

2022

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella



Il capitale culturale

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

n. 25, 2022

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

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Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

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Layout editor Oltrepagina srl

Progetto grafico / Graphics +crocevia / studio grafico



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Film festivals, cultural events for territorial and touristic development: the case study of Taormina Film Fest

Enrico Nicosia*

Abstract

Festivals represent a vital part of human society. They are predominantly social phenomena, traditionally offer respite from hard work and mundane activities and therefore are an opportunity for socializing whilst also enjoying some form of cultural entertainment. These festivals have become fundamental tools of the movie industry for promoting and selling films but also a means to enhance film awareness and the territorial attractiveness of the regions hosting the event. Film Festivals can generate direct, indirect and induced socio-economic benefits for the hosting territories: increased local tourist flows can be counted among direct economic effects, while new territorial brands linked to a cinematic identity can be surely considered indirect or induced impacts. The focus of this paper is analysing risks, opportunities and potentialities of film festivals in terms of socio-economic, territorial and touristic development, through an in-depth overview of a Sicilian case study: the Taormina Film Fest. The case of the TFF, still little discussed in the literature, is very particular and interesting because despite being a moderately low-budget event in terms of organization, it nevertheless manages to have very wide territorial effects.

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I festival rappresentano una parte vitale della società umana. Sono prevalentemente un fenomeno sociale e tradizionalmente ci concedono una pausa dal duro lavoro e dalla vita quotidiana mondana, consentendoci momenti di socializzazione e svago. I festival sono diventati strumenti fondamentali per l'industria cinematografica per promuovere e commercializzare i film e, allo stesso tempo, accrescono sia la conoscenza del cinema, le regioni che li ospitano, sia l'attrattività territoriale. I festival cinematografici possono generare benefici socio-economici diretti, indiretti e indotti per i territori ospitanti tra cui: l'aumento dei flussi turistici locali può essere annoverato tra gli effetti economici diretti, mentre la creazione di nuovi marchi territoriali legati a un'identità cinematografica possono essere considerati impatti indiretti o indotti. Il focus di questo lavoro è analizzare rischi, opportunità e potenzialità dei festival cinematografici in termini di sviluppo socio-economico, territoriale e turistico, attraverso una panoramica approfondita di un caso studio siciliano: il Taormina Film Fest. Il caso del TFF, ancora poco discusso in letteratura, è molto particolare e interessante perché pur essendo realizzato con un budget non troppo elevato riesce ad avere effetti territoriali molto ampi.

1. *Introduction*

In recent times, the importance and number of festivals have increased. Primarily in tandem with the increasing importance placed on festivals as opportunities for increased tourism, branding and economic development¹. Boorstin (1961) and Isar (1976)² underline how the economical and political effectiveness of such events, regardless of their location, is authentic and therefore it is no wonder that we have been witnessing a booming of festivals in recent years and a consequent rise of academic interest in this research field.

In today's information economy, territories have assumed economic value and identity opposed to a virtual flow of the network economy and a sales vehicle based on local specificities. The more an object is characterized, the more attractive it becomes, that is, it becomes a repository of resources and a network of relationships and aggregations³.

In this general framework, film festivals represent events of high cultural value, as they enrich the cultural and creative industry and ensure the transmission of knowledge. They also have a triple economic, social and environmental value⁴. Film festivals are events of high cultural value, as they contribute to enriching a place's cultural industry and promote its history.

¹ Brennetot 2004; Matheson 2005; Mair, Duffy 2015; Stevens, Shin 2017; Laing 2018; Mair 2019.

² Boorstin 1961; Isar 1976.

³ Andersson *et al.* 2017; de Valck Kredell, Loist 2016; Jago, Dwyer 2006; Richards 2015; Jarman 2018; Lopez *et al.* 2018.

⁴ Richards, Wilson 2006; Richards 2007; Quinn 2009; Corinto, Nicosia 2016; Scholtz Viviers, Maputsoe 2019.

From the perspective of perception, the growth of film festivals can be explained by referring to the increasing importance of experiences in contemporary culture⁵. It is not simply the artwork itself, but more specifically its spectacular exhibition that has become a commodified product in the cultural economy. Festival visitors do not only decide to devote their attention to watching a particular film, they also choose to experience that film as part of the festival screening process. Most importantly, the focus on attention, spectacle and experience offers ways of framing institutional decisions and cinephile practices without being caught in high-low culture dichotomies⁶.

Benhamou (2012)⁷ states that festivals embody occasions in which it is possible to specify needs and requests for multiple audiences, multiple languages that confront the cultural fragmentation and global society of our time. These events generate a production/consumption of culture that is capable of highlighting the dynamism of creativity.

Thanks to the performance of a cultural event, the place acquires a specific value that unfolds itself in different trajectories and impacts including the economic, social, cultural and environmental ones that are interconnected with the effects generated on the territory and linked to the identity of the resident population⁸.

The connection between a festival and the host territory is intrinsic, in fact, Gursoy, Kym and Uysal (see fig. 1) have shown that the synergy between all the stakeholders and the organizers generates a high level of cohesion in terms of both benefits and economic and social incentives⁹. So, during the planning stage of the event, an in-depth analysis of the territory in which the event will take place must be carried out. Special attention will be paid to attractive factors and critical issues to be defined, according to a systemic perspective and a coordinated organizational plan. Therefore, a festival can be perfectly considered as a communication tool, as territorial promotion and as a tourist event, which spreads a well-defined message that will attract flows of visitors/tourists. Accordingly, these events can produce an impulse to the community to strengthen and renew the urban system which in turn will increase the degree of attractiveness of the hosting location¹⁰.

As for the first effect, the communication tool, festivals can be considered an important opportunity for the host territories to generate positive repercussions for the local economy. In fact, thanks to festivals, the territory can specifically: increase tourist presences and therefore positively affect accom-

⁵ see Pine, Gilmore 1999.

⁶ de Valck 2007, 2014; Getz *et al.* 2019.

⁷ Benhamou 2012.

⁸ Quinn 2005; Arcodia, Whitford 2006; Quinn, Wilks 2013.

⁹ Gursoy *et al.* 2004.

¹⁰ Fainstein, Judd 1999; Getz 1991, 2008; Kim *et al.* 2001; O' Sullivan, Jackson 2002; Robinson *et al.* 2004; Richards, Palmer 2010.

modation, increase consumption in local businesses, increase tax revenues, local employment, the visibility and popularity of the territory. Some of these objectives are at the basis of the very birth of festivals, including film festivals.

Thanks to an unprecedented attention and trust towards the creative industries, these objectives have strengthened especially over the last twenty years. Nowadays creativity is perceived not so much as an artistic value or as a free expression of a specific talent, but as an added economic value, a driving force for territorial development, the ability to get multiple tangible benefits and to develop knowledge that can be spent on the market¹¹. Accordingly, one of the results we are witnessing today is the rise of a new Geography of Festivals whereas festivals themselves are multiple and they involve cities of different sizes maybe with no musical, cinematographic or literary tradition behind them.

Festivals can be classified according to their economic direct, indirect or induced effects. The direct effects are immediate and they depend on the expense of residents, tourists or visitors attending the event. The indirect effects consist in the production of goods and services by companies, which aim to respond and satisfy the demand connected to the event. The induced effects occur over time, for example the increase in the level of consumption, employment and income. These effects, therefore, depend on the tourist presence in the place, especially if these are linked to the performance of the festival, and if they also involve a level of expenditure, especially in terms of purchases of goods and services¹². Nevertheless, festivals represent an opportunity to achieve socio-cultural objectives too. For example, local governance can revitalize its identity, promote culture among its population, invest in the creation of new opportunities for professional growth and visibility for local talents. As a matter of fact, it is not easy to estimate to what extent these non-economic objectives are achieved by a given administration, since they are not measurable objectives in quantitative terms and their actual achievement can only be assessed in qualitative terms in the medium-long term. Consequently, their analysis is particularly complex.

Finally, festivals can generate tourist attraction phenomena, which are also very difficult to investigate but they manage to achieve objectives that have repercussions on the environment and the local population¹³.

The aim of this work is to analyze the potential of the TFF, an international event that dates back to the mid-fifties, hosted in one of the most famous Sicilian cities and Sicily, which like other Italian regions, can count on a differentiated offer of festival events that attracts large tourist flows. One of the issues that this work tries to understand is to what extent the Taormina festival is

¹¹ Watermann 1998; Prentice, Andersen 2003; Jordan 2016.

¹² Landry *et al.* 1993; Nurse 2004; Moscardo 2007; Waitt 2008.

¹³ Zukin 1995; Picard, Robinson 2006; Timur, Getz 2009; Getz, Page 2016.

part of a strategic planning of the territory or if it is more an initiative in its own right.

The current pandemic due to the spread of COVID19 has devastated the world economy and it has also had significant repercussions on the Sicilian tourism sector, inflicting a ferocious blow on all direct operators and on the related industries. The habits of tourists and the way of travelling after the pandemic, especially in the short term, have changed. The process of restarting and resuming the entire tourism sector has been very slow leading to serious consequences for workers and business closures.

This work is an attempt to analyze the TFF in the Sicilian territory and it is the result of a field survey and interviews, carried out between June and July 2020 which aimed at understanding the relationship between the local stakeholders, identifying current trends and suggesting new directions for future researches.

2. *Methods*

The methodology applied to this work, according to a standardized and effective approach, was based on interviews of residents, visitors, tourists, operators who gravitate around the area under investigation¹⁴. The interviewer was the author of this work and he used preset questions in the Italian language. Specifically, 20 interviews lasting one hour each were conducted which allowed to analyze the complex and significant micro-interactions that take place within the wider social space of the festival (socio-cultural effects), as well as the economic and possibly environmental effects, mainly in terms of sustainability. The interviews also helped to create a sense of social familiarity that facilitated more intimate conversations about specific topics crucial to this fieldwork. In addition to being very effective tools for obtaining basic information and feedback, interviews allow a wider amount of flexibility and adaptability to the context thus facilitating the identification of the needs and attitudes of users. By spending time in the festival's main offices in Taormina, I quickly realized that I was less interested in what would usually be considered the center of the institution – the offices, the core staff, the work of the festival's director, – and more interested in what might be considered its periphery: where the festival interacts with other institutions, businesses and individuals, and with its public.

At the festival headquarters in Taormina, much of the activity resembled that of any other film festival: watching screeners of films, contacting film-makers or sales agents. Thus, a large part of my research focused on the

¹⁴ Kvale 1996; Wilson *et al.* 2017.

relationship between the festival and other stakeholders, filmmakers, distribution companies, local businesses, cultural initiatives and programs in Taormina (eg. Taobuk), both public and private. I spent a great deal of time hanging out and chatting with people in their offices, in coffee shops, or in their homes; attending screenings, press conferences, and other events. A field research that allowed me to add value to the interviews and to the numerical data. Numbers are significant, but behind the sterility of the numerical data, the interpretation of the researcher is fundamental. The value of perception and active participation in events on the territory attributable to the TFF at various levels are two fundamental aspects of this research. A typical approach of North American cultural geography, initiated by Carl Sauer and his Berkeley school in XX century, although with completely different objectives.

3. *Results*

The results emerged from the 20 face-to-face interviews of the length of one hour. For the purposes of this work we report some of the most significant parts of the interviews with the Production Director of the TFF and the Regional Councilor for Tourism, Sport and Entertainment, and a reasoned summary of the other 18 interviews.

The interviewer asked the Director Marco Fallanca:

A: Every festival would benefit from having a strategic plan. What are the action strategies identified and applied, that aimed at achieving the objectives? How do you identify these strategies in order to integrate the Festival into the territorial planning system?

MF: We make use of the expertise of Taormina Arte, which is an organizational structure that has existed since the 1980s and it has directly organized all editions of the Festival up to the early 2000s. Subsequently, because of economic contingency, around 2010, they sold the organization of the Festival to external parties, who dealt the planning and the practical and logistical organization of the event. This means that we are directly involved, on an artistic level, with the realization of the product, and we have always made use of professionals in the sector [...] in this organizational structure, there are figures, such as myself, who directly guide the production and, in this sense, we conform to standards and needs which, roughly, are codified nationally and almost internationally, for two reasons: the first, as almost all festivals have a formula that adapts to the characteristics and the specific mission of the festival, clearly based on history, tradition or economic capacity [...] On the organizational-logistical level, we use a structure that in 2019, in just one week, occupied over 1,500 hotel stays in the area. The impact that the Festival has on the territory is approximately 1: 4 on the initial expense of the festival; this means that it multiplies by 4 times in terms of repercussions on the territory: because, clearly, having over 1,500 hotel nights and over 500 guests at our expense, plus the public, professionals, 400 accredited between the press and professionals, on all those that are shops, restaurants, drinks, has a very relevant impact. This allows us to work daily on the

realization of this event which requires over nine months of planning. In this sense, we found a municipal administration that decided, although we are the exclusive producers of the Festival, to create the festival involving the city.

The case of Taormina is a bit anomalous because it hosts a very important and historical event, but today this festival is entirely organized by private individuals and that means that from a strategic point of view, it requires a significant effort by a private company. If we compare the TFF to other festivals with a bigger budget and a much more “ministerial” organization, Berlin for example, things differ a lot. Berlin hosts a festival with a budget of 24 million; ours is 1.5 million. We try to optimize resources and make the most of what is concretely achievable.

The interview also highlights that only in recent years the idea that the TFF should be integrated into a broader strategic territorial planning has been strengthened, in order to optimize and make its socio-cultural, economic and environmental effects last longer. There is also the need for a broader involvement of institutional actors such as universities (there are four in Sicily), which can provide, through their studies and the identification of best practices, a new path to improve performances.

The interviewer asked the Regional Councilor for Tourism, Manlio Messina, what kind of impacts the Festival generates on the host area and what impact it has in terms of sustainability.

MM: The impact that the event has on the territory is very high, because almost half of the budget is spent on the territory. So, among hotels, agencies, businesses, meals, set-ups, almost half of what we spend ourselves, perhaps more than half, has a direct impact on the territory. In addition, there is no event in Taormina that, during the year, whether literary or musical, consumes like the TFF. This is a mathematical fact because, for example, a concert by an artist (despite having a staff, agents, technicians) could consume 20 rooms in a hotel for one night. With our event, which lasts seven days, we consume 1,200 nights for a cost of about 300,000 euros, with a lot of extras like lunches and dinners, transfers by taxi and so on. Film festivals, in fact, beyond Taormina, are among the most expensive events ever. From the point of view of environmental impact, especially in terms of sustainability, we are quite careful.

Now we will focus on environmental sustainability, one of the aspects that makes the case of TFF special, after the analysis of tourist flows, which is useful for fully understanding the extent of the phenomenon in Taormina, a small tourist centre with 11,000 inhabitants perched in the hills.

Some data relating to the tourist flows in Taormina are provided below.

The tourist sector represents the main driving force for the development of the city's economy. From the analysis of the data provided by the Regional Tourist Observatory, it appears that the two-year period pre-Covid 2018-2019 recorded growth for tourism in Taormina and its positive trend confirms the city itself as the driving force of the Sicilian tourist product.

From the observation of Graphs 1 and 2 it appears that, in 2019 and 2018 there was the greatest increase in tourist arrivals and presences. This positive

change was determined exclusively by the foreign market, of which an increase of 6.00% (+52.186 units) was recorded, with 922.001 admissions, They represented almost 84% of total flows, unlike the market which, with 182,527 admissions, recorded a decline of 7.29% (-14,355 units).

Analyzing the overall movement of tourist presences distributed over the months of the year, it can be seen that increases were recorded in the winter period¹⁵. Conversely, in the summer period some declines, albeit slight, were recorded. In fact, during the winter season (November/March) an increase of 22.6% was recorded (given by +24.5% of foreigners and +15.9% of Italians); during the summer season (June/September) there was a drop of 0.76% (given by +0.04% of foreigners and -4.16% of Italians); on the other hand, during the traditional tourist season (April/October) there was an increase of 1.9% (given by +4.6% of foreigners and -10.4% of Italians).

As for arrivals, in 2019 a total of 372,356 were recorded, generating an increase of +12,598 units, obtained from 284,008 foreign arrivals, with an increase of +12,951 units and from 88,348 Italian arrivals, with a decrease of -353 units, compared to 2018.

The tourist movement was therefore determined as reported in graphs 3 and 4.

From the analysis of the Italian tourist movement divided by regions, a positive trend was detected for Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia Romagna, but not for Sicily, Piedmont, Tuscany, Lazio, Campania, Puglia and Calabria, for which percentages were negative. As for the foreign tourist movement by nationality, however, it turned out that in 2019, the Russian market recorded a significant decline (-18.3%), together with other nationalities that have always been present in Taormina, i.e. Great Britain /Ireland , Scandinavia (Denmark-Finland-Norway-Sweden), Eastern European countries and Benelux (Belgium-Luxembourg-Netherlands), of which, however, a more slight decline was noted.

With reference to the daily average of Italian tourists, in 2019 there was a decrease compared to the previous year, from 539.40 units to 500.07. On the other hand, the daily average of foreign tourists, from 2,383.05 units in 2018, recorded an increase in 2019 reaching 2,526.03 units and a total daily average of 3,026.10 units, compared to 2,922.45 units in 2018.

Comparing the data between 2018 and 2019, although in 2019 there were decreases during the summer months, it is precisely during this time period that the greatest tourist flows tend to be concentrated in terms of presences. So, the summer period was considered the highest period of the tourist season and it coincides with the realization of the two festivals TFF and Taobuk and, more generally, with the carrying out of the numerous events that usually

¹⁵ Source: Regional Tourist Observatory.

begin in June and end in September. The summer season is the ideal period for holding events, thanks to the number of tourists. Consequently, the events themselves could also influence the flow trend, constituting a significant attraction for Italians and foreigners who could contribute to an extension of the peak summer season with June and September.

The relationship between TFF and tourism is a particularly relevant issue and therefore deserves an in-depth analysis. In terms of tourism the festival achieves objectives that have repercussions on the environment and the local population. In the short term, it improves the image of the place, increases tourist attendance, extends the duration of tourist stays, amplifies the attraction level of local resources, increases tourist expenses and causes multiplicative effects on the territory. In the medium to long term, however, it increases the popularity of the area, manages to reconvert or strengthen the image of the area, enhance the local artistic and cultural heritage, extend the life cycle of the tourist destination.

One of the current post-pandemic challenges will be to research and promote the alignment between the various segments that make up the tourist supply and demand, to direct the communication and destination branding efforts and the type of format commercials to aim for. Within the same tourist destination, where the coexistence of different tourist segments is a characterizing aspect of the regional offer, further efforts should be made to promote events and activities aimed at all those tourists who are looking for a complete tourist experience.

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, Taormina was ready to focus courageously on the promotion of tourism related to cultural events, as many international destinations have done, to diversify the offer. While it is not easy to define the extent of this phenomenon as well as to identify all the possible stakeholders, on the other it is clear that this type of tourism represents a segment of the tourist offer on which to focus in the future.

The other 18 interviews were administered to residents (6 in total, of which 3 linked to commercial activities in the historic center), users of the TFF (5), personnel engaged in services (2 traffic wardens, 1 paramedics, 1 tour bus driver and 1 shuttle driver from the car park to the historic centre), tourists not involved in the TFF (2). It is easy to identify what are the attitudes of each interviewee on the territory. For example, the tour bus driver will help us to better understand the subject of connections, while the traffic wardens and the ambulance operator will present their thoughts on safety. However, from their point of view, all will be useful to understand the territorial effects and dynamics of the TFF.

The analysis of these interviews outlines some critical problems connected to the case-study of Taormina which offer crucial thinking points for re-planning future TFF events. One of these is linked to the actual reception capacity of such a small town since the event takes place when the tourist season is at its

peak and all interviewees clearly perceived the impact on local sustainability (with all its social and cultural consequences) as a main downside of the event. The choice of hosting the event in summer could sound like good news for three of the shop owners based in Taormina that were interviewed during this study. However, they tend to express their perplexity due to the fact that it adds further workload to the already excessive over-time work (7 days a week from early morning until late at night) they are forced to handle in summer to compensate the lack of shopping activities during low-season periods. All the six residents interviewed, pointed out how excessive tourist density has a negative impact on local mobility and on simple daily purchases (bread and medicines) which take much longer due to the incredibly long queues. In the years marked by Covid-19 these inconveniences have obviously increased. Such point of view was also expressed by two traffic officers who shared their concern in terms of urban security and their inability to always grant street safety in Taormina when it is crammed with people, as it often happens during the TFF, since many cultural events take place together. All service workers (drivers, paramedics) complain about the excessive workload during peak season which inevitably impacts quality of life standards. A tourist bus driver said that in the midst of peak season weeks, finding a mere parking space can turn into a quest which proves tourist congestion has gone beyond predictions considering that the two multi-level parking lots built in the nineties (Lumbi and Porta Catania) are no longer enough.

Tourists directly involved with the TFF together with tourists not linked to the event, admitted how their visiting experience in Taormina was strongly compromised by the excessive amount of people. In particular the moment of most discomfort was experienced when walking along the main street (Corso Umberto) packed with hundreds of people making it impossible to stop at a bar or to indulge in any shopping activity.

Such statements are in contrast with the idea that the TFF should and can bring advantages in the long run because it is quite evident that the tourist experience is negatively compromised. All interviewees agree with the idea of organizing the TFF in a less frantic period of the year.

Aware of the political and managerial aspects connected to the TFF, four Taormina residents highlighted the importance of sharing the medium-long term goals of the TFF with other public and private stakeholders and calling the cooperation with international experts and local Universities. Taormina is fact in between the Universities of Catania and Messina and could therefore easily start involving both institutions to build strategic relationships. The TFF could host internships and training activities in partnership with Sicilian academic institutions thus paving the way for a truly strategic cooperation that could add value to such an important cultural event which at the moment has not been sufficiently enhanced.

4. Discussion

Film festivals can be a source of income, therefore increasing and improving the local economy can generate new forms of employment for the community, increasing the employment rate at the same time. These events can result in a boost to the community, strengthening and renewing the urban fabric and infrastructure and allowing better accessibility. The impacts on the tourism sector are the most important key factor because they facilitate the growth of resources with high added value for the area, provide greater visibility and publicity of the venue that hosts them and increase the degree of attractiveness of an area¹⁶.

The economic effects generated by the TFF can be distinguished as direct, indirect and induced (see Tab.1). The first type of effect is immediate and depends upon the consuming habits of the residents, tourists and visitors attending the event. The indirect effects are the production of goods and services by businesses, which aim to meet and satisfy the demand linked to the event. The induced effects are those that occur with the passage of time, which may consist of increases in the level of consumption, employment and income. These effects depend upon the number of tourists in the place, and if they involve a considerable level of expenditure on goods and services.

The desire of local governments to use the film festival to generate economic benefits for the area is the basis of the very birth of the festival, as in the case of the Venice Film Festival. In Taormina these objectives have not diminished over time, but on the contrary have only strengthened, especially over the last fifteen years, thanks to an unprecedented attention and trust in the creative industries. In fact, creativity is not only the artistic value or free expression of a talent, but also and especially it is considered an added economic value, as a driver of development that is capable of multiplying tangible benefits and cultivating the valuable knowledge of the market.

This renewed attention to the creative industries has led many subnational governments to invest in films, for example by creating film commissions and film funds, and to reinterpret the festival as an opportunity for economic development. In other words, public authorities are becoming major players in the movie business and they are sharing objectives, skills and sensitivity with those who work in the film industry. One goal for TFF is to create a strategic alliance between festival and territory, where everyone pursues their objectives in exploiting the interlocutor. This occurs when a territory provides its own location for a movie or financing for a festival. The film industry has no interest in promoting an area or in developing the local economy and or encouraging tourism. Similarly, public authorities are not interested in the economic objectives of film studios.

¹⁶ Derrett 2003; Boo, Busser 2006; Getz *et al.* 2019.

The change of direction from the past is clear: in the past subnational governments invested little in cinema and culture because they expected only intangible results in terms of the intellectual improvement of their citizens. Today subnational governments are investing a great deal more money than in the past because these industries stimulate tangible benefits that can bring growth, development and prosperity for the region and its population.

Local community cohesion	Economic Benefits	Social Incentives	Social costs
Income for urban projects	Increase of additional temporary (seasonal) employment	Increase opportunities recreational activities and entertainment	Increased traffic
Enhancing the image and local identity	Development of the tourism system	Promotion for organizations in the area	Exceeding the load capacity
Construction of a sense of community	Increase due to the armature	Growth opportunities for cultural exchange	Increased pollution

Table 1. Socio-economic impact of TFF on the host territory. Source: adaptation from Getz, 2008, 2009; Getz *et al.* 2019

The relationship between the host territory and the resident population is the critical element in the organization of a film festival at these levels: the community may feel harmed from these events, failing in exploiting all possible advantages that could be drawn to the local economy. To avoid these side effects and especially negative reactions from residents, the local policy makers, before agreeing and determining how to host an event, should try to predict and evaluate the consequences, often uncountable, that can accrue to the territory¹⁷.

If we apply these considerations to the case-study of Taormina it will be clear that the TFF can represent an excellent opportunity for territorial development nevertheless, the data collected and analyzed clearly shows a major problem of the TFF so far, which is the excessive amount of visitors. Sicily and its tourist destinations are marked by this crucial downside of the tourist industry. The seasonality of the sector causes overwhelming tourist flows between June and August. Considering that Taormina has always been a top tourist destination and that it has recently applied for the nominee (Taormina and Isola Bella) as Unesco World Heritage site, it is quite realistic to predict a further rise in tourists arrivals in the near future. Furthermore, there is a saturation of urban spaces to be used for building new parking lots or hospitality structures. This is why it is reasonable to argue that events

¹⁷ Crespi-Vallbona, Richards 2007; Nicosia 2012.

of such popular impact like the TFF should be held in the mild spring season when the Mediterranean climate is still appreciated and enjoyable. This overabundance of visitors during peak summer months is no longer a strong-point but unfortunately has become a weakness since it negatively impacts both tourists, who cannot experience the town's facilities in an efficient and pleasant way, and locals who struggle in ordinary activities and cannot provide top-quality services as wished. In such a scenario the beauty of the local culture and territory finds it hard to shine and even worse, it could set the grounds for contrasts between residents and tourists¹⁸. It is also worth noting that most of the Film Festivals held in Italy take place from September to May (approximately 80).

5. Final considerations

Film festivals and territorial development are strictly connected but this connection is stronger only if local authorities and private entities work together to ensure a mutual integration, to tighten a dense network of relationships and to fully grasp the potential of such important events.

Festivals can shape and reflect the values of a territorial context, trying to bring out its landscape, art, traditions, and community life. Also, they may be able to contribute to increase the visibility and attractiveness of a place. They increase the number of tourists in those places that are often characterized by a high concentration of tourist activity in certain periods of the year, thus acting as a tool of "seasonal adjustment" and balancing of tourists. And, as noted above, they may generate economic benefits that can be direct, indirect and induced.

So, it is firmly believed that an event like TFF depends on the social, cultural and economic development of the territory in which it is set. It manages to become the real expression of the culture of a place, enhances the distinctive elements and specificities of the territory, increases civic pride and sense of belonging to the local community.

In conclusion, culturally and historically specific geographical analysis of spatial dynamics will always reveal something interesting and important. Moreover, it will always reveal a powerful relationship that can be considered a challenge for the future: unravelling the true diversity and impact of film festivals in the different territories. To make it possible, a combination of talents, efforts and enthusiasm will be needed to face such a delicate task.

Taking everything in consideration the survey has highlighted the TFF's

¹⁸ Lozato-Giotart 2003.

main weak point which is the fact that it is held in one of the busiest and chaotic moment of the year (June-July) thus hindering an effective fruition of Taormina's tourist attractions and hampering social and cultural activities which require slower rhythms to be fully appreciated by visitors. If held in a smarter moment of the year – when there is no risk of exceeding local tourist capacity – the TFF could trigger positive social-cultural effects for its territory. The movie festival could represent a new incentive for visiting Taormina and consequently enjoying the sea view from the Greek Theatre, admiring the Norman buildings, tasting typical products and overall benefiting from the town's cultural offer.

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Appendix

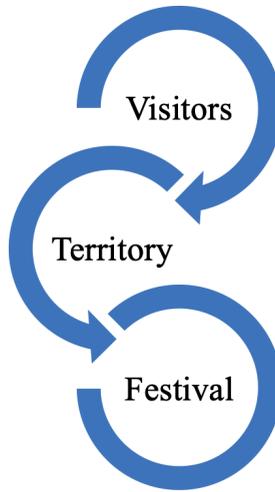
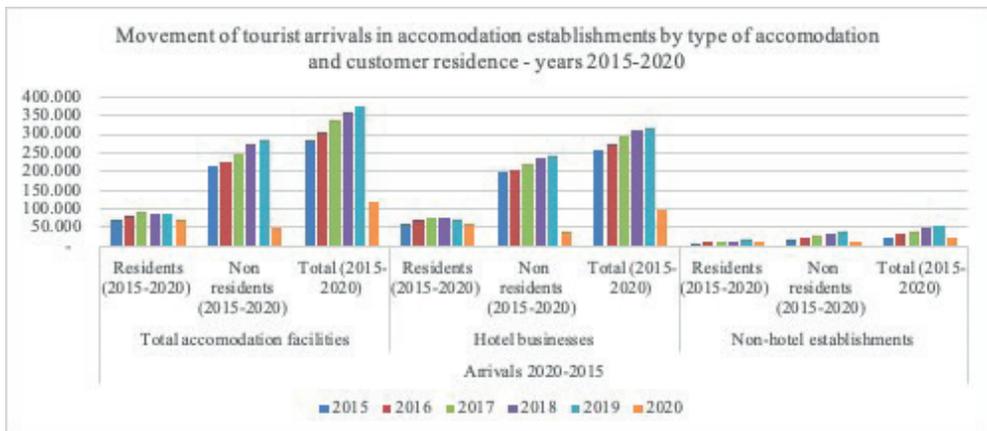
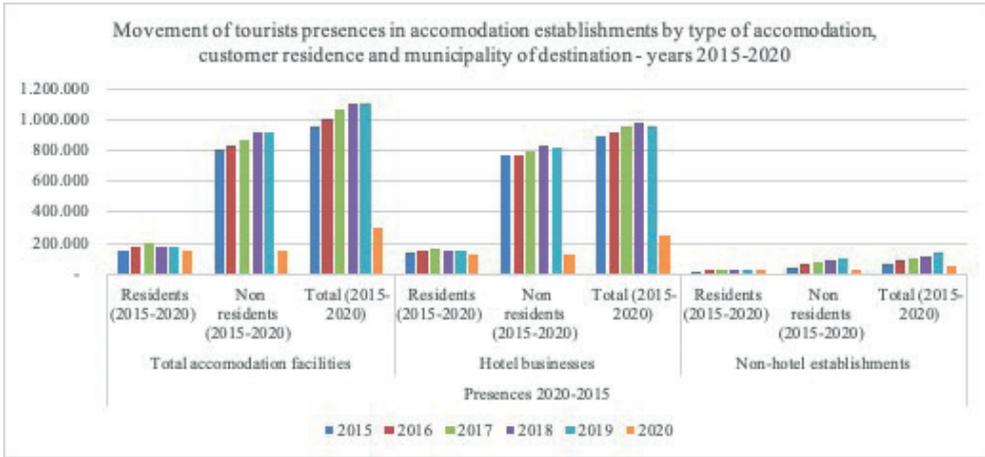


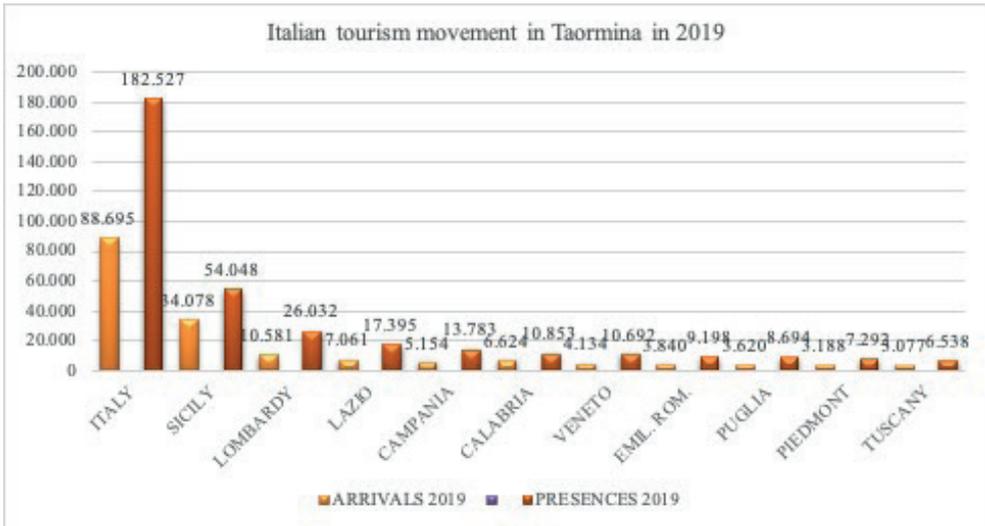
Fig. 1. Communication flows Visitors-Territory-Festival



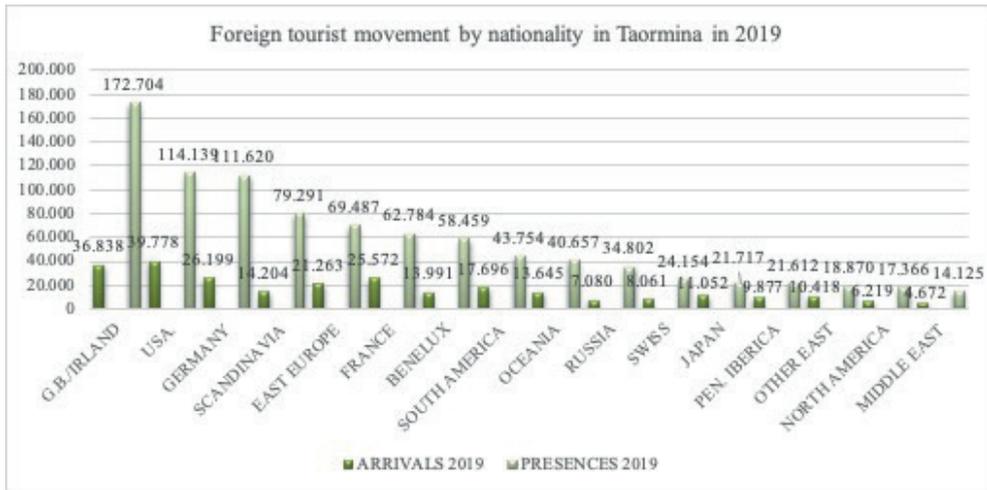
Graph 1. Movement of tourists arrivals in accommodation establishments by type of accommodation and customer residence - Years 2020-2015. Source: Regional Tourist Observatory



Graph 2. Movement of tourists' presences in accommodation establishments by type of accommodation, customer residence and municipality of destination - years 2015-2020. Source: Regional Tourist Observatory



Graph 3. Italian tourist movement in Taormina in 2019. Source: Regional Tourist Observatory



Graph 4. Foreign tourist movement by nationality in Taormina in 2019. Source: Regional Tourist Observatory

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Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

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