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Development of marginal destinations: the case of Menfi

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the promotion development of Menfi's territory. This paper fits the scientific debate about the critical role that Destination marketing and management play in the development of marginal destinations. This paper moves from a geographical approach and, trough a Stake Holders perceptions analysis, wants to emphasise the role of territorial milieu for Menfi's competitiveness.

Introduction

To describe the theoretical horizon of this paper, we want to focus on the scientific debate about territory, the proactive space where the society acts (cfr Castelnuovi, 2002; Cusimano, 2003; Cohen et al., 2011; Dematteis, 1996; Farinelli, 2003; Landini, 2007; Loda, 2008; Olsson, 2003; Vallega, 2008).

This definition of territory grounds on two crucial concepts of our research: territorial identity and territorial governance, meant as local development drivers

(cfr. Buttitta, 2003; Dredge, Jenkins, 2001; Governa, 2005; Healey, 1997; Jessop,1995; Rossi, Vanolo, 2010).
We have particularly stressed the strong link between identity – the image of a proper cultural, historical, traditional system- and territory. Territorial milieu (or genius loci) is the synthetic theoretical concept of our research. It represents the strongest element that allows to define a sustainable strategy for local development and to boost the competitiveness of a tourist destination (cfr Caroli, 2008; Carta, 2005; De Spuches et al., 2002 Ercole, Gili, 2005; Giliberto, Panetta, 2009; Haughton, Counsell, 2004; Kavaratzis e Ashworth, 2005; Martini, Ejarque, 2008; Pastore et al, 2002; Pioletti, 2006; Valdani, Ancarani, 2000; Williams, Millington, 2004).

Tourism represents the social and economical phenomenon that, more than others, is referred to those elements. A tourist destination is bounded in a place (cfr Lozato Giotart, 1999) and represents a specific territorial organisation that needs a proper development strategy and involves the material and immaterial resources of the territory, the society and the inner community (cfr Bramwell, Sharman,1999; D'Angella et al., 2010; Dredge, 2006; Gulotta et al., 2004;

We have faced the governance of marginal territory issue (cfr Amin, 1999; Amato, 2014; Aru, Puttilli, 2014): we have chosen Menfi (in Sicily) as case study to describe the development of the tourism destination.

Menfi is an interesting territory to be analysed. It has a specific geomorphological connotation, a specific productive branch and its public and private Stake Holders have convergent interests in its promotion and development.

In this paper we want to describe the quantitative dimensions of tourism in Menfi and the destination management and marketing policies. We have also

wanted to show the Stake Holder perceptions in order to understand how the local offer is going to be structured and to know which possibilities of local

development can be implemented.

We have supposed that in Menfi there is a shared vision and a strong synergy among the Stake Holders for the local development. The governance of Menfi can represent a good example of marginal destination management.

The quantitative analysis has been based on Agrigento's District data. The qualitative analysis on Stake Holders perceptions (cfr Corbetta, 2003; Hay, 2005; Phillimore, Goodson, 2004) has been implemented with semistructured interviews. The interviews have been copied and interpreted through a comparative approach (cfr Cusimano, Sabato, 2014, 68-84).

Menfi. Territorial Milieu and Tourism dimensions.

Menfi (Lat. 37.59922; Long.12.96824) lays between Carboy and Belice rivers. It is at the border of Agrigento's District. It is included in a bigger area between Platani river (the physical border of Eastern and Western Sicily) and the South Eastern part of Trapani's District.

Menfi's territory and landscape are just at the border of two different territorial systems: "Terre Sicane" and "Val di Mazara" ones. The rural landscape of "Valle del Belice" is the most relevant in Menfi: strongly farmed, unevenly populated, with a village that derives from medieval hamlet (cfr Regione Siciliana, 2014). The coast is flat and the beach is made of very fine sand, typical of Sicily's low coast beaches. The only exception consists of the dunal system area in the western area of the territory.

The seaboard of Menfi has an outstanding naturalistic value. In the area between Porto Palo (Menfi's fisherman village) and Castelyetrano, there is The Dunal System "Capo Granitola, Porto Palo and Foce del Belice", a Site of Community Importance (SIC) instituted by the Regional Department for Territory in 2000 and recognised by UE, with ITA010011 code (cfr Gazzetta ufficiale dell'Unione Europea, 21/12/2013, L 350/101). The whole coast of Menfi has been awarded by Federation European for Environment (FEE), 18 times, with Blue Flag. This award certifies the quality of the coastal environment.

The 80% of Menfi's territory is devoted to agriculture. The cultivations that, more than others, create the cultural and productive identity of the territory are vineyards (cfr Rippon, 2014, 154-162). In 1995 Menfi wine production has obtained the Denomination of Origin (DOC), it was a crucial recognition. Menfi has therefore become "Città del Vino"; the memberships with the "Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino" and the "Strade del vino delle Terre Sicane" fit into the framework of the initiatives for the development of the wine-making tradition.

This tradition is linked with environmental, historical and cultural values of the area. It also has obvious repercussions on the tourist and cultural promotion issues. The cultivation of vineyards is precisely the largest crop of the area. The wine sector is in fast development and it has strongly focused on the cultivation and winemaking excellence. In Menfi, the relationship between the territory and the wine economy is consolidated. With neighboring municipalities, the vineyards exceeds today the 20,000 hectares.

In Menfi there is one of the most important Cooperative wineries in Europe, "Cantine Settesoli", which, thanks to the work of over 2300 members, is managing the processing and marketing of approximately 600,000 tons of grapes per year; in 2012, the sales volume has exceeded 40 million euro (cfr Cantine Settesoli, 2013).

Another important player in the field of winemaking excellence is Planeta; this is a farm rooted in Menfi, now focused on two fronts: the exploitation of native

varieties; the installation and adaptation of the best international varieties. In the last two decades a lot of smaller wineries have also arisen: they are also focusing on product quality. Viticulture is economically and socially crucial and it is a driver for Menfi development.

A lot of important local events are linked with the winemaking. For example, "Inycon", founded in 1996 by the Municipal Administration and Cantine Settesoli, is the annual wine festival. In 2015, the twentieth edition, has been included in the Regional Official Calendar of important tourist events (cfr GURS, 2002).

Since 2014, the organising committee, adding the Association "Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino" and the "Strada del Vino Terre Sicane", has expanded the industrial base of those who are involved in the same strategic initiative.

Inycon (cfr Comune di Menfi, 2014) is an event that aims to enhance the relationship between the territory and its most important resource, the wine; it was created to confirm the identity of the city, to give the whole community an important role in to the construction of an innovative development model that focuses on wine, on sustainable tourism, on quality agriculture, on preservation and enhancement of the territory in its several peculiarities.

Municipality's data show that Inycon has a growing trend both for the proper tourist demand and for the hikers. Visitors rose from 30,000 in 2012 to 35,000 in 2013 and was estimated (thanks to tickets sold), that in 2014 the number of visitors was more than 37,000.

Food, excellent wine and local traditions support another local important event; it is organised by Settesoli – in partnership with Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino- through Mandrarossa brand: Mandrarossa Vineyard Tour. This initiative is the peak of a series of micro-events related to typical food and wines of the area organised along the year. It takes place during a weekend in late August and includes a visit to the vineyards during harvest.

During Vineyard tour Menfi maximizes its commitment to the reception; at a time when the Menfi community is diligently involved in a socially, economically and culturally crucial moment of their annuities, driven by the Settesoli marketing effort, the territory is permeated of visitor flows, curious tourists wishing to experience a unique feeling that combines productivity to relax, to sports events and to dolcevita.

Supported by a specialised Tour Operator, the Vineyard consists of a congeries of experiential possibilities that arise from the different offers on Menfi. In one weekend the tour, in 2013, led more than 4,000 paying visitors in the area.

Before presenting some reflections on the intensity and nature of incoming tourist flows to Menfi, we have calculated the main indicators of receptivity and touristicity. We have also compared them with the whole Agrigento's District ones to underline which are the characteristics and the touristic potential of Menfi.

From an examination of the compared values, it is clear that Menfi represents a destination that emerges respect to the context of the territory. All indicators report higher rates than the provincial reciprocal (Chart 1). All these rates obviously are useful tools for the governance of the territory. In our interpretation Menfi needs to strengthen its touristic offer both in a qualitative and quantitative way. This can represent a possibility of development for a so relevant destination in the District.

	Menfi		District of Agrigento (AG)		Menfi/AG		
	2012	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Beds	1.460	1.464	1.462	18.518	18.627		
Residents	12.701	12.739	12.725	446.081	448.831	1	
Accommodation capacity rate	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,04	0,04	2,77	2,77
Presences	41.070	64.089	76.305	1.264.206	1.305.828		
Residents	12.701	12.739	12.725	446.081	448.831		
Toristicity rate	3,2	5,0	6,0	2,8	2,9	1,78	2,06
Presences	41.070	64.089	76.305	1.264.206	1.305.828		
Area (kmq)	113,58	113,58	113,58	3.052,59	3.052,59	1	
Tourist consinstency rate	361,6	564,3	671,8	414,1	427,8	1,4	1,6
Beds	1.460	1.464	1.462	18.518	18.627		
Area (kmq)	113,58	113,58	113,58	3.052,59	3.052,59	1	
Accommodation consistency rate	12,9	12,9	12,9	6,1	6,1	2,12	2,11

[1]

Table 1: Menfi and District of Agrigento tourist indicators. Data: District of Agrigento and ISTAT

The data processed in graphs 1 and 2 show, already at first glance, that the overall flow of tourists to Menfi are growing. Between 2012 and 2014 has been noticed an increase of 35,000 total arrivals in the accommodation facilities of the area. With the exception of 2011, when there was a significant drop in arrivals, it can be noted that, between 2009 and 2014, there was an increase in arrivals of 39% and attendance of 116%.

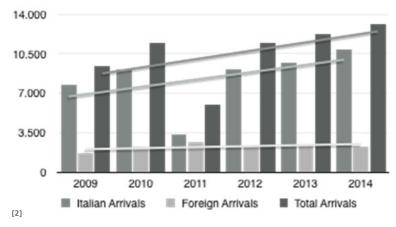


Figure 1: Arrivals in Menfi. Data: District of Agrigento

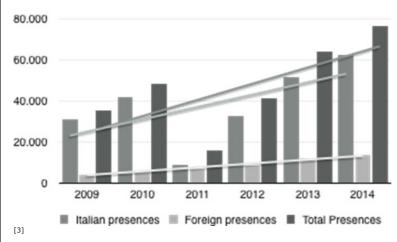


Figure 2: Presences in Menfi. Data: Distric of Agrigento

In order to analyse in detail the nature of tourist flows that insist on Menfi, we proceeded to examine the data month by month.

Data clearly show that the destination has a strong character of seasonality. Comparing to the average value between 2009 and 2014 we find that about 81% of arrivals is confined in seasonal segment between June and September (14% in June, 22% in July, 28% in August and 17% in September); a similar argument with respect to the presences leads to similar results: 85% of admissions are generated between June and September.

It emerges that in August there is 37% of the presences; this can be an indication of a more prolonged stay on the territory in this month. Compared with the average stay rate within the accommodation, there is a gradual lengthening of the tourist stays. From 3.73 days registered in 2009 it moves to 5.81 in 2014.

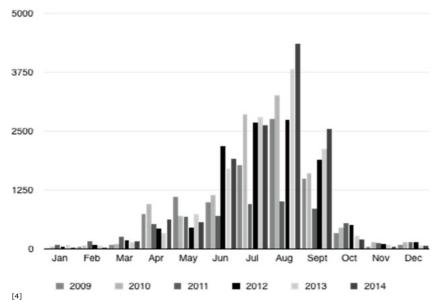


Figure 3: Arrivals in Menfi per month. Data: District of Agrigento

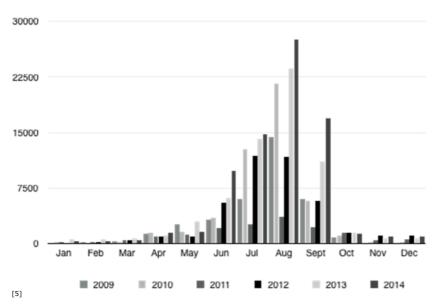


Figure 4: Presences in Menfi per Month. Data: District of Agrigento

To complete the quantitative analysis section with respect to tourist traffic detected on Menfi, we wanted to study its origin. In general terms, we found that the percentage of foreign tourists (arrivals) between 2009 and 2014 was between 17.6% and 20.5%. With regard to the presences it is between 12% in 2009 and 20.7% in 2013.

Menfi: Analysis of the perceptions of Stakeholders

Regarding destination management policies, we can affirm that they depend on two parameters: the territorial values on the one hand and the will to create synergies on the other. The promotion and management of destination are driven by a synergy between the Municipality, the main public SH involved in marketing choices, and the many private entities that contribute to a full program of events and promotional initiatives that have an important relapse on the entire territory.

Menfi, unique among the Sicilian marginal destinations, has introjected a sensitivity to the collaborative perspective. It has led to the creation of a Destination Management Organization.

"Si.S.Te.Ma Vino" is the non profit association, that joins the Municipality, Strade del Vino Sicane Terre, Cantine Settesoli, Planeta, Azienda Agricola Barbera, the Cooperativa La Goccia d'Oro (cooperative of more than 1,000 olive oil productors) and other agricultural enterprises and local accommodation businesses (cfr Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino, 2010).

Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino, even with limited resources, from 2012 collects public institution and local Stake Holders, and, through marketing plan "ScopriMenfi", focuses his attention on skills training processes, participation in exchanges and trade fairs, the organisation of business to business meetings and on scheduling of popular events for the entire annuity; it is responsible for enhancing the competitiveness of the tourist area on global arena.

Menfi, with the aim of countering the seasonal tourism flows, typical of beach destinations, is promoted as a complex destination which combines the sea product to the value of agro-food products of excellence, the rural landscape and traditions. The link with the products of the land is an iconic driver that is used in complex events from the tourist influx such as Inycon and Mandrarossa Vineyard Tour.

Those initiatives allow enjoyment and experience of the territory. Wine, oil, landscape, lifestyle convey an image complementary to that offered by the clean and accessible sea, awarded for two decades with national and international awards.

We have therefore analysed the perceptions of Stakeholder involved in the management and promotion of the destination.

The comparison with the Stakeholder is considered crucial to investigate an overall dynamic of local governance; it is standard practice in the literature (cfr Augustyn, Knowles, 2000; Bornhorst et al., 2010; Brent Ritchie, 1993; Buhalis, 2000; Sautter, Leisen, 1999; Yuksel, et al., 1999).

In this paper we will focus in particular on two of the interview areas: the first, on an overall assessment of the state of the destination through a SWOT analysis; the second, a comparison of the vision of local players. We have interviewed five actors; they have an high degree of recognition on the community.

They belong to the public sector (two) and to the private sector (three). They are: the Mayor of Menfi, arch. Vincenzo Lotà, elected by the majority of the population in 2013; President of Cantine Settesoli, dr. Vito Varvaro, reconfirmed at the helm of the Company by the majority of members in 2014, the founder of the winery Planeta, dr. Diego Planeta, appointed in 2013 as territorial identity Ambassador of Menfi; Dr. Valentina Barbera creator of ScopriMenfi and Councillor for Tourism and the President of Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino, dr. Salvatore Li Petri.

In order to have information to read synchronously the territory, we have chosen to solicit Stakeholder to prepare a SWOT analysis of Menfi. From the SWOT analysis comes out the perceptual horizon complexity of Stakeholders.

We have found substantial concordances but, particularly with regard to the weaknesses and threats, the interviews have clearly and distinctly revealed the problems of the territory.

We have immediately realized that strengths are essentially tied to the quality of landscape resources that characterise the Menfi territory and the quality of human resources. The sea and coasts, that are rewarded by qualitative recognition of national and international importance, represent a large attractive force in the territory.

The landscape is also appreciated for a substantial integrity, a sense of wildness, guaranteed by a low human settlement of coastal and inland bands, and the beauty and productivity of the rural landscape, which represens, in the perception of all, the true identity for the entire local community.

SH also agreed about the perception of an innate and strong sense of hospitality that the community offers to the visitors. They feel like part of the community more than guests.

Regarding the weakness, we have found that the destination needs to have more and better infrastructures; they are required to ensure the comprehensive development of the destination, first of all, the dock of Porto Palo.

Dr. Varvaro, in particular, deplores an inadequate level in terms of services offered to visitors, especially with regard to the coastal strip and the absence of an effective system of reception.

All the respondents denounce the lack of specific training and professionalism among tourism operators. It is finally revealed a paradox linked to the cleaning of the territory and the need to work intensively on the cultural sphere of the local inhabitants.

The problem is clearly exposed by Dr. Li Petri: "We are living a paradox. If you walk through the area, you can find rough roads and even, sometimes, abandoned garbage. But if you look inside the camps, in the vineyards, everything is perfect, orderly, productive, without even a plastic bottle on the ground. Here you experience the contrasts to be ironed out, here it is a real cultural challenge to be taken".

The opportunity, on which only Dr. Varvaro has some doubts, resides in the new ruling class. It should follow the tourism and territorial development road linked to sustainable tourism to agricultural production and winemaking excellence, to reception structures widespread in the territory, to a not massive and seasonally adjusted tourism. The biggest threat, however, is seen in the existence of phenomena, especially related to the summer and bathing tourism: the massive tourism that contrasts with the promotional efforts and destination management.

About this problem, the Commissioner Barbera said: "As threat, I perceive the offer of facilities like the Menfi Beach Resort, which add nothing to the exchange between tourists and territory and that, in an effort to maximise revenue, they tend to propose a typology of mass tourism from which we must absolutely shun", and Dr. Planeta: "Every year we witness the massacre, in August, of our beaches by aliens, who come from outside, taking their cases of beer, making dirty and then running away, fiercely cannibalising the land resources and representing, in fact the opposite, of the prospects for sustainable development that we should aim to"

The potential depart from the marked path is the worst threat detected by Dr. Li Petri. Menfi is following a line of territorial development and tourism, which although is greatly improving, tremendous shortages especially are recording in terms of services, infrastructure and shortage of specific skills. It is of course is strongly linked to the respect of the material and intangible resources, landscape, production and specificity of the cultural identity and values of the community. "I'd be worried if in the government people could see Menfi as a potential Rimini.

The road taken for sustainable destination development is correct. We must be realistic, favoring a small and diffuse tourism in the area, made up of many family-run facilities that are able to provide the added value of the truthful emotional experience of living. This is the correct model to deliver to our children a

healthy and competitive territory".

Finally, we wanted to assess the opinions of local players about the vision, the idea of development of the destination and the area in the next ten years. The framework of perceptions that have been collected is consistent with the interpretation of the territory lines identified so far.

The Mayor, "My vision is a city and a region where the great agriculture of excellence will be fully integrated with a system of accommodation throughout the area that offers high quality standards and ensures an experience that combines culture and tradition and innovation" and dr. Li Petri "We're a community made of agriculture and wine territory. We must continue alongside tourism and territory strengthening and to specifying the link between tourism and agriculture quality of excellence, because it is the best way for an organic development".

Councillor Barbera is more focused on the real prospects of development of the hospitality businesses, accompanying the development of the destination. She believes in the fairness of the distribution of small high-quality model structures to ensure an experience of intimat emotion al visit and deep loyalty: "Between 2005 and 2010 many investors have been able to bet on small resorts integrated with the landscape. Today the bet can be said to be won so I would like to imagine in the next years a new round of investment spreading all around the area with the same philosophy".

President Varvaro identifies in human resources the future development and competitiveness of the entire territory: "We need a new generation that addresses the problems with a new mentality. (...) We need new sensitivity and attention to the image, the brand, the way of presenting things. It serves in short, a change of outlook which only the thirties can be harbingers. I have been waiting for them!".

"Menfi can be like Capalbio without the snobbery of Capalbio", in this way Dr. Planeta combines in one sentence the need to protect and enhance the landscape and to offer an experience of visiting that respects the cultural values of the community.

s		w	
Strong territorial identity	Lotà	Deficiency of infrastudures	Latà
Receptivity culture	Lotà	Need for professional trainings	Lotà
Outstanding environment and landscape	Lotà	Deficiency of tourist services	Varvaro
The community looks after the territory	Lotà	Weak incoming system	Varvaro
Nature, environment and sea	Varvaro	Lack of economic resources	Varvaro
The nature of local people	Planeta	Cultural and professional gap	Varvaro
Receptivity culture	Planeta	Deficiency of infrastuctures	Varvaro
Beauty of the territory	Planeta	Accondiscendenza del carattere delle persone	Planeta
Farmers love the territory	Planeta	Cultural gap (cleanliness of the territory)	Planeta
Beauty and attractivity of the natural resources	Barbera	Cultural gap	Barbera
Hi quality human resources	Barbera	Deficiency of infrastuctures	Li Petri
Outstanding territory (lack of speculation)	Li Petri		
The community looks after the territory	Li Petri		
0		Т	
Small accommodation in the whole territory	Varvaro	There is no strength for destination developement	Varvaro
Local youth in the local governance	Planeta	Lack of qualified youth	Varvaro
Foreign investors	Barbera/ Li Petri	Massive tourism	Planeta
A new leading class	Barbera	Accommodations that offer a massive product	Barbera
Do more and more on receptivity culture and on professional touristskills	Li Petri	Chanoge of vision	LiPetri

[6]

Table 2: Stakeholders Perceptions SWOT Analysis

Conclusions

The research hypothesis on which we grafted our reasoning was this: Menfi for its geomorphological connotations, for the singularity of the manufacturing sector as well as for the presence of converging interests between public and privateon territorial promotion, is a relevant case study.

The territory of Menfi, 80% used for agricultural purposes, tells a history deeply rooted in the rural traditions of the community and, at the same time, a way of understanding agriculture that has in the pursuit of product quality and technical innovation its founding figures.

In a portion of space so limited and marginal, there are condensed important entrepreneurial experiences related to the two main products that typify the territory, oil and wine, such as the Cantine Settesoli, one of the main cellars in Europe in terms of vineyard area managed and number of bottles produced, Planeta, a brand rooted in the history of a family that had always been in the territory a recognised leader, "Goccia d'oro", the olive growers cooperative which groups together more than 1,100 members.

The business system related to agriculture quality is enhanced with a widespread system of smaller companies focused on high level productions. The roots of the agricultural tradition of quality i and an acknowledged landscape represent the axes of identity on which the local supply is built.

The aim of this paper was to show how Menfi, although unrelated to the typical tourist circuit, has been able to follow a sustainable territorial development thanks to a specific territorial and entrepreneurial milieu. In particular, we wanted to see and then describe and analyse the existence of synergies for the promotion of the territory. Menfi, with the aim of countering the seasonal tourism flows typical of beach destinations, is promoted as a complex target, experiential and emotional, which combines the sea product to the value of agro-food products of excellence, the rural landscape, the complex traditions. The management of the promotion of the territorial brand is based on a substantial synergy between the Municipality and the many private entities. In this sense, stands out the mission and objectives that substantiate the activities of "Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino", a non-profit organisation that, even with limited resources, from 2010 collects and puts in the system, a comparison peer, public Institution and local Stakeholders and, through the ScopriMenfi marketing plan, it stands as a Destination Management Organisation intended to enhance the competitiveness of the destination.

Menfi territory, which has a long history of cooperation and sharing of development options, has decided to focus strongly, in recent years, on a tourist development combined with the innovative development of agriculture. The process has just begun (Si.S.Te.Ma. Vino and ScopriMenfi had genesis respectively in 2010 and 2012) and it should be supported with more conviction and economic and professional resources.

To fully test the research hypothesis we wanted to analyse, with a qualitative perspective, the cohesion of the system of values, representations and perceptions of the principal Stakeholders involved in the governance of destination.

The results, discussed in the preceding paragraph, give us a full awareness of local actors involved in the enhancement of the destination and the territory to operate in a context of synergy.

Menfi binds its development to a specific way of understanding tourism: tourism made up of respect for the community and the territory, enhances and promotes both the outstanding sea and the rural dimension of identity; accommodations in Menfi are high-quality and integrated into the landscape; tourism in Menfi has a proper target: high spending tourist, culturally curious and sensitive to ecological issues.

Today Menfi promotes tourism by promoting its own territory and its own milieu. The findings in quantitative terms show that the destination is in developing, although the seasonality is still a prevailing phenomenon.

The enhancement of an offer to rural tourism, sport and nature can be in this regard an important key to try to face it. The scenery, the food and wine of excellence and an innate propensity reception from the community represent, today, all positive values that substantiate the territorial marketing activities.

It is however recorded, in contrast, a general absence of specific skills in the hospitality industry, a dearth of economic resources for the management of territorial promotion and a rather obvious lack of infrastructure which represent an obstacle to overcome in the near future.

Although events like Inycon, Mandrarossa Tour are progressively opening up the destination to well-segmented flow, initiating a process that contrasts the seasonal nature of tourist flows, Menfi, today still remains a target, although excellent in terms of quality and accessibility, too rooted in its seaside component. This is a critical factor on which management policies are called to intervene.

Stakeholder have identified two critical components: the absence or lack of adequate services on the coast and the persistence of a tourism component massive that opposes the ideal targets identified in the plans of territorial marketing. The sea and the coast, distinctive landscapes and essential resources in the tourism and territorial Menfi offer, must represent, through major infrastructural projects – such as the creation of an efficient port- and an adequate supply of services, both an attraction and an opportunity for development for the whole territory.

We have tested the research hypothesis revealing a strong SH awareness to work in synergy for the promotion of the destination; we have created clear synchronic framework of the destination, defined in SWOT analysis. Menfi, described in an holistic way, is a marginal destination compared to the most famous Sicilian tourist destinations; but it has started, thanks to the conscious synergy between public and private, a defined path of destination management and marketing, although in a nutshell.

This path lies in a shared vision, it aims to structure a tourist and territorial offer that are grounded on territorial identity and should be sustainable and respectful for the community. This offer is defining as sensitive to the quality of service and hospitality, and related to a specific segment of demand.

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