
A taxonomy of Italian territories within the National Strategy for Inner Areas based on tourism as a driver of development

Abstract

Inner peripheries are earning much attention in the academic and policy debate of regional development. The breakthrough of Italian Inner Areas represents a chance to examine this concept and the development policies, implemented in 2012, connected to them.

This article aims to analyse those Italian territories, identified by the National Strategy for Inner Areas, characterised by much untapped natural and human capital, hence proposing a taxonomy according to their current tourism level and their future tourism strategy for local development. The case studies presented are the ones that, to date, have already approved their strategy.

The objective of this paper is to frame the experience of the aforementioned Italian programme within the wider concept of peripheral areas and Inner Peripheries at the European Union level, by focusing on those areas proposing tourism as main driver for local development and actual engine for growth.

Keywords: *Inner Areas; niche tourism; local and tourism development; cultural and natural heritage; tourist destinations; peripheral areas.*

Introduction

In recent years much attention has been devoted to some European regions variously described as ‘peripheral’, ‘inner’ or ‘remote’, characterised by long-term demographic decline, mostly mountainous with economic and social performance levels below the European average (ESPON and University of Geneva, 2012; Barca, Casavola, & Lucatelli, 2014).

In spite of the growing academic attention, the concept of peripherality is still to be clearly defined (Salvatore, Chiodo, & Fantini, 2017). In fact, one of the issues that economic geography research in tourism had and still has to face is the definition of peripheral destination. Over the years, many different destinations have been qualified as peripheral, mostly paired with other names such as rural, countryside, frontier, remote or hinterland. In short, ‘peripheral’ has become the way to define a non-urban area (Schmallegger, Carson & Tremblay, 2010). Furthermore, peripherality concerns on one hand spatial characteristics (meant as geographical location) and on the other hand socio-economic issues in terms of lack of infrastructure, insufficient public transportation and economic disadvantages, turning into a synonym of marginalisation (Salvatore, Chiodo, & Fantini, 2017). According to Rodríguez-Pose and Di Cataldo (2015), European regions can be divided into ‘Periphery’ (meant as those less-developed regions eligible for Objective 1¹ during the period 2000-2006) and ‘Core’ (the remaining regions).

These peripheral areas have also been identified with the term ‘Inner Peripheries’, a definition that seems rather contradictory in itself. In fact, a question immediately comes to mind: how can a place be ‘inner’ and ‘peripheral’ at the same time (Copus, Mantino, & Noguera, 2017)? According to Servillo *et al.* (2014), Inner Peripheries are those areas remote from central hubs of economic activities, often mountainous or rural, comprising small towns.

In the Italian context, these unbalanced territorial dynamics have gained more prominence as ever thanks to the Italian government experience known as ‘National Strategy for Inner Areas’ (SNAI henceforth) (Servillo *et al.*, 2016). The SNAI was launched in 2012 within the new 2014-2020 programming period of regional policies and promoted by the Department for the Economic Development and Cohesion. The Action originated from the initiative of the Minister for Territorial Cohesion at the time, Fabrizio Barca. In the following months, the motivations

¹ Objective 1 of the Structural Funds is the main priority of the European Union's cohesion policy. In accordance with the treaty, the Union works to ‘promote harmonious development’ and aims particularly to ‘narrow the gap between the development levels of the various regions.’

and the programmatic lines were developed by a working group called 'Technical Committee for Inner Areas' (IFEL, 2015). SNAI is a multi-level governance, meaning that different tiers of government are involved: central State, Regions and local Municipalities. It is, then, not a bottom up neither a top down approach, but 'place-based' (Barca, 2009).

The Strategy gives the chance to move the focus of Cohesion Policies from inter-regional differences towards the ones between sub-regional levels (Mantino, Lucatelli, 2016).

The previous brief frame regarding Inner Periphery was necessary to introduce the particular concept of Italian Inner Areas which, from now on, will be the main geographical topic addressed in this article, being tourism development the research field.

Inner Areas are defined as small centres that are far away from services of general interests (more than forty minutes, in varying degrees of peripherality), providing residents with only limited access to essential services (medical care, education and local mobility, according to the Italian Department for Development and Social Cohesion). They cover around 60% of the national land surface, counting for almost 24% of the total population. Since the post-war period these areas have suffered a process of marginalisation whose main features have been the demographic decline and ageing of the population, a decrease in employment and the degradation of natural and cultural heritage with social costs, such as hydrogeological instability, loss of biodiversity and 'know-how' dispersion linked to local traditions, for the country as a consequence (Lucatelli, 2016).

According to this description, it is possible to argue that inner areas are a widespread reality (MIBACT, 2016). As stated by the SNAI, one of the key sectors identified for the intervention in favour of the local development is the enhancement of natural and cultural resources and sustainable tourism (Lucatelli, 2016), since tourism is recognised to be an essential driver for development and a great source of income, jobs and wealth creation (OECD, 2013). Moreover, tourism is counted among the most important activities in world trade. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO henceforth), tourism has showed a rapid growth in the last three decades and it is still growing exponentially (UNWTO, 2017). Therefore, it is considered by governments as a leading sector for revitalising regional and local economies.

Consequently, the potential of tourism to enhance economic development in peripheral areas has been deeply studied by tourism researchers over the past years (Schmallegger, Carson & Tremblay, 2010).

Nonetheless, tourism in inner areas is an underdeveloped economic sector, compared to poles of tourist attractions, despite the rich and great variety of natural and cultural resources. The SNAI, then, aims to enhance this extraordinary heritage of latent territorial capital, by assuming the exploitation of local resources as one of the potential drivers for development (MIBACT, 2016), through a ‘place-based’ approach. This approach aims at facing social exclusion and underutilisation of resources through interventions targeted on territorial specificities. It is in opposition to the space-blind approach (Barca, 2009; Barca *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the Strategy can be a great chance for these areas to discover and endorse their tourist hidden potential. In fact, tourism and cultural activities play nowadays an important role in the development documents adopted by the European Council and the European Commission. As a proof of this renewal, in 2013 in Italy there has been the reorganisation of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities in order to include tourism, leading to the realisation of the first strategic Plan of Tourism 2017-2022². Culture and tourism are, then, interlinked and their policies concern not only inner areas but the nation as a whole. In fact, the two big issues that SNAI wants to reverse – depopulation and socio-economic decline – negatively impact the natural, cultural and artistic national heritage. Examples of this effect are the abandonment of historical hamlets and agriculture areas, or the loss of memory of the assets, being them archaeological, architectural or belonging to the intangible sphere such as festivals, craft skills, rituals, and so on. By preserving cultural and natural landscapes, SNAI also aims to avoid damages from hydrogeological instability or collapses of entire buildings (MIBACT, 2016).

Since its launch, SNAI has recognised how tourism has been a deeply felt theme in all areas, which are trying to face the elaboration of their local development strategy.

As Perles-Ribes *et al.* (2019) suggest, one of the common tools for investigating the tourism reality in a region is the classification of tourist destinations. This type of analysis can be pursued to generate a decision-making process in the tourism sector and for applying entrepreneurial actions according to the distinctive characteristics of each territory. For this purpose, the most implemented methodology is the cluster analysis, which organises variables related to the tourism activity of each kind of tourist destination.

² In 2018 tourism functions have been transferred to the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and Tourism, in order to ‘foster an integrated policy of enhancing Made in Italy and, therefore, a coherent and sustainable promotion of the Italian System’.

This article is organised in four sections. Section 1 is a review of the extensive literature on tourism development that has been produced over the years, in order to outline a theoretical framework for the SNAI. Section 2 will introduce the case studies and their general characteristics, presenting four dimensions that will be used for the taxonomy. Section 3 will comparatively analyse the strategic plans³ of Italian Inner Areas available online on the SNAI website and propose a taxonomy of them according to the mentioned dimensions. Finally, section 4 will provide some conclusions, in order to review the main points discussed and the results obtained, useful for a future realisation of intents.

1 - Literature review

Before identifying and analysing the tourism strategies based on the rich endowment of cultural and natural excellence of each Italian pilot⁴ territory within the SNAI, a theoretical framework on the extensive literature on tourism development will be provided. The research was conducted in leading academic journals in tourism, geography and social sciences (*Annals of Tourism Research*, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Economics*, *Tourism Management*, *The Professional Geographer*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* and *Journal of Rural Studies*), complemented with other sources including Google Scholar and ResearchGate, using ‘niche tourism’, ‘rural tourism’, ‘tourism development’, ‘sustainable tourism’ and ‘peripheral areas’ as keywords.

Thanks to this filtered search, it was possible to develop the idea behind this review around the identification of selected themes, which better match the concept of local development in peripheral areas from a tourism strategy point of view: (1) causal relation to economic growth, (2) typology of tourism according to geography, (3) sustainability of tourism in peripheral areas, (4) changes on the motivation to travel based on new needs and (5) creative and experiential tourism.

(1) Causal relation to economic growth

³ The Strategic plans are available on the SNAI website.

See http://old2018.agenziacoazione.gov.it/it/arint/Strategie_di_area/Strategie_di_area.html

⁴ Starting with a limited number of areas is meant as a real experiment to evaluate the process and, in case of success, replicate it in the other areas (Lucatelli, 2016).

First of all, when tourism development is discussed, one issue regarding its causal relationship with economic growth necessarily emerges. In the last few decades many researchers in the tourism economic literature have contributed to the debate. Is tourism development caused by economic growth or, on the contrary, is economic growth caused by tourism development? The former concept is known in international tourism as economic-driven tourism growth theory (EDTG) (Lanza *et al.*, 2003; Narayan, 2004), the latter as tourism-led growth theory (TLEG) (Balaguer, Cantavella-Jordà, 2002; Payne, Mervar, 2010; De Vita, Kyaw, 2016; Perles-Ribes *et al.*, 2017). The EDTG hypothesis argues that stable political institutions, appropriate public investment in human and physical capital and government policies oriented to the strong application of property rights are all conditions able to promote economic activities, being tourism among them. The TLEG hypothesis, instead, assumes that tourism is an actual driver for growth because of its capability of inducing positive externalities and spillovers in the economy.

Several studies conducted in different countries have investigated this causal relationship, getting results supporting both hypotheses. Fiji, Korea and USA have supported the economic-driven tourism growth hypothesis, while Spain, Mauritius, Turkey and OECD countries have sustained the tourism-led growth hypothesis (Payne, Mervar, 2010). One of the aims of this review will be to locate the Italian Inner Areas in one of the two theories, mainly on the basis of the intentions of the regions, as it will be explained at the end of the literature section.

(2) Typology of tourism according to geography

Regarding the second theme, the typology of tourism according to geography is a necessary field of study in literature since geography is fundamental in tourism, being tourism geographical by its nature. As Murphy and Andressen (1988), Lai and Li (2012) as well as Chaperon and Bramwell (2013) have pointed out, one main argument of discussion is the emblematic territorial polarisation which has affected peripheral areas, in relation to tourism development. As other socio-economic dimensions, tourism has been represented in terms of ‘centre-periphery’ kind of hierarchical structure, which is a model of regional development first proposed by Friedmann (1966). Such conceptualisation of the world was studied within the

dependency theory⁵. The centres are metropolitan areas controlling trade flows, labour mobility, capital investment, transport, planning and the location of government services, while peripheries are less developed, mostly seen as support to the cores development. Initially, this model was used to describe the inequalities between developed and developing countries, but then broadened to the disparities between regions within the same country (Schmalleger, Carson & Tremblay, 2010). This concept was applied in the tourism context. It started to describe the relationship between the rich and industrialised tourist-attracting countries and the less developed ones (Brown, Hall, 2000). This means, not only services, but also tourist flows had for years centralised in some poles of attraction – seaside and alpine resorts, cities of art. Consequently, outer places have turned in state of abandon and marginalisation, with continuing economic disadvantages, often combined with out-migration, not able to catch flows of visitors and become travel destinations (Salvatore, Chiodo, 2016).

The centre-periphery structure can be seen as an urban and non-urban (peripheral) tourism dichotomy, which leads to different typologies of travel choices, activities and variety of experiences. In literature, peripheral tourism has often been associated with rural tourism which has been presented as a tourism branch in the form of experience of rural life, nature, culture and heritage, expected to enrich the local economy, strengthen the regional identity and keep the areas still attractive. Rural tourism includes: nature-based tourism, cultural tourism, agricultural tourism (Pröbstl, 2010). In many peripheral areas, rural tourism is, in fact, becoming an important part of the local economy. The reason is that it can easily answer to a tourist demand that is less oriented towards massified forms of fruition and more interested in the cultural and artistic resources of villages and towns, in green and protected areas, in the typical food and wine production and in the countryside life in general (Belletti, Berti, 2011). Intertwined with tourism in non-urban areas is the concept of sustainable tourism development in peripheral areas.

(3) Sustainability of tourism in peripheral areas

A question that immediately comes to mind when discussing about tourism in peripheral areas is whether this kind of tourism, split in all its diverse segments, is actually able to bring

⁵ The dependency theory was developed in the 60s and 70s and used to explain the relations between peripheral areas and major economic centres. According to the theory, peripheral areas problems are linked to domination and exploitation operated by the cores (Jordan, 2004).

development and create value in those areas. If so, whether these value and development go hand by hand with sustainability (Belletti, Berti, 2011). Before answering the question, it will be provided a definition of sustainable tourism which was produced in 1995 during the first World Conference on Sustainable Tourism:

“Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for the local communities” (Charter for Sustainable Tourism, Lanzarote 1995).

Even more so, according to the European Commission (2013), *“to be sustainable, tourism must be economically viable, meet the needs of society, conserve the environment and cultural heritage it depends upon, and in this way, continue to deliver benefits without detriment to current and future generations”*.

In fact, not only the positive effects of tourism on local development should be considered, but also the negative ones in terms of damages on ecosystems, consumption of natural resources, loss of local identity and traditional cultures (Belletti, Berti, 2011). These effects on destinations, from an economic point of view, are called ‘negative externalities’, meant as social and environmental costs paid by third parties, not involved in the consumption nor in the production. When these negative impacts are not properly taken into account, tourism becomes unsustainable (Stabler *et al.*, 2010).

Tourism models, sensitive to environmental and ecological aspects, are growing. Their goals are new formulae of receptiveness based on heritage and resources enhancement for the development of local economies. To be sustainable, tourism has to achieve significant quality standards in the service offered, must protect the natural heritage, respect local life style, customs and traditions and have positive effects on socio-economic indicators, such as employment, education and rate of youth entrepreneurship (MATTM⁶, 2014).

(4) Changes on the motivation to travel based on new needs

⁶ Ministry of the Environment (Italy) (Ministero dell’Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio e del Mare).

The forth theme, which is interlinked to the typology of tourism, concerns the changes on the motivation to travel. According to Garrod (2006), we are witnessing a phenomenon called ‘transition of tourism’. Over the years, in fact, new motivations and preferences about the choices of tourist destinations have emerged. The reason behind this new mindset lies on the changes regarding the tourist phenomenology. People are nowadays attracted to remote places through adventure tourism, where the main attraction is the exploration (Buckley, 2006), ready to discover hidden landscapes, experience the authenticity of life (Salvatore, Chiodo, 2016), get ‘a sense of place’ (Jepson, Sharpley, 2015), in search of experiential value (Pine, Gilmore, 1999).

Poon (1993) and Fayos–Solà (1996) were the first to discuss about a new trend in modern tourism towards non-traditional destinations. According to them, what was happening was a shift from mass tourism to a new kind of tourism which better matches the transformations in tourists’ needs, preferences and expectations.

As Hummelbrunner and Miglbauer (1994) have put it, these new trends in tourists’ behaviour derive from an increasing fascination for highly original travel experiences, emergent environmental awareness, strong desires to be part and enjoy the local life style and growing openness to new unconventional experiences.

Tourism incentive has, therefore, experienced a transition from the old-style standardised rigid motives to travel to a new and distinctive approach where wants and needs are focused on (and consumers are willing to pay for) experiences that may be more adventurous and meaningful. Due to this variation in tourist motivations, it can be said that niche tourism is growing in relevance. A definition of niche tourism can be provided. It fulfils the needs of certain markets offering more varied tourism products. According to the type of tourism market the cause for the increasing in niche tourism and its features can be found (Marson, 2011). The first one is due to the specific qualities of niche tourism, in relation for example to the characteristics of ecotourism, as suggested by Swarbrooke *et al.* (2003). The second is related to the dimensions of the niche market that is smaller, attracting a modest number of tourists. The last one is connected to the specialisation of niche tourism products which, as Deuschl (2006) stated, leads to the future development for tourist destinations, based on competitive advantages.

It is by no means a coincidence that the General States of Tourism, recently summoned by what was called the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism (MIBACT), have chosen the slogan ‘Italy, country for travellers’. This suggests that we are not dealing with ‘mass

tourism' any more, but with a 'niche tourism' (Salvatore, Chiodo, 2016). As already said, the rapid increase of tourist niches, due to the shift in motivational factors for travellers, is getting growing attention in the global tourism industry (Novelli, 2005). According to Robinson and Novelli (2005), niches seems to provide greater chances for economic development in peripheral/inner areas, since they appear to be more sustainable and less damaging for the environment. It does not mean that mass tourism is dead, but tourists have developed a growing interest in visiting, discovering and experiencing places, as well as participating in and getting to know better the everyday life of remote destinations.

But where does the term 'niche tourism' come from? Novelli (2005) declared that it derives from the term 'niche marketing' which means that a specific product can be tailored to match the needs of a particular audience. The market should not be homogeneous with general needs. On the contrary, it has to be a set of individuals with very specific needs regarding the quality of products. This concept necessarily leads to the idea of 'niche tourism products' and 'niche tourism markets'. The mentioned author went on saying that niche tourism can break down into 'macro niches' meant as homogeneous market sectors, such as cultural tourism or event tourism, each capable of further splits – 'micro niches'. Examples are the food and wine tourism and the sport tourism.

All in all, niche tourism represents the response to an increasing number of sophisticated tourists, requesting more specialised tourism products, so that destinations have the stimulus to differentiate their offer, hence competing with other tourist options. On the other hand, niches can contribute to create special interests and matching tourist products, which means that they are able to identify new tourist possibilities, anticipating preferences (Sharpley, Telfer, 2002). Destinations should be sensible not only to the needs of the existing demand, but also to potential markets they can appeal (McKercher, 1995; Tribe, 1997).

(5) Creative and experiential tourism

This also leads to the last theme of the review: the creative and experiential tourism. Richards and Raymond (2000, p. 4) stated that:

“creative tourism is a type of tourism related to the active participation of travellers in the culture of the host community, through interactive workshops and informal learning experiences based on the characteristics of the holiday destination where they are undertaken.”

As the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006) confirmed, creative tourism is, then, meant as an experiential journey into authenticity, made of participative learning activities in arts and heritage, in contact with residents who are brokers of local culture.

After all the themes have been discussed in a general way, as a conclusion of the literature review it will be highlighted how the particular case of the SNAI deals with them in the same order as they have been presented.

(1) Even if the causal relationship between tourism development and economic growth is normally related to international tourism, it can still be applied to Inner Areas since almost all of them have expressed the intention of relying on tourism (Andreoli, Silvestri, 2017) to improve their current status of marginalisation and boost their economic growth, following the tourism-led growth hypothesis.

(2) By the definition provided in the introduction, Inner Areas are mostly rural or mountainous with scattered villages and small towns. Their geographical characteristics call for a non-urban kind of tourists, drawn by nature holidays and outdoor recreation, seen as a getaway not only from cities meant as everyday life area, but also from the connected urban tourism which can suffer overtourism⁷.

(3) The idea of the SNAI in terms of sustainable tourism is based on a tourist supply re-organisation, heading towards new formulae of hospitality (including the creation of '*albergo diffuso*'), the restoration of historical hamlets, second homes and other public properties and the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage and of typical food products (Andreoli, Cuccu, Silvestri, 2017).

(4) The transition to niche tourism might turn peripheral areas into tourist destinations, seen as a chance to make full use of the local resources, so as to exploit new development opportunities for the rural economies. Communities, therefore, are called upon to differentiate their tourist offer in such a way to promote their cultural and environmental high-quality products, to improve the tourist experience focusing on the territorial identity and go beyond the mass

⁷ Overtourism is defined as "*the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have enforced permanent changes to their lifestyles, access to amenities and general well-being*" (Milano, Cheer, Novelli, 2018, p. 2).

tourism (Salvatore, Chiodo, 2016). These new tourist phenomena, then, are meant to foster a proactive conservation of landscape (Salvatore, 2015), acting as a replacement for abandon.

(5) Finally, one of the main goals the SNAI wants to pursue is related to creative and experiential tourism, which includes visits to artisan workshops, such as fabric production, wood and leather crafts or the transformation of agri-food products, directly involving tourists in manual activities (Andreoli, Cuccu, Silvestri, 2017).

2 - Case Studies

By the end of January 2018 nineteen pilot areas, among the selected ones involved in the Italian SNAI programme⁸, have approved the third document in a four stages strategy construction. The strategy contains specific actions, expected results and result indicators. Once shared with the Technical Committee and the respective Region, the strategy is sent to the Territorial Cohesion Agency which will start to set up the fourth and last document: the Framework Program Agreement.

Figure 1: The location of Italian Inner Areas

⁸ In total, the selected areas are 72, the pilot areas are 22. The Regions and the autonomous Province of Trento have picked from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 5 areas each. They are composed of 1,077 municipalities, counting 2,072,718 inhabitants (referred to 2016). Every area on average consists of 29,400 inhabitants and 15 municipalities (De Vincenti, 2018).



Source: own elaboration on SNAI data

As shown in Figure 1, these areas are spread from the very North to the South, highlighting how the geography of the Strategy deals with the country as a whole.

The statistical analysis of this work is based on secondary data research, mainly on data elaborated by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), SNAI and MIBACT and published on their websites, respectively.

2.1- Socio-economic characteristics

Before focusing on the tourism strategies applied in each research areas, some general socio-economic characteristics will be illustrated in Table 1. They describe the process of marginalisation occurred in these territories regarding the ageing of the population and the demographic decline, compared to Italy.

Table 1: Indicators related to general characteristics and demography used by the Strategy for the selection of the areas

Inner Areas (province)	N° of municipalities ⁹	Population (2011) ¹⁰	Population over 65 (2011) ¹¹	Demographic decline (1971-2011) ¹²	Demographic decline (2001-2011) ¹³
Basso Sangro – Trigno (CH)	33	22,568	32.0%	-43.8%	-13.7%
Montagna Materana (MT)	8	12,131	28.5%	-43.2%	-17.2%
Alta Irpinia (AV)	25	64,386	23.7%	-25.5%	-5.8%
Appennino Emiliano (RE)	7	33,914	27.3%	-6.1%	0.5%
Alta Carnia (UD)	21	21,069	26.9%	-34%	-8.2%
Antola Tigullio (GE)	16	18,625	29.4%	-14.9%	3.6%
Valchiavenna (SO)	13	24,611	19.7%	5.6%	2%
Alta Valtellina (SO)	5	18,554	19.4%	1%	0.5%
Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano (PU/AN)	10	41,435	26.9%	-12%	-1.3%
Matese (CB/IS)	14	20,572	21.0%	-9.5%	-3.1%
Valli Maira e Grana (CN)	18	13,689	23.8%	-15.3%	1.1%
Monti Dauni (FG)	29	60,691	24.6%	-35.4%	-9.2%
Alta Marmilla (OR)	20	10,553	30.1%	-34.5%	-11.2%
Madonie (PA)	21	66,389	26.2%	-25.6%	-7.7%
Casentino-Valtiberina (AR)	10	21,841	26.9%	-16.5%	-3.8%
Sud – Ovest Orvietano (TR)	20	62,532	26%	-0.4%	3.2%
Bassa Valle (AO)	22	23,435	21.8%	6.6%	2.9%
Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni (VI)	8	21,247	22.6%	-7.3%	0.9%
Tesino (TN)	3	2,368	29.8%	-34.6%	-9.6%
Italia	8,092	59,433,744	20.8%	9.8%	4.3%

Source: own elaboration based on SNAI data

Considering the demographic decline, during the last interval census (2001-2011) the observations are all lower than the total performance of Italy (4.3%), and in many cases negative (only 8 areas out of 19 registered positive performances). Montagna Materana (Basilicata) and

⁹ Elaboration by the Department for the Economic Development and Cohesion

¹⁰ Census by ISTAT

¹¹ Census by ISTAT

¹² Census by ISTAT

¹³ Census by ISTAT

Basso Sangro-Trigno (Abruzzo) are the ones with the strongest drop (-17.2% and -13.7%, respectively).

As for the population over 65, according to the last census all the inner areas under observation showed a higher rate than Italy, meaning a dramatic ageing of the population as a consequence of the intense demographic decline.

Table 2: Economic measures related to employment rate and GDP at provincial level (2011)

Inner Area	Region (province)	Employment rate (2011)	GDP (2011) in million euro
Basso Sangro – Trigno	Abruzzo (CH)	55.2%	9,508.71
Montagna Materana	Basilicata (MT)	47.4%	3,430.1
Alta Irpinia	Campania (AV)	45.6%	7,545.32
Appennino Emiliano	Emilia Romagna (RE)	67.2%	17,300.6
Alta Carnia	Friuli Venezia Giulia (UD)	64.1%	15,484.32
Antola Tigullio	Liguria (GE)	63.0%	27,963.63
Valchiavenna	Lombardy (SO)	62.8%	5,351.39
Alta Valtellina	Lombardy (SO)	62.8%	5,351.39
Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano	Marche (PU) (AN)	63.9% 64.1%	9,399.8 13,763.81

Matese	Molise (CB) (IS)	49.4% 52.4%	4,770.06
Valli Maira e Grana	Piedmont (CN)	68.0%	17,774.39
Monti Dauni	Apulia (FG)	40.6%	10,209.54
Alta Marmilla	Sardinia (OR)	51.7%	2,857.22
Madonie	Sicily (PA)	40.5%	23,269.63
Casentino- Valtiberina	Tuscany (AR)	64.0%	9,186.64
Sud – Ovest Orvietano	Umbria (TR)	60.4%	5,360.75
Bassa Valle	Aosta Valley (AO)	66.9%	4,558.8
Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni	Veneto (VI)	66.7%	26,507.51
Tesino	Trentino Alto Adige (TN)	65.9%	18,013.9
Italia		56.8%	1,637,462.9

Source: own elaboration based on Eurostat data

These are the signals that prove how these territories need a boost for local development that can reverse these trends. One of the options indicated by SNAI and analysed in this article, as explained in the introduction, is tourism.

2.2- Tourism as strategic solution

In order to outline the current tourism level of the above Inner Areas and their tourism strategy, through the plan documents available online, this section will present three dimensions, pointed out as central idea of the taxonomy:

1. The first one is the identification of different ‘typologies’ of tourism from the supply point of view. This characterisation will be based on the main attractiveness of the destinations. As already mentioned in the introduction, Italian territories benefit on one hand from a rich cultural heritage in the form of historical hamlets, archaeological excavations, architecture items, UNESCO sites and craftsmanship. Linked to cultural heritage is the religious tourism which exploits religious places such as churches, abbeys, sanctuaries, hermitages, and so on. Other forms of tourism are linked to natural heritage, such as natural parks, forests, lakes, falls and nature pathways, which can be enjoyed also through outdoor sports activities. In addition, Inner Areas also benefit from the traditional food and drink sectors which are linked to the eno-gastronomic tourism. Examples are food, wine and beer festivals and taste itineraries (Punziano, Urso, 2016; Andreoli, Silvestri, 2017).

Business tourism has been excluded from the typologies of tourism because, as Ryan (1991) sustained, tourism is a *non-work* activity, while business tourism is considered as a profitable activity, far from being a classic leisure practice.

2. As second dimension, it will be explored whether the tourism strategy, which each area has decided to follow, is underlying a mass tourism or a niche tourism model. Each territory will be analysed in terms of different numbers of tourist flows (available for the year 2012) to see which area has the characteristics of mass destination and which of niche destination.

Either way, a territorial reorganisation of the tourist supply is required, considering the integration between other economic sectors and the promotion of local aspects of territorial identity (Salvatore, Chiodo, 2016).

3. The third dimension analysed will be the study of the life cycle stages of the tourist destinations and the level of integration of tourism within the SNAI.

In fact, even if tourism plays an important role in all pilot areas, some of them can be considered in a maturity phase, so that they need a new model to rejuvenate themselves,

hence avoiding the decline stage; others can be found in an initial phase, still trying to outline a tourism strategy (Andreoli, Silvestri, 2017).

Regarding the level of integration, this article will refer to three possible scenarios of the weight of urban tourism in development strategies pointed out by Bellini and Pasquinelli (2016) and adjust them to tourism in inner areas. These are: *dominant tourism*; *surrogate tourism*; *marginal tourism*.

Some territories, even before the Strategy was launched, were building their economic development on tourism, and now are trying to strengthen it, and tourism is meant to play a *dominant* role. Other areas, with a less developed tourism, have decided to rely on tourism to boost the local development together with the local production. This is the case of the *surrogate tourism* and examples are the agri-food industries. Lastly, some areas see tourism as a *marginal* driver for development; nonetheless, it is still present in their strategies (Bellini, Pasquinelli, 2016; Andreoli, Cuccu, Silvestri, 2017).

The following section will explore in detail the three dimensions through the lens of indicators which will help to define the current level of tourism in each area, from the tourist offer point of view, and the future intents that every area has decided to pursue within their strategies.

3 - Typologies of tourism, tourism model and life cycle stages of the tourist destinations

First of all, to examine the typologies of tourism there will be an overview of two indicators elaborated by MIBACT for the cultural tourism, one elaborated by MATTM¹⁴ for the natural tourism, one elaborated by INEA¹⁵ for the eno-gastronomic tourism, as part of the open diagnosis of the SNAI, used for the selection of the areas;

- Number of usable state/non-state cultural sites: these are cultural sites of the state and of other territorial and private entities whose existence and activity are documented, and which have responded to the ISTAT-MIBACT survey. They include museums, archaeological sites, archaeological parks and historical complexes;
- Number of non-usable state/non-state cultural sites: these are cultural sites of the state and of other territorial and private entities whose existence and activity are documented. They have responded to the ISTAT-MIBACT survey, but are currently not open to visitors. It is, therefore, an indicator of unused potential (MIBACT, 2012);
- % of the surface protected areas: these are natural areas characterised by heterogeneous landscapes and inhabited by different species of animals and plants. The list includes all officially recognised marine and land protected areas. The indicator allows to assess how much of the surface of the inner areas is destined to a protected area (MATTM, 2010);
- Incidence of companies with PDO¹⁶ and/or PGI¹⁷ productions on the total number of companies in each area: this percentage is an indication of the degree of activation of local food production enhancement processes (INEA, 2010).

These indicators are showed in Table 2.

¹⁴ Ministry of the Environment.

¹⁵ Italian Institute for the Agricultural Economy (now abolished).

¹⁶ Protected Designation of Origin.

¹⁷ Protected Geographical Indication.

Table2: Indicators related to cultural heritage, protected areas and companies with PDO and/or PGI productions used by the Strategy for the selection of the areas

Inner Areas	N° of state/non-state cultural sites ¹⁸	N° of non-usable state/non-state cultural sites ¹⁹	% surface protected areas ²⁰	Incidence of companies with PDO and/or PGI productions ²¹ (%)
Basso Sangro-Trigno	3	5	21.7	1.3
Montagna Materana	2	1	18.8	0.2
Alta Irpinia	14	1	19.3	4.5
Appennino Emiliano	4	2	16.2	30.8
Alta Carnia	10	6	7.7	3.1
Antola Tigullio	3	1	8.7	8.5
Valchiavenna	7	0	0.8	7.9
Alta Valtellina	4	0	64.9	10.5
Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano	18	6	3.0	7
Matese	4	2	2.8	1.8
Valli Maira e Grana	8	3	0.1	3.9
Monti Dauni	9	10	3.6	1
Alta Marmilla	4	2	n.a.	19
Madonie	7	1	24.3	0.6
Casentino-Valtiberina	9	3	14.4	12.2
Sud-Ovest Orvietano	28	7	8.5	20.9
Bassa Valle	19	5	7.7	38.6
Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni	6	3	n.a.	24.6
Tesino	1	0	0.1	0

Source: National Strategy for Inner Areas

According to these indicators, it is possible to differentiate between typologies of tourism, apart from the religious and the sport ones since there are no usable indicators or proxies in the SNAI database. Consequently, the information contained in the above table will be combined with the ones provided in the strategic plans. Results are indicated at the end of the present section.

Carrying on with the analysis, this is the place to provide the different numbers in terms of tourist flows and the specific intents in terms of tourism development that every area has

¹⁸ Elaboration by MIBACT (2012).

¹⁹ Elaboration by MIBACT (2012).

²⁰ Elaboration by MATTM (2010).

²¹ Elaboration by INEA (2010).

decided to follow in the future thanks to the SNAI. The second dimension of this study, therefore, is described through two indicators generated by MIBACT and used by SNAI for the selection of the areas:

- Number of visitors: it is the number of visitors of the state cultural sites (see above) and represents the attraction capacity of them;
- Number of visitors per 1,000 inhabitants: it is the ratio between the total number of visitors and the total population of the area per 1,000 and it measures the impact on the population of the cultural sites' tourist attraction capacity (MIBACT, 2012).

These indicators are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Indicators related to tourist flows used by the Strategy for the selection of the areas

Inner areas	N° of visitors ²²	N° of visitors per 1,000 inhabitants ²³
Basso Sangro-Trigno	8495	396
Montagna Materana	2500	206.1
Alta Irpinia	50632	786.4
Appennino Emiliano	4700	138.6
Alta Carnia	28161	1388.3
Antola Tigullio	15050	808.1
Valchiavenna	32013	1300.8
Alta Valtellina	6805	366.8
Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano	47172	1138.5
Matese	22652	1101.1
Valli Maira e Grana	36341	1251.7
Monti Dauni	29322	483.1
Alta Marmilla	9500	900.2
Madonie	11069	166.7
Casentino-Valtiberina	68573	3139.6
Sud-Ovest Orvietano	321185	5136
Bassa Valle	537895	2952.6
Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni	59268	2789.5
Tesino	2700	1140.2
Italia	103888764	1748

Source: National Strategy for Inner Areas

²² Elaboration by MIBACT (2012)

²³ Elaboration by MIBACT (2012)

To complete the analysis of the three dimensions, it is time to investigate the life cycle stages of the tourist destinations and the level of integration of tourism within the SNAI through one indicator, that is:

- accommodation capacity/beds per 1,000 inhabitants: it is given by the relation between the accommodation offer (expressed in beds) and the resident population per 1,000 and it indicates the intensity of the accommodation offer. The higher the rate the greater the opportunities of relations between the resident population and the temporarily present tourist population and the greater the dependence of the resident population on the economy induced by tourism. Low values of the rate, instead, can reveal both a limited attractiveness of the area and an insufficient capacity of exploiting the existing attractiveness (MIBACT, 2012). Table 4 shows this indicator.

Table 4: Indicators related to accommodation capacity per 1,000 inhabitants used by the Strategy for the selection of the areas

Inner areas	Accommodation capacity per 1,000 inhabitants ²⁴
Basso Sangro-Trigno	70.2
Montagna Materana	13
Alta Irpinia	30.2
Appennino Emiliano	160
Alta Carnia	442.5
Antola Tigullio	100.8
Valchiavenna	154.4
Alta Valtellina	536.4
Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano	107.5
Matese	52.9
Valli Maira e Grana	85.2
Monti Dauni	16.7
Alta Marmilla	31.6
Madonie	61.5
Casentino-Valtiberina	138.4
Sud-Ovest Orvietano	120.8
Bassa Valle	469.3
Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni	748.2
Tesino	888.5
Italia	79.8

Source: National Strategy for Inner Areas

²⁴ Elaboration by MIBACT (2013)

First, the areas will be categorised considering the goals stated in the plan documents. Hence, it is possible to outline the following combinations:

Category 1: some alpine areas (Bassa Valle, Alta Valtellina, Valchiavenna, Spettabile Reggenza dei Sette Comuni, Tesino and Alta Carnia) have a good allocation of accommodations. They usually are well known tourist destinations in their maturity phase thanks to the winter sports, such as skiing, which attract lots of tourists. Tourism, therefore, plays a dominant role, being the driving sector of the local economy, leading to a successful development and economic growth of the areas. Nonetheless, the SNAI aims to diversify the tourism offer and regenerate the sector. One of the possible options is the outdoor tourism covering all seasons through hiking, trekking, natural paths and trails. These activities, according to their level of difficulty due to the different range of altitudes, are meant for families, amateurs and experts (Alta Valtellina). Another option is the natural kind of tourism, in particular based on sports activities for families and children, thanks to the protected areas of untouched beauty and extraordinary biodiversity of habitats and species. These natural environments can, for instance, be exploited through pathways twisting around alpine pastures and mountain shelters (Valchiavenna).

Category 2: Other areas – Sud-Ovest Orvietano, Casentino-Valtiberina, Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano – have less accommodations (compared to the previous category), but their number is still good. Tourism is meant to play a dominant role here as well. These territories focus more on cultural and religious attractors with a robust tourism flow seeking spirituality, authenticity and history. In Sud-Ovest Orvietano, for example, although the area has a robust tourists flow, it is meant to be only a quick getaway kind of tourism, a crossing point between the two main attractions – Rome and Florence – while the Strategy wants to pursue a longer-term tourism. It is easy to recognise in this territory the main three identifying strong points of ‘destination Umbria²⁵’ which are: history, culture and events; environment and landscape; spirituality and authenticity. It is precisely around these main attractive elements that the tourist offer has to focus in the future.

Category 3: Appennino Emiliano and Alta Irpinia are trying to strengthen the tourism development, which is still in its initial phase, exploiting linked sectors such as the agri-food traditions. This means that tourism plays a surrogate role. In Appennino Emiliano, for example,

²⁵ It is a regional brand.

the SNAI aims to promote and implement an organised and recognisable circuit of rural niche tourism based on quality food products, with particular emphasis on the local production of *Parmigiano-Reggiano*.

Moving on less tourist developed areas, the combinations identified are:

Category 4: Valli Maira e Grana and Antola-Tigullio where tourism plays a marginal role with modest numbers in accommodations. They are, however, more inclined to develop sports tourism, exploiting the high potential of natural heritage through outdoor activities. Antola-Tigullio, for example, aims at specialising the tourism supply, in a niche tourism-oriented way, making the territory recognisable through its characteristics – an Apennines context, few kilometres distant from the city and the sea – that can show itineraries able to connect mountains and sea through daily excursions.

Category 5: Similarly, Basso Sangro-Trigno, Monti Dauni and Madonie, even if tourism plays a marginal role, want to create a strategy based on natural tourism and food and wine attractors, able to develop a niche tourism model.

Category 6: From a cultural point of view but same marginal role for tourism, Matese, Alta Marmilla and Montagna Materana can count on their historical heritage in the form of archaeological sites in order to develop niche cultural circuits and pathways intended as journeys in history. In Matese, for example, an interesting point of attraction of exceptional importance can be the archaeological site of *Altilia* with its 3,000 years of history and the overlapping of different historical periods such as Roman-Samnite, Langobard and Mediaeval.

As a result of this overview, it is clear that each approach is different from one another, showing distinct priorities and real territorial vocations-oriented decisions, even if the strategies could have seemed to be similar at a general look. Apart from the different typologies of tourism these territories are going to rely on, which is just one example of their extraordinary variety and complexity, the analysis highlighted the dissimilarities in terms of their life cycle stage.

Regarding the numerous decisions of heading towards a niche tourism, it just confirms that phenomenon of the ‘transition of tourism’ examined in section 1, which perfectly applies to Italian Inner Areas considering their remarkable natural, historical and artistic-cultural beauties, their remoteness, their authenticity and their values. Even the well-known destinations (mostly meant for winter vacation), with a long history of mass flows, are trying to diversify their tourist offer, heading towards more niche-oriented markets, exploiting off-season tourism.

As Lucatelli (2013) pointed out, this focus on Inner Areas could help them earning a new strategic position for the national economy, without any distinction between Northern and Southern Italy.

The next section will provide a cluster analysis to see if the categorisation based on plan documents will be confirmed or not by the clusters obtained.

4- Cluster analysis

Table 5 provides a description of the sample.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the sample

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
innerareas	19	10	5.627314	1	19
surfacepro~s	17	13.09412	15.51481	.1	64.9
incidenceo~r	19	10.33684	11.31755	0	38.6
nofstateno~s	19	8.421053	6.930735	1	28
nofnonusab~a	19	3.052632	2.758294	0	10
nofvisitors	19	68107	133846.2	2500	537895
nofvisito~ts	19	1346.858	1290.115	138.6	5136
accommodat~a	19	222.5316	262.2714	13	888.5

Source: own elaboration on SNAI data

The methodology that will be used is a cluster analysis. According to Kaufman and Rousseeuw (1990)

*“Cluster analysis
is the art of finding groups in data”.*

The aim is to classify the sample of inner areas according to the dimensions outlined in the previous section – typology of tourism, tourism model and life cycle stages of the tourist destinations – in order to have groups of areas with homogeneous characteristics.

More specifically, as in Brandano, Osti and Pulina (2018), the clustering technique employed is the k-means non-hierarchical analysis since this method assigns objects to a defined number of classes²⁶ (k), maximising the separation between clusters while minimising intra-clusters distances relative to the cluster’s mean or centroid.

²⁶ The terms ‘cluster’ and ‘class’ are used interchangeably.

K-means cluster analysis also allows to define the number of classes. Hence, following the previous section, the number of clusters will be 6. In fact, this number, according to the plan documents of each area, seems to provide the maximum homogeneity within each cluster and the maximum heterogeneity among clusters.

The first step of the investigation is a hierarchical cluster analysis by means of Ward's linkage method and the Squared Euclidean Distance measure. Then, the k-means algorithm must be performed. This non-hierarchic method involves a prior decision on the number of groups to be formed, which is 6.

Results are listed below:

Cluster 1: Sud-Ovest Orvietano, Bassa Valle;

Cluster 2: Montagna Materana, Tesino;

Cluster 3: Basso Sangro-Trigno, Appennino Emiliano, Alta Valtellina;

Cluster 4: Alta Carnia, Valchiavenna, Matese, Valli Maira e Grana, Monti Dauni;

Cluster 5: Alta Irpinia, Appennino Basso Pesarese e Anconetano, Casentino-Valtiberina;

Cluster 6: Antola Tigullio, Madonie.

4 - Conclusions

In the wider concept of peripheral areas and inner peripheries, Italian Inner Areas as defined by the SNAI are playing a leading role in addressing this issue. The research line pursued in this article was the tourism development strategy. The reason is that, despite the rich endowment of the territories in terms of cultural and natural assets, tourism is an underdeveloped sector.

From a national perspective, given the territorial extension of Inner Areas, it is undeniable how these territories are relevant for the economic development of Italy. This is why leaving this heterogeneous capital unused and in state of abandon is a missed opportunity. Hence, the launch of the SNAI is pertinent to unlock this potential (UVAL, 2014).

The taxonomy of Italian Inner Areas presented in this paper was based on a comparative analysis of the strategic plans approved by the areas combined with data available on the SNAI website (section 3) and on a cluster analysis provided in section 4. This process was necessary for different reasons. First of all, to have a complete picture of the three dimensions illustrated in section 2:

- the tourism typologies appropriately chosen on the basis of the distinctive characteristics and attractiveness of each individual territory (connected, for example, to landscapes, culture, art, agricultural or artisan production);
- the tourism model that best suits each area (according to visitors' numbers);
- the life cycle stages positioning of the destinations (based on the accommodation capacity).

Secondly, to evaluate the current tourism level of the areas and their potential tourist offer. Finally, following the strategic plan documents, to suggest a convenient development direction for tourism, in accordance with the typical tourist vocations emerging.

Through the three fore mentioned dimensions, strong and weak points have been highlighted, together with the positioning of each area in terms of tourism process development. Consequently, each territory has to keep in mind its strengths and weaknesses to overcome its own flaws and enhance the local advantages.

As observed in the case studies presented, the factor that differentiates Inner Areas from other typical tourist destinations is their rural condition which allows experiential tours (Sharpley, Jepson, 2011) and other highly specific activities. It is exactly what niche tourism is meant to offer: diversity and more sophisticated and meaningful set of practices and experiences that meet tourists' new needs and expectations (Robinson, Novelli, 2005). In regards to this, in section 1 it was explained one point that stands out from this work: the transition from

traditional and mass tourism to niche tourism, seen as way of diversification of the tourism market.

Given the peculiar characterisation of the Italian territory, rich of natural and cultural resources, it is not by chance that almost all the analysed Inner Areas have decided to concentrate on tourism as main activator/accelerator of local development (Andreoli, Silvestri, 2017), trying to reverse years of failures and strengthen the quality of life of the people living there (Uval, 2014). However, as suggested by Barca (2016) during a Keynote speech at First Seminar on Tourism in Inner Areas²⁷, and as exemplified in the categorisation proposed, tourism alone is not a sufficient condition.

In fact, according to the tourism-led growth theory, as illustrated in section 1, tourism can actually play a promising role as pull factor for underdeveloped areas and, therefore, as major factor of overall long run economic growth (due to spillovers and positive externalities) (Payne, Mervar, 2010). However, it has to be accompanied by the production of other goods and be linked to the agricultural or the cultural supply chain, integrating tourism with other sectors able to act as complement or multiplier of its development impact (Barca, 2016; MIBACT, 2016). As MIBACT (2016) cautiously stated:

“tourism is not the universal solution to the problems arising from a lack of development. It would be wrong to see in that sector the only alternative to a situation of economic difficulties” (ibidem, p. 4).

Discussing tourism development strategies, as in the intention of this article, can disclose new research opportunities and wider causes for reflection in the regional academic debate regarding the study and the interpretation of the existing and potential tourist demand, which can help inner areas in the process of differentiate their offer according to trends, needs and origins of the tourists.

²⁷ L'Aquila, May 31 and June 1, 2016.

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