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TOURIST LOCAL SYSTEMS, GIS AND GEO-ITINERARIES: STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN MEDITERRANEAN PERIPHERAL AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Many destinations in the Mediterranean Region are still to be discovered, with landscapes that conserve traditional lifestyles, far from the urban ones. In the conviction that rural internal areas have all the potentialities to answer the current tourism demand, where the tourist forgets to be a visitor and takes part in the local community, this paper illustrates strategies that can enhance local sustainable development in Mediterranean marginal regions. This theme is presented by discussing general tendencies and principles and exploring them in the praxis, with application to a particular case-study. The area studied is Molise, a small region in central-southern Italy, that could consider the possibility to become a geotourism destination. This area, where geomorphological features and strong emigration flows hampered a modern economic development, is rich in natural and cultural resources and has preserved a good environmental quality. If in the past these features determined the marginality of the region, today's perspective is different and the redemption chance is offered by geo-itineraries. Nevertheless, the recognition of natural and cultural resources, that could satisfy the request for a tourist demand that becomes more and more sophisticated, is not enough. Geotourism destinations need to create and manage a territorial product that must be complete and flexible, that reflects the wishes and appeals of different tourists, while at the same time conserve the spirit of the place. The Tourist Local Systems are recognized by the Italian law and have been applied in some Italian regions, in order to promote a stronger integration in the tourist sector and to associate also subjects that work in other sectors in the same territory. The advantages offered by these systems are various and they are argued in the paper, in order to test their suitability also for peripheral areas. An efficient organization of the product is possible only with a systematic analysis of the market demand worldwide, of the tourist resources in the territory and of the local carrying capacity. Geographic Information Systems are a helpful tool in the tourist sector, permitting a global knowledge of the territory and, in a second time, its promotion. Considering the idea of a Tourist Local System for High Molise, a GIS application is shown in the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Many destinations in the Mediterranean Region are still to be discovered, with territories that conserve traditional lifestyles. Rural and internal areas have all the potentialities to answer the current tourism demand for authenticity, where the tourist forgets to be a visitor and takes part in the local community; these regions cannot attract large numbers of tourist flows, but tourism can become helpful to maintain local activities and to empower local development processes, if tourism activities are well integrated in the local economy (integration with agriculture and craftsmanship, for example). The paper illustrates strategies that can enhance local sustainable development and promote stronger integration in Mediterranean marginal regions. Particularly, the role of Tourist Local Systems (TLS) and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will be discussed.

These themes are presented by discussing general tendencies and principles and exploring them in the praxis, with application to a particular case study. The region studied is Molise, especially High Molise, a small area in central-southern Italy, that could consider the possibility to become a geotourism destination. Geotourism, according to the definition given by the Centre for Sustainable Destinations of the National Geographic Society, is intended as a kind of "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. The geotourism approach is all-inclusive, focusing not only on the environment, but also on the diversity of the cultural, historic, and scenic assets of the place; the geotourism approach encourages citizens and visitors to get involved rather than remain tourism spectators, and the geotourism approach helps build a sense of national identity and pride, stressing what is authentic and unique" [1].

The case-study area, where geomorphological features and strong emigration flows hampered a modern economic development, is rich in natural and cultural resources and has preserved a good environmental quality. If in the past these features determined the marginality of the region, today's perspective is different and people think more and more of tourism as a chance to stop emigration and invert the flows direction.

TOURIST LOCAL SYSTEMS: THE THEORY

The Tourist Local Systems are defined by the Italian law 135/2001 art. No. 5 as homogeneous or integrated tourist contexts including geographical areas, even if they belong to different administrative regions, characterized by the integrated offer of cultural, environmental and tourist attractions, including local agricultural products and handicrafts, or by the widespread presence of tourism businesses, single or in groups; in other words, a TLS is meant to be a flexible and open organization model of tourism products and services in the territory. They are, in fact, a model of integrated management of areas which are characterized by tourism services, conceptually referring to another well-known Italian development model based on territorial integration, the industrial district¹.

The definition of TLS is based on the study of Industrial Districts (ID) [2], with a particular reference to the NEC area in Italy². Literature on this theme evidenced that the development of an ID is the local result of the meeting of particular social and cultural features (values and institutions), historical and natural characteristics of a geographical area and specific technologies of the production process, but not only this; it is also the product of the dynamic interaction process between the division-integration of work in the district and the widening of the market. This concept was applied also to the tourism field in the framework of destination marketing where we talk about "territory-product" as the real tourist resource of a destination. In fact, taking into account that tourists look for new experience and emotions, the only answer can be given by the territory on the whole, that offers its cultural complexity. Focusing on the role of the territory in the development of tourism, the strategies and the aims must be determined considering the geo-territorial aspects that characterize the system [3].

The concept of TLS is explained in the law 135/2001 by referring to three elements that characterize such local systems: i) territory, that permits the application of a destination marketing logic; ii) local community, public and private subjects, that create a system and take all the decisions; iii) development project, with a focus on the TLS as a project and not as an institution. The same law mentions different purposes that a TLS must pursue but there is no reference to the promotion and business techniques, maybe in order to give more liberty to the companies that are interested in the development of the TLS [4] or to give to all the subjects of the system the opportunity to decide how to promote their product considering also that techniques evolve quickly and a unique model could be not suitable for all the TLS.

However, the introduction and regulation of TLS fall under the competences of the administrative regions in the more general framework of their legislation and program instruments, even more so after the entry into force of the Constitutional Law No. 3/2001, determining that there is no obligation for the Italian Regions to adopt the Tourist Local Systems as defined by the law 135/2001.

TLS can be therefore proper destination management tools for the reinforcement of the relationship between public and private subjects, to show the potentialities of the territory, to connect tourism subjects that work in the same territory and the existing resources, to associate also subjects working in other sectors. This kind of integration has been successfully experienced in some mature tourist regions in Italy, and the law 135/2001 tries to encourage and generalize these models.

¹ We must say that in Italy in the latest years several kinds of territorial integration initiatives have been experienced also based on cultural assets, some of them strongly pushed by the European funds and incentives, such as cultural districts or literary parks, but the results have often been questionable.

² Industrial districts of the "Third Italy" are located primarily in Northeast (Veneto, Friuli) and Central Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marches).

The question is whether they can be suitable tools also for peripheral areas which are still in the first phases of Butler's tourist destination life-cycle model [5]. We must consider that peripheral areas must strengthen and care for cohesion and responsibility to promote a bottom-up development process with the involvement of local actors, in order to valorize territorial identity, before being invested by superimposed forms of regionalization policies.

The ask for a "system" culture to be cultivated in the relationship between tourism and territory – that we can find in the spirit of the TLS recognized at the legislative level – is surely a positive aspect. This culture can be encouraged by regulatory instruments and mechanisms of financial incentive, but requires above all the willingness to develop cooperation, working from a perspective of common interest, and the ability of systemic comprehension of the territory.

THE PRAXIS: THE MOLISE CASE STUDY

Nearly five years after the entry into force of the law 135/2001, the Molise Region has decided to adopt a Resolution of the Regional Council, No. 652/2006, which regulates the guidelines for the recognition of TLS. The resolution defines them and the actors, maintains the character of territoriality given by the Italian law, states general requirements, indicates the duration of three years, states the obligations to the Region, incorporates an interregional character. The national law was not fully implemented by the Region, which decided to use a simple resolution to meet the approval of the TLS, a process which took place in other regions through a regional law and soon after the entry into force of the national law. The first systems planned in Molise were projected in 2004 (with the name "Molise") and 2005 ("Stella del Molise") but they didn't reach the operative phase, due to scarce consideration of territorial identity, feeble links with local actors especially in the private sector, poor strategic vision. In fact, after the presentation of all the documentation for their recognition, both of them did not carry on their project; at present nobody of them exist. Now the question of TLS is again on the political table of present local governments at the regional and provincial levels.

From the study of these first experiences we can say that building a valid TLS requires a careful analysis of the area to be considered and must meet certain empirical geographical criteria, such as: i) contiguous territorial area characterized by a similar culture and more or less homogeneous socioeconomic conditions (even if the presence of a stronger community can assume the role of engine of local development); ii) spatial extent large enough to constitute a system and a network of goods and services supply to tourists; iii) resources, real and potential, capable of assuming a value of critical mass for an important role in the attractiveness of the destination.

That's why the local governments, first of all at the regional level, are asked to perform a complex task, as subjects providing a mechanism for socializing development projects on a territorial basis, to facilitate the integration of tourism policy and more general policies of government of the territory, without imposing interventionist solutions, according to models that have already given poor results in the past. Simple aggregative solutions designed to gain more weight or simply to obtain financial resources – sometimes regardless of the same reasons under the functional mechanisms supporting these associations – should be refused.

To be put in the praxis, the theory and design of the Tourist Local Systems require: i) the in-depth knowledge of the area (accommodation, transport systems, cultural resources survey, tourism services and activities survey, quantity and quality of real tourist demand, image / perception of the visitors, etc.); ii) the study of the potential demand and the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, the definition of the objectives, the identification of strategies (specific actions to achieve the objectives of intervention); iii) an organizational setting and a management initiative (identifying the responsible authority of financial and material resources, as well as how to carry on public / private partnership, with a cost-benefit analysis of the project). The TLS project must also provide for the creation of an integrated information system, for reception and booking services but also to support the demand for territorial understanding coming from outside.

A path which can be the development of a multi-year strategic plan, real heart of the TLS project and instrument to be offered for the consideration and open competition of the various stakeholders.

GIS AND GEO-ITINERARIES: TOOLS FOR TERRITORIAL PROMOTION AND DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Technological innovation introduced by GIS, satellite imagery and GPS machines closely concerns the tourism sector, as regards the link between tourism resources and the attractiveness of places and the ability to put them on the tourist market [6]. Just think of how the very way in which the tourist receives information on the places visited is changing and the increasingly important role assumed by internet networks and multimedia information systems, which also allow direct promotion activities from anywhere in the Earth's surface enough that there is an Internet connection. This prompts an increasingly strategic role in the development of areas which have still remained at the edge of the tourist circuits and now must invest in overcoming the digital divide.

In the analysis phase of the territory to be promoted, as well as in the design of a TLS, it becomes necessary to have tools capable of storing all the information about the area and return them in synthetic forms, easily understandable and impactful. In this regard, we cannot operate without the support of a GIS, which presents itself, despite its complexity, particularly flexible for different needs.

The GIS offers the opportunity to collect all data related to the territorial system and organize them in a series of relational geodatabases, that is interrelated databases linked together by the common language of spatial reference. Then these data become the subject of analysis through various analytical tools integrated in the GIS, and results are returned in the form of thematic maps. We can answer questions regarding the different economic situation of the tourism sector in the area at present and in its temporal dynamics, the development possibilities offered by the area to allow a sustainable growth of the tourism sector and the structuring and localization of services in the area; it is useful to assess the accessibility of the destination from outside as well as inside, and in the planning stage, it allows the organization and design of tourist itineraries. The versatility of GIS and its capability to select from the territory specific issues answering particular targets permits to use them in the projection of geo-itineraries, resulting in printed maps or digital maps that could be downloaded on mobile instruments like i-pads, tablets or smartphones provided with GPS engines [7].

An itinerary is a central element in the development of a tourist product and its design is a complex operation that must take in consideration various factors and components, therefore it needs a systemic approach [8]. A "geoitinerary" is a tourist product in itself aimed at the exploration of a territory according to the geotourism approach. Particularly during the construction of a geo-itinerary, different elements – physical, cultural, social and economic elements concerning the territory and the local community – must be contemplated altogether and it is necessary to have the support of a geographic information system able to store, and combine in multiple factor analysis all the elements of the area.

The Tourism Research Centre at the University of Molise is supporting tourism development process in the Molise region and, within the ITINERA project, is elaborating GIS application for tourism, particularly intended to promote GIS-based itineraries to answer different tourist needs in terms of time spent in the visit, of transport used, of kinds of interest. We also work for developing multimedia products (hypertext, hypermaps, web-cd ...), coordination and management of geographical information network (through websites, portals, info-points ...), with the following objectives: i) construction of multimedia products for the promotion of the territory and its use; ii) definition of best practices for use in a synergic and operational way of tourism information systems existing and under development (GIS, databases, multimedia catalogues) at the regional scale; iii) search for shared values between insiders and outsiders; iv) looking for new ways of reading the environment and the territory, which include the objective

dimension of collective management and the subjective dimension of individual users / tourists / travellers.

APPLICATION TO HIGH MOLISE: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

We have been working with applications to Molise in order to accompany local actors in a process of recognition of the territorial resources, of analysis of strengths and weaknesses, of comprehension of the socioeconomic dynamics. In this paper we are discussing the results of an application to High Molise, a territory comprising the Upper Trigno Valley and thirteen municipalities in the province of Isernia: Agnone, Belmonte del Sannio, Capracotta, Carovilli, Castel del Giudice, Castelverrino, Pescolanciano, Pescopennataro Pietrabbondante Sannita Poggio San Pietro Avellana, Sant'Angelo del Pesco and Vastogirardi (fig. 1).

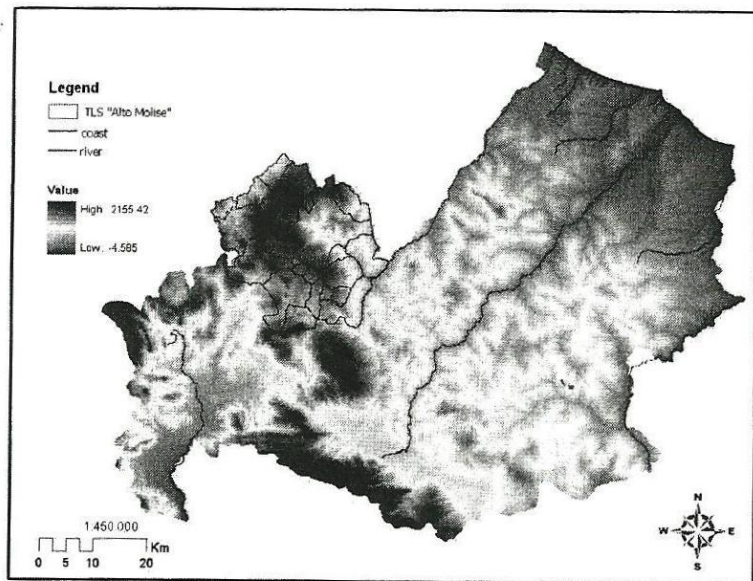


Fig. 1 – Molise physical map and the High Molise district

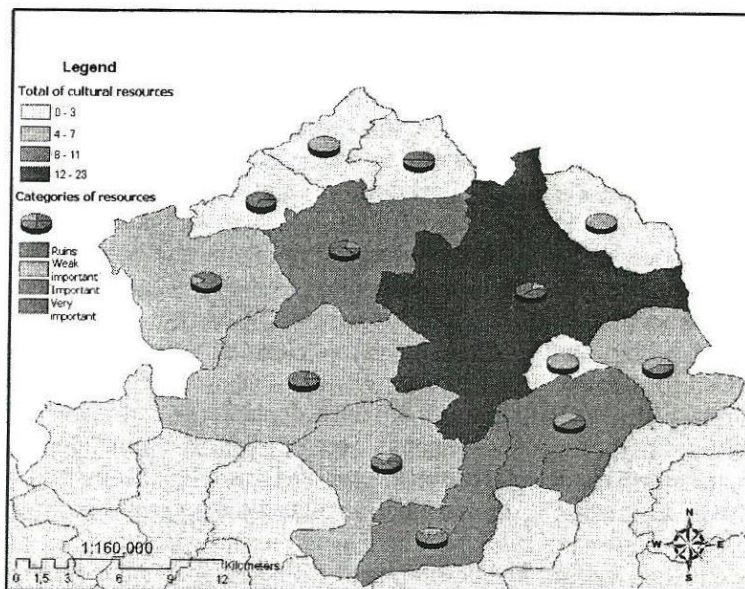


Fig. 2– Cultural resources

The presence of large green spaces and woodlands, the conservation of ancient agricultural roots and the still strong bond between man and his environment characterize this area. Tourism does not appear among the major sectors, despite the presence of important tourism attractors. Agnone and Capracotta are the main tourist centres. During the latest ten years there has been a marked trend of growth in tourist arrivals and nights above all for Capracotta, that is an important cross-country skiing destination in the Apennines. Basically we can say that a certain orientation to tourism activities is present in the area, though a major boost to real tourism launch is still missing. Even if small in size, this area is rich in resources that could give a great impulse to the development of the tourism sector: the variety of the landscapes and the cultural heritage could permit to satisfy the requirements of different targets, with which High Molise could affirm itself as a tourist destination.

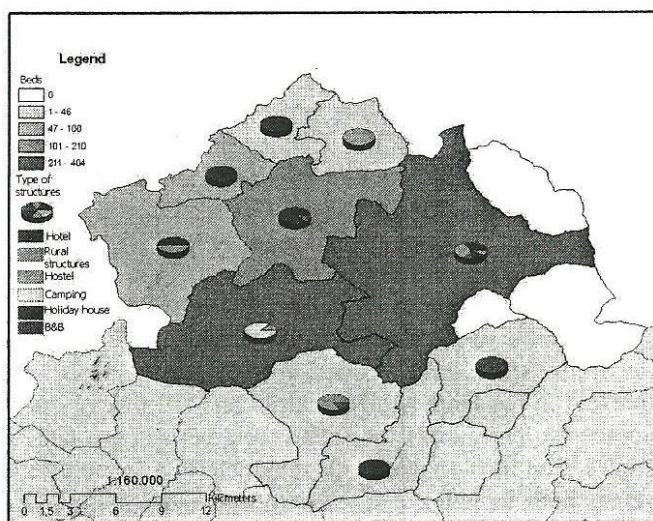


Fig. 3– Tourist accommodation equipment in the area

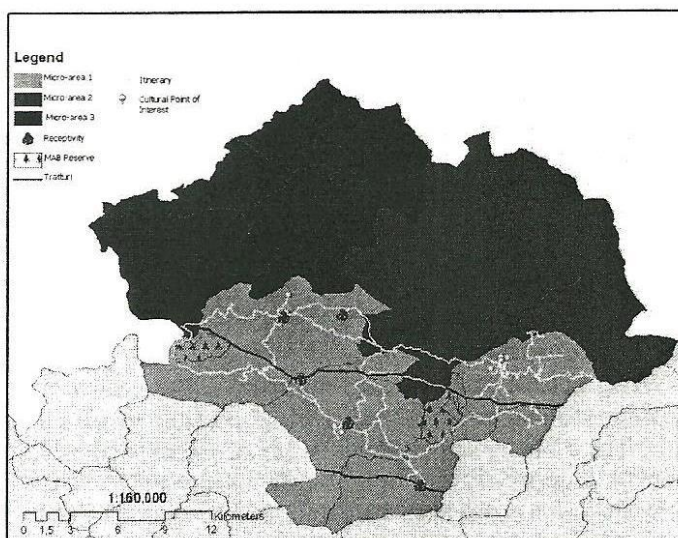


Fig. 4– Identification of sub-areas and an example of geotinerary

This territory includes some of the most interesting places of natural interest in central Italy: Vastogirardi and Pescocostanzo especially are distinguished for the presence of the UNESCO MAB Oriented Reserves of Collemeluccio and Montedimezzo and of two major transhumance

trails (the "tratturi" of Castel di Sangro-Lucera and Celano-Foggia) linking the Abruzzi mountains with the Puglia plains. For its natural resources we can say that the entire area can be considered as a perfect ecotourism destination, where the visitors can immerse in nature hiking or mountain-biking along forest trails and discover the secrets of plants and animals, extensively documented in the MAB Reserves.

But this area does not certainly lack historical and archaeological wealth. In fact, in Pietrabbondante we can find the main evidence of pre-Roman Samnite civilization with the Temple-Theatre complex outstanding in the whole archaeological area. Remains of the Samnite era are also present in Carovilli, with regard to the remains of defensive walls, cemeteries and archaeological finds of great interest, and Vastogirardi, where a small Italic temple and various archaeological finds can be visited. Pescolanciano, on the other hand, stands for medieval times historical and cultural heritage. Besides, the region offers entertainments that have as subject the various events typical of both religious and peasant traditions.

The GIS application regards two steps: i) analysis of the territory and its tourist resources; ii) construction of a pilot geo-itinerary. In the first phases, the study allowed the individuation of some sub-areas in which the territory could be divided in order to design different geo-itineraries. The division of the territory can be based on some criterions that contribute to better manage the areas, which must be homogenous for attractiveness and tourist carrying capacity. The criterions used in this case are: i) tourist resources distribution, differentiating them for type and importance; ii) tourist bed capacity and services for each municipality; iii) territorial proximity of the resources meant to be part of a sub-area; iv) individuation of a major attraction centre in each sub-area; v) similar extension of the territory of the sub-areas.

The first outputs of the elaboration have been a series of thematic maps that gave us a picture of the territorial situation. Considering the two major type of resources, natural and cultural, that are present in the High Molise district and attributing them a rank evaluation, we immediately could see the core areas for each resource category (fig. 2 refers to cultural resources, as an example). The next analysis was conducted on the tourist bed capacity of each municipality in the area, both in hotels and other accommodation types (fig. 3), and other tourist services. Considering the results of the different analysis and according to the above mentioned criterions, it was possible to design a regionalization based on three sub-areas.

The second step was the construction of the pilot geo-itinerary for one of the sub-areas (fig. 4); we chose the sub-area concerning the territories of the four municipalities situated in the southern part of the High Molise district: Vastogirardi, Carovilli, Pescolanciano and Pietrabbondantes. We have implemented the GIS with: i) features and geodatabases with points of interest (POI) concerning attractions and services (tab. 1,2,3,); ii) road network, with classified and qualitative attributes (e.g. scenic routes) also related to size and quality according to different tourist use (walking, bus, horse-riding etc.); iii) identification of places to stop at (road network nodes) that correspond to areas of primary services (food, toilet etc.) or attraction places to be visited or any other convenient place to park (even according to the time spent on travel); iv) network analysis, with the attribution to each POI of a distance value (spatial / temporal) from the nearest place of lodging or rest, so that for each POI is given a place of rest with the relative distance (spatial / temporal) and, conversely each stopover has a set of POI to be reached with relative distances. The creation of the itinerary must take in consideration an important variable, the tourist's accommodation; consequently it is not possible to set a unique starting point and get a unique route. The itinerary must show a series of possible paths among which the visitors can choose the most appropriated according to their needs. The result is a geoitinerary that could be adapted on the basis of the needs and interests of each tourist; in this way it will be possible to change the route in each moment. We can then create simulations with suggested routes based on specific targets and specific scheduled time visit.

The GIS allows to answer several kinds of spatial questions that may arise from tourists' demand (tab. 4). The final product is a hypermap that can be used and interrogated by the potential tourist on the web. In this way it is possible to visit the places also with a virtual tour,

with the possibility to decide how to plan a physical visit and spend holiday time in the High Molise district.

Tab. 1 Layer of the naturalistic resources

Municipality	Natural resources	Feature
Carovilli	Oasi Legambiente	Area
	Tratturo Castel di S.-Lucera	Line
Pescolanciano	Riserva MAB Collemeluccio	Polygon
	Tratturo Celano-Foggia	Line
	Tratturo Castel di S.-Lucera	Line
Pietrabbondante	Tratturo Celano-Foggia	Line
	Belvedere Morgia Castello	Point
	Percorso su roccia Morgia dei Marchesani	Line
	Pineta di Monte Caraceno	Area
Vastogirardi	Riserva MAB di Montedimezzo	Area
	Sorgenti del Trigno	Point
	Tratturo Celano-Foggia	Line
	Tratturo Castel di S.-Lucera	Line
	Faggio Re Fajone	Point
	Praterie Regionali della Signora di Montedimezzo	Area

Tab. 2 Layer of the cultural resources

Municipality	Cultural resources	Feature
Carovilli	Chiesa S. Maria Assunta	Point
	Torre dell'orologio	Point
	Fontana di Bacco	Point
	Fortificazione di Monte Ferrante	Point
	Chiesa San Domenico	Point
Pescolanciano	Castello d'Alessandro	Point
	Chiesa del S.mo Salvatore	Point
	Porta di Piazza della repubblica	Point
	Porta di Piazza Marconi	Point
	Torre S.Maria dei Vignali	Point
Pietrabbondante	Palazzo e Torre Marchesani	Point
	Chiesa S. Maria Assunta	Point
	Statua bronzea ai caduti di guerra	Point
	Area archeologica sannita	Point
Vastogirardi	Borgo fortificato(castello)	Point
	Palazzo Selvaggi	Point
	Palazzo Marracino	Point
	Chiesa di San Nicola	Point
	Chiesa S.Maria delle Grazie	Point

Tab. 3 Layer of the accommodation structures

Municipality	Accommodation structures	Type	Feature
Carovilli	La Grande Quercia	Agriturismo	Point
	La Dimora del Sergente	B&B	Point
	Locanda del Parco	Rural residence	Point
	Masseria Monte Pizzi	Rural residence	Point
Pescolanciano	Cona	Hotel	Point
Pietrabbondante	Pensione del Panorama	B&B	Point
Vastogirardi	Il Vecchio Granaio	Agriturismo	Point
	La Dimora del Duca	B&B	Point
	Rifugio del Brigante	B&B	Point
	Cerritelli	Camping	Point
	Le Serre	Agriturismo	Point

CONCLUSIONS

The diffusion of a new approach in tourism like geotourism could permit to come out from the economic marginality that afflicts peripheral areas offering new perspectives for the local communities. The possibility of a development that integrates tourism in the economic basis of these areas is certainly a way to be pursued, if the aim of the local community is to keep alive without a drastic transformation of the economic, social and territorial assets, as well as to base new development projects on the means and the resources available. In the case of High Molise, an unspoilt environment and a cultural bond to the popular traditions are the resources that must be used, while the means must be found in the local community, by building together a tourist

Tab. 4 Query simulations for personalized routes of the pilot geoininerary in the High Molise district

Questions	Possible technical solutions
Which accommodation facilities are within a distance of 200 m from Pietrabbondante archaeological area?	Buffer followed by point-in-polygon overlay, and finally a spatial query.
Which is the longest trail in the MAB Reserve Montedimezzo?	Measuring length or formulation of a query (in the case where the length of the trails have been added as an attribute).
What is the total forest cover within the High Molise district?	Measurement of the area or reclassification of forests and subsequent calculation of the area.
Which roads and trails run through wooded areas?	Line-in-polygon overlay.
How many B&B are there in High Molise district?	Formulating a query attribute, but not spatial.
Where are the hotels with fewer than 20 rooms?	Formulating a query attribute or spatial query followed by a formulation of a query that simultaneously consider two characteristics through the logical AND.

image on the regional identity values, and in the local enterprises of different sectors, that must collaborate so that each subject can give a significant contribution to stimulate the local economic growth. The advantages that could derive by the application of the two important tools discussed in the paper, TLS and GIS, are different but synergic. The consciousness of the territorial resources, the creation of a tourist product based on them and the collaboration between the different local subjects, public and private, could allow the High Molise district to organise a TLS with a stronger image in the market and a consolidation in future times as a competitive tourism destination. Technological tools like GIS have the advantage to be a versatile instrument that can be used in three important steps of the tourism development of a destination:

1. analysis: evidencing all the resources and the critical assets of the territory;
2. organisation and projection of the tourist product and the further construction of geoinitineraries in which to insert the information about the resources and the community;
3. promotion: the final product, the hypermap, could be used and interrogated by potential tourists on the TLS website – before, during and after the visit.

The increasing interest of tourists in new technologies supporting them in the choice and in the visit of the destination suggests that digital itineraries could represent an opportunity for many peripheral areas to promote their territory on their own, but it is also important not to neglect the contact between visitors and local communities in order to avoid the risk of a total digitalization. Tourist promotion and territorial enhancement actions must so combine two dimensions that are apparently distant, the technological dimension and the human dimension. This is the meaning of the principles of geotourism and the aim of geoinitineraries. To come to a conclusion, an efficient organisation of an integrated tourist area is possible only with a systematic analysis of the market demand, of the tourist resources in the territory and of the local tourist carrying capacity. Geographic Information Systems are a helpful tool (also) in the tourist sector, permitting in-depth knowledge of the territory and, in a second time, its promotion. We think that universities must work for the transfer of technological knowledge to territories, so we are working to give local actors the most innovative technological solutions, but we cannot forget that the core problem is what the local communities and their governments do with it. We must not forget the cultural awareness of local communities; we must not forget the cultural issues anyway because, as one of the fathers of behaviour analysis used to say, “the real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do” [9].

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