Tourism as a driver of development in the Inner Areas

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ABSTRACT

This work is aimed at evaluating on one hand tourism development potentiality in territories involved in Italian "National Strategy for Inner Areas" (SNAI); on the other hand, at eliciting the conditions to be secured so that tourism could act as a real engine for growth. Starting from the analysis of available documents produced by Inner Areaso far, we classify the different territories on the basis of their emphasis on the tourism issue. The analysis is followed by an explanatory section, where we interpret the main tourism strategies referring to mainstream and heterodox economics approaches to local development. Finally, we consider the possible actions to be implemented in Inner Areas to get a tourism driven development.

Disclaimer: Comments and assertions that follow are personal opinions by the authors and a product of their collaboration. For no

reason the contents of the article could be attributed to the organizations authors are affiliated to.

1. INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

The greater part of Italian territory is characterized by small towns and villages which often have restricted access to essential services: health, education and transports. We define these territories "Inner areas", meaning areas far away from large and medium-sized urban centres, and from their associated services. Inner Areas cover almost 60% of the whole national territory, embracing about 23% of total population (nearly 13.54 million people), who live in the 53% of national area.

To the benefit of Inner Areas, Italy is developing since September 2012 a "National Strategy for Inner Areas" (*Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne*, hereafter SNAI). The SNAI purpose is to improve the quality of life and the well being of local population and to reverse the long term demographic trend. SNAI focuses on the provision and the strengthening of basic services (public transports, healthcare, and education), funded by National budgetary law, joint with specific plans for socio-economic development in selected areas (financed by EU funds managed by Italian Regions).

SNAI identifies sustainable tourism as a promising activator/accelerator of local development, along with agricultural and food production, renewable energy filières, and handicraft (Lucatelli, 2016).

Most of the territories involved in SNAI rely on tourism as a dominant driver to implement long-run and sustainable local development: in a milieu characterized by a rich endowment of historical hamlets, archaeological assets, monuments, museums, UNESCO sites, natural parks, the tourism supply is based upon cultural heritage, environmental recreation, sport activities, food and wine fruition.

The objective of this work is twofold: on one hand, evaluating tourism development potentiality in those territories; on the other hand, eliciting the conditions to be secured for tourism being a real growth driver.

To deal with these objectives, we at first propose an interpretation of potential tourism strategies referring to mainstream and heterodox economics approaches to local development: endogenous growth theory, tourism-led growth, resource-based approach, and actornetwork theory (Section 2). Then, we analyzed official documents produced by Inner Areas so far, searching for the current tourism organization and the strategic lines involving tourism. We see that Areas' approach changes, even when very similar at a first sight, according to tourism cycle of life affecting each destination: some territories struggle against obsolescence and stagnation of their tourism business model, while others are in an ascendant phase of tourism development (Section 3). After this description, we consider the possible actions to be implemented in Inner Areas to have a tourism driven development (Section 4). A final section of Conclusions (Section 5) retrieves and comments the main outcomes of the study.

2. TOURISM AND GROWTH: A LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last 15 years, a deep debate has involved the tourism-led growth hypothesis, both on theoretical and empirical basis (Balaguer and Cantavella-Jorda, 2002). Once tourism development is observed in a Country or in a smaller territory, the issue is if economic growth causes tourism development (economic driven tourism growth hypothesis) or - vice versa – if tourism development has been the main driver for economic growth (tourism-led growth hypothesis). According to the former, the typical conditions for economic growth, such as political institutions enforcing property rights, stability in prices, public investments in infrastructure and education, will favour

any rentable activity, and tourism among the others, since institutional solidity and local communities' life quality act as the strongest signals to foreigners and tourists. On the other hand, tourism-led supporters assert that for many territories, either post-industrial or lagging areas, tourism is the most productive growth factor, generating positive externalities across the whole economy, even after the last global economic crisis (Payne and Mervar, 2010; Perles-Ribes *et alia*, 2017; De Vita and Kyaw, 2016).

Albeit usually related to Country-wide systems and to international tourism, the issue can be raised even with respect to districts such as the Inner Areas involved in the SNAI: as illustrated in following pages, tourism has been highlighted as the key activity for local development by almost every SNAI area, but according to experts its success options are higher when it is inserted in an environment characterized by a lively domestic society and where local economy is still able to produce other goods and services requested by the market¹.

To understand in which sense tourism-led hypothesis is a viable path for SNAI areas, it can be useful to review one of the main endogenous growth models dealing with tourism development (Lanza and Pigliaru, 1994). Recalling the seminal work of Lucas (1988) on human capital and endogenous growth, the authors set up a model where a territorial system can choose between a manufacture or a tourism activity.

Lucas claims that economic growth is driven by labour productivity, which is the result of a free choice by agents between work-time and study (here is the endogenous nature of the model). The relevant equations in Lucas (1988) are the following:

$$y = f[u, h(1-u)]$$
 [2.1]

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¹ Fabrizio Barca, Keynote speech at First Seminar on Tourism in Inner Areas, L'Aquila, May 31 and June 1 2016.

$$\lambda_h = \dot{h} = \frac{dh/dt}{h}$$
 [2.2]

[2.1] is the production function; total product (that we can consider in terms of total GNP) is the outcome of workforce (u) and human capital (h), with the last one that is the result of time taken up from work activity and invested in studying, while [2.2] reflects the productivity of human capital accumulation.

Shifting one hour of time from work to study activity (1 - u) reduces production y directly (dy/du > 0), but increases it indirectly through the human capital growth effect (\dot{h}) on y.

Lanza and Pigliaru (1994) take inspiration from Lucas, considering a system where the choice is in investing in human capital devoted to manufacture or to tourism ability. Labelling λ_M and λ_T the labour productivity of manufacture activity and tourism respectively, τ the relative price of tourism products with respect of the numerary given by the price of manufacture products (i.e. $\tau = p_T/p_M, p_M = 1$), and y_i the total income generated by the considered economy in the two alternate path of development (i = M. T), Lanza and Pigliaru (1994) find that tourism could be the most prospective activity for growth when increasing term of trade τ more than compensate the productivity gap between the two economic sectors; namely:

$$\dot{y}_T - \dot{y}_M > 0 \quad \text{iff} \quad \dot{\tau} > \lambda_M - \lambda_T$$
 [2.3]

where, similarly to [2.2]:

$$\dot{y}_i = \frac{dy_i/dt}{y}, \quad \dot{\tau} = \frac{d\tau/dt}{\tau}$$
 [2.4]

The outcome of the model is straightforward: higher growth and tourism specialization are viable either when (i) relative prices favours tourism goods against manufactured ones, or (ii) the gap between human capital driven productivity of the two activities reduces (Candela and Figini, 2010).

According to this intuition, any activity aimed at raising tourism productivity λ_T goes in the direction of enhancing the availability of a sustainable growth path for a local system. Higher tourism productivity, defined as the increase in total tourism revenue referred to tourism occupation, can be fostered through different channels. In brand new tourism destination they are given by investment in tangible assets such as roads, hotels and other tourism facilities (resorts at seaside or sky-areas in the mountains), and they are often considered the most prominent actions to be implemented for a true tourism development. But in recent years, other kind of investments have been perceived as more promising: they are intangible investments in education, network coordination, and aimed at building confidence among operators.

Investments in intangible assets seem to be more suitable for Inner Areas. As pointed out by Salvatore and Chiodo (2016), in recent years the accommodation capacity in the 72 areas involved in SNAI increases (+27% for number of accommodation structures, +7% for number of beds between 2002 and 2013); it is lower than the increase in the National average, but it takes place in areas where population is dramatically collapsing, so that accommodation rate (i.e. the ratio between number of accommodation structure and number of inhabitants) is far raising.

At the same time, new tourism practices are growing faster than traditional mass ones: a new attention for remote and less attended places and landscapes, or for deeper emotional experiences, for instance learning manual activities from local and traditional craftsmen (Natali, 2015). It is a process of tourism transition (Garrod *et alia*, 2006) that – even due to the unstoppable success of the web is leading to a rethinking and a reorganization of tourism industry as a whole (Salvatore and Chiodo, 2016).

Inner Areas have plenty of a similar endowment, out of the recalled accommodation equipment, but nonetheless they are still little

attended by tourists, and the matter is the weak organization and coordination of local supply. The lack of coordination in a tourism destination with open usage resources is a well known issue, that could lead to an over-exploitation of local resources (Candela and Figini, 2010, Mak and Moncur, 1998), in the line of the so-called "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin, 1968). But it is worth noting that the same lack of coordination could generate the reverse state of under-utilization of local assets, with a consequent dissipation of their economic value. This is the case whenever e resource shows the features of an anticommon, i.e. whenever multiple owners, each endowed with the right to exclude others from a scarce resource and no one of them with an effective privilege of use, could reduce the profitability of the resource (Heller, 1998). "In the limiting case, in which all persons in a large group are assigned rights of exclusion such that each proposed user must secure the permission of all persons, the resource may not be used at all, despite its potential value" (Buchanan and Yoon, 2000, p. 4)².

In many Inner Areas, the anticommon issue is strongly perceived with respect to agriculture and forestry: where land and wood property is nowadays fragmented among a plethora of owners and heirs, mostly living outside the area, new exploitation of assets claims for some forms of coordination among owners or of property rights redefinition. But even tourist sites can have the nature of anticommon (Candela and Figini, 2010): whenever a mayor interprets tourism in terms of tangible assets to be arranged or recovered (a little museum, an architectural attraction, a nature trail), paying no attention to the future management of them, whenever the quality of an accommodation is far misaligned to the other or the opening hours of tourist attraction

² Authors assert that an anticommon framework could be considered as a competition among excluders, producing economic loss instead of transferring value to consumers as in usual competition (Buchanan and Yoon, 2000).

are different, some agent is producing negative externalities to the others, generating an anticommon state. This happens typically in marginal territories such as Inner Areas.

A solution to take care of the strong interdependences existing among actors, overcoming the anticommon trap and the consequent under-utilization of resources, is enabling coordination. Tinsley and Lynch (2001) propose to investigate the utility of networks in building a tourist destination. Denicolai *et al.* (2010) claim that a significant turning point in order to reduce the tourism path dependence and to establish a satisfactory coordination level is the establishment of networking initiatives, and that a network approach in a tourism destination is given by four dimensions: knowledge sharing, formal agreements, integration of local services, and reciprocal trust. They are all features that a place-based approach and SNAI are meant to strengthen (Barca, 2011; Lucatelli, 2016).

Salvatore and Chiodo (2016) see in local participation and co-design processes the tools to create such a network. Denicolai *et al.* (2010) emphasize inter-organizational learning, coupled with systemic vision at the destination level as the features that allow to move from a traditional destination management strategy to a "networked tourism core-competence" with systemic dynamic capability.

Participation and networking are a well known issue in recent tourism literature: Dedeke (2017) recourses to Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to explain the rise of tourism supply in a protected area inside the Brazilian Amazon, stressing the role of a volitional actor; Komppula Management (2014)challenges prevailing Destination the Organization (DMO) approach to tourism competitiveness, calling for the acknowledgment of collaboration between small tourism enterprises in the enhancement of rural destinations; Romeiro and Costa (2009) demonstrate that networks contribute to the creation of a cohesive rural tourism destination, whereby the sharing of resources enables innovative local responses to the global market challenges,

while Beritelli (2011) gest the same result for cooperation in an Alpine destination.

Natali (2016) applies the ANT framework to SNAI, claiming the need for enhancing local competence and innovation aptitude. According to ANT, each active member (an "intermediate" in the taxonomy applied by Natali, 2016) influences the network he belongs to in a twofold way: on one hand, bringing inside the main network new kind of subnetworks made of competences, artefacts, individuals connected with their own personal experience; on the other, reinterpreting initial impulses that generated the main network, operating translations of meaning and changes in the original information. In this sense, according to Natali it is true that tourism development is a network matter, but to be generative networks must be made of stable relations among knots, and they must be open to the entry of new members, each of them with its own charge of (mis)interpretation, interests, and intentions. And, what is more important, those new members are network themselves.

3. STATE OF THE ART: CURRENT TOURISM IN INNER AREAS

According to 2011 data, the Italian supply of tourist accommodation is 153,723 establishments and 4,742,064 beds. Respectively 52.5% of the former and 48.6% of the latter are located in Inner Areas. The main type of accommodation facilities in the Inner Areas are hotel-tourism residences (53.1% for establishments and 57.5% for beds), tourist camp-sites (61.5% and 54.3% respectively), holiday dwellings (59.4% and 59.7%), farmhouses (59.7% and 60.0%) and mountain hut (83.4% and 84.8%).

All strategic documents of the 21 pilot areas out of the 66 involved in SNAI³ assign to tourism a central role for the local development, even when the areas are characterized by different socio-economic conditions.



Figure 1 - Inner Areas involved in SNAI

Source: www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/it/arint/

Another common point of the analyzed strategies is that territories tend to present a 360-degree tourism offer, with many segments involved (cultural and nature tourism, rural, active, and so on).

Cultural heritage in the forms of archaeological excavations, historical hamlets, architecture items, landscapes, literary parks, but even craftsmanship and other working traditions, is present in Inner Areas.

³ www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/it/arint/Strategie_di_area/Bozze_della_strategia.html

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In some cases, the endowment shows the absolute excellence levels of UNESCO sites.

Natural heritage in Inner Areas is equally relevant: natural parks (both National and Regional, and Natura 2000 sites), lakes, falls, environmental monuments, nature trails and pathways where to practice outdoor recreation and sports (mountain bike, fishing, equestrian tourism).

In many Inner Area of the Alps tourism is traditionally addressed to alpine resorts, winter sports and outdoor recreation in the summer, with the former experiencing a long-term crisis, due to many different factors: climate change that reduces the snow period, increasing management costs, competition from international newcomers, obsolescence of ski lift facilities. In these areas SNAI is perceived as an important opportunity to differentiate the tourist offer and favour the attraction of off-peak tourists.

In addition to cultural and nature tourism, Inner Areas strategic documents frequently refer to food and wine tourism, with the magnification of traditional goods and recipes, restaurants and food festivals.

It is quite usual to see all or part of those segments bundled under the generic definition of "sustainable tourism", meaning a type of tourism interested in authenticity of local communities and of vacation spots. In other cases, the preferred definition is "slow tourism", i.e. a package emphasizing contemplation activities, interest in local traditions, and usually suggesting the use of public transports. Another growing label is "accessible tourism", entailing the possibility to include in tourism activity people with different kind of disabilities. Last but not least, it is frequent referring to "experiential" (or "immersive") tourism, identifying a tourism activity made of visit to craft workshops and of manual activities directly involving visitors.

Even though very similar for characters, Inner Areas' strategies differ with respect to the life cycle positioning of tourist destinations: while some territories are in a maturity when not a stagnation phase, *IJPP – Italian Journal of Planning Practice*Vol. VII, issue 1 - 2017

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claiming a rethinking of the whole business model, some others are in a introductory phase and they still have to design a common tourism strategy, based on environmental, food, or experiential tourism.

Mature tourism destinations show a good allocation of beds and accommodations; they register a robust tourist demand and have a strong and well articulated supply chain (hotels and unconventional accommodations, intermediate services, sports and other services supply). Often they are locations renowned in the tourism market, with attractors that permitted a successful development past and economic growth. They are typically alpine resorts such as Alta Valtellina (with more than 10,000 sleeping accommodations, one million presences, ISTAT, 2014), or relevant cultural attractors as Sud Ovest Orvietano (7,700 sleeping accommodations, more than 460,000 presences; ISTAT, 2014, Region Umbria, 2015). Alternatively, they can be a part of wider tourism districts, where culture, nature and rural tourism are well exploited, as for Casentino-Valtiberina, which is part of tourist offer of Tuscany (7,700 sleeping accommodations, more than 200,000; Region Tuscany, 2015). But the conditions are similar for Alta Carnia, Valchiavenna, and Bassa Valle (Alpine areas), Appennino Basso Pesarese-Anconetano and Madonie (rural and cultural heritage).

In ascendant areas, on the other hand, number and quality of sleeping accommodations is quite modest, demand is still low in overnight tourists, but significant considering one-day visitors, week end travelers, school and pilgrimage trips, events, and so on. Tourism in this kind of places is an opportunity not fully sized yet, because of a systematic under-utilization of existent commons and public goods. This is the case for Basso Sangro-Trigno, Montagna Materana, Alta Irpinia, Valle di Comino, Matese, Monti Dauni, Simeto, Tesino and Antola-Tigullio. According to strategic documents, expected outcomes from SNAI with respect to tourism development are quite general. The most mentioned are the increase in the number of tourist overnights, of visits to cultural and natural monuments, of users of natural trails and IJPP – Italian Journal of Planning Practice Vol. VII. issue 1 - 2017 91

footpaths; a higher occupation in tourism and culture sectors, with particular attention to young and qualified manpower; the strengthening of tourism industry chain through the increase in the number of active firms. Finally, almost each Inner Area aspires to raise the number of sleeping accommodations, mostly in non-hotel facilities (B&B, country house, *albergo diffuso*), even when occupancy ratio of existing accommodation facilities is low.

Nonetheless, relevant objectives such as the increase in tourists' local expenditure, a higher value added of tourism sector, and the profitable management of cultural heritage are absent from almost any local strategy, even though some territory (Appennino Basso Pesarese-Anconetano, Alta Valtellina, and Alta Carnia) set the target of improving education and skills for tourism accommodation operators. Finally, two features in Inner Areas' strategies deserve a deeper attention: the first one is that many of them claim for strong connections and interdependency between tourism and agriculture/food production. Agriculture is considered a relevant asset for tourism-led growth, for at least three reasons: primarily, food production is a factor of attraction for any Inner Area; second, farm holidays and country-houses are ascending forms of travel and accommodation; farmers in rural places are invested of new functions as guardians against hydro-geological instability and as trails keepers. In the depicted mature tourist destinations, agriculture and food are mostly a collateral or a niche item of local tourism supply. In ascendant areas, on the contrary, wine-food production and agriculture play a more relevant role, being one of the main attractors for national and foreign tourism.

The second issue to be highlight is that – in the line of Actor-Network Theory - some strategies declare the objective of creating a network among tourism operators (this is the case of Casentino Valtiberina, Alta Irpinia, Alta Valtellina), or of implementing some kind of coordination, to ensure a local governance for tourism strategy (Grand Paradis, Sud Ovest Orvietano).

4. NEW PRACTICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

In Section 2 we highlighted the concepts of networking initiative and of systemic dynamic capability as the means to overtake the anticommons problem and to neutralize the focalization on tangible resources that affect many tourist destination. At the same time, we mentioned the success of new heterodox tourism segments more appropriate to the web medium than traditional ones. In this section, we expand those topics, trying to suggest a promising development path for tourism in Inner Areas.

The coordination issue is a well known problem, at least in mature tourism destination, that claims for integrated strategies: for many years traditional DMO have dealt with it, handling a collective promotion and preparing integrated tour packages.

In recent years, tourist packages organization encountered growing difficulties: the demand for customized itineraries, joint with the increased ability of travel consumers to search autonomously for information and alternatives, is uncomfortable with a fruition model substantially rigid and pre-conceived. Traditional packages are progressively substituted by dynamic packaging, i.e. the opportunity of assembling multiple travel components on demand of individual customers through automated online configurations and web platforms (Cardoso and Lange, 2007).

Relying on the competence of a more aware customer, dynamic packaging on one hand asks for a less capillary and a lighter organization, exploiting the skills of the same customer, invested of a new nature of co-producer (or *prosumer*, i.e. a producer-consumer) of the travel package; on the other, it needs a higher ability in capturing the attention of the potential client among the almost infinite tourist experience available, mostly conveyed by the web *mare-magnum*.

Both characteristics could be relevant in helping Inner Areas to fill the gap, at least partially, with mature tourist destinations. As a matter of fact, Inner Areas could exploit their rural condition to specialize in the supply of emotional tours (Sharpley and Jepson, 2011), peculiar activities such as traditional craftsmanship, unusual architectural and natural heritage; it is a tourist product that could strike imagination because of its eccentricity and that claims for an appropriate storytelling, a proper manipulation of contents, to emerge.

In addition, travel products in general, and emotional and immersive tourism products in particular, are mostly experience goods (Nelson, 1970), so that they require appropriate channels on one side to inform the customer about the product characteristics, on the other side to circulate and exchange travel experiences for users. Nowadays, multimedia platforms and social network are commonly employed for both purpose (Cardoso and Lange, 2007).

Finally, modern travellers are interested not only in peculiar products, but even in connecting them across time and space in a more complex framework, that goes over a single destination involving different areas and sites: visiting two similar monuments made by the same artist, or understanding the diversity in the pasture landscape in two different mountain areas (Natali, 2015).

Dynamic packaging, storytelling, internal and external and supply coordination, multimedia and social network aptitude are the concepts to be highlighted in dealing with the promotion of Inner Areas as tourist destination. They are all notions and activities typical of modern creative industry, creating opportunities that could be seized by groups of highly educated young people, start-ups, and fab-labs.

Nonetheless, the rise of dynamic packaging and web organization in tourism is not sufficient to claim for the end of local network and the futility of coordination: if the objective is not the success of a single business activity (a new hotel, a spa or a rural itinerary), but the contribution of tourism to the economic growth of a wide area, then coordination is needed. In this sense, the concept of Destination *IJPP - Italian Journal of Planning Practice*Vol. VII, issue 1 - 2017

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Management Organization changes in a brand new one of Destination Management Community (DMC), that claims for the combination of technological tools and local communities' involvement, for the provision of smart services and traditions, in a unique and original local supply. This is the path followed in Inner Area of Madonie.

Coordination asks for hybrid forms of planning and administrative decision (Menard, 1996), mostly in anticommon conditions, i.e. when different stakeholders possess fragmented assets which need to be pooled in order to organize local supply (Van Huylenbroeck *et alia*, 2009).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Recalling Porter (1998), local development can be of three kinds: (1) factor driven, with the exploitation of site-specific resources; (2) investment driven, when local development is the result of investments in facilities, for instance in the construction of new tourism resorts; (3) innovation driven, based upon the implementation of intangible assets such as creativity and networks. Inner Areas fit mostly with the latter.

The wide majority of Inner Areas that have begun to design their SNAI strategy insofar, focused on tourism as a main factor for local development. In previous pages we analyzed if this is a viable option to reverse a long history of failures and socio-demographic decline.

For this purpose, we considered different theoretical frameworks, extracting from each of them some useful notion: Tourism-led growth theory, suggests that tourism can be the most promising growth factor for lagging areas, since it has a high external power on other economic sectors (Payne and Mervar, 2010). To seize this opportunity, Inner Areas must create an inviting environment, where local society is still active, and they must accompany the tourist supply with the production of other kinds of goods.

Economic growth theory claims that tourism can be a viable alternative to other sectors when relative prices favours tourism goods against other kind of goods or when its productivity raises due to specific human capital accumulation in tourism sector (Lanza and Pigliaru, 1994). In inner areas we see the attempt to concentrate on niche tourism such as emotional or nature tourism, characterized by higher tourists' spending power with respect to mass tourism; in addiction, many Inner Areas decided to invest in immaterial educative activities on tourism to improve sector productivity (see Section 3).

Tourism economics warn against the risk of having an anti-common condition that prevents from a full exploitation of economic opportunities from a tourist location (Heller, 1998). The risk can be limited with a stronger coordination and enabling a tourism network, and we saw in Section 3 that some Inner Areas (such as Grand Paradis, Sud Ovest Orvietano and Casentino Valtiberina) are addressed to this path.

Finally, Actor-Network Theory specifies that networking is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to have development: to be generative, networks must be open to new contribution and ideas, even when not perfectly aligned or even disruptive with respect to local organization (Natali, 2016), and the role of SNAI is even to facilitate this relationship.

From those contributions and due to some promising reasons, we can draw the conclusion that tourism can be a capable factor of development for Inner Areas, even though with a relevant *caveat*.

The promising reasons are that Inner Areas are particularly suitable to host emerging demand for experience and immersive tourism, community tourism, nature and landscape fruition; this kind of activities show higher unit returns than mass tourism ones, even if they move lower flows of visitors. In addition, the strong effort of SNAI in overcoming population digital divide and connecting Inner Areas to broadband allows to implement dynamic packaging tourism through web platforms and social networks.

The *caveat* is that this kind of development needs a strong coordination effort to let out the local territory from the condition of tourism anticommon. To do so, it is necessary addressing to a networked competence approach, rather than to a resource-based strategy.

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