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Networks, Markets & People

Communities, Institutions and
Enterprises Towards Post-humanism
Epistemologies and AI Challenges,
Volume 5



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Challenges, Volume 5

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**Policies and Practices of Cohesion
and Social Innovation for Inclusive
Cities**



Tourism Policies in the Regional Operational Programmes in Calabria from 2000 to 2020

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Abstract. In the paper, an overall reading of the evolution of tourism policies in Calabria over the 20-year period 2000–2020 is proposed. The aim is to investigate the regional capacity to translate Community and national indications oriented towards overcoming a sectorial vision of tourism interventions and in favor of a territorially integrated strategy that also considers the new models of enjoyment of tourism resources. The text proposes a brief commentary centered on a critical comparison of the three programming cycles; the first, 2000–2006, which marked the transition from the conventional sectorial approach to tourism policies to integrated territorial planning; the second, 2007–2013, in which the quality of tourism is associated with the quality of life, the environment and the general principle of sustainability; the third, 2014–2020, centered on the stimulation of unprecedented forms of competitiveness and innovation in the tourism offer. In the final analysis, an attempt is made to understand whether in this twenty-year period the Region of Calabria has succeeded in synthesizing public intervention for tourism into a coherent strategy capable of concretely interpreting the principle of environmental, economic, and social sustainability shared by all today. Or whether, despite the maturation of a broader interpretation of tourism policy towards the identification of cultural, natural and landscape attractions and the acceptance of a declination as a resource spread and shared by communities, Calabria has limited itself to ‘chasing’ or legitimizing market trends, rather than orienting and governing them.

Keywords: EU cohesion policy · Integrated Territorial Planning · Tourism

1 Introduction

The early 1990s saw a critical reflection on mass tourism, and on new possible designs for ‘sustainable tourism,’ stimulated by the increasingly decisive role of international bodies for the enhancement of cultural and natural heritage - primarily UNESCO through

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its technical advisory bodies - in orienting community institutional policies toward a changed conception of attractiveness¹.

The launch of the European Cohesion Policy (ECP) for lagging regions (1989) thus overlaps with the global debate on the need to reformulate the tourism phenomenon in a sustainable key that responds to a new demand, diversified and also directed toward cultural enjoyment. In Italy, the launching of the ECP just precedes the end of the *Intervento Straordinario* (1992) and the shift, also for tourism policies, from a centralized to a more decentralized approach that entrusts regional governments with the responsibility of preparing a programmatic framework to design and implement initiatives co-financed by the Structural Funds. The idea behind this shift is that subnational governments can design strategies that are more closely aligned with real local development needs.

If in the first two cycles (1989–1993 and 1994–1999) the Community Support Framework (CSF)² are divided into thematic Axis - including the ‘Tourism’ Axis - according to a vision that is still essentially sectoral, since the third cycle of ECP (2000–2006) regional strategies in general, and for tourism, in particular, also take on the task of integrating sectors and actors. With the introduction of Regional Operational Programs (ROPs), in fact, regions are called upon to prepare a programmatic framework within which to design and implement - directly managing expenditure - initiatives co-financed by European Structural Funds, including those related to tourism.

ROPs, moreover, are also called upon to accommodate new instances for sustainable tourism development to which they must respond by privileging the segment of environmental and cultural tourism, of discovery and experience. Consistent with the international debate on alternative tourism models to mass tourism, the regions must also respond to the needs of a contemporary society that also attributes a recreational function to environmental contexts characterized by peculiar anthropic-cultural factors and gives rise to new forms of land use, thus increasing the ecological orientation of tourism [1].

The following text proposes an overview reading of the evolution of tourism policies in Calabria in the twenty-year period 2000–2020, which brings together, in extreme synthesis: the outcomes of research on primary sources (legislative and regional programmatic documentation) and secondary sources (literature on tourism as a field of development); the results of fieldwork obtained through 27 qualitative interviews with a selection of ‘actors’, engaged, in various capacities and in different spheres, in Regional Programming (policy, regional administration, regional evaluation, local administration, technical assistance and territorial animation, Local Action Groups administration, Economic and Social Partnership, entrepreneurship).

¹ After the Brundtland Report of 1987 and the Rio Summit of 1992, it was 1994 for the ‘Green Paper on the Role of the European Union in Tourism’ and 1995 for the Lanzarote Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

² The Community Support Framework is the document that defines priorities and intervention strategies regarding the use of European structural funds. The document, submitted by each member state and approved by the European Commission, contains a snapshot of the starting situation, strategy, priorities for action, specific objectives, allocation of financial resources, and conditions for implementation.

The general objective is to investigate the regional translation capacity of EU and national indications toward overcoming a sectoral vision of interventions in favor of a territorially integrated strategy for tourism that also considers new models of tourism fruition. The specific objective, finally, is to try to understand, whether in this two decades the Calabria Region has managed to synthesize public intervention for tourism into a coherent strategy in the direction of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Or whether, while maturing a broader interpretation of attractor - cultural, naturalistic, landscape - in its declination as a widespread resource shared by communities, Calabria has limited itself to 'chasing' or legitimizing market trends, rather than directing and governing them.

2 Tourism Policies in the 2000–2006 Programming Cycle: From Sectoral Approach to Integrated Territorial Planning

Unlike previous programming, which was articulated on a sectoral basis, the programming for the 2000–2006 period places the territory at the center of the strategic process and aims, therefore, to create and sustain the contextual conditions-whether cultural, environmental, economic, urban or rural-for the initiation of territorially rooted development paths, from a system perspective [2].

The new orientation is based on the conviction that regions are able to allocate financial resources to more effective objectives that do not only pertain to criteria of accounting efficiency, but above all to principles of sustainability, equity and participation of the inhabitants. Thus, the central role of local communities is enshrined not only as beneficiaries of resources, but also as protagonists of development, and in the field of tourism, the new interpretations of tangible and intangible cultural heritage as a public and identity asset are acquired [3]. The vision of tourism as an engine of growth is also linked, in this cycle, to a full usability of natural, cultural and historical resources in the Mezzogiorno and therefore also to infrastructural, productive, service, research and training strategies aimed at reducing also the pressure factors on the environment. According to this new perspective, in ROPs the tourism sector no longer has a dedicated Axis, but is fed by several measures, related to different Axis, among those that articulate the CSF. In the ROP Calabria 2000–2006, the two Axis that most involve tourism are Axis II 'Cultural Resources' and Axis IV 'Local Development Systems_Tourism'.

In particular, through Axis II, the regional document responds to the difficulty to deseasonalization and the entrenchment of a 'mass beach' tourism model, which is also pandered to by the strong presence of second homes and attributed to the «lack of integration of the tourism offer with the natural, artistic and cultural heritage in the broadest sense» [4] and the need to enhance, therefore, endogenous cultural resources, by financing interventions for the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage, innovative cultural events, and entrepreneurial initiatives in the cultural heritage sector.

Even with respect to exogenous variables, the foreword to the regional document, regarding tourism, illustrates how the indicators are unfavorable. Calabria suffers an absolute deficit compared to the Italian universe regarding the attractiveness of tourist consumption; despite its coastal heritage, environmental and cultural resources, in 1998 the index of tourist presences per inhabitant was 2.5 percent compared to 5.2 percent at

the national level [4]. Compared to this disadvantage, the regional document, responds with Axis IV measures, financing marketing and distribution actions of the ‘Calabria product’, interventions for the qualification of existing tourist receptivity and the creation of new receptivity, the creation of major attractors (theme parks, cultural parks, recreational-educational facilities, etc.) and services for the enhancement and integration in tourism products (organization of guided tours, realization of events, etc.), the creation of new tourist packages, the creation of information points for tourists and multipurpose facilities for sports and leisure.

For the Region of Calabria, therefore, as will be better seen in the definition of Integrated Territorial Projects (PIT), tourism takes on the role of the driving sector of numerous local systems. A guideline, therefore, that should have favored the concentration of interventions in limited areas with a strong real or potential tourist vocation and that will not find consistency in implementation in the decision to identify PIT for the entire regional territory, favoring, on the contrary, an interpretation of these instruments, by local authorities, as unselective spending mechanisms [5].

Of the 23 PIT implemented, in fact, thirteen clearly define the *idea-forza*³ on an endogenous tourism potential to be enhanced [6] and the 7 that propose a generic territorial development project nevertheless see the integration of Axis II and IV measures concerning attractiveness and tourism promotion in the overall proposal.

The choice of ‘tourism development’ as the strategy common to most of the PIT, goes in the opposite direction even with respect to the Region’s own indications to territorial aggregations not to privilege the choice of tourism development, «don’t propose tourism and benches» (interview with a former regional politician, 08/02/2023). Despite this, the final choice, left to local ‘spontaneity,’ highlights the adherence to a vision of territorial conditions and potential that admits only one leading sector and the difficulty of identifying, therefore, original and sufficiently selective thematic and targeted paths to achieve them. Most PIT, in fact, choose not to exclude any municipality from resources, with a parceled distribution of infrastructure interventions throughout the territory and a low degree of financial concentration. For PIT devoted to tourism development, the generic nature of individual interventions, «clumsily adapted to small local tourism» (interview with internal regional evaluators, 03/03/2023) and reduced, in most cases, to works of real estate rehabilitation and ‘urban décor,’ betrays an inability to make field choices for their territories in favor of an excessive fractioning of the planned interventions, more concerned with pleasing the municipalities involved than with maximizing the overall effects of the project. The nature of the interventions, in fact, suggests that the proposed *idea-forza*, in most cases, considered already crystallized local expectations, finding «collective rationality ex post» [6] and was not, on the contrary, generative of actions conceived later.

The simultaneous adoption, for the 23 territorial aggregations of an *idea-forza* that focuses on the traditional cultural heritage-tourism pair, denotes, moreover, a lack of ‘competitive balance’ between the choices of the different PIT territories and a disregard

³ By *idea-forza* is meant a summary objective, which, by describing the change that the project is intended to cause at the territorial level, allows the thematic or sectoral focus of all its interventions. The *idea-forza* is the real defining element of the instrument, as its expression by project proponents is required of every PIT, in all the different regional models.

toward an overestimation of the potential demand for tourism, even with respect to a very short season and an essentially seaside demand. If the type of interventions, as mentioned above essentially infrastructural, aim at upgrading environmental, rural, historic center and urban contexts, as they are small and spread over the territory, they are not able to guarantee attractiveness, at least in the short term, not having been conceived, in most cases, as «articulation of a macro project for the whole area, but in isolation, having in common only a generic reference to the *idea-forza*» [7].

Finally, the logic that seems to unite all tourism development-oriented ITPs is to prioritize investment in supply, neglecting to investigate and forecast demand: in a nutshell, improving the local environment and enhancing the accommodation offer seems to be the main formula espoused by the region to ensure that the area will receive an increase in tourist flows.

3 Tourism Policies in the 2007–2013 Programming Cycle: New Tourist Attractors for Quality of Life

The 2007–2013 programming period sees the abolition of the CSF and the drafting, by each member state, of a National Strategic Framework (NSF), a policy document, rather than actual programming, negotiated with the Commission. For this reason, unlike in the previous cycle, the 2007–2013 ROPs, while addressing the themes proposed by the NSF, are divided into 'Axis' that differ both in name and numbering from those provided in the national document. Actions - in this programming called 'specific and operational objectives' - specifically dedicated to tourism should be traced, a fortiori, among the different Axis. As a new element of this programming, even within the 'tourism system', the quality of life of resident communities and their environment, a parameter on which the attractiveness of urban and territorial systems is measured and designed, including for the external visitor, becomes a priority.

Even in the case of cultural resources, in the face of an imbalance of funding on protection objectives, a pulverization and low selectivity of interventions of the integrated projects of the previous cycle, the new programming prefers a strategic approach that also 'listens' to the demand coming from the resident population. Moreover, while on the one hand, the national document proposes the implementation of major cultural projects to strengthen areas and sites of excellence, it calls, at the same time, for «a systematic rebalancing and recovery activity where individual local realities are unable on their own to reach the indispensable critical mass» [8].

From this perspective, cultural and natural attractors constitute a collective heritage capable of generating conditions of cultural and social growth first for local communities, through the emergence and strengthening of entrepreneurial chains related to it, and for external users, at a later stage. It is believed, in fact, that the success of the overall strategy lies, above all, in the ability of resident communities to recognize in the cultural and identity value a key factor in strengthening the competitiveness, including tourism, of the relevant territories.

Similarly, for tourism development, while the NSF proposes to focus strategies on selected areas through an ex-ante assessment of demand, it also calls for the acquisition of a territorial tourism supply chain approach, the activation of which would maximize

the induced effect on the local economy starting with an idea of promotion focused on the 'sale' of opportunities to stay in the area and no longer exclusively on bed capacity [8].

The ROP Calabria 2007–2013 proposes two types of SWOT analysis: one, general, and 26 referring to as many Sectorial/Thematic and Territorial compartments. Both the general analysis and the detailed ones more pertinent to tourism - referring to Natural Resources and Biodiversity, Landscape, Cultural Resources, Territorial Systems - note the lack of minimum quality standards - of the natural, cultural and service environment - which determines a low attractiveness of the Calabria-system. The 2007–2013 ROP attempts to respond mainly with Axis V 'Natural, Cultural Resources and Sustainable Tourism' and Axis VIII 'Cities, Urban Areas and Territorial Systems'.

The actions financed by Axis V are aimed primarily at supporting the development of economic activities compatible with the requirements of protecting and preserving biodiversity and the landscape and aimed at maintaining human activities and improving the quality of life of residents, increasing the visibility and usability of the cultural heritage present in Calabria, and improving the quality of tourism supply and the market orientation of territorial tourism packages.

The actions financed by Axis VIII aim above all to resolve the poor connection between the enjoyment of the environmental and cultural heritage and the promotion of typical regional productions (e.g., artistic handicrafts, food and wine, etc.) and to support an interpretation closer to a trend now globally acquired of the role of the environmental heritage in the growth and qualification of tourist activities and, more generally, in the economic development of the region. To this end, the ROP focuses on the quality of life, competitiveness and attractiveness of 'Non-Urban Territorial Systems' and to enhance their local resources and specificities, countering the decline of the territories of inland and marginal areas through the implementation of Integrated Projects.

In particular, in this programming cycle, a «multi-sectoral approach such as to ensure that the different issues affecting the development and enhancement potential of the territory taken as a reference are taken into account» [9] is dedicated to the Non-Urban Territorial Systems according to 3 Integrated Regional Development Projects (PISR) and 4 Integrated Local Development Projects (PISL), one of which is dedicated to 'Local Tourist Systems and Local Tourist Destinations' [10].

In contrast to PIT, whose territorial definition was drafted by a regional directorate, for the PISL dedicated to tourism, project proposals are selected through a public call for proposals in which territories participate according to voluntary aggregations. The proposals financed, therefore, are defined from the bottom up by all stakeholders (municipal governments, businesses, associations, etc.) who, based on common thematic objectives, aggregate around an *idea-forza*, the only commonality with the PIT. In line with the indications of the ROP, the approved proposals tend to promote an offer that connects the coast to the mountains through the creation of new attractors, such as theme parks and recreational and sports parks, the diversification of the offer with the enhancement of major musical events and the qualification of archaeological areas and places related to religious spirituality (pilgrimages' destinations and routes). Also consistent with Regional Sustainable Tourism Development Plan 2011–2013, the defined strength

ideas aim to support cultural tourism, which is considered ‘debutant’, and to promote ‘new tourism’: religious, naturalistic, sports, social, eno-gastronomic [11].

While, compared to the PIT that allowed for the integration of all ROP Axis and different sources of funding, the ‘Tourism’ PISL, is limited to integrating only a few lines of intervention of Axis V and VIII, it can be said that the ‘PISL instrument’ has allowed, through the interventions carried out, a synthesis between community indications and regional strategic priorities. It has also had the merit of bringing out strongly different territorial identities and the possibility of a heterogeneous and diversified tourism offer even in non-urban contexts.

4 Tourism Policies in the Years 2014–2020: In Search of Competitiveness and Innovation

The last ECP cycle of the 20-year period analyzed highlights substantial new features. The Partnership Agreement (PA) replaces the NSF and, as per EU guidance, identifies 11 Thematic Objectives to support smart, sustainable, inclusive growth for the period 2014–2020, as suggested by the ‘Europe 2020 Strategy’ [12].

At the regional level, there is a return to a greater correspondence - at least in terms of structure - between ROPs and PA. The Regional Operational Programs all follow the same articulation, like that of the national document, in terms of both Thematic Objectives and implementable interventions - the ‘Specific Objectives’ - with the possibility of turning some of them on or off.

For the 2014–2020 programming period, however, the European Commission considers as a precondition for access to funding the adoption of a research and innovation strategy based on the logic of a ‘Smart Specialization Strategy’ (S3), which also contemplates a strategic plan for digital growth and allows the regions to devise development directions anchored in the real vocations of the territories. Consistent with European guidelines, the horizon toward which the PA looks, through S3, is that of concentration of interventions on a limited number of areas. The principle of ‘concentration’ has, therefore, not a limiting meaning but one of strategic selection. The aim is to avoid generality and dispersion often practiced in the past because they were ‘convenient’ but had little incisive results. The Regions, in this perspective, are urged to define a selected number of ‘Innovation Areas’, within which to implement some objectives of the general document, based on the real vocations of the territory, so as to avoid phenomena of dispersion and fragmentation of interventions and develop regional innovation strategies, which enhance the productive and technological areas of excellence in a perspective of positioning in the global context.

The Calabrian regional strategy ‘embraces’ the directions of the PA for both levels of programming. The ROP, with Thematic Objective (OT) 3 ‘Promoting the competitiveness of SMEs’ interprets the enhancement of cultural heritage and creativity as a development factor as opportunities for innovation (technological and non-technological) and tourism as a strength of the territory, current but above all potential, and with Thematic Objective (OT) 6 ‘Preserve, protect, promote and develop the natural and cultural heritage’, it intends to harness the territory’s potential to support pathways to growth by promoting sustainable and integrated management models, creating innovative systems

and services for the use of resources and training activities that are essential for qualifying human capital.

But if the ‘Specific Objectives’ of the ROP, in fact, act in continuity with the interventions launched in the previous programming phase, supporting a model of business support that allows greater productive specialization and better integration between the same businesses and territorial resources, both in the tourism sector and in the cultural and environmental sector, on the basis of OT3 and OT6, the S3 Calabria Strategy identifies tourism, together with culture, as one of the 8 regional Innovation Areas.

S3 Calabria, starting from a regional specialization in seasonal seaside tourism, defines, for the Innovation Area ‘Tourism and Culture’, a strategic approach aimed at strengthening the cultural and creative industry system, increasing cultural and proximity tourism in inland areas, also in connection with seaside flows, diversifying the possibilities of action of tourism operators, and encouraging the creation of a young entrepreneurial fabric, especially through the implementation of lines of intervention dedicated to ICT for tourism, diagnosis and restoration, and design and creativity [13].

If, in general, also in coherence with the Regional Sustainable Tourism Development Plan, the ‘Specific Objectives’ of the ROP, are aimed at protecting and enhancing the environment and culture in a broad sense and creating the necessary conditions to ensure greater productivity of tourism enterprises, orienting them more to the needs of the tourist and to national and international market trends [14] with Action 3.3.4 ‘Support for the competitiveness of enterprises in tourist destinations’ the S3, in particular, aims to support tourism as a competitive and innovative sector. To this end, S3 ‘reserves’ specific funding for SMEs and the self-employed, granted through a ranking evaluation of proposals related to the consolidation and innovation of existing tourism products/services, the creation and promotion of new innovative tourism products/services, and the upgrading, energy efficiency and technological innovation of tourism facilities.

S3 Action 3.3.4 mobilized a large participation of enterprises (435, many more requests than funds available). Thus, the notice mobilized strong investment and incentive interest, which was met to a limited extent. Of these enterprises, in fact, only 22.3 percent (97) were financed, decreeing that related to ‘Tourism and Culture’ as the S3 Innovation Area most affected by the phenomenon of exclusion of initiatives: in fact, almost 46 percent of the total excluded contribution can be attributed to it. The figure that emerges is clear and significant: none of the businesses participating in the tourism calls for proposals can be traced back to high-tech or high knowledge-intensive production activities [15].

5 Conclusions

The 20-year period 2000–2020 sees the emergence of a ‘systemic’ and decentralized policy approach, but with very different results between territories. When regional programmatic paths begin to differ significantly, according to the different strategic capacities of regional and local governments, while in some regional trajectories processes of maturation and refinement of strategies are detected, in Calabria an unfocused approach seems to persist [16].

In the 2000–2006 programming cycle, the idea pursued by the Calabria ROP is to propose interventions for the enhancement of public natural and cultural resources,

to be associated with interventions in favor of private enterprises in the sector, with a common goal of increasing territorial attractiveness. While a generalized programmatic commitment can be detected, implementation is weak overall. Even Integrated Projects, which represent the real break from the sectoral logic of previous programming and see successful applications, are not always conceived based on an assessment of the actual potential for demand growth and often remain mere motions of intent. They cover territories that are too wide, without a clear identification of the segments of tourism demand to which the offer should be addressed and resort to generic and/or flattened ideas-force on the themes of environment, culture and tourism still denoting a certain naivety in identifying targeted strategies consistent with local specificities. Although the principle of integration seems to be applied only as a mechanical coupling between measures of different axes and not in terms of a tourism 'chain' and diversified cultural offerings [17], there has nevertheless been a cultural maturation in the recognition of territories in terms of tourism by communities of inhabitants.

The 2007–2013 cycle is characterized by interventions more consciously aimed at intercepting demand segments oriented toward conscious tourism consumption. The Calabria ROP attempts to support a more diversified and integrated offer than in the past and deploys policies for the regeneration and enhancement of minor, non-urban territorial systems. The breadth and variety of partnerships, however, is sometimes matched by a fragmentation of the idea force into too many operations that are often financially unsustainable. It can be said, however, that with the implementation of PISL, new models of tourism, especially of a cultural nature, are beginning to be targeted. Alongside a gradual assumption of responsibility by regional and local governments, albeit in the absence of an overall strategy capable of giving coherence to the various actions, there is a maturing awareness of the opportunities arising from the recognition and promotion of identity territorial areas (e.g., the Grecanica Area) [18].

Finally, in the 2014–2020 cycle, the Calabria region, with its large number of 'Innovation Areas', exhibits a certain generality of approach with perhaps, once again, overly ambitious goals, whose achievement, yet cannot be assessed. It can be said, however, that compared to the continuous oscillation between an approach for direct punctual interventions, a diffuse approach to support businesses and attempts at transversal integration by thematic or territorial areas, which characterizes the tourism policies of the two previous programming cycles [19], the ROP 2014–2020 pursues, at least on paper, an integrated enhancement of territorial resources and competencies, aiming at the development of strategically important cultural and natural attraction areas, to experiment with new governance models involving public and private actors in the territory. A few projects financed by the 2014–2020 ROP have already started, which in the successful combination of culture-environment-sustainability, seem to fully embrace the spirit of integrated planning, while not responding to any 'implementation formula'. An example of this is the integrated enhancement project 'Ciclovia Parchi Calabria', supported by the action of the four Calabrian Natural Parks (three national and one regional), a network, connected to them, of municipalities and their villages, cultural and naturalistic (national, regional, sub-regional and municipal), religious, eno-gastronomic attractions, as well as private services (financed by a call for proposals combined with the Ciclovia

project) to support the visit. This is also an attempt at vertical coordination of tourism policies that will hopefully see other effective applications in the future.

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