Evaluation Aspects in the Strategic Planning of a Reticular DMO for the Promotion of Inner Areas of Calabria

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Abstract. The study, first phase of an applied research on the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria, aims to identify the best organizational solutions for the cultural-tourist offer of specific territorial contexts, such as inner areas. The paper intends to deepen the contribution of economic-estimative evaluations to the construction of an experimental reticular DMO (Destination Management Organization) to support the local development processes of areas with an unexpressed cultural potential. The study deals with the implications connected with an organizational-managerial model of the Destination, as a support tool for the decision-making process of the network construction in order to guarantee an added value in the tourist chain.

Keywords: Economic-Estimative Evaluations · Strategic Planning · DMO · Widespread Heritage · Cultural Tourism · Inner Areas · Local Development

1 Introduction

The paper explains the methodological approach and the first results of the research activities carried out by the UNESCO Med Lab of the Mediterranean University (RC) on the territory of the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria.

The research activities are aimed at promoting the development of the investigated areas, through the valorization of their Cultural Heritage, mainly from a tourist point of view. The research is structured in two connected fields: one oriented towards the best organization of the tourist offer, the other focused on issues more closely related to Cultural Heritage, in particular on the management aspects associated with its fruition.

The paper focuses on the first research line, starting from the state of the art of the scientific debate on DMO (Destination Management Organization), to then develop an innovative hypothesis of Reticular Destination Management Organization (R-DMO), based on the common themes of the territories and not on their geographical contiguity.

Particular attention is then dedicated to the different contributions that the culture of economic and estimative evaluation can bring to the topic.

After the presentation of the methodological approach, the paper introduces the innovative hypothesis of R-DMO, to finally present the first results of the research activities on the case study.

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2 State of the Art

In a country like Italy where it continues to discuss a wide and different cultural-tourist offer, the era of importing a foreign model is over, strategic planning through the construction of a Destination seems feasible above all for those places that, minor by nature (less known and at risk of depopulation or abandonment), are crushed by the globalized tourism market which tends to cut them off from the international circuits [1].

The Tourist Destination represents the fundamental unit of analysis in the management and organization of the tourist systems: in addition to its role as a tourist attraction, it represents the *value chain* of the tourist product and experience [2]. In this sense, a DMO plays a leading role in the management of the destination network (integration of services, definition of a territorial product) and in establishing and maintaining cooperation between the local interested parties (tour operators, businesses and administrations) [3].

In the complex and global scenario, the DMO has become the core of all destination development activities, as a catalyst and facilitator for the tourism improvement.

Although its notion has been extensively addressed in the literature over the past twenty years, much fewer models have been empirically developed to optimize its activity [4]. While some authors amplify the marketing component, others in recent years have underlined its global character from a management point of view [5], with attention to a smart approach [6].

From the DMO point of view, each territories of the network can be interpreted as hubs of a complex system, as "systems of systems" on varying of socio-economic and cultural contexts. In this sense, the enhancement of the Widespread Heritage of specific territories can be a potential asset for a conscious strategic plan based on the enhancement of endogenous resources [7], as local drivers of sustainable development [8]. This perspective is able to recover the dimension of the Widespread Museum [9], that due to its flexible nature is able to face many of the current challenges that cultural institutions are facing. It represents the most complete, complex and innovative form in which the protection and enhancement of heritage [10, 11] on a wide scale is combined with the aim of promoting tourism that gives again centrality to inner areas and their territories and communities [12, 13].

These reflections are even more felt in the most fragile areas such as Calabria, where the need for integrated management of the widespread heritage overcome the fragmentation of policies and interventions, raising questions on the issue of protection and quality of tourist offer.

3 Methodology

In application to the principles of the Economics of Welfare [14–16], the contribution deals with the issue of enhancing the Cultural Heritage of a Wide Area through the tool of the DMO (Destination Management Organization) for the construction of a Tourist Destination.

A DMO can be considered as the basis of the tourism system, whose production criteria are organizational efficiency and effectiveness; it plays a leading role in the management of the Destination's network, in establishing and maintaining cooperation between the interested parties (local institutions and organizations, economic entities, service providers, residents, groups and entities such as second houses) and in supporting tourists [17, 18].

The methodology started from a synthetic analysis of the characteristics of the Calabrian heritage: a territory in which, for different reasons, there are no characteristic sites of a given era, which individually have the attractive potential, for example, of a place like Pompei (Campania, IT). In particular, the earthquakes that have followed over the centuries, have destroyed significant parts of the Heritage, whose distinctive character today is given precisely by its heterogeneity and widespread availability.

This distinctive character suggested a strategy for the construction of the Destination that would enhance its features (tangible and intangible heritage): for this reason, rather than using a geographical logic, a thematic one was opted for in relation to multi-stratification, considering at the same time the weaknesses of Calabrian infrastructure.

With reference to the DMO concept as a formal organization that serves a tourist destination with a geographical area of responsibility, generally of a supra-municipal level between contiguous territories [19], it has been identified the possibility that this organization could favor the promotion of territories also not contiguous, but characterized by a common heritage.

Based on this reasoning, two types of DMO have been distinguished:

- one on a geographical basis (characterized by a network of contiguous territories);
- one on a thematic basis (characterized by a network of territories that may not be contiguous, but with common assets).

It is with regard to the second one that, starting from the concept of Widespread Heritage and borrowing the components of a DMO (Attractors, Public Orgs, Attraction Managers, Accessibility and Transport, Services: Accommodation Providers, Restaurants and Retail Outlets, Complementary Services), the hypothesis of a reticular DMO (R-DMO) is developed as a Destination made up of interoperable systems (see Table 1) [20]. In this sense, the R-DMO can be considered a response to the fragmentation and heterogeneity of a widespread heritage such as the Calabrian one, through the search not for geographical continuity, but for the interactions connected to the heritage and the landscape. Consequently, the choice of the case study fell on three non-contiguous areas of the same province and characterized by the presence of a Widespread Heritage (different in nature, eras and characteristics), but with a common element that influences the landscapes, the wine tradition.

In this context, the culture of evaluation can make it possible to identify the organizational-management models most suited to the specific characteristics of the territories, resources and stakeholders and to verify their feasibility and economic sustainability (see Table 2).

The methodological approach consists of four different phases as specified below. The first, of a theoretical nature, is dedicated to bibliographic and documentary recognition, the subsequent ones, of an applicative-experimental nature, concern the elaboration of the strategy and the evaluation tools.

– Phase 1: bibliographic and documentary recognition
– Phase 2: identification and cataloging of resources (Attractors) – analysis of the DMO components (system of services) → objective: definition of a cognitive framework functional to the construction of a Tourist Destination

Phase 2.0: Construction of the Attractors Selection Criteria

– Phase 3: development of support tools for decisions and impact estimation (in progress)

Phase 3.0: Construction of the Actions Selection Criteria

Specifically, the theorized evaluation plan (see Table 2) concerns:

2.0 – the structuring of the Attractors Selection Criteria (subject of the paper);
3.0 – the identification of the Actions Selection Criteria (in progress).

Table 1. Methodological Approach. Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

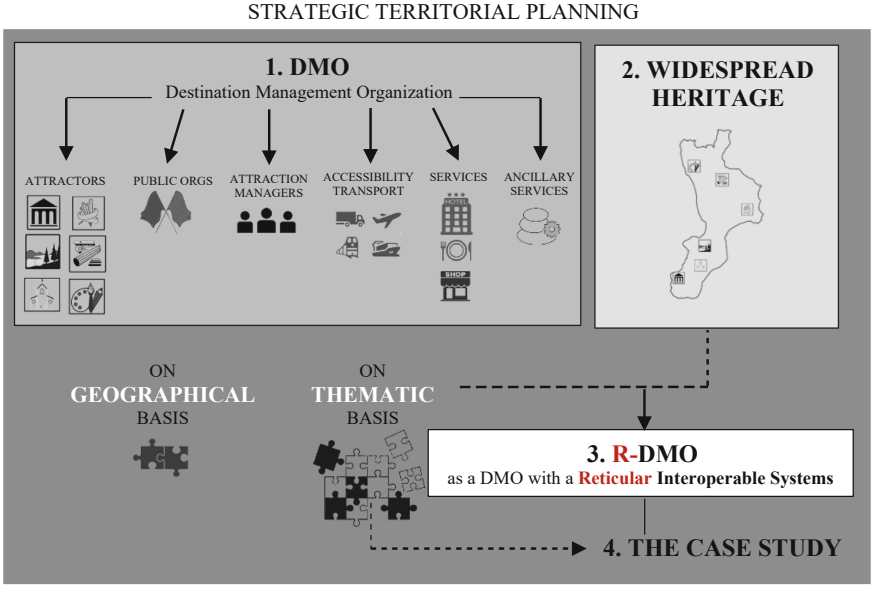
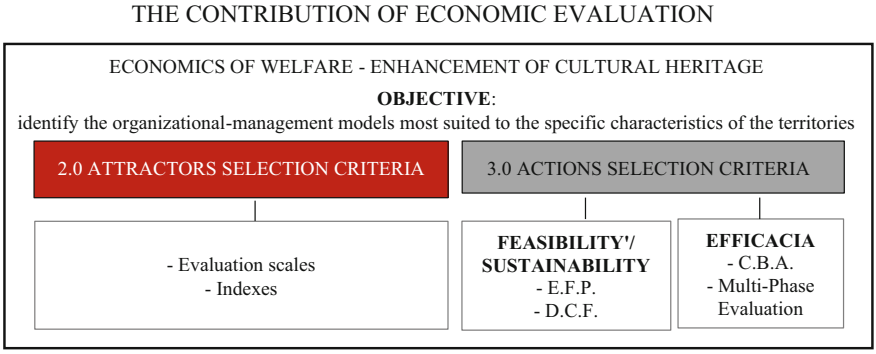


Table 2. Evaluation plan. Elaboration by the authors, 2023.



The Attractors Selection Criteria. With reference to the selection of tangible resources (see point 4), the evaluation plan saw the structuring of the Attractors Selection Criteria in order to understand the levels of their attractiveness. Therefore, the method and criteria were explained, on the basis of the following informations:

– Type of Resources;
– Period of Construction;
– Ownership Structure;
– Relevance;
– State of Conservation;
– Services for Use.

With regard to the Typology of Resources, the following classes have been identified:

– Historical-Architectural Heritage, classified according to the historical period in order to facilitate the selection in a multi-stratification logic (Byzantine / Norman / Renaissance / '600 – '700 – '800 – '900 Architectures);
– Archaeological Heritage (Greek / Roman / Norman Archaeological Parks; Rock Settlements);
– Landscape Heritage (Protected Natural Areas).

For each of theme, the Ownership Structure (public/private) were surveyed and the State of Conservation assessed, identifying three possible situations:

- *sufficient* (required interventions)
- *good* (small maintenance interventions required)
- *excellent* (no interventions required)

The Relevance was assessed on a four-point evaluation scale, based on its reporting in different publications, crossed with the judgment of experts. The Services for Use were assessed on a four-point evaluation scale, based on:

- presence of a management model;
- maintenance levels;
- provision of: website, electronic ticketing and online reservations; parking spaces; public toilets; informative materials; reporting of routes; tourist guides or audio guides;
- opening time;
- entrance ticket.

The Actions Selection Criteria. The identification of the Actions Selection Criteria (Point 3 – in progress) will take place on the basis of:

- evaluation of economic and financial feasibility/sustainability;
- evaluation of effectiveness.

Specifically, the verification of the economic-financial feasibility/sustainability of the organizational and managerial models of the R-DMO will take place on the basis of the construction of the Economic and Financial Plan (E.F.P.) and the Discounted Cash Flow Analysis – D.C.F.).

With regard to the evaluation of effectiveness, the first reasoning connected to the multidimensional evaluation of the overall effects generated by the R-DMO is reported, through a Multi-Phase (see point 5) and integrated approach (use of monetary and non-monetary techniques), focusing in particular on:

- the multidimensional evaluation of the overall effects generated by the R-DMO, in terms of economic development and revitalization of social and territorial contexts such as Inner Areas, of changes in social welfare and promotion of local identity on the basis of participatory processes;
- the identification of the public and private conveniences' system and of the economic aspects for their balancing for the feasibility and sustainability, in a long-term time.

The construction of a wide area DMO – with poorly connected territories and devoid of a large ranging planning – constitutes the obstacle to its innovative charge and its range of action, despite the presence of a widespread cultural heritage.

In relation to the areas under examination, characterized by dynamics of physical and socio-economic marginalization but by the heterogeneity and quality of cultural resources (tangible and intangible), the construction of a reticular DMO (R-DMO – Reticular Destination Management Organization) has been identified as a functional tool for the development strategy. Therefore, the proposed R-DMO suggests a new way of planning a Tourist Destination for non-contiguous, heterogeneous and functionally connected territories, such as a network of hubs selected through appropriate indicators and considerations.

This methodology can contribute to the optimal construction of Tourist Destinations in inner areas, presenting a current framework of the processes and interdependencies connected to a single management organization. This can be the basis for the development of a decision support tools in order to optimize activities and operations in R-DMO.

3.1 Good Practices

These considerations include different examples of creative planning and tools. In the national territory (IT), the experiences of the *Sistema Puglia* are particularly interesting. In this case the Wide Area Planning, in line with the provisions of *Documento Strategico Regionale 2007/2013* and of the FESR European Programme, has had a strong development into the *Strategic Plans of Wide Area* (Piani Strategici di Area Vasta) of ten territorial aggregations (Lead institution: Bari, Brindisi, Foggia, Lecce, Taranto, Casarano, Gravina, Barletta, Comunità Montana Monti Dauni Meridionali, Monopoli); these plans outline specific and shared objectives by addressing human and economic resources in the same direction (*Linee Guida per la pianificazione strategica territoriale di Area Vasta – NVVIP Regione Puglia*). These aggregations include the cases of:

- TARANTINA WIDE AREA (twenty-eight municipalities). Strategic objectives of the Plan: construction of a new identity and a unitary image of the territory; promotion of a renewed economic and productive mission; development of an integrated infrastructure system.
- WIDE AREA OF MURGIANA CITY (six municipalities). Strategic objectives of the Plan: to strengthen municipal cooperation; ensure the protection and enhancement of the heritage; open up to the world by improving internal and external accessibility.
- VISION 2020 WIDE AREA (ten non-contiguous municipalities of the new polycentric BAT Province). The vision is based on seven creative cities and visions that represent as many theme-places, proposed as "territorial intuitions", which interpret the themes and opportunities for the development of the territory and its evolution: the City of Rurality; the City of Typical Production; the City of Art; the City of the Sea; the City of Design; the City of Entertainment; the City of Government.

Among other experiences, *Le Vie Dei Tesori* in Sicily, a project dedicated to the story and discovery of the island's heritage (places, people, landscapes, experiences, traditions, productions) as a widespread museum. Born in 2006 in Palermo on the occasion of the

Bicentenary of the city's University, the project has gradually expanded involving twenty of the capital municipalities, large cities and over fifty villages. In 2017 one of its spin-offs was born in the Lombardy Region with the aim of growing communities starting from their heritage. The project, carried out by the *Le Vie dei Tesori Onlus Foundation*, produces an induced income of over 5 million euros every year (data source: Otie – Observatory on Tourism for Islands Economy). It collaborates with local authorities and over two-hundred public and private partners on participatory enhancement projects, such as the *Borghi dei Tesori Fest* in 2021, that digitized, narrated and opened the heritage of small municipalities to the public.

4 The Study Context

The Areas. In connection with the reasoning, the choice of the case study fell on three non-contiguous Areas (see Fig. 1) of the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria (IT) not particularly developed from a tourist point of view but characterized by the presence of cultural resources of value, and contiguous to territories with well-known heritage (Reggio Calabria: Bronzi di Riace; Palmi: Varia – UNESCO IH; Gerace: Borgo di Eccellenza; Scilla: Borgo Marinaro of Chianalea; Locri: Archaeological Park of Locri Epizefiri; Casignana: Roman Villa).



Fig. 1. The study context, Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria (IT), Armeni Walley – Stilaro Walley – Costa Viola. Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

In identifying the case study and in a geographical and territorial reasoning to support the inner areas, a Coast Hub with a connection function was identified for each Area under examination (see Table 3).

Table 3. Case study – Areas.

AREA	MUNICIPALITY	
	COAST HUB	INNER AREA
1. Valle degli Armeni	Brancaleone	Bruzzano Zeffirio, Ferruzzano, Staiti
2. Vallata della Stilaro	Monasterace	Bivongi, Camini, Pazzano, Stilo
3. Costa Viola	Bagnara	Delianuova, Sant'Eufemia d'Aspromonte, Seminara

The Common Theme. In relation to the concept of R-DMO referred to the point 3, the examined areas are characterized by the presence of a widespread heritage, but with a common element that influences their landscapes, the wine tradition [21]; they constitute, in fact, the main areas of quality wine in different production in the province (Armeni Valley: Greco di Bianco D.O.C., Mantonico D.O.C., I.G.T. Rosso di Palizzi; Stilaro Valley: Rosso di Bivongi D.O.C.; Costa Viola: Zibibbo – Bianco I.G.T.).

The Area Under Examination. Specifically, the contribution reports the analyses conducted on the Armeni Valley (Area 1), while the investigations on the remaining areas are in progress. In particular, the analyses concerned:

- the Geographical and Infrastructural System;
- the Economic and Productive System connected to the cultural resources and to the common heritage of municipalities (wine landscapes);
- the Cultural Heritage System;
- the Accommodation System;
- the Tourist Flows;
- the SWOT.

The Geographical and Infrastructural System. The Armeni Valley – Area 1 (see Fig. 2) includes four municipalities of the Metropolitan City of Reggio Calabria (Brancaleone, Bruzzano Zeffirio, Ferruzzano and Staiti); the Area is the product of long processes of historical and identity stratification, which have settled and integrated, marking and designing the landscapes that are still perceptible today; therefore, resources and anthropic or natural emergencies and vocations were examined in order to determine a cognitive framework. The area is characterized by a rich natural heritage: two out of four municipalities fall within the Aspromonte National Park (Bruzzano Zeffirio and Staiti) or have a *Sito di Interesse Comunitario – SIC* (IT9350160- *Spiaggia di Brancaleone*; IT9350159- *Bosco di Rudina*, Ferruzzano); three out of four municipalities fall within the *Costa dei Gelsomini* Regional Marine Park (Brancaleone, Bruzzano Zeffirio, Ferruzzano).

The Economic and Productive System connected to the cultural resources and to the common heritage. From an economic and productive point of view, the Armeni Valley is known for the richness of its biodiversity and its wine heritage with over one hundred vines with a unique genome currently kept in the *Kepòs Conservation Field* (Ferruzzano). From Roman times to the Middle Ages, the production of wine was an important resource

for the area, connoting it as one of the main production centers of Calabria; historical and cultural evidence of this heritage is the MiC (Ministry of Culture) census of over one hundred and sixty millstone – *palmenti* (ancient tanks dug into the rock where the grapes were pressed to produce the must). During the 20th century, wine production underwent a period of decline due to national economic redirection policies with the consequent emigration of farmers to the cities and the abandonment of vineyards. However, in recent years, there has been a return to the production of quality wine (eleven wineries surveyed by the authors as of 2023 and three quality designations – D.O.C., I.G.T., D.O.P.), with the adoption of modern techniques and the enhancement of local varieties (Zibibbo, Greco di Bianco and Mantonico), appreciated on the national and international market (see Fig. 3).

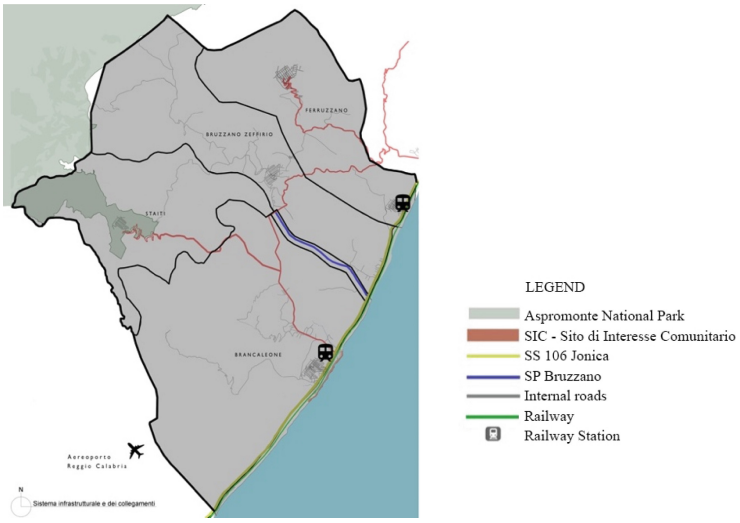


Fig. 2. Area 1 – The Territorial Context. Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

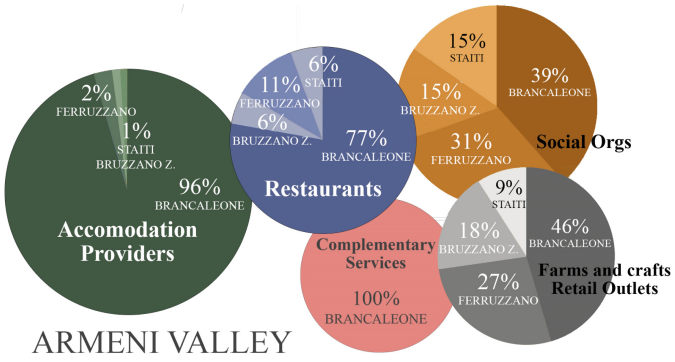


Fig. 3. Area 1 – Summary of winery data collection, Armeni Valley (RC). Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

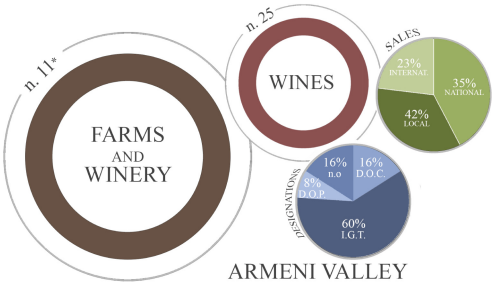


Fig. 4. Area 1 – Summary of data collection on economic-productive services connected to cultural heritage, Armeni Valley (RC). Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

The Cultural Heritage System. After outlining the context, the MiC (Ministry of Culture) data on the cultural resources of each municipality were analyzed in order to highlight their distribution and understand the levels of attractiveness, explaining the method and evaluation criteria that allowed it the selection (see point 3). The analyses do not derive exclusively from studies based on documents and statistical data, but are the result of an applied research by the authors.

The analyses revealed a strong concentration of resources which confirm the landscape and naturalistic value of the area, the variety of archaeological and architectural assets [22, 23], among which the evidence of the defensive needs of the Norman period (towers, walls, castles and other fortification systems), and the signs of rurality linked to the economies of the Aspromonte hinterland. Therefore, a map of the Cultural Heritage concentration was drawn up through the integration of services (see Figs. 4 and 5).

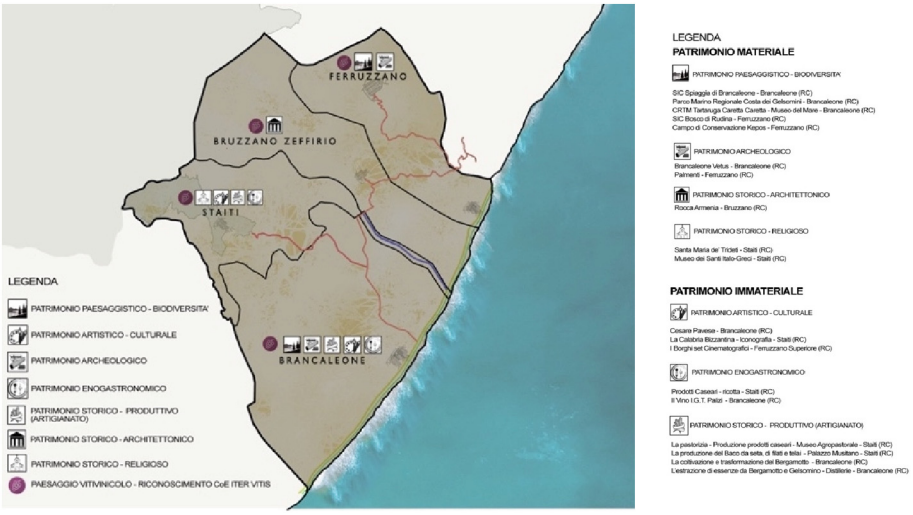


Fig. 5. Area 1 – Summary of cultural heritage data collection, Armeni Valley (RC). Elaborations by the authors, 2023

The Accommodation System. The analysis of the relevance and consistency of the cultural heritage was a necessary but not sufficient operation for the study of the attractiveness under a tourist profile, if not correlated to a study of the visitor flows and the accommodation offer [24, 25], key factors for understanding whether the territories are prepared to welcome an innovative, inclusive and sustainable tourism planning. Therefore, the Istat (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) data up to 2021 on accommodation facilities divided by municipality and type was examined, cross-referenced with the data of the main OTA (Online Travel Agencies) up to 2023 (see Table 4). The capacity of the Area 1 consists of 91.4% of beds in hotel structures (Brancaleone), 6.6% of B&Bs and 1.9% of Holiday Homes (see Table 4); even if it is not possible to make a subdivision of the flows based on the reason for the stay, this share of the offer concerns a demand related to tourist-bathing and return reasons. By comparing the distribution of the accommodation offer with the cultural one (see Table 4, Fig. 5), substantial coincidences emerge between the areas with the greatest concentration of cultural resources and those in which the accommodation offer is more structured (Brancaleone); on the other hand, the less dense areas in terms of censed cultural heritage are also those in which the availability of beds is more limited (Staiti).

The Tourist Flow. The tourist flow of the metropolitan city of Reggio Calabria reveals a strong dichotomy on a provincial and regional scale, which has its roots in the attractiveness of some seaside and coastal destinations which only increases the divergence with inner areas. If the proposed strategy is able to integrate cultural heritage and inner centers that otherwise would not have the strength to generate a tourist demand, the discontinuity of the accommodation offer could be an obstacle. The Istat data collected up to 2021 attest that 89.3% of arrivals and 91.7% of presences in the province were absorbed by the city of Reggio Calabria and by the large centers along the coast (e.g. Locri, Siderno, Roccella Jonica). In fact, it is no coincidence, that the data on the tourist flows of the four municipalities cannot be deduced from the Istat surveys since, to protect the privacy of the economic subjects involved, the data on arrivals and presences in the minor municipalities are merged (unlike the data on the consistency and quality of

Table 4. Area 1 – Analysis of tourist flows and accommodation system (Sources: Istat 2021 data cross-referenced with the main OTAs up to 2023). Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

TOURIST FLOWS		ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY		
Armeni Valley		Municipality	Structure Typology	Number of Beds
Arrivals	6.200	BRANCALEONE	B&B	40
			Hotel	858
Presences	44.600	BRUZZANO ZEFFIRIO	Holiday Home	10
		FERRUZZANO	B&B	22
Average Stay	7,2 days	STAITI	Holiday Home	8
		Tot. Beds		938

the structures which are detailed); the tourist movement was, therefore, analyzed in a comparative perspective for disaggregated data.

The SWOT Analysis. From the SWOT analysis (see Table 5) a great endogenous potential emerged for tourism development that, however, requires on the one hand a project for the sustainable use of individual resources, and on the other the elaboration of an integrated project and system capable of promoting sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

Table 5. The SWOT Analysis. Elaborations by the authors.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• **Tangible Heritage** of high cultural value (*Brancaleone Vetus, Rocca Armenia, Santa Maria De Tridetti*, ancient distilleries, *Costa dei Gelsomini*- Caretta Caretta Turtle, Aspromonte National Park – Geopark UNESCO) • **Wine landscape** (*Palmenti*, *Kepòs Conservation Field, Quality wine production cellars*, *International Quality Denominations*, *CoE Cultural Route – Iter Vitis*) • **Intangible Heritage** (art of cooking: bergamot, dairy products; craftsmanship: production of silkworms, yarns and looms, essences of bergamot and jasmine) • **A well-established sense of hospitality** as a • behavioral culture of the communities	• **Insufficient infrastructural equipment** • **Low level of the Standards of tourist services** • **Seasonality of tourist flows and employment in the sector** • **Dismiss of rural areas** in the absence of interventions to support geographical isolation • **Progressive abandonment of centers** – youth emigration • **Few presence of tour operators** • **State of conservation of heritage** • **Access to financial resources** – Insufficient capacity of entrepreneurship to use the resources financed by rural development and tourism policies • **Difficulty of entering national and international commercial circuits** • **Poor functionality of the PA** • **Low level of coordination between stakeholders** • **Scarce presence of associations** • **Inadequate media coverage of positive actions**
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• **Market trend of cultural tourism** • **Improvement of the attractiveness of the territory through the integrated management of resources** • **Diversification of the economy** – creation of employment opportunities • **Intersectoral integration of food production and valorization of local crafts** • **empowerment of decision makers** • **Rationalization and renewal of the offer**	• **Competition and globalization of the tourism market** • **Prevalence of return and transit tourism and of nearby seaside area on the coast** • **Perception of the local economy as a specialized issue and a sectoral policy** • The plurality of subjects and services as a strong point, in the absence of **adequate coordination**, can produce fragmentation and a difficulty in monitoring the evolutionary scenarios

5 The Enhancement and Networking Strategy

The proposed strategy takes into account the existing resources and, at the same time, the new resources that the project can generate, taking into account the model of *multi-polar* networks [26], in which a complementarity between centers of dimension and of different hierarchical level [27].

The poly-centrality and poly-functionality of urban contexts, the cultural diversity that characterizes them, the being inhabited by heterogeneous flows, paves the way for new tourism opportunities beyond the best-known resources [28].

On the basis of these considerations, the network was built starting from connections in which the role of a center does not depend on its size but on the ability to fit into the exchange circuits, not only economic, but also environmental and cultural, synthesizing the complexity of the connections present at the local level [29]; each hub of the network assumes, therefore, a specific role according to the relationship it develops with the theme of the R-DMO (in this specific case, the wine landscape) and the role of signifier it assumes in the local context.

5.1 Objectives and Actions

General Objective (GO) of the strategy, the structuring of an experimental reticular DMO (R-DMO). In line with the Specific Objectives (SO), seven Actions (A) are envisaged as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Specific Objectives (SO) and Actions (A). Elaborations by the authors.

Specific Objectives (SO)	Actions (A)
SO1 – foster collaboration forms between public and private stakeholders	A1 – identification and implementation of partnership forms
SO2 – promote the protection, enhancement and promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage	A2 – research activity (filing and heritage mapping), design and implementation of knowledge tools (information and dissemination material, storytelling)
	A3 – identification of public buildings with historical-cultural value to be recovered for the promotion and localization of productive activities of excellence (in the specific case it should be emphasized how much this operation refers to a back-ground lacking in experience)
SO3 – promote and enhance typical local products through quality tourism	A4 – construction of a cooperation technology platform (e-commerce)
SO4 – involve the owners of the services around the cultural system	A5 – design of integrated circuits and tourist packages (attractors and services)
SO5 – make the territory a competitive product	A6 – development of territorial marketing forms through the elaboration of a communication and rebranding plan
SO6 – seasonal variations of the offer	A7 – membership in national and international circuits

6 The Economic and Estimative Implications

In a historical moment in which community awareness is completely different from the past and in a regulatory framework made up of a particularly intense planning season, it appears evident that neither the Municipalities nor the Regions may be able to manage these opportunities directly, but it also appears useful to identify territorial aggregates ready to welcome and finalize the needs of one and the other and to summarize them. In this situation the Municipalities prove to be completely unsuitable as they are not able to respond to the managerial breadth that this form of enhancement of the territory requires; therefore, the need arises to build a management framework which, in addition to the linearity of the DMO, is able to support aware and coherently constructed territorial aggregates.

In this context, the proposed R-DMO can be defined as a complex network with a series of hubs that are extremely interesting for the search for optimal functional programs and related management models on a wide area [30, 31].

On the numerous expectations placed on development opportunities connected to the enhancement of cultural tourism, it is also important to evaluate the expected impact of such operations [32–34].

In this context, the culture of evaluation can make it possible to identify the organizational-management models most suited to the specific characteristics of the territories. Specifically, the study reports the first reasoning on the identification of the Actions Selection Criteria on the basis of economic feasibility and sustainability and effectiveness [35–37].

With regard to the effectiveness, an interesting impact assessment was the one launched by the Toscana Region starting in 2009 for the Cultural Itinerary of the Council of Europe under its responsibility, the *Via Francigena*, through the use of three methodologies [38]:

a) a counterfactual approach focused on areas that are currently less developed in terms of tourist attraction, which saw the comparison of the evolution of tourist presences in rural areas crossed or excluded from the *Francigena*, demonstrating a differential of 34% of presences (290,000 unit);
b) the application of a multi-regional input-output model, for which the presences directly attributable to the *Via Francigena* were isolated with the application of a geographical method for estimating GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and work units (ULA – Unità di Lavoro) activated by public investment and local tourism spending. In the evaluation phase (investment phase), an activation of 10.8 million euros of GDP and 200 full-time work units (ULA) was estimated, for the total expenditure when fully operational, an estimated activation of 49.1 million euros of GDP (0.04% of regional GDP) and 881 work units (0.05% of Tuscan employment).
c) the elaboration of long-term evolutionary scenarios (until 2022), based on the application of the dynamics of tourist presences experienced in comparable territories, assuming that the *Francigena* evolves in four different ways, according to the different sizes:
   1) the regional average (WTO – World Trade Organization Organization);
   2) the dynamics of the English Cotswold, a rural area comparable to the Tuscan hill;

3) the dynamics of the similar Camino de Santiago;
4) the dynamics of another prestigious rural area of the region, the Chianti.

In relation to the case study, the impact assessment will refer to two phases, *pre* and *post*. Specifically, the reasoning reported relates to the *pre-phase* and concerns the applicability of the *counter-factual* and *input-output method* to the examined territories.

With regard to the *counter-factual method*, the isolation of a control group was identified as a condition, which has characteristics similar to those of the examined territories, but which will not benefit from the R-DMO. In fact, the area concerned a very heterogeneous territory, made up of large rural and seaside parts and contiguous to well-known destinations (see point 4). Therefore, the first step should consist in isolating the rural municipalities from the mature ones from a tourist point of view. The former can then be compared with rural territories not affected by the Destination.

The *input-output model* can instead be applied to estimate the economic and employment impact in two different ways:

a) in the pre-phase, it will be able to measure the income and employment attributable to the investments of the last few years in the cultural and tourist heritage sector (see Table 7);

Table 7. Area 1 – Implemented Strategies in the cultural heritage and tourist sector. Sources: Open Cohesion, Amministrazione Trasparente of Brancaleone, Bruzzano Zeffirio, Ferruzzano and Staiti. Elaboration by the authors, 2023.

IMPLEMENTED STRATEGIES CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TOURIST SECTOR		
SECTOR	MUNICIPALITY	EXPENSE
INFRASTRUCTURE	BRANCALEONE	€ 430.387,21
	BRUZZANO ZEFFIRIO	€ 652.115,10
	FERRUZZANO	€ 322.335,00
	STAITI	€ 350.000,00
TOT. ARMENI VALLEY INFRASTRUCTURE		**€ 1.754.857,31**
CULTURE AND TOURISM	BRANCALEONE	€ 569.294,20
	BRUZZANO ZEFFIRIO	€ 820.688,22
	FERRUZZANO	€ 661.552,58
	STAITI	€ 1.401.860,10
TOT. ARMENI VALLEY CULTURE AND TOURISM		**€ 3.453.395,10**
COMPANY INCENTIVES	BRANCALEONE	€ 65.000,00
	BRUZZANO ZEFFIRIO	€ 21.981,00
	FERRUZZANO	-
	STAITI	-
TOT. ARMENI VALLEY COMPANY INCENTIVES		**€ 86.981,00**
TOT. ARMENI VALLEY		**€ 5.295.233,41**

b) in the post-phase, it will be able to estimate the income and employment deriving from the total tourist expenditure connected to the R-DMO.

For the estimation of economic results and employment according to a more integrated approach, the hypothesized approach is based on the development of microdata bases on local economic activities to determine the range of variation in labor productivity; this approach also opens up new possibilities for analyzing the estimate of employment and the economic results of companies starting from local level productivity maps (on the basis of parameters identified in the cost and revenue relationships of the selected companies) consistent with the basic data and with the estimation inputs of the national aggregates.

7 First Conclusions and Research Perspectives

The research carried out has allowed, on the one hand, to recognize the value necessary for heritage and the landscape for it to contribute to the construction of a Tourist Destination, but more striking is the recognition of the absence of tools that manage the cultural system in an integrated way. Recognizing this dependence is the preliminary step for its strengthening, necessary to recognize the importance of the identity function exercised by the territories. In this context, the work offers possible guidelines and a framework of strategic choices outlining various opportunities for the territories concerned. Among the possibilities that emerged it finds the continuity of reading of the territories and their landscapes regardless of the territorial borders.

The contribution aims to demonstrate the innovative character of a new way of planning a Tourist Destination, not necessarily for geographically contiguous territories, but characterized by a common heritage, with the aim of providing with the next studies, a quantitative evaluation of the potential competitiveness of a R-DMO, understood as the ability to enhance the attractiveness on the market of disadvantaged territories [39].

For this reason, the transversal nature of a R-DMO, which includes several territories, even non-contiguous ones, and the collaboration between heterogeneous associations and foundations that manage the development of the destination in a participatory manner, can produce widespread and non-selective effects, combining economic-employment development with the protection and enhancement of the heritage and guaranteeing visibility to minor territories that is perceptible by potential visitors and investors [40].

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