

XXXVII CONFERENZA ITALIANA DI SCIENZE REGIONALI

INTERNAL AREAS IN ITALY: THE ISSUE OF SUSTAINABLE LOCAL PLANNING. THE CASE OF VAL CAMONICA

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SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of internal areas at different scales and what factors can be drivers of a sustainable long-term growth for them.

Starting with the origin and evolution of the term we defined the state of art of internal areas in term of accessibility, attractiveness and economic perspectives. In line with our experiences we decide to focus our work on internal areas in mountains and on the specific context of Alps.

Based on the experience of "Piano di Sviluppo Sostenibile e di Marketing Territoriale per il territorio della Val Camonica" we present some empirical evidences.

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1. Introduction

In the last ten years the issue of internal area has obtained a central position in the European debate in term of opportunities that are enclosed in the large amount of space that they cover. It's interesting to highlight that just in Italy internal areas cover almost 60% of the national territory (IFEL, 2015).

In this context Italy has a special role because of its leadership in the debate proposal with the document "An agenda for a reformed cohesion policy" (Barca, 2012). According with the European purposes of cohesion (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012), internal areas should be read as a big challenge for the right "functioning of the European Union" and also as a big opportunity for a virtuous growth of Italy.

After Barca's report (2012) all the governmental institutions, from national to local level, have understood the importance of a shared strategy for the strengthening of internal areas.

Internal areas enclose big potentialities for the economy development of a region. One opportunity of development is closed in the possibility to make internal areas more attractive in term of tourism at national and at international scale (Baum, 2011; Garrod, Wornell, Youell 2006)

The issue of development and sustainable local planning so are strictly connected to the concept of tourism if we consider the idea of a tourism based on endogenous resources (E. Simkova, 2007). Rural tourism, involving in the territory a multitude of variables (Lane, 1994), is able to activate virtuous territorial mechanisms of economical growth (McGranahan, 2005) and it can also be a determinant of a new quality of life (Simkova, 2007; Kachniewska, 2015). Place-based tourism and agro-tourism are also confirmed as a good opportunity of growth in Italy and in Europe specially for marginalized areas that are still characterized by a high authenticity (Prideaux, 2002; Ferrari, Adamo 2005).

The aim of our work is to design a sustainable method to exploit local resources in order to improve internal areas attractiveness. New perspectives of sustainable long-term development, reduction of abandonment and an increase of tourism flows were the main objectives of this work.

In particular our work tries to read the intrinsic characteristics of an Italian example of internal area in Alps as drivers to pull it out of its marginalization.

Aware about the negative impact that a non strategic approach can bring in a region, in term of environmental impacts (Holden, 2008) and heritage contamination, we decided to involve the community to define a sharing design of tourism for their territory (Jamal, Getz, 1995). Defining characteristics and strengths of the territory in a shared vision we design the path for a strategic management of tourism. The development plan of tourism economy for Val Camonica has considered as key point the equilibrium between residents, stakeholders, tourists and environment (Murphy, Murphy, 2004).

With this premises is important to highlight that a plan that involve organizations linked to the concept of territorial identity (Paasi, 1986; Dematteis, 1994), and not just through an administrative division, is a strong transversal tool for cohesion (Baum, 2011).

2. Literature and institutional framework

"Internal areas" is a geographic concept related with the idea of marginalization.

Distance from coastal areas, metropolitan context and from an active market in other words means low level of hierarchy (Cristaller, 1933).

The origin of the term "internal areas" could be identified in the agronomic studies. Rossi Doria (1958) gave the first definition of internality joining the issue of distance from an urban pole or a metropolitan area and a low level of agricultural production. This first definition include the qualitative characteristic of a geographical disadvantage and a quantitative aspect related with poor economic activity. Under this point of view has to be considered internal areas all the areas that have an extensive or promiscuous agriculture or with a considerable level of isolation. Under this lens is possible to define "intern" both rural and mountain areas. Starting from south Italian economic problems he highlighted that the weight of internal areas was underestimated and that was necessary a specific policy for the development of those areas.

Fifty years later the issue of internal areas and the related problems of territorial inequity were put under the spotlight by the Italian Territorial Cohesion Minister Fabrizio Barca with the report "An agenda for reformed cohesion policy". The unsolved problem of territorial inequity and fragmentation, both at National and at European level, was the main stimulus to define the issue of internal areas as main challenge of the cohesion policy (Treaty of Lisbon, 2009; Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012).

Analysing the concept of cohesion and its application in Europe, Barca explains the opportunity to provide to a real cohesion starting from the sew up of the territory with its internal areas. Internal disparity is the main reason of social and administrative fragmentation so a solution is enclose in a policy of development and promotion of these areas. Barca proposes a development approach based on a place-based approach. Starting with the definition of spatial units that have common characteristics the place-based approach aims to define a shared strategy of development. In line with this theory Barca promotes an endogenous development of long period that put the bases on local services and territorial resources. A fundamental element to achieve this purpose is the definition of a multilevel governance that has the ability to involve local community and its knowledge as key players.

The problem marginalization related with internality is widely treated especially in term of disparities and differences in comparison with urban poles.

The problem is analyzed in two main ways: the necessity to make more accessible internal areas, in term of mobility and communication, and the possibility to make in more attractive in term of investments and tourism.

The issue of accessibility is central in the debate on internal areas, both in mountain and rural areas, cause it seems to be the main reason of emigration flows and the general state of abandonment (Glaeser, 2009). Presence and efficiency of transportation and accessibility of natural resources are the factors, between others, that can attract industries (Porter, 1994) and people.

The possibility to reach an urban settlement or to improve its accessibility is considered one of the main goals to increase economic vitality and to break territorial inequity (Kreutzmann H., 2000). At the same time a better accessibility is necessary to ensure a fair use of services (Mcgranahan D.; Wojan T.; 2007).

So while the difficulties to be attractive related with the problem of distance are a clear disadvantage is possible to identify an alternative perspective. How this disadvantage can be read as a key factor for a talented endogenous growth? (Romer, 1994, Florida 2002)

This question find an answer in the possibility to develop a new opportunity of rise through touristic exploitation of natural amenities. (McGranahan D. 1999, Deller at al. 2004).

Exclusive natural landscapes, a strong territorial identity, specific knowledge and an interesting cultural heritage so can be the drivers of new internal development (Battaglia M., Frey M., 2014).

According to Simkova (2007) to increase quality of life and, at the same time, to ensure a sustainable long-term growth in rural areas is necessary start a new development based on tourism. Individual specificities are the main drivers of a sustainable tourism and can strongly influence regional development.

In this context the creation of a rural heritage and the promotion of a brand should play a key role in the rise of rural and mountain areas (Prideaux, 2002; Battaglia M., Frey M., 2014).

Tourism based on cultural and environmental resources can also be a vehicle for local community development in term of economical growth, creating new jobs position, and social impact, increasing the network (P.Sharma, 2000).

With these premises is interesting to focus the attention on a specific case of internal areas in mountain such as Alps because of their unique environmental characteristics.

The centrality of the theme emerged in 1991 when Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Principality of Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland signed with European Community an Alpine Convention to ensure shared objectives about culture, development, planning, protection and preservation. The document express the will to have a coordinate and sustainable growth and to ensure a specific care on social issue such as: local identity, knowledge heritage and mutual collaboration between different alpine communities.

The Convention also puts at stake tourism as an opportunity for a territorial development based on endogenous resources, provided that there will not be ecological or cultural upheavals ports.

The Convention paying attention to the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage is able to cover almost all the critical aspect of mountain and internal areas. The key concept that emerge from this collaboration at sovra-national scale is the necessity of a shared sustainable plan both for territory and landscape.

Another step to understand the centrality of the theme came out again from the sovra-national regulation. The European Parliament and Council in 2013 with the Regulation no. 1305 art.32 confirmed the necessity of a special attention for upland areas. To stop the outflows and ensure a support to disadvantaged areas the

Regulation define eligible for payments mountain areas. This measure has the scope to balance the natural, and consequently economic, inequity of these areas.

In this specific sensitive context Dematteis (2010) confirmed the necessity of a specific policy to for internal areas in mountain for the European and Italian cohesion policy. The key to create cohesion is to reduce the disparity between internal areas and the rest of the territory. Such disparity can be compensated with two main solutions: improve the accessibility and to cover all the Alps region with the network connection. These two solutions are read as driver to put internal areas out from their physical and social marginalization. According to Gioia (2010)³ the capacity to be developed is also connected to the higher or lower presence of infrastructures that give the possibility to go achieve it. The special shape of Alps is in one hand the its main strenght, in term of quality of landscape, but is also a strong edge at local scale and also at European level. With these premises is clear that Alps and its internal areas needs to find their own way of development just through a sustainable plan of development and through a targeted policy with specific founds.

3. Case Study - Method

In this context our project have had the aim to design a sustainable method to exploit local resources in order to increase the attractiveness of the specific case of Val Camonica in the central Alpin Arc. New perspectives of sustainable long-term development, reduction of abandonment and an increase of tourism flows were the main objectives of the Piano di Sviluppo Sostenibile e di Marketing Territoriale della Val Camonica.

The study was developed between 2014 and 2015 by Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna under the input of the sovra-municipal organization: Comunità Montana della Val Camonica that include 41 municipalities along Oglio River valley.

The project was structured in four phases. The first phase posed the basis of all the work defining the framework. The second phase consist in the elaboration of the plan. The third phase was focused on the monitoring of the plan actions. Finally the School drew up a final report to explain objectives and outputs.

The study have adopted a mix of quantitative and qualitative method. The first one based on the objective and technical study of the territory. Instead the qualitative method was based mainly on opinions emerged from the collaboration of stakeholders in focus groups. Cultural, environmental, economic and statistical perspective were analyzed to define a clear framework of Val Camonica.

The first phase was characterized by a study aimed to the definition of natural, social and economical aspects of Val Camonica.

The combination between the objective state of art of Val Camonica and the perception of the needs perception of stakeholders defined the perimeter of our work and defined the first draft of the Marketing Plan.

³https://books.google.it/books?hl=en&lr=&id=3WRW_vCErDIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA15&dq=Dematteis,+aree+interne,+alp&ots=LQlfGe3z7q&sig=bkk46g0XxwCXUKO_Hybw3F_4mhk#v=onepage&q&f=false

The valley could be divided in three main areas: High, Middle and Lower valley. Each section is characterized by different morphological, ecological and economical aspects.

High: characterized by mountains and woods. It have experienced a phenomenon of depopulation

Middle: characterized by industrial presence and agricultural activities.

Lower: characterized by plains. The economy is influenced by the presence of Lake Iseo

All the territory of Val Camonica is characterized by the presence of 41 municipalities on an area of almost 1320 kmq that means a high level of administrative fragmentation. The valley cover an area of 27% of the provincial territory and it host just the 7% of the provincial population.

According to di Gioia (2012) Val Camonica is one of the most marginalized area of the Alpine Arc. Analyzing 26 indicators and adding the distance factor from urban poles di Gioia find an high presence of **full** and relative marginalization in all the Alps Arc and specially in Val Camonica region.

These specificities and the high level of administrative fragmentation, that can also be found at national scale, in an area with this dimension is probably the reason of the high complexity of territorial management.

The quantitative phase was built through a detailed territorial study based on economical, demographical and statistical data. This process have led to the development of a SWOT analysis.

The main result of the study was the detection of a large amount of natural resources. Forestry, water and a strong agricultural system find a sustainable exploitation in local activities such as wood-chain, production of hydroelectric energy and agro-food system. Val Camonica has an high level of agro-food production that represent 16,5% of the regional production. The valley also has 27, of 252 national, products with protected designation of origin.

Not less is the value of cultural and historical heritage in Val Camonica. Ancient villages and the archaeological UNESCO site play a special role in tourism attractiveness in Val Camonica. The site "Rock Drawings" consist in 180 sites (just 8 are open to visitors) spread over 24 municipalities with a presence of almost 50.000 person-year.

In the other hand many weaknesses are linked with fragmentation that is present at different levels and different sectors, and in general with the absence of a net that can define a strategic structure of the region.

The low level of integration between different sectors and inside them is clear with a general disorganization.

The first material problem is the large presence of abandoned plants in the Middle Valley. The last economic crisis has left marks on the territory leaving structures of the 50' and 60' industrialization. These structures in concrete represent a large amount of unused mc. The same problem is also evident in term of land abandonment. Large amount of land is completely abandoned cause of the high level of owner fragmentation. That means not just a low use of the land, but also a degradation of the landscape pattern .

The large presence of forestry and of wood chain clash with the low level of technologization of production processes and the low level of continuity during different seasons.

Forests appear also underused in term of carbon storage. The forests ability to absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide can be exploit as carbon storage. According to the European Union Emission Trade Scheme is possible to exploit carbon credits and sell allowance to the carbon market.

The biggest weakness is visible in the tourism sector. Tourism services in general are weak and activities are addressed to niche tourism. This phenomenon is clear looking at the average age of tourist that is around 43 and 51 years.

Finally is important to highlight the poor integration between tourism services and other sectors. Agriculture, parks and museum systems appear completely unintegrated. The Rock Drawings site seems to be very spread and without convention between different poles. The promotion of museum system is weak and the absence of an integrated system put an additional factor of fragmentation that bring outside an unattractive and confused imagine of Val Camonica.

The second phase, based on a qualitative research, started with the definition of four meetings with stakeholders from different sectors. According to European Government Principles (White Paper on Governance, 2001) we have decided to use the participation tool to involve all the community, through their representatives, also as a first step to overcome the territorial segmentation. These consultative meeting had played the role of glue to reach internal cohesion.

Adopting group-based session we aspired to obtain a consultative design (Carmel at al. 1993). In particular the focus group method was used as tool to define all the specificities of the region and to understand all the needs through a bottom-up approach.

Four thematic meeting were organized:

- 1) agro-food sector
- 2) wood sector
- 3) cultural sector
- 4) RETE NATURA

This division was designed to ensure a transversal debate between same typology of stakeholder that operate in different areas of Val Camonica.

Stakeholders were involved mainly as sources of design information, they helped us to understand not only their point of view about needs, but also they introduced us to their cultural background. This approach helped us to understand all the variables that are involved with the territorial dynamics of evolution and growth.

Each group was introduced to the issue of the Marketing Plan and to the importance of their contribution and collaboration.

Stakeholders were stimulated in discussing together about main needs of their own topic. From stakeholders interviews have been defined all the needs and priorities for each specific sector. The results were used as guidelines for the design process of Piano di Sviluppo Sostenibile e di Marketing Territoriale della Val Camonica.

The biggest weakness is represented by the low level of interaction between associations and local organization. This result means that administrative fragmentation is also the reason of an unsuccessful desire of independence in the lower levels of local institution.

One key point emerged from all the stakeholder groups is the necessity to overcome the fragmentation to define common line of development and ensure a shared growth of Val Camonica. All the sectors highlighted that a coordination could be useful as support tool between sectors.

A coordinated production process at local level can be promoted better in the market and can be certified as product of quality.

Tourism seems to be the sector with the major number of weaknesses, but seems to be the most interesting sectors to potentiate. Parks as much as farmhouse or museums are independent one each other and are not able to offer a path to discover Val Camonica.

According also to the data emerged about average age of tourists what appear as a priority is the necessity to change the tourism target.

Other notable issues emerged are linked with the low accessibility both in term of mobility and communication and the necessity to increase the occupation.

In general the main critical issue is the necessity to overcome the fragmentation by defining a shared plan and promoting a single regional brand that enclose a bunch of products, activities and opportunities.

4.

The Piano di Sviluppo Sostenibile e di Marketing Territoriale della Val Camonica was designed to find a material solution to all the weaknesses by defining a strategy.

We have decided to put the attention to 4 main topics that could open the path of a new sustainable growth. Environment, culture, agro-food and forestry were identified as topics with main potentialities. Starting from these strategic topics were identified 19 goals to reach through 45 specific actions.

In general all the actions are targeted to achieve a sustainable growth and to create a strong net between sectors and to overcome the fragmentation at different levels.

The objective to overcome the fragmentation at administrative level is achievable through an administrative reorder by defining new proxies. To achieve in a efficient way the objective of a new unity is strategic the promotion of those sovra-municipal bodies and associations that already exist. At the same time is necessary to promote this new territorial configuration at community level.

As showed in focus-group meetings the necessity to promote local products will achieve through the increase of product process quality and through the consecutive certification of these processes. One opportunity to local producer is also the possibility to transform a monofunctional activity in a multifunctional. For this scope our plan suggest incentives for those producers that will include cultural, educational and recreational activities in combination with the main activity.

Aware that territorial promotion pass also through the landscape beauty the plan include the landscape appreciation through territorial marketing actions through the promotion of parks and protected areas.

Landscape will be improve through actions of regeneration such as the redesign of pattern and the recovery of abandoned fields. To achieve the territorial beauty goal so is also necessary a reduction of land crumbing through new local regulations.

All the information about tourism activities and attractions, parks and protected areas will be put on line in a information system or/and in an app that will help tourist in finding their own targeted activity and to better promote all the services.

About the environmental topic and with special attention on forestry weaknesses our plan suggest to improve carbon storage capacity by a recovery of those areas that are abandoned or underused.

To ensure a good wooden product is necessary to improve the link between all the ring chain and ensure that all the subjects will be involved in the process. Just through a strong relation between all the subject is possible to ensure a continuative work.

In this context tourism sector play a key role in create a net between activities, sectors and different levels of administration. The first objective is the promotion of the total Val Camonica system through a coherent and clear single brand that enclose several activities and opportunities. To reach this goal is necessary define a single management system that overcome administrative divisions.

(...)

5. Discussions and conclusions

The aim of this paper was to investigate the role of internal areas at different scales and what factors can be drivers of a sustainable long-term growth for them.

Starting with the origin and evolution of the term we defined the state of art of internal areas in term of accessibility, attractiveness and economic perspectives. In line with our experiences we decide to focus our work on internal areas in mountains and on the specific context of Alps.

The study of the framework have highlighted that Val Camonica is a rich in term of endogenous resources and in term of possibilities of development. All the plans for the territorial management of Val Camonica had still taken in consideration all the strength of the region, but without consider the opportunity to create an integrated system between different sectors and different level of administration.

The study had showed that next to strong potentialities of growth there is also an important problem of fragmentation, at administrative and social level. This fragmentation is clear expressed in a low level of integration and of collaboration between sectors.

Under this awareness our plan defined 45 actions to overcome all the divisioni and to create a real univoque imagine of Val Camonica brand.

In this context the key role is played by a stronger relation between rural resources, certified process of food production and tourism.

Abstract

Internal areas in Italy cover almost 60% of the national territory (IFEL, 2015) which represent 52% of the Italian municipalities. According with the European purposes of cohesion (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012), internal areas should be read as a big challenge for the right "functioning of the European Union" and also as a big opportunity for a virtuous growth of Italy.

After Barca's report (2012) all the governmental institution, from national to local level, have understood the importance of a shared strategy for the strengthening of internal areas. According with Barca, a long-term strategy for the development of depressed territory can take place only with a vertical action and with the involvement of different level of governance.

Starting from the concept of "internal areas" (Rossi-Doria, 1958) in the years and the evolution of policies about these sensitive areas, this paper wants to analyze their weight, in term of local development and sustainability, in Italy.

Our research is focused especially on mountain context, that represent 65% of internal areas (IFEL, 2015), because of the presence of demographic aging and of a continuous migration flows despite the wide availability of natural resources potentialities (De Matteis, 2013).

Based on the experience of "Piano di Sviluppo Sostenibile e di Marketing Territoriale per il territorio della Val Camonica" we present the steps that led to the drafting of a regional development plan for central Alpine areas.

Considering the importance of local knowledge and of the public acceptance we approach the territory with the involvement of stakeholders in focus group activities. Different governmental institutions debated face to face to define common aims and to find together a shared development path. Local heritage and natural resources, as the practice of forest-wood chain and agro-chain, were defined like groundwork for a place-based action. After the definition of strengths and weaknesses we define some strategic actions for the reactivation of the territorial metabolism.

In the last part we design generic guidelines for the analysis and the sustainable planning of internal areas. Defining such guidelines would benefit planners by enabling them to read weaknesses as opportunities for planning.

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