



Managing a tourism destination as a viable complex system. The case of Arbatax Park

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to propose a view of territory based on a systems perspective, in order to identify the levers on which to act to improve, particularly, a tourism destination value. The theoretical approach adopted herein is based on systems theory and, in particular, on the conceptualizations of the Viable Systems Approach (vSa). Starting from the definition of the elements that mostly effect the development of a specific territory, our contribution proposes an integrated approach to a tourism destination with the aim of enhancing the complex of resources that are included within a specific territory in order to increase its potential cultural value and viability. The focus is on the development of tourism in the Sardinia Region, where Arbatax Park represents a case study that offers interesting insights into the relevance of a shift in the territory perspective, specifically when the area is referred to as a tourism destination.

1. Introduction

The attention paid to the territory, in sociological, anthropological, geographical, urbanistic, economic studies is closely linked to the specificities that characterize it. The territory, in fact, is understood as a space for the living and viable evolution of society and, at the same time, for the production of social subjectivities that interact through conflict and through the generation of social interactions, that, from time to time, are incorporated and contribute to the circuit of development of the territory itself (Magnaghi, 2001, 2012; Castells, 1972; Bourdieu et al., 1993).

"Territory is the use that is made of it" (Soja, 1985; Prêteceille, 1974; Calabi and Indovina, 1973). In line with this paradigm, this work aims to overcome the vision of the territory as a purely physical-geographical concept, considering it, on the contrary, as a real social product (Lefebvre, 1974).

Therefore, the concepts of stillness and stagnancy are put aside: the territory becomes an eventual outcome of social interaction (Crosta, 2000), that defines a plurality of interconnections between different actors involved in the processes that create a "public space" (Simone et al., 2018; Faludi, 2012; Crosta, 2000).

Thus, the "public" nature is not related to the physical space, but it is the result of interactions of use: it refers to the social relations established between the users.

Furthermore, in the present case, a "public place" becomes a tourism destination as it offers the opportunity to exploit a variety of attractions and services to the subjects involved in the migration-territory relationship (Butler, 2015; Brouder et al., 2016; Enright and Newton, 2004; Pavlovich, 2003; Tamma, 2002; Piciocchi et al., 2013; Tarrius, 1993; Manente and Cerato, 2000).

Addressing a theme such as that of the tourism destination also allows us to pay specific attention to the so-called "circulation territories" (Tarrius, 1993).

Indeed, this work aims to extend the analysis also to the "territory users", individuals interacting in a situation of coexistence and in territories seen not as places of sedentary activities, but as a crossroads of mobility (Tarrius, 1993; Martinotti, 1993).

Accordingly, this imposes an effort towards the search for interpretive approaches consistent with this new dimension of the phenomenon (Barile, 2015; Barile and Saviano, 2015; Martini, 2015; Franch and Martini, 2013; Della Corte and Sciarelli, 2012; Macchiavelli, 2001; Piciocchi et al., 2012; Bassano et al., 2018).

Based on the above, the aim of the paper is to propose a view of territory based on a systems perspective, in order to identify the levers on which to act to improve, in this particular case, a tourism destination value.

The methodological lens adopted herein is the Viable Systems Approach (vSa) (Barile, 2008, 2009; Barile and Saviano, 2011; Barile

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et al., 2012, 2013; Golinelli, 2000, 2010).

Indeed, in the light of the theoretical corpus of the vSa (Golinelli, 2000; Barile and Golinelli, 2008; Barile, 2008, 2009; Barile and Di Nauta, 2011; Barile and Saviano, 2015; Barile et al., 2012), the territory, originally defined by the concepts of area, space and region, and described, on the basis of its physical configuration, as a set of “endowment resources” (Barile and Saviano, 2011), is now seen as a “reservoir of resources and entities in action for the emergence of a unitary system” (Barile et al., 2013).

Therefore, the geographical area to which we refer no longer has a purely structural connotation, but becomes the result of interactions (relationships activated between individuals, and between individual and environment) that dynamically evolve and develop recursively.

Thus, the natural, artistic and structural endowments, which are ‘objectively’ included in the definition of territory, are combined with the systemic components (individuals, organizations and institutions) which, with their visions and projections of subjective expectations, can pursue different goals, in order to survive in the reference context (Barile and Golinelli, 2008; Barile, 2009).

Starting from these considerations, the paper is organized as follows: after this Introduction, Section 2 illustrates the theoretical evolution of the territory as a complex system and the theoretical framework adopted herein describing the main conceptualizations of the Viable Systems Approach (vSa) and the vision that it offers of the “territory” notion, which are useful to the understanding of its complexity. Section 3 illustrates the history of the Sardinia Region with a focus on the Arbatax Park case study, which offers interesting insights into the relevance of a shift in perspective, specifically when the territory as a complex system is referred to as a tourism destination. Section 4 discusses how, from a vSa perspective, the governance and management approach of a tourism destination should leverage the complex of resources that are included within a specific territory in order to enhance its potential cultural value and systems viability. Section 5 sets out our main conclusions and discusses future implications for research and the limits of the study.

2. The territory as a (viable) complex system

2.1. The territory as a complex system

Numerous have been the interpretative theories adopted by scholars to try to deeply understand the essence of the territory and to formalize the laws of its operation, behavior, and evolution. This need has often led to definitions of the territory, or rather to interpretative hypotheses, influenced by culture or by the ‘strong thought’ of the moment or by new theories elaborated in other fields of scientific research and translated into territory studies (Rossi, 2013).

However, the complexity achieved by the territory with its laws, its processes and its often-uncontrolled changes, make it increasingly difficult to build an interpretative model based on reductionist approaches, and increasingly necessary, instead, the adoption of systems approaches (Simone et al., 2015).

It follows that the investigative process of the territory as a system requires the adoption of a theoretical approach that makes this analysis possible, since the territory itself is difficult to observe and to be known directly.

On closer inspection, it could be stated, in apparent contradiction with what has been described so far, that the territory is not a system; in fact, if observed only in its structural composition, the territory could appear only as a group of components, often not related to each other.

On the contrary, the adoption of systems theories in the study of the territory allows the construction of a framework useful for the homogenization of the different components of the territory and able to facilitate the process of inferring the characteristics and laws of the territory understood as a system, otherwise unknowable.

The deterministic paradigm cannot be applied to the territory, since

the territorial phenomena have the following characteristics:

- *non-linearity*: the evolution of the population over time cannot be assimilated to a linear phenomenon;
- *irreversibility*: territorial changes cannot go back, as the territorial phenomena are absolutely irreversible;
- *dynamism*: the territorial phenomena are dynamic in the sense that they evolve, so that a territory, after one year, is not the same as itself.

These are the three fundamental characteristics of the territory and of evolutionary systems in general, i.e. systems that evolve and self-evolve over time (Holland, 1975; Maturana and Varela, 1980; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984).

In line with this, different scholars’ contributions on the territory tried, over time, to reflect these characteristics and give a definition that could include its geographical, temporal and social dimensions.

Starting from the seminal contributions of Calabi and Indovina (1973) and Prêteceille (1974), which defined the territory as a natural space decreed in time by human beings, the scientific community moves on the definition of “territory”. Subsequently, the territory was considered a product (Lefebvre, 1974), a structure (Foucault, 1994), or a social laboratory with a specific geographical location in which nature and human beings interact over time. Crosta (2000) comes to the following conceptualization of territory: it is a specific physical space, eventual outcome of social interaction, characterized by a set of heterogeneous processes (such as the exploitation of natural resources, the negotiation of conflicts and the resolution of problems). In conclusion, the interaction between geographical space, time and social relationship leads to the emergence of the territory.

Simone et al. (2018) identify two more dimensions that define a territory as a complex system: complexity itself, related to the heterogeneous nature of the process that defines the emergence of a territory, and uniqueness of the territory, related to the elements that define it and orient its future evolution (memory, experiences, values) (Simone, 2011).

From the above, it derives a view of territory as a dynamic and complex system (Holland, 1975). This means that for its knowledge, planning, management and government the tools of systems thinking and the paradigm of complexity seem to be more consistent. To say that we use, as tools of knowledge of the territory, the characteristics of union and complexification means to say that we do not look at the territory as a set of elements and we do not consider it composed of individual subsystems. The territory is, in fact, a complex system; what interests, therefore, to know and analyse is what are the relationships that exist between the various components of the territory seen as a complex system.

The concept of territory as a complex system began to spread simultaneously with the spread of general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). This approach, abandoning, as mentioned, the reductionist vision of phenomena, was considered particularly effective in the study of the problems of the territory, given its multifaceted nature (Conti and Ciasullo, 2016).

In fact, according to the general systems theory, a system can be defined as a set of parts in relation to each other and each system can be thought of as part of a larger system and in turn containing smaller systems. This means that the systems paradigm, in fact, allows us to think in pluri-systemic terms. We can consequently think of the territory system as articulated in two constituent systems (or subsystems): a functional system and a physical system. Obviously, in reality, these distinct systems are one and the same indivisible, and this abstraction is allowed us, from the adoption, for our study, of the systems logic for the construction of the interpretative model. The functional system is made up of the set of territorial functions and the relationships between them. The physical system consists of the set of constructed spaces, the material three-dimensionality of the territorial reality and the material

channels of connection between them. The territory is a place where exchanges of information, of material goods, also of ways of being are carried out and this characteristic can be defined as a substratum that interests in an undifferentiated way all that deals with the social organization of man. The systems approach hypothesizes the study of the territory based on an analysis of the elements and relations between the two sub-sets and the elements defined above. The use of this approach involves the definition of a series of concepts that represent an instrument for the determination of connections between the reality of a territory and the theoretical model that man builds to try to govern its evolution. To do this it is necessary to ask first what is a territory, what are its characterizing aspects and, on this basic knowledge, to define a theoretical approach, that is a set of conceptual references.

However, the difficulty to identify management models for the territory as a complex system, able to explain their potential in terms of usability (tourism attractiveness, residents' well-being, sustainability), recognized by Ehlinger et al. (2015), is generally addressed through the proposal of new management models aimed at ensuring effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability to support the decisions of the governing bodies (Saviano et al., 2010; Barile et al., 2014). Other contributions are dedicated to specific aspects related to the governance of sub-systems existing in the territory.

Starting from the above, the theoretical approach adopted in this paper is based on systems theories (Beer, 1984; Capra, 1997, 2002; Checkland, 1981; Laszlo, 1996; Meadows, 2008; Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Weinberg, 1975), which, as said, could be particularly useful in supporting the overcoming of the limits of reductionism, a still-dominant approach to the management of organizations. If the reductionist view is limited to the analysis of the parts that compose the observed phenomena, a more holistic and systems view (Barile, 2008, 2009) allows for the interpretation of the dynamic behavior of a phenomenon as a whole.

In this sense, the vSa could be a helpful approach to managing territory and its complexity because, going beyond the traditional reductionist view, it can support a more holistic view and enhance its potential value. Specifically, in this case, a systems perspective is applied to a territory managed as a tourism destination, in order to allow for a definition of an effective enhancement policy.

Consequently, our research questions include the following:

- Considering the territory as a complex system, what are the key dimensions to focus on to enhance its potential value?
- Based on the above, what managerial approach is required to enhance such potential value, when a territory is managed as a tourism destination?

2.2. vSa as a theoretical framework to understand the territory complexity

The notion of a viable system was initially introduced by Stafford Beer (1972) and was based on this definition, “a system is viable if survives, remains united and is integral, is homeostatically balanced both internally and externally and possesses mechanisms and opportunities for growth and learning, development and adaptation, which allow it to become increasingly effective within its environment”.

Starting from Beer's conceptualizations, the viable systems approach (Barile, 2009; Golinelli, 2000, 2010) proposes a definition of a viable system based on several conceptual innovations.

Each entity capable of action is defined as a *viable system* that can be observed both in its structural configuration (*static perspective*) and in its development (*dynamic perspective*) (Barile, 2009; Golinelli, 2000).

The static perspective pertains to the *structure* and describes a *viable system* “as it is”, allowing for the identification of a physical boundary between what belongs to the structure and what is external; the dynamic perspective regards the *system*, which is understood as a “specific structure oriented to the achievement of a purpose”, namely, survival (Barile et al., 2015).

According to vSa, environment and context are two different concepts. The context is the result of a process of perception and the subjective interpretation of the environment by the governing body of a given viable system.

The decision maker filters only the entities he considers *relevant* from the environment, thus identifying other viable systems with which to relate, the so-called *suprasystems*, or systems capable of projecting their expectations on another system, which are qualified as *subsystems*.

The relevance depends on the ability of a system to condition the chances of the survival of the considered viable system. It is also possible to measure the degree of relevance by referring to the resources released by suprasystems, which can be critical or influential. Resources are influential if they contribute exclusively to the achievement of the systemic purpose; they are critical if they contribute independently of it.

Within the context of reference, as identified by the governing body, there are some actors who mature expectations towards the same viable system.

The ability of the viable system to satisfy these expectations influences the preservation and fostering of its condition of viability. This becomes more and more relevant when referring to territorial governance, as this issue calls for an ‘openness’ of the decision-making process that considers the relevance of the interactions between the viable system and all the entities of a specific territory, thus identifying the most appropriate path of governance (Barile et al., 2018a,b; Simone et al., 2018; Saviano et al., 2018).

Structurally, as said, a territory can be defined by the physical and administrative boundaries that define it and the components incorporated in it, particularly by the so-called “endowment resources”. According to a systems perspective, on the other hand, in addition to the abovementioned endowment resources, it is also necessary to include “systemic” resources, which are understood as “resources and entities in action for the emergence of a unitary system” (Barile et al., 2013).

The endowment components are represented by natural, artistic, cultural, infrastructural, and other elements, and they belong “objectively” to the geographical area considered, while the systemic components are companies, individuals, bodies, etc. and have subjective expectations regarding their survival in the reference context. Overcoming the structural vision means overcoming a definition that emphasizes the boundaries and the physical configuration of the territory; this allows us to understand the complex of interactions between the components and the opportunities emerging from the systemic dynamics. The first step is represented by the definition of the context or, rather, its extraction from the environment by the governing body. One of the foundations of the vSa postulates that “a viable system has the aim to survive in a specific context” (Barile et al., 2015). In terms of territorial development, this postulate implies that the decision maker orients the decisions and the actions towards the creation of value “for the territory” or establishes initiatives realized in the interest of the territory itself. In this sense, creating value for the territory means creating value for the suprasystems identified as relevant by the governing body (citizens, companies, other organizations, etc.) and, therefore, increasing the possibility of the survival of the system in the environment through the choice of context operated by the decision maker; this is always directed towards *consonance* research, which is understood as a potential alignment of expectations of several systems. From this, it follows that the valorization must be understood not so much as an increase in the value of the goods located in the territory but, rather, as the capacity to generate use value for the suprasystems of reference, which, by expressing varied expectations and exerting pressure, direct the subject of government to favor different objectives (Barile, 2008, 2009). The territorial development becomes, in this way, co-created by a plurality of actors (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008; Barile and Polese, 2010a,b; Vargo and Lush, 2004, 2006, 2008; Bassano et al., 2019), each of which acts within a context subjectively extracted from a

more general shared environment. Under such conditions, the governing body acts to harmonize the interests, respecting the conditions of consonance, and to synergistically integrate the resources to achieve a unified vision oriented towards a shared objective that generates resonance.

Since the territory is characterized by a variety of components and subjects, its government is divided into a series of actions aimed at:

- enhancing the present components;
- coordinating the behavior of the components involved in the development of the specific territorial system;
- attracting new resources and components;
- obtaining conditions of consonance.

Consonance, in fact, allows for aligning the strategies of the various agents acting and interacting in the territorial system towards shared development objectives; it is an indispensable condition to satisfy the relevant suprasystems and subsystems and to attract new components.

The achievement of these conditions, from the perspective of territory development, therefore, presupposes that the governing body is endowed with the capacity to allow the enhancement and growth of the potential and of the specific vocations of the reference area. The relevance of specific territorial identities has also led many scholars to consider the territory as a driving force of social relationships and interdependencies (territorial and multiterritorial) that is potentially able to promote radical changes not only in business models but also in consumption and lifestyles (Paniccia et al., 2017; Brouder et al., 2016; Silvestrelli, 2015; Gregori et al., 2013; Pilotti, 2011; Pedersen, 2002; Weaver, 2000).

Therefore, the decision maker's strategies must be consistent with the inclinations of the territory (historical-artistic, cultural, tourist, productive), which represent strategic elements of differentiation on which to build the foundations for a competitive advantage that is stable and functional for its development.

In what follows, the need for a system-based management approach will be highlighted through the analysis of Arbatax Park in Sardinia (Italy), which is an case study in which the value of a destination risks being damaged due to the lack of a holistic perspective.

3. Tourism in Sardinia

3.1. A brief history

Tourism in Sardinia started to develop in the middle of the 19th century with the realization of the first beach resorts, which were initially frequented for the most part by the Sardinian people and, less frequently, by foreigners. However, the first signs of the development of the Sardinian touristic system arrived in the last fifty years of the last century, particularly at the beginning of 1948 when Sardinia became a Special Administrative Area. In the following years, the region started to grow rapidly, mainly due to tourism. In 1949, the Regional Department of the Internal Affairs and Tourism was constituted, which, one year after its institution, realized a plan aimed at improving the road network and the links to the mainland; increasing the hotel accommodations; supporting and promoting local events, landscape and natural beauty; and, especially, increasing and improving touristic awareness within the native population. In support of the plan, two regional laws were enacted: L. R. L. No. 62 of 22-11-1950, establishing the "Ente Sardo delle Industrie Turistiche" (ESIT), which built the Grand Hotel ESIT, and L. R. L. No. 63 of 23-11-1950, which established a special fund at the "Sessione Autonoma del credito industriale del Banco di Sardegna" to restructure, build and expand hotels, guest-houses and inns.

At the bottom of the plan, there was the idea that tourism is one of the essential drivers of regional economic development, which made it necessary to provide the island with appropriate tourist

accommodations that have hosted international and national visitors (Regione Sardegna, 1953). The first tour operator that promoted Sardinia was Horizon Holidays, which was founded by Vladimir Raitz, a Jewish Russian journalist who settled in London; after a holiday in Corsica, in 1947, he decided to organize low-cost travel for British people throughout the island, focusing on the city of Alghero, where, at that time, there were three hotels.

On 4 June 1954, an airplane from London landed for the first time at Alghero-Fertilia airport, and since that day, it continued arriving every Friday until 24 September. Alghero became "the gold door" of tourism in Sardinia, and because of this, it established a relationship between Sardinia and Great Britain (Battistoni, 2014). Over the years, thanks to this relationship, Sardinia has succeeded as a tourist attraction, though the success was also due to factors such as the international and domestic growth in demand, the central geographic position of the island, the convenient land value for investors (Battino, 2007), and the peculiarity and beauty of the coasts and the bathing waters. Until the sixties, Sardinia welcomed just under 1% of national tourists (Price, 1983); however, in those years, the demand for beds increased (Price, 1983) as did the touristic system in northern Sardinia, which was also due to the presence of Olbia airport and of the ports of Olbia, Golfo Aranci and Porto Torres.

In 1962, the Consorzio di Costa Smeralda was born in Gallura with the aim of implementing the control and development of the area, as was promoted by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV who decided to invest substantial amounts of money to buy the coasts belonging to Olbia and Arzachena (Price, 1983). Prince Aga Khan gave introduced one of the most important Italian tourist systems, which is characterized by an exclusive style and organized on three centers: Porto Cervo, Cala di Volpe and Razza di Juncu. Initially, the consortium's goal was to build high-level hotel structures targeted at wealthy tourists; later, it initiated the improvement of the second homes that were fabricated following high standards.

In 1962, the region adopted state law n. 588/62, the Social and Economic Recovery Plan on Sardinia, which involved interventions in all sectors: primary (agriculture, fishing, breeding), secondary (industry), and tertiary (services).

Regarding the latter sector, the plan introduced incentive measures for accommodations, private activities, and complementary structures; it also instituted six tourism districts (five coastal and one natural park in Gennargentu) (Regione Sardegna, 1971). The sixties were the years in which Sardinia began to acquire ever-greater tourism importance in the Mediterranean and witnessed a massive cementing and parceling of activities, which was supported by the region itself through development concessions in agricultural areas.

Only at the end of the following decade did there arise the need to protect the territory by controlling the proliferation of buildings, particularly the ever-increasing numbers of hotels, luxury hotels and, above all, second homes. The uncontrolled growth of the buildings and the consequent depletion of resources accelerated the drafting of some regional laws (L.R. n.26/1975; L.R. n.33/1975; L.R. n.10/1976) aimed at limiting the serious speculation phenomenon and, above all, with L. R. L. of 1976, at protecting coastal areas from abuse.

The idea began to spread that tourism cannot be conceived of only as a real estate investment; above all, it is a means of enhancing cultural resources. While acknowledging the fundamental importance of government measures, there is no doubt that the birth of Costa Smeralda has contributed to the development of the island economy, with very positive impacts:

- in the first period (until the end of the 1960s), the construction activity led to a wave of very large investments for the construction of hotels, second homes and restaurants and for the related supply and maintenance activities;
- in the second period (starting in the seventies), it led to strong growth in the supply chain thanks to the birth of companies in

related industries, even if they were not strictly complementary (banks, tourism services, transport, insurance, etc.; Ugolini, 2015).

The entire territory benefited from this development, being enriched with dedicated infrastructure, network connections and various connected services.

First Alghero, then, to a greater extent, Costa Smeralda provoked an emulation effect on the whole island; in fact, in a few years, in different parts of Sardinia, a large number of hotels and luxury hotel structures arose, modifying, often radically, the previous coastal settlement model.

From the above, it is clear that the development of the Sardinian tourism and accommodation system is mainly focused on seaside tourism. This has, as a negative consequence, a disadvantage in the other sectors of the industry and in the related resources (mines, handicraft, food and wine, lakes, cultural heritage, archaeology and mountains), which the region intends to promote as well. The objective, in this sense, is to promote these resources to ensure better conditions of use, spread knowledge, and intercept new tourist flows. In fact, although tourism is one of the most promising industries for the island economy, there are some critical issues in the design and execution of tourism services, which means that there are unexploited potential and untapped opportunities.

However, the main criticality, one of the main causes of the seasonal nature of demand, is represented by the infrastructural dimension of transport (roads, railways, port and airport systems, telecommunications networks), which is still inadequate.

This inadequacy concerns both the communication networks within the island and the infrastructure that connects Sardinia to the rest of Italy, Europe and the world. As far as external transport is concerned, not all channels require an increase in infrastructure; the port and airport systems could be sufficient (except for the Tortoli-Arbatax case, which will be discussed below) if the frequency of connections and especially transport and management costs were to be reviewed. With regard to inland transport, on the other hand, the situation is much more serious since, with reference to both the rail and road systems, the island needs to reconstruct and increase the development of infrastructure. Logistics generate large losses for the region, which translate into inconvenience for residents and, from a purely tourist point of view, into a slowdown in flows. Focusing the analysis exclusively on the negative effects that transport has on the tourism system, it emerges that the presence of adequate transport infrastructure is essential: the mobility gaps, in fact, clearly feed the seasonality of tourist flows and, at the same time, make it difficult to enjoy the goods and services offered by the tourism industry, even in the months of maximum concentration of arrivals, slowing down growth in tourism offerings. An obvious example of how these problems can have a direct and amplified impact on tourism is given by the microregion of Ogliastra, where the Arbatax Park Resort is located, which is the object of analysis of this work.

3.2. The case of Arbatax Park

Ogliastra is a region in central-eastern Sardinia; with L.R. n. 9/2001 (operational since May 2005), it has become a province with 23 municipalities, covering 1854 square kilometers. It is the least populated province in the region, and it offers an unspoiled natural environment characterized by a great variety of landscapes: sea, lakes, rocks and mountains (Fig. 1).

The entire southeastern side of the “Gennargentu National Park and the Gulf of Orosei”, which were established by the decree of the President of the Republic 30/03/1998 and recognized as a protected area, extends throughout its territory. In Ogliastra, there are also six Sites of Community Importance (SCI), established by the European Union with Directive 92/43/EEC “Habitats” and subject to protection:

- Monti del Gennargentu;
- Supramonte di Oliena, Orgosolo e Urzulei, Su Sercone;
- Golfo di Orosei;
- Riu Siccaderba (Arzana);
- Lido di Orrì;
- Area del Monte Ferru di Tertenia.

In addition to the natural heritage, the Ogliastra is rich in archaeological and cultural heritage, making it a unique and authentic territory, the spokesman of a proud Sardinian identity, featuring “Domus de Janas”, ancient hypogeic tombs carved into the rock, some “Menhir” and a high number of nuragic sites.

This wealth of natural and cultural heritage could be an excellent starting point for a beneficial economic and social growth process. However, the great importance of the environmental, historical and cultural heritage clashes with a series of difficulties related especially to the scarcity of infrastructure and is partly determined by the characteristics of the territory, which is mainly mountainous and impervious. Some areas in the province are connected by fast road axes, while others have long distances and long journey times; the whole area, however, is semi-isolated, especially about links with the southern part of the island. The accessibility from the northern part of the island, on the other hand, is less problematic and is permitted by the connections with Olbia and Nuoro (Regione Sardegna, 2005).

There is also an airport in Tortoli and a port in Arbatax; the latter is connected with Genoa and Civitavecchia. The airport and the port were both built in the sixties as a logistical support for the Arbatax paper mill; however, while the port is still in operation, the airport, after having long ago been converted to tourist use, has now been closed for almost 10 years. The paper mill has marked an important chapter in the Ogliastra's economy since 1963 when its operation began; in less than a decade, the plant came to provide 60% of the national consumption of newsprint and rotogravure paper, employing more than a thousand employees, including workers and harbor workers. In 1989, a long series of failures, bankruptcies, mafia infiltration and attempts at rescue began, ending in 2005 with the definitive closure of the factory. The paper mill has been the only true local experience with industry; currently, the most important industrial activity is building fueled by the development of tourist flows and the demographic growth of coastal municipalities. Ogliastra's economy mainly revolves around the agricultural and pastoral sector and the tourism sector, which is a source of many opportunities thanks, above all, to the endowment of natural, cultural and gastronomic heritage of the territory. On the coast, Tortoli and Arbatax (Tortoli's municipal segment) represent the spearhead of a particularly developed tourism sector.

The Arbatax Park Resort extends over sixty hectares, forty of which are dedicated to the “Bellavista Natural Park (an area of typical Sardinian flora and fauna); the resort includes five hotels (“Monte Turri”, “Borgo Cala Moresca”, “Telis”, “Cottage”, “Dune”) and a Thalasso Spa and Wellness Center, totaling one thousand rooms and five hundred employees. The first village built by Pierpaolo Mazzella, originally from Arbatax, was Telis Village at the foot of the Bellavista promontory, which is composed of only twenty *paillottes* of reeds; it was built in the Sixties, the years in which Karim Aga Khan “built” the Emerald Coast. After the early death of his brother Pierpaolo (in 1971), and the kidnapping of his father Attilio (in 1975), Giorgio Mazzella took over the business and, in 1984, built the Village “Cala Moresca”.

The village was faithfully built as an ancient Sardinian village, with traditional materials and styles and stone houses harmoniously inserted into the red rocks, which are a symbol of Arbatax.

In 1988, Giorgio Mazzella built the luxurious “Monte Turri” Hotel in the highest part of the Bellavista promontory, which he acquired a portion of in 1990, thus linking the three structures and creating the “Bellavista Natural Park”; only in 2010 were the structures merged into the only mega structure, “Arbatax Park Resort”. With the aim of consolidating and expanding the tourist vocation of Ogliastra, Giorgio



Fig. 1. Map of Ogliastra.
Source: http://www.sardegnaonline.it/en/map_sardinia/map_of_ogliastra_sc_98.htm

Table 1
Key elements of the Ogliastra SWOT analysis.
Source: Authors' elaboration

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>The naturalistic heritage of Ogliastra, an area that hosts several Sites of Community Importance (SCI) and archaeological and cultural resources (“Nuraghi”, “Domus de Jana”, “Menhir”, etc.).</p> <p>It is an “island in the island” that offers a wild and unspoiled natural environment characterized by a wide variety of landscapes: sea, lakes, rocks and mountains.</p> <p>The low population density, secular isolation of the population, geographical position and morphology of the territory have made it possible to preserve the Ogliastra identity, an important differentiating factor for tourists.</p>	<p>The Ogliastra identity, although strong, does not result in coordinated actions at the territorial level; in addition, there is not perfect harmony between tourist operators and the local administration. This means that, despite its important natural and cultural heritage, Ogliastra is unable to live off its resources and make the elements beyond seaside tourism sufficiently attractive.</p> <p>The lack of infrastructure in the transport system (roads, railways, airports, ports) makes it impossible to exploit the potential of the territory.</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>The authenticity of its natural and cultural heritage makes Ogliastra a true concentrate of Sardinia and offers the opportunity to focus on specific categories of tourism, going beyond the seaside tourism and extending the tourist season (green tourism, sports tourism, food and wine tourism).</p> <p>The recognition of “Blue Zone”, which is linked to the world record in male longevity, represents an important starting point for generating new tourist demand, especially since such longevity is determined by living conditions (environment and lifestyle) rather than by genetic factors.</p>	<p>The strong internal competition (at the regional level) and the stereotyped image of Sardinia as a luxury tourist destination are threats to the Ogliastra tourism industry whose fundamental values are hospitality, genuineness and authenticity.</p> <p>Furthermore, promoting and revisiting natural resources and archaeological heritage sites in terms of tourism, without any in-depth infrastructural intervention, is a serious double-edged sword: it would attract new tourist demand even though it is unable to satisfy it.</p>

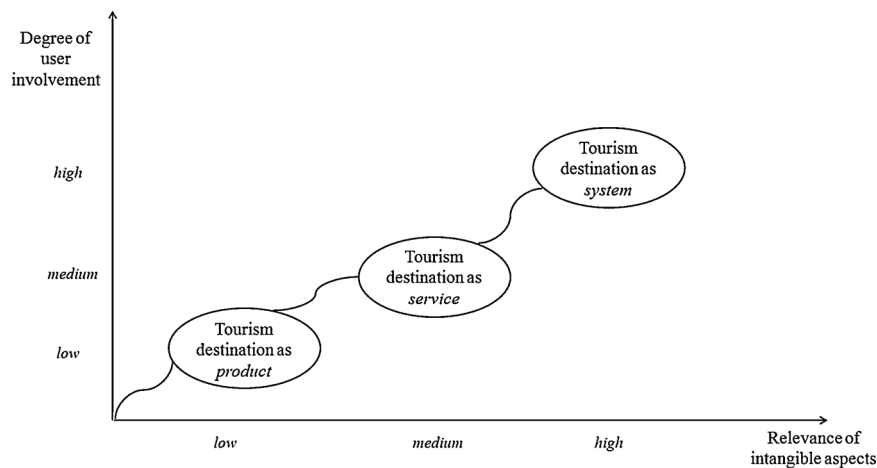


Fig. 2. The evolution path of a territory as a tourism destination: a systems view.
Source: Authors' elaboration

Mazzella decided, in 1993, to acquire and restart the Arbatax-Tortoli Airport, leading it, in 1997, to have traffic of approximately 50,000 passengers, which is a great result for an isolated territory such as that; the airport has been closed since October 10, 2011.

Sardinian tradition and authenticity are the key factors of Arbatax Park, which links its attractions to the preservation of the environment and the enhancement of its territorial identity through the recovery and revival of cultural and productive traditions in a tourism-friendly manner.

Raw materials are purchased from local producers, many typical events are organized for guests, and the traditional Sardinian styles and materials are used in the construction and furnishing of spaces.

The enhancement of the peculiarities of Sardinia, in particular of Ogliastra, and the continuous monitoring of demand and market trends are important strengths that ensure good results for Arbatax Park, but they are partially limited by the weaknesses of the Sardinian tourism sector: logistics and seasonality. Although, in fact, in the summer season, the air connections to main destinations are intensified in the airports of Olbia and Cagliari, the problem of the road and rail networks remains, especially about the connection with the regional capital.

If the perspective is extended to the whole dimension of public services, a perfect connection between the strategies of the local and regional administrations and the expectations of operators in the tourism sector is lacking. Furthermore, about the seasonal nature of the tourism, the following observations need to be made:

First, the summer season undoubtedly provides the best tourism opportunities for the resort and the region in general because the sea and bathing are the only key factors whose appeal justifies the high costs of a stay on the Island.

However, the problem of seasonality could be overcome by stimulating tourism flows at other times of the year and for longer stays. Ogliastra, in fact, is one of the places in the world where people live longer lives. At the beginning of 2000, the doctor and medical statistician Gianni Pes and the Belgian demographer Prof. Michel Poulain visited dozens of Sardinian municipalities to examine the birth and death certificates of the municipal archives.

The purpose of the analysis was to calculate the extreme longevity index (ELI), which is defined as the percentage of people born in Sardinia between 1880 and 1900 who became centenarians. At the end of this study, Ogliastra gained the “Blue Zone” award and still holds the world record in male longevity (Poulain et al., 2004). This incredible longevity is due in small part (30%) to the genetic heritage of the Ogliastra population that has lived for a long time in relative isolation but especially to modifiable factors (70%), such as nutrition, lifestyle, environment, air and other psychological factors. Living in

communities where older people are still considered a resource is a fundamental parameter for good aging, as well as religiosity. In these areas, the strong adherence to religious worship helps the elderly to contextualize and emerge unscathed and strengthened from negative experiences. The environment, air and food of this land can be understood and enhanced for tourists.

This is the goal that Arbatax Park pursues with the “Blue Zone” project whose assumptions are consistent with the protection of the natural heritage, the availability of local products (farm-to-table) and the full respect for the culture and tradition of Ogliastra. The Blue Zone project begins with a medical spa combined with the air, water and nature of Ogliastra and a diet based on locally produced raw materials; it goes beyond the idea of a holiday, embracing the need to reinvigorate and regenerate the body and spirit and to connect with the local culture and community.

4. Discussions

This reinterpretation from a systems perspective, as was previously mentioned, arises from the need to change the analysis and resolution approach to the problems that have emerged.

The shift from a structural analysis to a dynamic analysis of the phenomena, in fact, means being able to evaluate the resources available in the territory and the related problems but based on the interactions they have (systems perspective), rather than separately (reductionist approach), in order to guarantee the vitality and survival of the analyzed tourism system.

In the Arbatax Park case, it is necessary to recognize that the gradient of the relevance of the normative component is so high as to inhibit the complete implementation of projects aimed at value creation. The legislation, in fact, is the main factor responsible for the delayed development and the dramatic infrastructural situation by which the Sardinia region is affected and which has, consequently, significantly affected the economy of the Arbatax Park.

The problem of transport and the origin of a double isolation, with respect to the rest of the national territory, to Europe and within the island itself, represents another major obstacle to development, particularly because the high gravity of the situation is not perceived by the legislation that acts as an obstacle and an opponent to the project.

Therefore, the Blue Zone project developed by Arbatax Park will not be able to deploy its full potential until its philosophy is shared at the regulatory level.

What emerges from the brief description of Arbatax Park underlines the need to progress towards an integrated territory management approach, overcoming the limits of unexploited potentialities of value co-

creation (Payne et al., 2008; Wieland et al., 2012; Pels et al., 2014; Spohrer et al., 2012; Polese et al., 2018) to achieve development, and it highlights a necessary tendency to combine resources and naturalistic values in the wake of a policy of enhancement based on the cultural value of a territory.

Therefore, the efforts of local institutions should be implicitly directed to reduce the negative impacts due to the delays caused by the law and the bureaucracy.

Accordingly, a change in perspective could reveal the very potential of a destination, starting from its specific strengths (as seen in Table 1) and fostering harmonic human-nature relationships through tourism activities proposed to visitors, thus developing interactions between them.

Based on the previous considerations, the two dimensions that should be considered regarding the evolution path of a territory as a tourism destination, as illustrated in Fig. 2, can be described as follows:

- 1 Relevance of intangible aspects and
- 2 Degree of user involvement.

Relevance of intangible aspects is a dimension that qualifies the importance given to the set of relationships, interactions and expectations among the different actors of the tourism destination (e.g., low relevance: focus on the material/structural characteristics of the territory; high relevance: focus shift from the relationship between material/structural characteristics to the interaction among actors).

Degree of user involvement refers to the level at which a single user is directly included in the decision making process (e.g., low involvement: giving information to the user; high involvement: directly including users into planning/strategic issues).

For each of the two dimensions, we can identify three levels of intensity (low, medium, high); the intersection of the corresponding different degrees defines the following three constructs:

- Tourism destination intended as *product*: locality having the requisites of utility, materialness, limitedness and accessibility;
- Tourism destination intended as *service*: locality as a set of tangible and intangible attributes for procuring a benefit for a tourist;
- Tourism destination intended as *system*: locality having the capacity for establishing the conditions of *consonance* between two or more interacting entities.

Considering the above, the governance and management approach of a tourism destination should leverage the complex of resources that are included within a specific territory (Leigh et al., 2012) and that show a common potential cultural value: if they are synergistically organized into valorization structures, they become essential in the dynamic of a system.

Adopting the viable systems perspective, therefore, allows us to move from a limited perspective of a single component to a perspective extended to the overall viable system to reach conditions in which it is possible to generate value for a wider variety of actors, acting on the overall conditions of the survival of a viable system.

In viable systems terms, this means that, until we reach the sharing of the value categories, that is, the set of values and beliefs that guide a viable system, it will not be possible to achieve conditions of systemic consonance and resonance. Consonance and resonance allow us to pursue the objective of the effectiveness of the viable system in its specific context of reference and the efficiency of the structure, thus acting on the broader maintenance of the conditions of the vitality of a system and, consequently, on its survival.

Ultimately, the decision maker cannot be considered isolated since his ability to govern and manage lies mainly in his ability to adopt choices that are shared by the group of reference subjects, consisting of the suprasystems relevant to the system's survival itself.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the tourism phenomenon was analyzed through the lens of the Viable Systems Approach (vSa) to identify the potential for development and opportunities for improving the value of a territory intended as a complex system.

The focus was on tourism in Ogliastra, which could be a key strategic lever for the growth and development of the island's economy, despite being heavily compromised due to the seasonal nature of the tourism and the dramatic characteristics of the regulatory and transportation systems.

The seasonal nature of tourist demand can be considered based on the reduced appeal of the island when the conditions for bathing worsen, in addition to the usual difficulties and costs of reachability imposed by insularity. Moreover, the connections with the six access gates are more difficult in nonsummer months, especially in the Province of Ogliastra due to its territorial configuration, which makes it semi-isolated.

Therefore, there is a deficit in planning and intervention by regional and local institutions, which should set the conditions for overcoming a series of bureaucratic and infrastructural restrictions affecting the industry.

In particular, the Blue Zone project can become a first-class attractor and contribute to the increase of the island's appeal outside the summer season only and exclusively following an intervention by the public administration with regard to infrastructure and the improvement of the logistics.

In this scenario, vSa can represent a valid support for the management of the territory as a complex system, with particular reference to our research questions: *Considering the territory as a complex system, what are the key dimensions to focus on to enhance its potential value?; Based on the above, what managerial approach is required to enhance such potential value, when a territory is managed as a tourism destination?*

The adoption of the vSa theoretical framework derives from the need for a profound rethinking of the traditional analytic approaches, as well as of the consequent proposed solutions of the problems related to the governance of any system. This becomes more relevant if we refer to multi-stakeholder and multi-dimensional entities, like the territory as a complex system is. The variety of expectations, perspectives, and interests present in a specific context of reference is the origin of the typical problems related to the government of the territory. In this direction, the proposal of an approach based on the concept of the territory as a viable complex system can support decision-making and allows the overcoming of the traditional view, focused only on the physicality of its structural components. In fact, moving the emphasis on the interaction between the systemic components, vSa, with its conceptualizations of relevance, consonance, resonance, and survival, provides an understanding of the territory managed as a tourism destination from a new perspective that can maximize the value of a destination and fully exploit the potential of a territory. Finally, from a managerial point of view, vSa represents a valid support to the decisional processes within a territory, since it takes into consideration the requests, needs, and expectations of all the subjects belonging to the specific territory considered.

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