2010). The “slow” areas are as capable of mixing rural and urban aspects traits, developing original growth trajectories in multi-sector perspective that makes these territories with more development engines (Michael, 2000; Miele, 2008; Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011).

In this perspective, the territory is the central competitive factor, since it is the area that develops and consolidates identity and collective interests, leveraging the widespread responsibility, they can act as an engine of development. In this virtuous growth circuit, the main actors are the industrial manufacturing base of territorially based quality, linked to the land agriculture, the third sector, tourism. The “slow” areas are as capable of mixing rural and urban aspects traits, developing original growth trajectories in multi-sector perspective that makes these territories with more development engines (Rizzo, 2016).

The polyvalent nature of this development implicates a new approach to the measurement of its various aspects. In particular, it assumes importance the search of a method of multidimensional evaluation of the development that allows gathering the different factors that compete to the formation of the comfort and the quality of the life (Sen, 1999; Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009).

Innovative relationships between agricultural and industrial realities, processes of exploitation of local products, cultural heritage, and landscape are the distinctive features of these territories, which are grafted on a strong traditional identity, based on reciprocity, trust, attachment to the roots (Fukuyama, 1995). It is precisely because

of these characteristics that the territory can become a promoter of quality districts, based on the exploitation of local roots, the landscape, and the communities. In these territories, values such as reciprocity, knowledge of local conditions giving, trust three people and businesses are the features characterizing the economic and social logic.

The intertwining of local communities, land, and businesses, where the quality is the common denominator in these territories gives uniqueness, a uniqueness that becomes their true competitive strength.

Some strands of studies recognize in these traits typical areas of industrial districts (Visconti, 1996): the presence of a population of small and medium-sized enterprises among which are established cooperative relations, the geographical boundaries, the existence of a people carrier of a system community fairly homogeneous values and territorial identities.

In recent years, the “slow” territories have initiated an intense process of construction or reconstruction of a local identity, which gives renewed value to the share capital, to fiduciary relationships, traditions, lifestyle, and sustainability. These contexts have become witnesses of an active land policy, understood as the construction of local areas with a high quality of life, relying on the recovery and enhancement of the individual features, attention to the environment, the ability of cultural resources, crafts, landscaping, etc. to narrate the history and local tradition.

Slow territories and sustainability

At the center of the development policies of the “slow” territories, especially in recent years, there is only competitiveness, but increasingly the habitability and sustainable development (Giaoutzi & Nijkap, 1993; Evans, Joas, Sundback & Theobald, 2006; Roberts & Simpson, 1999).

The idea of physiological evolution of the territory, consistent with the concept of sustainability, refers to the definition of sustainable development offer in the 1987 Brundtland Report: our common future, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are harmonized so as to take into account both the present necessities, that of future generations.

Sustainability is, therefore, a concept that encompasses three components: economic growth, dynamic balance of the environment, social cohesion and inclusion. Each of these components is divided into a number of specific conditions that take on a different significance in relation to the particular model of sustainable development that a given territory intends to follow and which have been identified by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

With regard to the environmental component, the management of a territory and the use of the resources available to go in the direction to simultaneously optimize current results and enrichment or at least the maintenance over time of the wealth of resources available. In terms of environmental sustainability, they are now consolidated several instruments: the local Agenda 21, reporting and environmental accounting, environmental appraisal systems, urban planning at different levels. In this sense, and with particular reference to the “slow” territories, the concept of

sustainable development is to be superposed on the sustainable landscape, it understood as the ability to preserve the quality of natural and environmental resources, as a pillar of a new concept of well-being. In essence, the management of a territory increasingly aims to enrich or at least maintain over time the wealth of available resources. This means that their use must be done in ways that favor its replicability over time or at least limit its depletion.

In a wider perspective, which also includes the social, land management aims to achieve a number of conditions (Caroli, 2006): a proper balance in the satisfaction of the interests of all stakeholders, the participation of all stakeholders to the benefits arising from the economic development of the territory, the extension of opportunities for access to factors of economic growth, social and cultural development for all people and social groups, the gradual reduction of economic development and social differences between the sub-areas that comprise the territory. It should, however, be stressed that in terms of social sustainability, the rule structure is less developed in territorial systems. The economic and industrial policy choices made by the governing bodies have a fundamental influence on the degree of social sustainability with which we see the economic growth of a region (Lancerini, 2005).

The conditions for the sustainable development of a territory pass through the synergistic integration of the three dimensions, economic, social and environmental.

The synergistic balance between the different components of sustainability is achieved operationally by several means, an organization of territorial spaces and particularly in production plants, the development of community welfare systems, the promotion of lifestyles and ways of organizing the human activities. In this framework, there is also the search for different rhythms and lifestyles, which can become a political and social project of growth.

The promotion of lifestyles oriented to waste reduction and reuse of resources, as well as models of organization of production activities that go in the direction of an efficient use of resources are just some examples of local policies aimed at sustainability.

Sustainable development of a territory is, therefore, the result of certain territorial government choices, made by defining a balance between economic development strategies, ecological, cultural and social. The integration of economic, environmental and social requires a complex process of involvement of all stakeholders, public and private, operating in a territory, in a systemic long-term vision. Such passage, as will be noted later in this work, it is crucial to ensure a territory a sustainable development trajectory over time

In the management strategies of a territory and as part of an increasing focus on sustainability, the assessment of an activity such as tourism, which more than others interested in natural areas, cultural and social, establishing a composite relationship with the environment, assumes a central significance.

The "slow" territories, which were characterized by the ability to enable development paths quality oriented consistent with their vocation, are presented as actually potentially very attractive to tourists who are looking for quality experiences, pleasant places, and traditions, far away from the highly urbanized contexts. The development

of territories “slow” in the direction of strong recovery of identity and sustainability is consistent with the changing characteristics of the tourism market, especially in recent years, it shows the growth of a substantial segment of the application seeking an experiential holiday away from the more traditional routes, in the choice of which is gaining greater weight to ethical and environmental variable. In this context, the promotion of tourism, if able to integrate the three dimensions of sustainability, environmental, economic and social, may be a response of the smaller destinations to competitive challenges that they are facing (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 1993; Turnock, 2002).

In this perspective, the “slow” areas can be configured as true tourist districts, whose peculiarity is based on the specialization of enterprises not for the production phase, but for the product, in the case of companies whose output will be included in the overall tourism product. Thus, the territory-district assumes the characteristics of an organizational entity characterized by both companies specialized in tourism activities, both from a set of environmental, cultural, artistic, etc. which make that vocation for tourism territory (Lazzaretti & Petrillo, 2006).

References

- Barile, S., Saviano, M., Polese, F., & Di Nauta P. (2013). Il rapporto impresa-territorio tra efficienza locale, efficacia di contesto e sostenibilità ambientale. *Sinergie*, 90(1), 25-49.
- Buhalis, B. (2000). Marketing the Competitive Destination of the Future. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 97-116.
- Caffyn, A. (2012). Advocating and Implementing Slow Tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 37(1), 77-80.
- Caroli, M.G. (2006). *Il marketing territoriale. Strategie per la competitività sostenibile del territorio*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Cianciullo, A., & Realacci, E. (2006). *Soft Economy*. Milano: BUR.
- CST (2009). *Sviluppo turistico e territori lenti*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Dickinson, J.E., Lumsdon, L., & Slow, R.D. (2011). Slow travel: issues for tourism and climate change. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(3), 281-300.
- Evans, B., Joas, M., Sundback, S., & Theobald K. (2006). Governing local sustainability. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 49(6), 849-867.
- Folorunso, S., & Ojo, A. (2013). Slow tourism: experiences and mobilities. *Anatolia*, 24(2), 278-280.
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press.
- Giaoutzi, M., & Nijkamp, P. (1993). *Decision Support Model for Sustainable Development*. Avebury: Aldershot.
- Golinelli, G.M. (2000). *L'approccio sistemico al governo dell'impresa. La dinamica evolutiva del sistema impresa tra economia e finanza*. Padova: Cedam.
- Lancerini, E. (2005). Territori lenti: contributi per una nuova geografia dei paesaggi abitati italiani. *Territorio*, 34(1), 9-15.
- Lanzani, A. (2005). Geografie, paesaggi, pratiche dell'abitare e progetti di sviluppo. *Territorio*, 34(1), 19-37.
- Lazzaretti, L., & C. (2006). Petrillo, *Tourism Local Systems and Networking*. London: Elsevier.

- Lumsdon, L., & McGrath, P. (2011). Developing a conceptual framework for slow travel: a grounded theory approach. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(3), 265-279.
- Marshall, A. (1920). *Principles of Economics*. London: Macmillan.
- Meng, B., & Kyuhwan, C. (2016). Extending the theory of planned behaviour: testing the effects of authentic perception and environmental concerns on the slow-tourist decision-making process. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(6), 528-544.
- Michael C.H. (2009). Degrowing Tourism: Décroissance, Sustainable Consumption, and Steady-State Tourism. *Anatolia*, 20(1), 46-61.
- Miele, M. (2008). CittàSlow: Producing slowness against the Fast Life. *Space and Polity*, 12(1), 135-156.
- Mutti, A. (1998). *Capitale sociale e sviluppo. La fiducia come risorsa*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Parra, C. (2010). Sustainability and multi-level governance of territories classified as protected areas in France: the Morvan regional park case. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 53(4), 491-509.
- Pink, S. (2008). Sense and sustainability: The case of the Slow City movement. *Local Environment*, 13(2), 95-106.
- Poon, A. (1993) *Tourism, Technology, and Competitive Strategies*. Wallingford: Cab International.
- Porter, M.E. (1985). *Competitive advantage*. New York: Free Press.
- Rizzo, A. (2016). Declining, transition and slow rural territories in southern Italy Characterizing the intra-rural divides. *European Planning Studies*, 24(2), 231-253.
- Roberts, L., & Simpson, F. (1999). Developing Partnership Approaches to Tourism in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 7(3-4), 314-330.
- Rullani, E. (1996). Reti globali e reti metropolitane per l'economia del Nordest: In Banco Ambrosiano Veneto (Ed.), *Nord-Est: fattori di competitività* (pp.49-79). Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Staber, U. (2001). The Structure of Networks in Industrial Districts. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25(3), 537-552.
- Stanford, D. (2008). Exceptional Visitors': Dimensions of Tourist Responsibility in the Context of New Zealand. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(3), 258-275.
- Stiglitz, J., Sen, A., & Fitoussi J. (2009). *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, CMEPSP. Retrieved from www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr.
- Turnock, D. (2002). Prospects for sustainable rural cultural tourism in Maramures. *Romania Tourism Geographies*, 4(1), 62-94.
- Visconti, F. (1996). *Le condizioni di sviluppo delle imprese operanti nei distretti industriali*. Milano: Egea.