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Models of cultural tourism development in peripheral territories. Insights from the *In Luce* funding program

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Abstract

Local development in peripheral areas is a central topic at the European level. Promoting local tangible and intangible cultural resources to sustain regional growth through tourism is frequently considered a successful strategy for depopulated and less developed territories. A “culture-led” approach to local development is combined with a “tourism-led” one. To better understand and classify the multiple links between cultural endowments and tourism promotion in peripheral areas, the *In Luce* call launched in 2021 by the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation in Northern Italy is analysed. The study is conducted through an in-depth analysis of the 15 projects awarded by a grant and the related territory. Combining the types of heritage promoted by the projects, the associated types of tourism activated, and the degree of tourism specialisation of the involved municipalities, three leading models for culture-led tourism development are identified: Cultural Activation, Cultural Diversification and Tourist Leverage.

Lo sviluppo locale delle aree periferiche è un tema centrale sia in Italia sia a livello europeo. La promozione delle risorse culturali locali, materiali e immateriali, per sostenere la crescita attraverso il turismo è spesso considerata una strategia di successo per territori poco abitati e scarsamente sviluppati. Un approccio allo sviluppo locale “culture-led” si combina così con un approccio “tourism-led”. Al fine di meglio comprendere e classificare i legami e le relazioni tra le risorse culturali locali e la promozione turistica nelle aree periferiche, in questo studio viene analizzato il bando *In Luce* lanciato nel 2021 dalla Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo nel Nord Italia. Lo studio si sviluppa attraverso un’analisi approfondita dei 15 progetti selezionati per il finanziamento e del territorio coinvolto dalle azioni proposte. Combinando le tipologie di patrimonio promosse dai progetti, le tipologie di turismo associate e il grado di specializzazione turistica dei comuni interessati, vengono individuati tre modelli per lo sviluppo turistico a base culturale: il Modello dell’Attivazione Culturale, il Modello della Diversificazione Culturale e il Modello della Leva Turistica.

1. *Introduction*

Local development in peripheral areas is a central topic at the European level, both in academic and policy debate. The promotion of local cultural resources and the evolution of rural and peripheral territories towards tourism destinations is one of the strategies that have been considered to trigger or foster local development processes. This culture-led approach recognises local development as a process based on enhancing local identity through a place’s tangible and intangible culture. In this context, cultural districts are often leveraged when the interaction between a place’s social, economic and cultural aspects drives cultural resource enhancement. In peripheral territories, this approach is generally associated with tourism-led strategies and policies oriented towards local growth by attracting foreign visitors to new destinations where nature, sports, events, and, in general, people’s wellness are key

factors. Combining culture and tourism seems to be the perfect formula for bringing development; however, it is often presented in an oversimplified way.

Interest in cultural and tourism interventions in rural and peripheral areas has significantly grown in recent years. The relatively large academic literature¹ and the numerous EU-funded Horizon projects² aiming to achieve sustainable local development by promoting cultural tourism, witness an exceptional and growing research and institutional interest in this direction. Nevertheless, the interpretive framework still needs to be clearly settled, not allowing the full comparison of the types and results of development projects.

Within this context, our study aims to contribute to the debate on the trajectories of cultural and tourism development in peripheral areas by examining the *In Luce: Valorising and narrating the cultural identities of the territories* funding program, a call promoted by the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation for the cultural and tourism enhancement of Piedmont, Liguria and Aosta Valley in Italy. This funding program, developed over the 2021-2024 period, selected 15 small-scale culture-based projects implemented in a broad and diversified range of territorial specificities considering the extent, the level of tourism, and the endowment of natural and cultural resources. An in-depth analysis of the projects allows us to highlight the existence of three models to interpret and explain the links between cultural endowments and tourism promotion in peripheral areas.

The article is organised as follows. The main theoretical literature on cultural and tourism development in peripheral areas is presented in the next section. In section 3, the methodology and the data derived from the projects are described, and in section 4 the results of the empirical analysis are presented. The results are discussed in relation to the three models identified and further described in section 5. The conclusion is drawn in section 6.

2. The theoretical framework for culture and tourism as drivers for Italian peripheral areas

Several indicators diagnose a territory's peripherality³. Demographic decline is the most evident, but it is normally accompanied by low population density, a high incidence of older people, difficulties in maintaining services in the territory caused by economic and organisational sustainability issues, low incomes and entrepreneurship levels, and general low attractiveness. Periph-

¹ MacDonald, Jolliffe 2003; Belletti 2010; Tang, Xu 2023.

² See for example <<https://incultum.eu/>>; <<https://www.ruritage.eu/>>; <<http://www.smartcultour.eu/>>; <<https://sophiaplatform.eu/en/>>; <<https://textour-project.eu/>>, 11.09.2024.

³ Carrosio, Osti 2017.

eral areas are physically distant from towns and main centres where essential services (education, health and mobility) are supplied. All these factors often lead to a spiral of marginality⁴.

To deal with this problematical condition, in 2013, Italy adopted the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)⁵, which allowed to quantify that about a quarter of the Italian population lives in peripheral areas and that approximately 60% of the territory is peripheral, mainly in the areas close to the Alpine and Apennine Mountain ranges. Regarding policy intervention, the strategy aimed at fostering socio-economic development by adopting a place-based approach with active, project-based and participatory planning. Key factors are the sustainability and the enhancement of natural and cultural resources and tourism. The sustainability of the territories is framed through the activation of local agri-food chains, the supply of renewable energy, the promotion of local know-how and craftsmanship, and the improvement of the essential services offered.

In this context, a particular interest in mountain⁶ and the so-called “metro-mountain”⁷ territories arose. These areas even though characterised by environmental fragility and socio-economic marginality, in recent decades have tended to be increasingly perceived as spaces of socio-economic growth and entrepreneurial innovation, witnessed by an increasing number of social innovation experiences as the one of the “new mountaineers”, i.e. the “mountaineers by choice” who moved to the mountains leaving the main centres⁸.

Moreover, peripheral areas are often rich in significant environmental and cultural resources. Based on the literature investigating the link between creative sectors and tourism⁹, the role of tourism in peripheral areas is often examined by exploring specific issues such as the role of creativity¹⁰, cultural and creative industries¹¹, cultural tourism¹², the effects of improved connectivity to urban centres¹³, and the importance of place-based planning, community engagement, and sustainable tourism practices¹⁴.

⁴ Buran *et al.* 1998.

⁵ Barca *et al.* 2012.

⁶ See, for instance, the Camaldoli Manifesto signed by numerous associations and scholars: *Manifesto di Camaldoli per una nuova centralità della montagna* 2019.

⁷ With the use of the word “metro-mountain”, scholars of local development policies refer to the strengthening of cultural and operative connections between the mountain and the city, with the purpose of emphasising a polycentric development in line with the territorial and cultural diversity of Italy.

⁸ De Rossi 2018; Barbera, De Rossi 2021; Cottafava *et al.* 2023.

⁹ Della Lucia, Segre 2017; Petrei *et al.* 2020; Richards 2020; Duxbury *et al.* 2020.

¹⁰ De la Barre 2012.

¹¹ Porta *et al.* 2024.

¹² García-Delgado *et al.* 2020; Gato *et al.* 2022.

¹³ Hall *et al.* 2013.

¹⁴ Fusco Girard, Nijkamp 2009; Cave, Dredge 2020; Fusco Girard, Vecco 2021; Bellato *et al.* 2022.

Specific concerns about the negative impacts of tourism also emerge, such as the risk of commodification, tourist “monoculture”¹⁵, and tourism extractivism¹⁶. In particular for peripheral areas, the efforts of the transport system improvement to ameliorate the connectivity to urban centres, which also attracts tourists, risk generating congestion of public transport for local residents and increases dependence of the local community on external players¹⁷. These issues are part of a broader literature that can be ascribed to the sustainable tourism discourse. It emerged in the 1980s in response to a growing concern about the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities¹⁸ and the attention to the overtourism phenomenon¹⁹. Recently, as one of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourist flows, the potential role for local development played by proximity tourism and local visitors is highlighted²⁰. Similarly to the effects of the ongoing climate crisis, the mass tourism model is challenged, and new models for the tourism sector arise.

An important driver for local development is the enhancement of cultural capital, as defined by Throsby²¹, which is composed of tangible and intangible cultural assets expressing both cultural and economic values. To design opportunities for cultural, social and economic growth in peripheral areas, the concept of cultural capital can be fruitfully integrated with that of “territorial identity”, introduced mainly by regional sciences. Territorial identity concerns the socio-cultural system that defines people, traditions, culture, landscape and the various types of ties of the inhabitants with their territory²². It would determine a certain level of convergence between private and collective interests that consequently nurture feelings of loyalty and a sense of belonging²³. A place’s historical and artistic heritage can, then, be a source of endogenous development when combined with other tangible and intangible factors²⁴ that strengthen communitarian ties, local sense of belonging, cohesion and social inclusion²⁵. This vision can be further integrated with the notion of cultural districts, which emphasises the positive role of economies of scale and scope when a concentration of cultural resources is present in a specific place, and a

¹⁵ Hall *et al.* 2013; Bohlin *et al.* 2016.

¹⁶ Kauppila *et al.* 2009; Kuščer *et al.* 2017; Saarinen *et al.* 2017; Cocco *et al.* 2020; Di Gioia, Dematteis 2020; Bronzini *et al.* 2022; Cotella, Brovarone 2022; Matarazzo 2023; Sabatini 2023.

¹⁷ Hall *et al.* 2013.

¹⁸ Weaver 2007.

¹⁹ Mihalic 2020.

²⁰ Bertacchini *et al.* 2021.

²¹ Throsby 1999, 2000, 2017.

²² Paasi *et al.* 2022.

²³ Capello 2019.

²⁴ Camagni *et al.* 2020.

²⁵ Panzera 2022.

network of local actors share know-how and information²⁶. This combination of factors generates strong symbolic meanings and improves the identification or reputation of the place locally and internationally.

Cultural districts are a helpful theoretical framework for promoting local development by leveraging cultural and heritage resources and a dense network of relationships within a particular area. If institutional forms that enable the recognition of these resources and the cooperation between geographically localised cultural organisations and enterprises are introduced, such as collective property protection or standards, the link between cultural districts and local development is realised by raising the awareness of local actors to behave and operate as a collective and integrated system²⁷. Moreover, the cultural district model is particularly appropriate to meet the demand for cultural tourism²⁸. Cultural tourism districts are characterised by concentrations of activities related to hospitality (hotels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants), tour operators, transport services, the supply of cultural services (historical heritage, museums, festivals) and the production of craft goods and material culture.

3. *Methodology and data*

3.1. *The research design*

Our empirical analysis is based on a sample of 15 projects selected and funded by the *In Luce* program launched by the Italian Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation. The research design is structured in four main steps.

In the first step, the projects' goals, the activities, the type of heritage and the type of tourism enhanced are identified through the analysis of the documents of the project proposals as described in the submitted application dossier. In the second step, the municipalities involved in the projects are identified, mapped, and analysed in terms of their socio-economic and tourism characteristics. In the third step, the activities and initiatives carried out are examined based on the monitoring phase of the projects through 2 perspectives: *i*) the main focus of the activities and initiatives; *ii*) the kind of local actors involved. The first perspective is analysed by considering 4 indicators: the number of experience-oriented activities, artistic/musical initiatives, thematic itineraries, tours and hike paths, and installation of dissemination materials. The second

²⁶ Santagata 2006; Cooke, Lazzeretti 2008; Sacco *et al.* 2013; Marques, Richards 2014.

²⁷ Santagata 2002.

²⁸ Russo, Segre 2009.

perspective is analysed by measuring the number of tourism operators, enterprises, cultural organisations, and institutions involved.

As a final step, 3 leading models for culture-led tourism development are identified by referring to the different types of heritage promoted by the projects, the associated types of tourism activated, and the level of tourism specialisation and the form of tourism vocation of the involved municipalities. The models are analysed by applying the 2 main perspectives illustrated above.

3.2. *The data of the In Luce funding program*

The *In Luce* call for proposals was launched in 2021 by the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation²⁹ as part of the actions of its culture sector. This sector emphasises the role of culture – in terms of heritage, art, creativity and community participation – as one of the main drivers for the sustainable development of territories. It is organised around 4 main goals: to create territorial attractiveness, to develop skills, to preserve beauty, and to foster the active participation of local communities. In particular, the *In Luce* program belongs to the activities designed “to create attractiveness”, aimed at fostering the possibility for territories to attract human capital through culture and creativity. A budget of 3,375,000 Euro was dedicated to the program, which was designed to cover three years (2021-2023) and support 15 projects.

The call intends to solicit projects for non-metropolitan areas and requests to plan actions aligned with the following objectives:

1. To enhance the diffuse artistic and cultural heritage of Piedmont, Liguria and Aosta Valley to create opportunities for cultural, social and economic growth for the territories, especially those non-metropolitans;
2. To foster and enhance the value of territorial networks;
3. To foster sustainable development and tourism that promotes knowledge of local cultures while respecting the environment and community living systems.

The objective underlying the call refers to the role of cultural capital as a means of development, encouraging cultural offers based on new narratives of the artistic and architectural heritage, developing new cultural tourism proposals or creating integrated promotion systems such that a virtuous circle between cultural and economic value is generated.

²⁹ Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation was established in Turin in 1563. After the reform of the Italian banking system in 1992, it can be considered among the Italian foundations of banking origin created by the reform. It is one of the oldest and largest private foundations in Europe. It was established with philanthropic aims to boost cultural, civil and economic development. The main goals are developed through projects to promote culture, enhance human capital and protect the planet in the regions of Piedmont, Liguria and Valle d’Aosta in Northern Italy.

The importance of strengthening local stakeholders' networks is also stressed, and the concept of cultural districts is implicitly recalled. Culture as a resource is linked to the broader consideration of the multiple territorial resources of a place, leveraging, directly and indirectly, the local system of institutional actors and economic activities.

Finally, the topic of sustainability is also introduced. The aim is to encourage sustainable tourism practices by promoting knowledge of local cultures while respecting the environment and community life systems. This last dimension intersects with the previous two by identifying tourism as one of the main channels to foster sustainable cultural and natural heritage enhancement processes. The *In Luce* program responds to 4 SDGs³⁰: creating economic growth; promoting business, innovation and infrastructure; making cities and communities inclusive, safe and sustainable; and encouraging responsible consumption and production.

Overall, the 15 projects implemented 627 initiatives pursuing different objectives ranging from the valorisation of specific local cultures to the promotion of the territory through tourism initiatives of various kinds: festivals, walks, and slow tourism initiatives leading to the rediscovery of little-known local assets. In Table 1, the main information about the projects is presented.

<i>Project name</i>	<i>Brief description</i>	<i>Main activities</i>
Beica Ben	Enhancement of Occitan culture in the Grana and Maira valleys by networking local assets and associations	Artistic initiatives and outdoor cultural activities
Bormida Gotica	Valorisation and creation of a network of late Gothic assets in the Bormida Valley	Museum promotion and outdoor cultural activities
FestivAlContrario	Enhancement of the cultural identity of the upper Val Neva, in the Savona area, through the realization of a diffuse festival	Artistic and music initiatives
Gipsoteche in Luce	Creation of a tourist district with high specialisation and expertise in plaster working, enhancing 3 gypsum libraries in Bistagno, Monastero Bormida, and Nizza Monferrato	Museum promotion
Habitat	Creation of a widespread cultural park in Val Sesia, starting with the Carlo Conti Museum of Archaeology and Palaeontology	Outdoor cultural activities, workshops, and museum promotion
Itinerari dello Spirito	Enhancement and extension of the Oropa Walk to the Canavese area	Excursions; artistic and music initiatives

³⁰ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, <<https://unric.org/it/agenda-2030/>>, 11.09.2024.

<i>Project name</i>	<i>Brief description</i>	<i>Main activities</i>
Landscape Storymovers	Narrative of the Langhe-Roero-Monferrato wine-growing landscapes to preserve and protect memories and traditions	Artistic and music initiatives; experiential workshops
Le Strade dei Forti	Enhancement of the Pinerolo “fortified landscape” and the historical events connected to it	Excursions and outdoor cultural activities
Le Vie dei Walser	Creation of a European cultural itinerary through the symbolic places of Walser culture between Upper Piedmont and Val d’Aosta	Excursions and outdoor cultural activities
Lento	Promotion of a slower and more sustainable tourism in the village of Cervo, favouring deseasonalisation	Artistic and music initiatives
Morena Stories	Enhancement of the culture, also naturalistic, of the Ivrea morainic amphitheatre	Excursions and outdoor cultural activities
Note dal Cammino Balteo	Promotion of “minor” heritage away from the main tourist circuits, in low and medium altitude areas of the Aosta Valley	Excursions and outdoor cultural activities
Terre del Rossese	Giving voice to the rural culture of the villages of the Imperia hinterland	Artistic and music initiatives; excursions
Valle dei Pittori	Enhancement of the Vigizzo Valley painters through the Rossetti Valentini School of Fine Arts	Outdoor cultural activities and museum promotion
Woolscape	Creation of cultural HUBs in the Biella territory, enhancing the industrial landscape of the area	Artistic initiatives; museum promotion and workshops

Tab. 1. Summary description of the *In Luce* projects (Source: own elaboration)

The projects are heterogeneous in terms of both types of heritage enhancement and territorial extension. Considering them as a whole, however, allows us to better understand the design coherence of *In Luce*, intended as an extensive program for the cultural revitalisation of territories through the enhancement of various types of cultural resources.

Overall, the projects involve over 140 municipalities and 400,500 inhabitants in three Italian regions (Piedmont, Liguria and Aosta Valley). Most of the projects include municipalities belonging to the same administrative province, four projects include other provinces in the same region, and two projects have a trans-regional extension as *Le via dei Walser* involves Piedmont and Aosta Valley and *Bormida Gotica* involves Piedmont and Liguria. In Figure 1, the geographical distribution of the projects is presented on a map where the regional boundaries are identified, and the dimension of the municipalities is graphically highlighted. The colours of the dots correspond to the projects listed in Table 1.

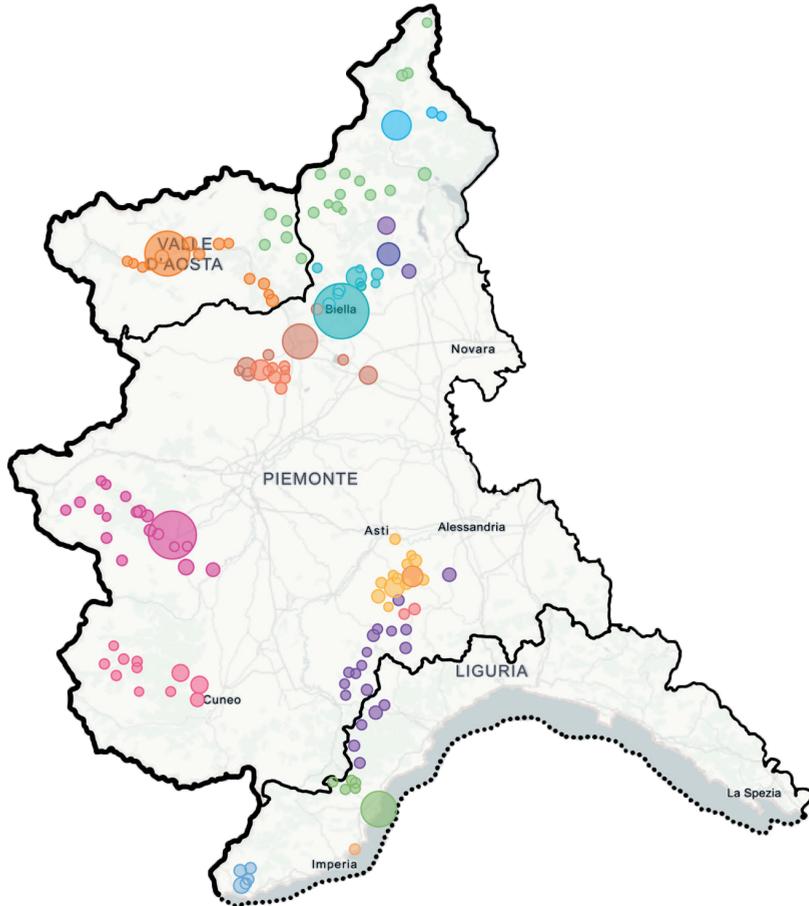


Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of the *In Luce* projects (Source: own elaboration)

Even if the *In Luce* program does not explicitly refer to peripheral territories, it can be considered connected to the policy dedicated to inner areas launched in Italy in 2013 with the SNAI³¹. By applying to the 15 projects the classification distinguishing between Centres and Inner Areas as introduced by the SNAI, it emerges that more than 60% of municipalities belong, in fact, to inner areas (32.6% are classified as intermediate, 23.7% as peripheral and 3.7% as ultra-peripheral), which correspond to over 41% of the total involved population (about 166,000 people). The targeted municipalities also include

³¹ SNAI is the Italian program for the revaluation of peripheral areas launched by the Agency for Territorial Cohesion and Minister for Territorial Cohesion Fabrizio Barca. The policy proposes a classification of Italian municipalities according to their distance from the essential public services and then suggests a series of active actions and policies to contrast, or at least mitigate, the trends of demographic decline and territorial marginalisation of those areas.

some cities, such as Biella and Aosta, which are part of wider strategies connecting non-urban areas.

Overall, the geographical distribution of the projects confirms both the nature of the program, which mainly aims to promote the less developed areas of the Italian North-West, and the heterogeneity of the territories involved.

4. The results of the empirical analysis of the In Luce projects

4.1. Categories of heritage behind tourism development

If the valorisation of the territories’ cultural and natural heritage is a common aim of all projects, the way this is carried out in every single proposal is very heterogeneous, offering a wide range of cultural and tourism applications.

Relying on the analysis of all the documents of the project proposals’ submission, the research focused on identifying the prevalent types of assets on which each project designed the actions to be undertaken. This process allowed the identification of 7 types of heritage, as presented in Table 2: industrial, natural, architectural, artistic, linked to traditions, gastronomy and museum³². More specifically, natural heritage refers to landscape and biodiversity endowments; artistic heritage also encompasses literary and music production, and gastronomy includes local food and wine promotion activities.

Project Name	Industrial	Natural	Architectural	Artistic	Traditions	Gastronomy	Museum
Beica Ben							
Bormida Gotica							
FestivAlContrario							
Gipsoteche in Luce							
Habitat							
Itinerari dello Spirito							

³² The proposed heritage categories are inspired by the classification introduced in the Horizon 2020 Heritage Types – TExTOUR project (<<https://textour-project.eu/heritage-types>>, 11.09.2024), which is a very detailed classification of types of heritage and cultural tourism models. Moreover, if compared to other broader classifications (such as UNWTO categories), the TExTOUR classification is more suitable for the description of peripheral areas’ development.

<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Industrial</i>	<i>Natural</i>	<i>Architectural</i>	<i>Artistic</i>	<i>Traditions</i>	<i>Gastronomy</i>	<i>Museum</i>
Landscape Storymovers							
Le Strade dei Forti							
Le Vie dei Walser							
Lento							
Morena Stories							
Note dal Cammino Balteo							
Terre del Rossese							
Valle dei Pittori							
Woolscape							

Tab. 2. Classification of cultural and natural heritage (Source: own elaboration)

It is worth noting that in all cases, the planned activities support at least two types of heritage through an integrated approach, and in most cases, the types of heritage are three or more. Below are a few examples of the integration of several activities.

Some projects rely on walks and hikes, a type of tourism that is becoming increasingly popular and appreciated by tourists, associated with the enjoyment of artistic and cultural productions: among these is *Morena Stories*, which provides cultural walks and hikes in the area, accompanied by cultural and artistic initiatives by artists, scholars and singers. The project proposes a new tale of the Piedmontese culture and landscape by creating a storytelling itinerary of the territory.

Another integrated proposal is that of *FestivaIContrario*. This project aims to raise awareness about the environmental and cultural features of the villages of Val Neva in the Liguria region through various initiatives such as artistic residencies, performances, and workshops that mainly concern the realisation of a multi-location festival.

Some projects focus on intangible heritage, integrating it with forms of material enhancement, for example through handmade artefacts realised with materials from the local area. *Woolscape*, a project that promotes the Biella cultural landscape, falls into this category. It aims to valorise historical wool production – which has always characterised the area productively – through an experiential offer that combines the enjoyment of the local industrial tradition with contemporary artistic production.

As presented in Figure 2, natural and landscape heritage is the most diffused category in the projects (12 projects), followed by architectural heritage (9

projects) and artistic, literary and music heritage (8 projects). Industrial heritage is the less-represented heritage type in our sample.

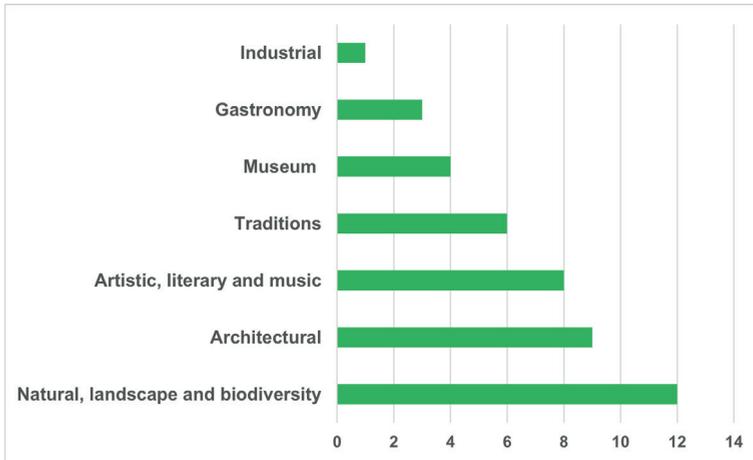


Fig. 2. Distribution of cultural and natural heritage categories. (Source: own elaboration)

4.2. A proposal for defining cultural tourism development with three models

In our sample, hiking is the main type of tourism promoted (10 projects). This result reflects the principle of the *In Luce* program, which refers to sustainable development and tourism capable of respecting the environment. Hiking is a proper form of visiting a place's natural heritage and enjoying landscape and biodiversity. The second form of tourism promoted mainly by the projects is based on the enjoyment of events (8 projects), and built heritage (museums, architecture and villages) is the third (6 projects). In some projects, tourism is also driven by food and wine, industrial heritage and religious properties.

Combining the information on the projects with the tourism characteristics of the target areas, we propose three models of cultural tourism development, defined as follows: 1) Cultural Activation Model, 2) Cultural Diversification Model, 3) Tourist Leverage Model. The three proposed models also reflect the existing literature on culture, tourism and local development, as specified in the description below.

Cultural Activation Model (CAM): This model refers to projects and policies implemented in areas with little tourism and where cultural resources are not recognised as a pivotal asset for local development. The model is based on the literature on the strategic advantage cultural heritage can represent in promoting local development opportunities through tourism³³. The project

³³ García-Delgado *et al.* 2020; Petrei *et al.* 2020; Gato *et al.* 2022.

proposals belonging to this model aspire to activate the dynamics of tourist attractiveness by relying on cultural resources whose value still needs to be recognised or appreciated. The model applies primarily to inner areas that are strongly depopulated and need social, cultural, and economic revitalisation.

Cultural Diversification Model (CDM): This model refers to projects and policies implemented in areas with an already attractive and known cultural offer but which intend to enhance cultural resources less recognised by tourists but belonging to the local cultural identity. The aim is to diversify and expand the cultural tourism offer. The model can be traced back to the discussion concerning tourism monocultures' socio-economic and environmental impacts and the effects of tourism extractivism³⁴. In this sense, it encompasses all the claims expressed by the sustainable tourism discourse linked to valorising all tangible and intangible aspects of cultural capital.

Tourist Leverage Model (TLM): This model refers to projects and policies in territories that already benefit from a relatively strong tourist demand, but which is not strictly linked to the attractiveness of cultural resources. In this case, the project aims to enhance local culture by intercepting or leveraging pre-existing tourist flows, thus expanding the tourist product offer. Although the model can be partially traced back to the logic of districts, particularly cultural districts, it represents an original model. It is currently not covered by the existing literature, and it is proposed as a result of our analysis of the *In Luce* program. This model intersects both the valorisation of local cultural capital and the need to differentiate, in a sustainable perspective, the tourism offers.

4.3. Deepening the three models of cultural tourism development

Additional information about the characteristics of the *In Luce* projects in relation to the proposed models can be provided.

In particular, the role of the territory's tourism specialisation is taken into account based on the classification provided by ISTAT. The index of tourism specialisation classifies Italian municipalities according to their "tourism density" described by a set of statistical indicators measuring the endowment of accommodation infrastructure, the presence of tourist flows, the number of productive/entrepreneurial activities and employment levels in tourism-oriented sectors³⁵. Moreover, the index of the tourism vocation classifies Italian

³⁴ Kauppila *et al.* 2009; Kuščer *et al.* 2017; Saarinen *et al.* 2017; Cocco *et al.* 2020; Di Gioia, Dematteis 2020; Bronzini *et al.* 2022; Cotella, Brovarone 2022; Matarazzo 2023; Sabatini 2023.

³⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the index, we refer to the ISTAT's methodological note: <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/09/classificazione-turistica-comuni.Istat_.pdf>, 11.09.2024.

municipalities according to the “prevailing tourism category”, which is the potential tourism vocation of the municipality identified mainly on the basis of geographic (proximity to the sea, altitude, etc.) and anthropic criteria, combined with the assessment of the presence of a minimum level of tourism³⁶.

In our sample, the CAM covers 30% of municipalities with a very high and high tourist specialisation (Fig. 3a), a lower percentage than the total average of the *In Luce* projects, which is 40%. Moreover, the tourist vocation of the municipalities (Fig. 3b) is not strongly marked (61% of municipalities have a touristic vocation not belonging to a specific category), and only 6.8% have some cultural or natural vocation.

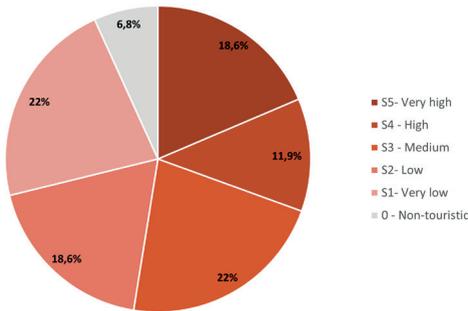


Fig. 3a. CAM Municipalities' Tourism Specialization (Source: own elaboration on ISTAT data)

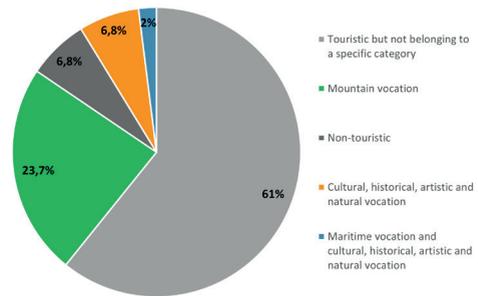


Fig. 3b. CAM Municipalities' Tourism Vocation (Source: own elaboration on ISTAT data)

In the territories involved, no significant paths of cultural and tourist valorisation had been activated in the past, and the *In Luce* projects act as a driving force for changing the situation. An example is *Morena Stories*, a project realised in an area of Piedmont characterised by a low tourist specialisation index where, although prestigious cultural asset such as the *Agliè* Castle (UNESCO World Heritage Site) exists, no real cultural and identity enhancement has ever occurred. This project aims to convey the story and the culture of an undervalued territory, involving both visitors and the local population, to increase awareness about the territory's cultural and artistic heritage, above all through outdoor cultural activities.

The projects belonging to the CDM are located in municipalities with low tourism specialisation (Fig. 4a); only 22% of the municipalities have a high or very high specialisation. This reflects the main characteristics of this model, which generally applies to areas with a single strong cultural attractor

³⁶ For a more detailed explanation of the construction of the index, we refer to ISTAT's methodological note: <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/09/classificazione-turistica-comuni.Istat_.pdf>, 11.09.2024.

surrounded by municipalities with low endowments of tourist attractions. The tourism vocation index (Fig. 4b) highlights the presence of important cultural, historical and natural aspects (28% of the municipalities belong to this typology).

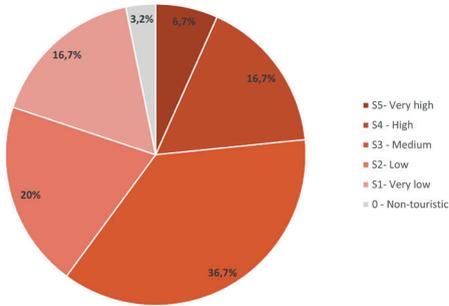


Fig. 4a. CDM Municipalities' Tourism Specialization (Source: own elaboration on ISTAT data)

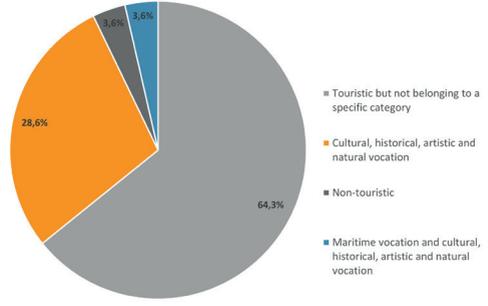


Fig. 4b. CDM Municipalities' Tourism Vocation (Source: own elaboration on ISTAT data)

The illustrative example, among the projects considered, of the CDM is the project *Itinerari dello Spirito*. It was realised in the area surrounding the Oropa Sanctuary, the area's outstanding historic cultural and tourist attraction. Through the enlargement of the walking path *Cammino di Oropa* to the surrounding area, the project aims at the promotion of this cultural asset to a wider territory.

The TLM applies to municipalities with a high degree of tourism specialisation. As presented in Figure 5a, about 60% of the municipalities have high or very high specialisation, a higher percentage than the total average of the *In Luce* projects. Moreover, a predominantly mountainous vocation of the territories emerges (Fig. 5b).

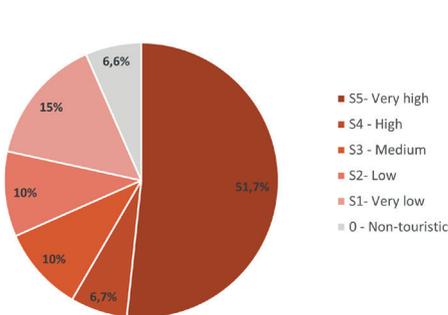


Fig. 5a. TLM Municipalities' Tourism Specialization (Source: own elaboration on ISTAT data)

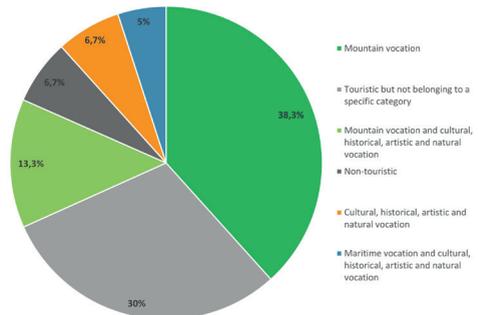


Fig. 5b. TLM Municipalities' Tourism Vocation (Source: own elaboration on ISTAT data)

For the TLM, we take as an example those projects, such as *Note dal Cammino Balteo* and *Le Vie dei Walser*, which, being in mountainous areas, are characterised by prosperous winter tourism, not particularly related to cultural initiatives. These projects aim to enhance a little-known cultural heritage by leveraging the strong presence of tourists in the area. The goal is to diversify the tourist offer by valorising the minor architectural heritage linked to the alpine churches and by promoting slower and more conscious tourism.

5. Features of cultural tourism development models for the In Luce projects

In our sample, 6 projects are attributed to the CAM (Bormida Gotica, Beica Ben, FestivAlContrario, Gipsoteche in Luce, Morena Stories and Wooscape), 4 projects to the CDM (Habitat, Itinerari dello Spirito, Landscape Storymovers and Lento), and 5 to TLM (Le Vie dei Walser, Le Strade dei Forti, Note dal Cammino Balteo, Terre del Rossese and Valle dei Pittori). The figure below (Fig. 6) makes the nature of the projects explicit in relation to the three cultural tourism development models identified³⁷.

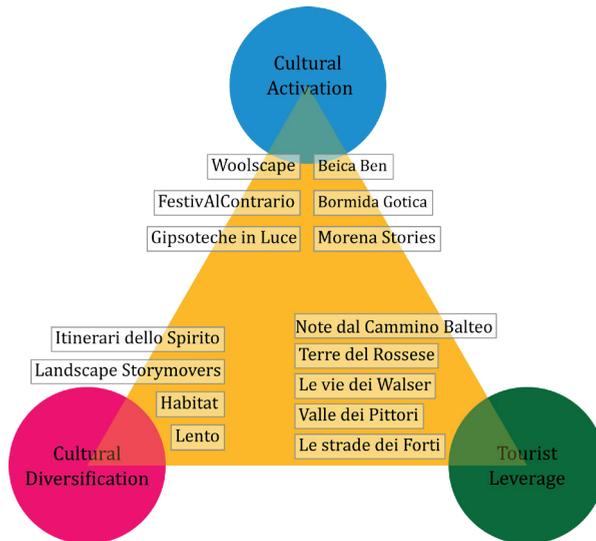


Fig. 6. Three models of cultural tourism development, a graphic representation (Source: own elaboration)

³⁷ Although we placed the 15 projects within the 3 models' scheme, it must be said that other similar projects, while using the same theoretical approach, could be placed at the intersection of different cultural enhancement models. The boundaries between the models are, therefore, not to be understood strictly.

Based on the about 630 initiatives implemented by the 15 projects, in Figure 7 a comparison among the models is presented. The CAM is characterised by projects that rely mostly on artistic/musical initiatives and experience-oriented activities, elements that suggest strategies aimed at attracting new public in the area. The CDM focuses mainly on creating thematic itineraries to enhance cultural attractions in the less visited parts of the territory. The TLM relies on a more balanced array of initiatives, suggesting how the high tourist demand allows for greater diversification of cultural proposals for the tourist.

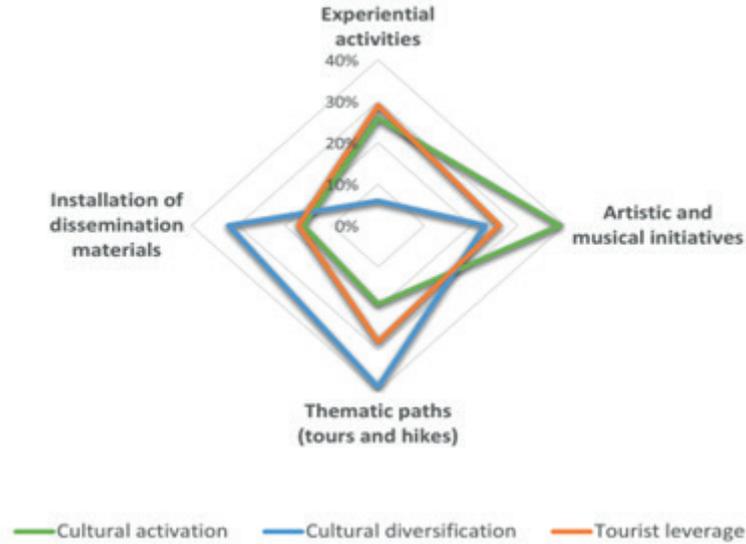


Fig. 7. Percentage of initiatives and tourism models (Source: own elaboration)

Further considerations concern the involvement of local actors (tourism operators, enterprises, cultural organisations, and institutions). As shown in Figure 8, in the CAM, on average, a lower number of actors are involved. The two other models differ in terms of network-building strategies. In the TLM, the network is primarily characterised by tour operators and enterprises and less by cultural organisations and institutions. This evidence confirms the hypothesis that project proposals belonging to this model can leverage an already tourism-oriented territorial system. On the other hand, the CDM has a more balanced network composition regarding the number of tourism enterprises, cultural organisations, public institutions and other enterprises.

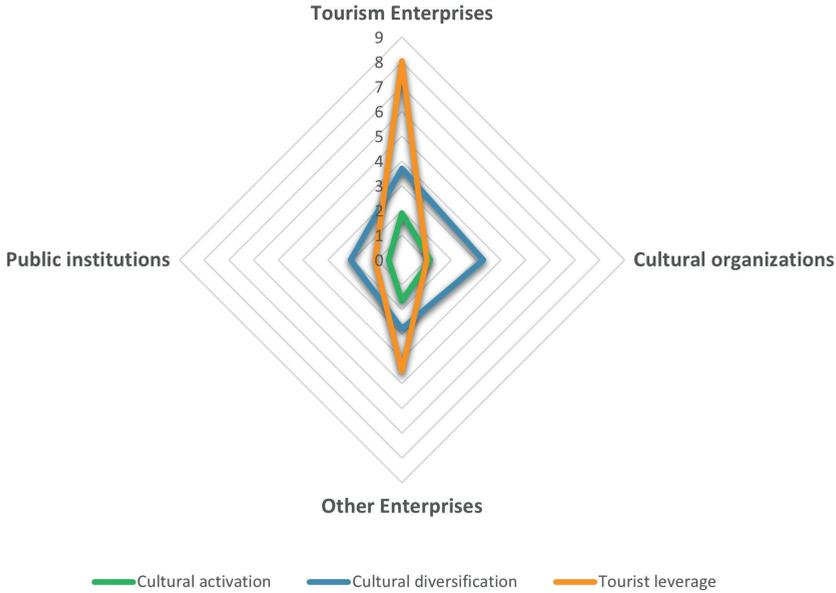


Fig. 8. Average number of actors involved by category in the three models (Source: own elaboration)

Our results highlight how these three models can represent a useful interpretative and policy tool to analyse and promote tourism development in peripheral areas. While the CAM could represent a start-up phase of the strategies for promoting a territory’s cultural endowment with tourism, the other two models can contribute to avoiding potential distorting effects deriving from tourism monocultures.

6. Conclusions

This study represents an attempt to describe and classify different trajectories of cultural tourism development starting from 15 projects implemented in North-western Italian territories that are different in geographical extension, tourism specialisation, and endowment of tangible and intangible resources. The literature on local development related in particular to peripheral areas, as well as the concepts of cultural capital, cultural districts, and the strand of studies on sustainable tourism, allow us to consider the issue of local sustainable development in an integrated manner. The research allowed us to better define the types of cultural heritage involved in development-oriented projects in peripheral areas and propose three models of cultural tourism development that can be interpreted both as territorial marketing strategies and institution-

al policy tools to facilitate long-lasting, culture-led local development paths. Through the analysis of the *In Luce* case study, we addressed in a novel way the relationship between culture and tourism in peripheral areas, with the awareness that, to date, these issues are still underexplored, and the reference literature is highly fragmented. Existing literature tends, in fact, to focus on single aspects of cultural and tourism development in peripheral areas rather than providing a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. In this perspective, the main contribution of this work is to stimulate a reflection on different trajectories of culture and tourism enhancement at the local level informed by empirical cases.

However, a major limitation of our study concerns how the proposed models were derived. It is important to point out that, while the choice to focus on projects supported by the *In Luce* call allowed to base the analysis on a relatively diversified number of cultural interventions and territorial contexts, the projects analysed represent a small and targeted action in a specific territory. In fact, we considered only a single call for proposals in three Northern Italy regions, representing a particular and restricted context and certainly this limited sample might hinder the generalisability of the three models identified through the analysis. As a result, it would be necessary to expand the analysis by referring to similar projects to the *In Luce* program to validate and reinforce the proposed models. Future research should therefore analyse a wider range of regions and contexts to develop more comprehensive and adaptable theoretical models for describing the plethora of plausible cultural and tourism-driven development pathways that can take place in peripheral areas.

Nevertheless, this contribution can constitute a starting point for a broader reflection on the potential virtuous intertwining of cultural capital, territorial identity and local networks, which increasingly have to be considered jointly to deal with projects and policies for the recovery, enhancement or complete activation of cultural and tourism development.

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