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Sara Belotti

Introduction

- 1 The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns have imposed tight limitations to mobility and have overwhelmed our habits, the time and space dimensions of our routine. This situation has obliged each one of us to question and reconsider our standards, schedules, and lifestyle. Such questioning affected also tourism, which is one of the most important economic industries globally, contributing to 10% of the world’s GDP, 7% of exports and generating one in every ten jobs. During the pandemic, it was one of the sectors that was hit the hardest by the mobility restrictions, with an estimated loss of \$460 million in 2020 and a reduction of 440 million tourists (UNWTO, 2020). This scenario has forced the whole industry, including all operators, to rethink and reorganize themselves for the future (Burini, 2020). More specifically, the need for physical distancing and avoid crowding have raised a debate about a system that, until one year ago, saw periods of overtourism, which had already created large debates in the past. Pictures of cities like Venice, practically deserted during the lockdown, went viral and forced us to acknowledge the facts. In addition, the indicators showing the decrease in pollution during the lockdown have led us to question the environmental issues and their effects on our health¹. Finally, mandatory quarantines, the ban on numerous physical open-air activities and the psychological consequences caused by this emergency situation have generated, in a moment when restrictions had been eased, a greater demand of outdoor activities compared to the previous years. Precisely, as far as tourism is concerned, in 2020 there was an increase in the number of

people who chose their summer holidays destinations based on the possibility of doing some kind of sport. In this context, many travellers have rediscovered the bicycle riding, also encouraged by the implementation of mobility bonuses in Italy, which provided funding precisely for the purchasing of bicycles and electric scooters. There has also been a rediscovery of small villages, minor destinations, locations out of the classic tourist routes, searching for healthy, safe and less crowded places, supporting a new style of vacation, strengthening and consolidating the idea of slow tourism, which has been under debate for some years now (Oh, Assaf, Baloglu, 2014; De Salvo, Calzati, 2018; Cresta, 2020). Considering this background, local territories and institutions must take action in order to make the most out of the new emerging opportunities. Not only because the current health crisis situation will probably last for some time, but also to put in the spotlight the new perspectives that are coming up, such as the need to develop a more sustainable, slower tourism, localised and away from popular destinations.

- 2 Recently, the Touring Club Italiano (TCI)², analysing the impact of the Decree of the Italian Prime Minister of October 24th 2020 on the tourism sector, has indicated as pillars for the recovery of the domestic tourism the digitalization, regional sustainability and remote areas (Centro Studi TCI, 2020). In this regard, the Revamping Plan and its related Decree (Agenzia di Coesione, 2020), which outlines the actions to be taken for the period 2020-2022, underline the need to move towards a greener and more sustainable country and to focus on green mobility, increasing the number of cycle paths (e.g. Project "Italia in Bici" and "Sentiero dei Parchi"), in association with the project of embellishment of villages and mountain areas. These recommendations regarding the tourism partly recall those already included in the *Strategic Plan for Tourism 2017-2022*, published by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities and for Tourism (MIBACT, 2017).
- 3 In this scenario, this paper claims to be an opportunity for the recovery of the territory and its sustainable development to support tourism, starting from an analysis of the bicycle tourism in Italy and highlighting its potential demonstrated in the past few years. Subsequently, it analyses the case of Terre di Casole Bike Hub, a project born in 2016 in the small village of Casole d'Elsa, in Tuscany. This project was chosen for its innovative nature. In particular, in the entire region of Tuscany, there was not before a structured tourist product related to cycling. Today the project offers more than 700 km of low-traffic roads, combined with cycling-dedicated services (accommodations, restaurants, technical assistance, bike shops, bike cafes, etc.). Created from the fostering of a local entrepreneur, Terre di Casole Bike Hub - bike-eat-live engaged, in less than one year, some public administration partners, more particularly the municipal administration and Pro Loco³, as well as public partners (hoteliers, restaurateurs, guides etc.), all coordinated by an external consultant, building a network to support touring cyclists. The project thus configured is an example of best practices to be replicated in other regions, as it favours networking and the involvement of local operators, as well as local communities.

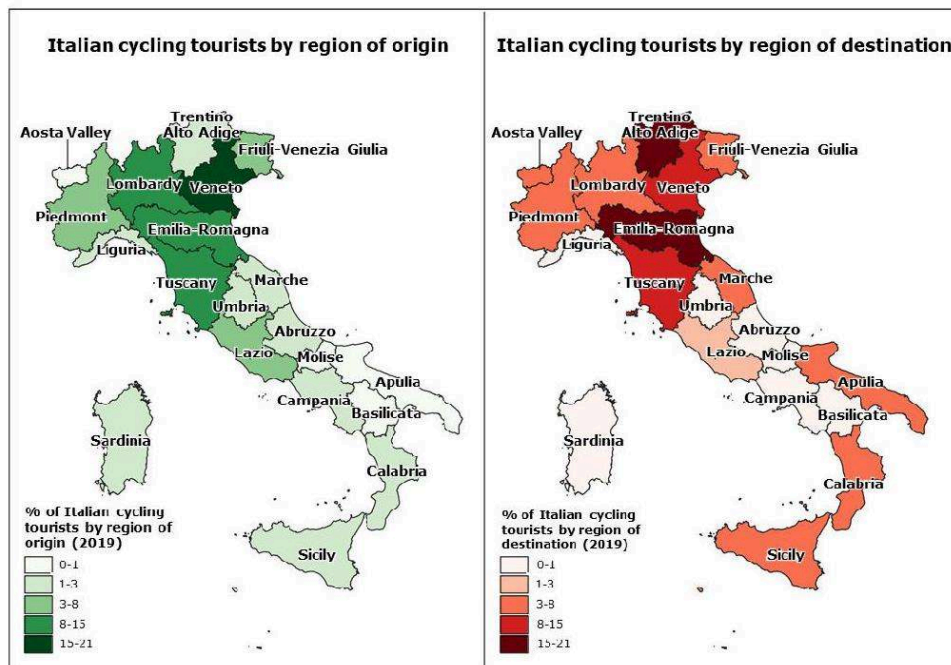
Bicycle tourism in Italy

- 4 Bicycle tourism can be defined as the activity of "visiting and exploring sites for recreational goal, along one or more days, predominantly focused on cycling for leisure

purposes" (Sustrans, 1999, p. 1). This definition, therefore, excludes those people who use the bicycle only occasionally while traveling or those who travel to participate in competitive bike events, while the attention is focused on the "cycling holidays", meaning a vacation in which cycling is the priority.

- 5 The bicycle tourism sector in Italy has seen an expansion phase since a few years now. Tourists who seek for "ideal places" to do some sports represent in general 16% of the total demand, and cycling appears in the first place among the preferred activities⁴. This data is certified by the second Isnart & Legambiente⁵ report dedicated to bicycle tourism in Italy⁶, which reports that this activity generated approximately 55 million overnight stays in 2019, which represent about 6% of those recorded nationally. In 2020, despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic losses recorded in the tourism sector in general, almost 5 million Italians used bicycles during their holidays, corresponding to 17% of the overall tourists. The estimated total expenditure of cyclists is 4.6 billion euros in 2019 or 5.6% of the entire tourism expenditure in Italy. In this scenario, international travellers, which represent 63% of the total, generate almost three billion euros. In the last summer, despite the huge contraction in the arrivals of foreign tourists in Italy (-68.6% in the first 9 months of 2020, according to Istat data), the total expenditure has just exceeded 4 billion euros, equivalent to 18% of the entire tourism expenditure in Italy (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020).

Figure 1. Italian cycling tourists by region of origin and destination in 2019.



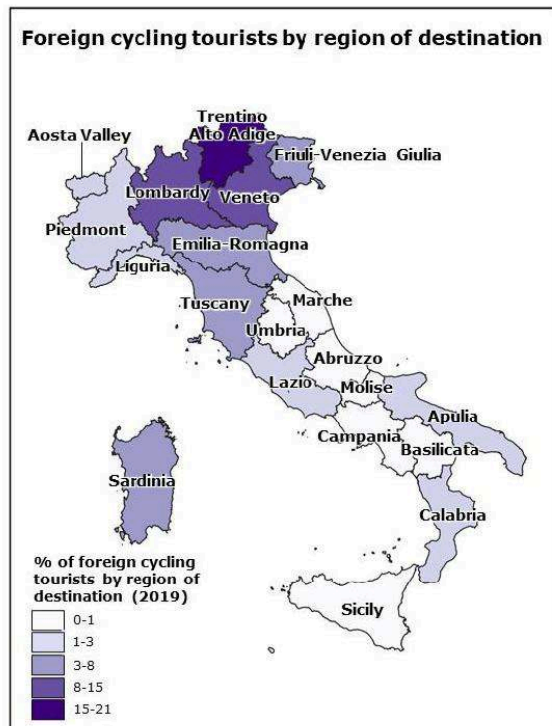
Data: Isnart-Legambiente, 2020. Map created by the author

- 6 The cycling tourist, as described in the report, has a good availability of monetary means. As a matter of fact, if the share of generic tourists who declare a high or very high income in 2019 is 8%, for cyclists this value rises up to 12%. Being more specific, foreigners are shown to be the wealthier ones, representing 15% or even 34% if you add those who declare a medium-high income. Except for the accommodation costs, which absorb about 39% of the tourist budget, the list of expenditures of touring cyclists

includes mainly restaurants, local wine and food products. The wine and food products occupy the fifth place among the reasons for the cyclist to stay overnight, against the twelfth place for the general tourist. On average, 41% of cyclists purchase typical local products, and this figure increases up to 44% if we talk about foreigners. Among the services purchased in the holiday destination, it is worth mentioning the rental of sports equipment, which, although affects only 4% of cyclists on average, becomes relevant, since the average daily amount (between €26.00 for Italians and €40.00 for foreigners) seems to be related to the average costs of renting electric bikes from Italian vendors (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020).

- 7 In 2019, geographically speaking, Veneto, Lombardy and Emilia Romagna were the main origin for almost half of Italian touring cyclists, followed by Tuscany and Piedmont, while the Southern Regions remained at the bottom of the ranking. The main destinations of Italian cycle tourists were Trentino Alto-Adige and Emilia-Romagna, followed by Veneto, Tuscany and the whole of Northern Italy (Fig. 1).
- 8 For what concerns foreign visitors, those coming from countries close to Italy prevailed: Germans, in particular, represented a quarter of the total number of cyclists who spent their vacation in Italy, followed by Austrians and French; altogether, they contributed for about 60% of the total. Right after, came the British cyclists, while the number of those coming from Eastern Europe like Polishes, Albanians and Slovenians presented an interesting growth, corresponding altogether for 11% of all foreign cyclists. Regarding the destination of foreign bike tourists (Fig. 2), once again Northern Italy prevailed, as this area offers a vast number of bike paths. Trentino Alto Adige was the region with the highest number of cyclists (30%), followed by Lombardy (14%) and Veneto (10%), which shows that cycle tourism is mainly identified as short-haul tourism. In fact, for example, Germans and Austrians mainly go to Trentino Alto-Adige, while the French go to Lombardy, Trentino and Sardinia (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020).

Figure 2. Foreign cycling tourists by region of origin and destination in 2019.



Data: Isnart-Legambiente, 2020. Map created by the author

- 9 Also in 2020, the Regions of Northern Italy came out on top concerning the bicycle tourism. Lombardy, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto were the home region of half of the Italian cyclists, followed by Campania and Lazio. The main destinations were Trentino Alto-Adige and Veneto, attracting 20% of touring cyclists. Differently from 2019, also the Southern destinations achieved a good result, with Calabria, Abruzzo, Apulia, and Sardinia on top, showing a renewed vitality for the domestic tourism (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020).
- 10 Moreover, the report proposes to calculate the bicycle tourism dedicated presence, determining the ratio between the number of cycling tourists over the total tourists in a Region, and the number of cycling tourists over the total tourists in Italy in 2019. The resulting ranking sees Aosta Valley, Friuli Venezia-Giulia and Trentino Alto-Adige, all in Northern Italy, emerging above other Regions. Here the proportion of the Italian bicycle tourism therein over the total Italian tourist demand ranged between 15% and 20%, against a national average of 6%. In 2020, however, alongside Regions traditionally selected by touring cyclists like Trentino and Veneto, some Regions started to show up. In particular, in 2020 the bicycle tourism in Piedmont and Abruzzo had a far greater importance than the overall domestic tourism. Another significant aspect is what could be defined as the level of internationality of the Regions, calculated only for 2019⁷. Once again, the Northern Regions appear on top, with Trentino Alto Adige, Lombardy and Liguria, to which Sardinia is added, altogether⁸ representing more than 70% of foreigners over the total number of cyclists.
- 11 As we have seen, the bicycle tourism is acquiring the dimension of an industry, presenting significant figures in terms of number of tourists and related services. This is also due to the fact that a new culture is arising, either privately, with a growing

trend of tourists coming for cycling activities, or institutionally, by the increasing development of infrastructures dedicated to cyclists. Institutions are surely driven by the necessity to support a more sustainable tourism, in line with the worldwide guidelines, dictated, among others, by the UN 2030 Agenda. This context bodes well for the future as, according to the figures, despite the difficulties the tourism sector encountered in 2020, the bicycle tourism maintained its trend and contributed significantly to the economy of the sector.

New perspectives for the future: the bicycle tourism after Covid-19

- 12 In a scenario tainted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the bicycle tourism appears as an activity that offers appropriate features and fits very well with the “new normal” and to the so-called Low Touch Economy⁹, whose watchwords are safety, health, physical distancing and, as far as travels are concerned, short hauls. Among the positive effects of cycling, we count the lower emission of carbon dioxide (with an estimated reduction in CO₂ production of 1.5 million tons per year)¹⁰. During the last year, the discussion on the correlation between the virus outbreak and pollution has been very heated (Coker *et al.*, 2020; Cori, Bianchi, 2020); it is impossible to forget the satellite images showing the reduction of pollution during lockdowns¹¹. The pandemic has somehow forced us to become aware of the current environmental situation and, at the same time, it has strengthened the need to implement new lifestyles. In this regard, there are many websites of institutes, including that of the Italian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization, that invite the population to be active and adopt healthy habits, to be able to improve not only their immune defences, but also their psychological conditions in this moment of crisis¹². In everyday life, cycling appears as a particularly suitable response to revitalise and reactivate, either physically or psychologically. In addition, cycling is among the activities that naturally provide safe distancing and can easily adapt to different situations. In this regard, the need to avoid gatherings and the mistrust noted towards the public transportation during the pandemic, have led to an increasing number of people who bike to work or just to carry out daily errands, as it allows them to move in an agile and independent way. Generally speaking, according to a research conducted by mUp Research and Norstat for Facile.it using a representative sample of the national population, 26.6 million people started using more environmental-friendly means of transportation rather than automobiles; among them, one in four actually chose cycling. Although it does not mean that people who started using bikes also decided to definitively abandon their car, the data indicates a renewed interest in the cycling world and in its economic, environmental and healthy benefits (Di Stefano, 2021a).
- 13 In this scenario, are included the Italian government bills issued in 2020, to finance the so-called mobility voucher, one of the measures introduced by the Revamping decree that provided a 60% refund on the purchase of bicycles and electric scooters or on bike sharing services, for a maximum of €500.00¹³. While the bicycle market was already expanding, with a sales increase of +7% in 2019 comparing to 2018 (Confindustria ANCMA, 2020), thanks to State incentives, the sales growth in 2020 reached +17%, with more than two million of sold units.

- 14 Precisely, traditional bikes increased +14% on 2019 with 1,730,000 purchased pieces, while there has been a real boom for e-bikes, with 280,000 units, equivalent to +44% against the previous year (Di Stefano, 2021b). As the President of FIAB (Italian Federation of Environment and Bicycle) Alessandro Tursi declared, "The boom was precisely related to e-bikes, which have flattened the hills of the cities: thanks to this bike revolution, many people that used to do short commutes by car have switched to the bicycle. The mobility bonus has also favoured folding bikes, the perfect choice to combine different means of transportation, regardless whether public transport offered bike-friendly spaces" (<https://fiabitalia.it/rivoluzione-bici-in-italia-se-ne-sono-vendute-oltre-2-milioni-nel-2020/>).
- 15 Moreover, this incentive to use bicycles lays the foundation for new initiatives in the bicycle tourism field. During the summer of 2020, 32% of tourists chose their holidays destinations based on the possibility of doing sports, matching in the ranking the same position of history-driven tourism, such as the presence of natural beauty and historical heritage¹⁴. This choice was probably an outcome of the need for greater freedom and contact with nature, after the long months of the lockdown, which also forced the suspension of sporting activities. In the second place among all favorite activities, we find cycling in all its forms (31%), preceded by trekking (39%). Activities traditionally carried out in seaside resorts, such as diving, surfing and sailing are the following options, occupying different ranking positions (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020). Cycling, especially in 2020, demonstrated to be a particularly suitable activity for the so-called "staycations", which have determined the entire tourist season, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. In addition, tourists recognise that the bicycle presents great versatility to organise short trips (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020). Such considerations lead us to affirm that the bicycle tourism can be a travel mode that offers new possibilities for the development of many Italian regions, especially those less prepared to welcome tourists, considering, despite the ongoing vaccination campaign, that the restrictive measures are here to stay, in order to avoid COVID-19 outbreaks.
- 16 In this sense, the summer of 2020 was a first "test bench" for numerous mountain resorts, villages and smaller locations, that have been "invaded" by a great number of tourists if compared to the previous years. Tourists indeed have mostly sought destinations out of the classic routes, driven by the desire to avoid crowded places. Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics) shows how, during the summer of 2020, tourists have favoured mountain resorts, which in August closely reached the share of 2019 with a -0.4% and, above all, towards small towns with cultural, historical, artistic or landscaping purposes, that in August recorded the only positive change with a +6.5% compared to 2019 (Istat, 2020). Generally speaking, in the summer of 2020 tourists were driven by the willingness to explore less usual places, presumably less crowded and with a different kind of accommodation, such as farmhouses, open air resorts, etc., rather than traditional summer destinations (i.e., seaside resorts and large cities), usually identified by a greater crowding (Istat, 2020). This trend will probably continue also in the summer of 2021, with the difference that, for the new season, the smaller resorts, villages and mountain towns will find themselves better prepared than the last year to welcome tourists. Actually, while in last year these locations were somehow taken by surprise by the great tourist flow¹⁵, over time they had the opportunity to reorganize themselves and adapt their services offered to the new public, as well as

update their communication which, besides highlighting the landscape, may emphasize safe and healthy holidays¹⁶.

New proposals for the enhancement of the territory through bicycle tourism: "Terre di Casole Bike Hub" project

- 17 Casole d'Elsa is a small medieval burg in the province of Siena (Tuscany). Surrounded by ancient walls, the village is located on the back of a hill, from which a picturesque and scenic view can be enjoyed, with low to medium hills, vines, olive groves, cereal crops and wooded areas. Another important aspect is the proximity to famous places, such as Siena, San Gimignano and Volterra, as well as Via Francigena and the famous Tuscan White Roads¹⁷. This small town offers you the opportunity to appreciate the typical Tuscan landscape, combined with an artistic, architectural, historical and gastronomical heritage, highly cherished by tourists. Casole d'Elsa is therefore an interesting tourist destination, to which the Italian Touring Club has also awarded an Orange Flag brand (*Bandiera Arancione*), a trophy for its touristic-environmental quality, given to small towns of the Italian hinterland (maximum 15,000 inhabitants), that provide an outstanding offering and quality welcoming¹⁸.

Figure 3. Location of Casole d'Elsa, Tuscany.



Map created by the author

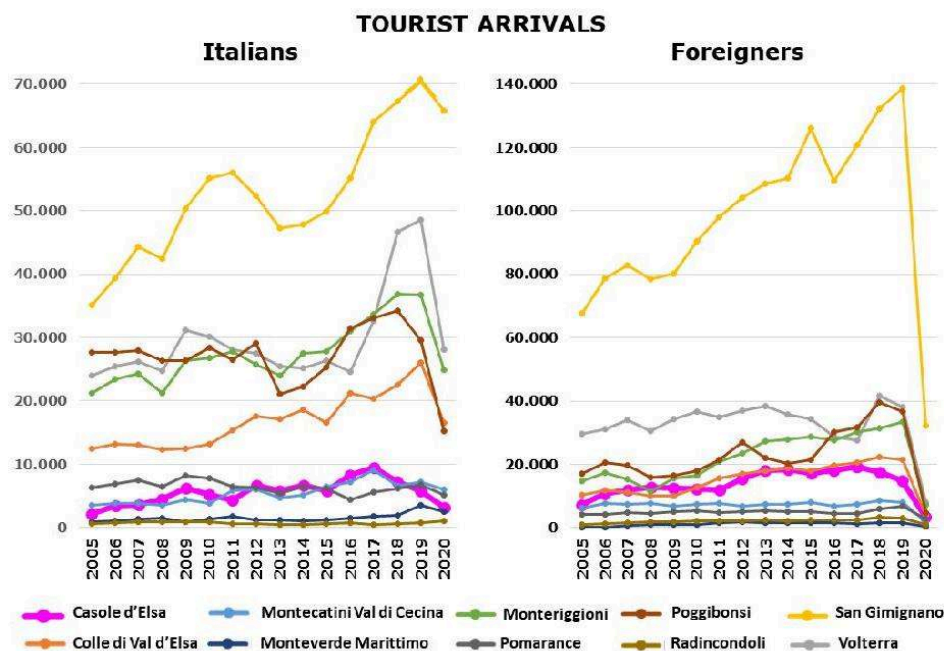
- 18 It is in such context that, in 2016, an innovative project was born to promote the territory through bicycle tourism, with the creation of the first Italian bike hub, a network with more than 700 km of low-traffic roads, involving cycling-dedicated

services. In particular, the project aims to develop a new way of offering tourism that involves local accommodations, restaurants and other local businesses. In addition, in the entire region of Tuscany, there was not before a structured tourist product related to cycling, although the territory is absolutely suitable (Cecere *et al.*, 2021).

- 19 Created from the fostering of a local entrepreneur, Terre di Casole Bike Hub – bike-eat-live¹⁹ has become, in less than one year, an example of best practices, by generating a network of thirteen entrepreneurs, the municipal administration and Pro Loco, all coordinated by an external consultant. The intention behind the project was to extend the tourist season, offering new services. This is how bicycle tourism became a new marketing tool, the one to be focused on for the enhancement of the territory.
- 20 Terre di Casole Bike Hub is nowadays a brand that embraces the municipality of Casole d'Elsa and its Pro Loco unit, hostelry structures and several partner Companies. The municipality of Casole d'Elsa manages all issues related to the organization and the management of the territory, including the preparation of a "bike-station", i.e. a tourist meeting point in the town centre, the information system management, the maintenance of routes and paths and their signage. The accommodation facilities involved are currently fifteen, two of which are located outside Casole d'Elsa, demonstrating the potential of the project in connecting territories. Tourists can choose a wide range of accommodations, from five-star hotels to farmhouses. In addition to the standard services, all accommodation facilities provide specific cyclists-dedicated services, including protected and surveilled bike storage, repair shops, charging room for electric bicycles, special menu, laundry for technical clothing, route maps and the possibility of booking guided tours. Finally, the entities organise various activities, specifically designed for the cyclists' partners, even for those who are not interested in cycling, such as language lessons, cooking classes, vineyard tours, children's activities etc. The project has also promoted the connection and the collaboration between these accommodation facilities, which, for example, support each other during the high season in order to meet the tourist demand. There are also several partner Companies that guarantee the technical support to cyclists (e.g. repair shops, specialized guides, etc.) or relax moments along the way (e.g. vineyard tours, such as "Terre di Casole DOC"). As a plus, the community, of less than 4,000 inhabitants, is very committed to the project (Cioli, 2016).
- 21 There are many advantages for the networking partners: from branding, to the participation in international trade fairs, such as BIT²⁰ in Milan, the visibility in the communication materials and in events organised by the network, joint and complementary communication activities with the support of the territory and Companies. These marketing tools allow small operators to increase their visibility in the domestic and international markets, favouring new businesses, not only related to the bike world.
- 22 Regarding more specifically the cycling activity, "Terre di Casole Bike Hub" offers routes with increasing difficulty levels, suited for every type of cyclist, with offerings for bicycle tourism, mountain biking, but also for gravel and electric bicycles. It is possible, indeed, to enjoy a well-developed network of hiking trails or retrace important itineraries of "Gran Fondo" (a sportive ride also known as "Big Race"), or traditional bike races, associating them to numerous points of interest related to the environment, history, culture and gastronomy (Cioli, 2016).

- 23 Terre di Casole Bike Hub proclaims itself as “the first bicycle reserve”, since it allows touring cyclists to move safely, on low-traffic roads characterised by specific cycling-dedicated signs that, among other things, invite car drivers to share the road with the cyclist and to moderate their speed. In addition, the cyclist can find, along the way, all the services he needs. Thanks to the numerous initiatives, the tourist season can last from March until November, but the project aims to promote “never-ending” holidays, that can be extended across all seasons.
- 24 Besides the creation of the network of cyclist-dedicated services, the project has also contributed to the improvement of some useful services for the entire territory. For instance, the installation of twelve recharging units for electric cars and bikes, funded by the Tuscany Region, and the installation of ten defibrillators connected to a capillary network (AED - Automated External Defibrillators), purchased using private funds. Finally, among other goals, the project also encourages the use of the bicycle by citizens and business owners on a daily basis, promoting cycling as a healthy lifestyle.
- 25 If we analyse the data regarding tourist arrivals in the Municipality of Casole d'Elsa we notice a progressive reduction of tourists, especially since 2016, when the Bike Hub was created (Fig. 4). However, it is necessary to note that these data refer to all accommodation facilities in Casole d'Elsa²¹, while no specific data are available on the facilities that are part of the Hub (13 in the territory and 2 in neighbouring Municipalities).
- 26 In this context, if an in-depth study of the impact that the Bike Hub is having on the territory of Casole d'Elsa and its surroundings is a must in the near future, at the same time the potential of this network dedicated to bicycle tourism is undeniable, if we consider the data analysed in the first paragraph relating to the exponential growth that this type of holiday has been having in recent years in Italy. In this scenario, Tuscany is among the top regions in terms of origin of Italian cycle tourists and among the top regions as a destination²².

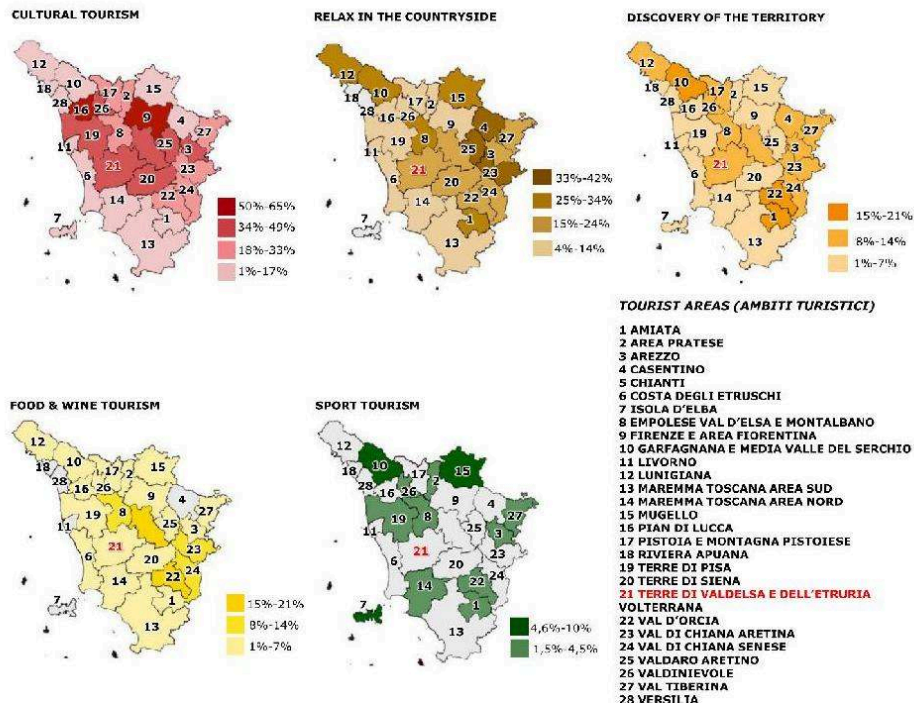
Figure 4. Municipalities of Tourist Area "Terre di Valdelsa e dell'Etruria Volterrana": Tourist arrivals 2005-2020.



Data source: elaborations on ISTAT – Italian National Statistical Institute data by Decision Support Information System Sector. Tuscany Regional Statistics Office. Chart created by the author

- 27 Moreover, if we take into consideration the data collected by Toscana Promozione Turistica²³ in the new operative programme of tourism of Tuscany Region, divided by Tourist Areas (*Ambiti turistici*), we notice that the *Area Terre di Valdelsa and Etruria Valterrana*, of which Casole d'Elsa is part, is mainly attractive for cultural tourism (34-49% of the total), since San Gimignano and Volterra are the catalysts of the major flows in the area (Fig. 5). This type of tourism is associated with tourism linked to relaxation in the countryside (15-24%), the discovery of the territory (8-14%) and wine and food tourism (2-7%), which mainly involve small villages. In particular, the latter three types of tourism also involve extensive use of bicycles (respectively 37%; 50% and 20% of tourists use bicycles). The area is identified as less attractive for sports tourism²⁴. However, this tourism concerns the two neighbouring Tourist Areas (*Ambiti turistici*)²⁵, i.e. *Maremma Toscana North Area; Empolese Val d'Elsa and Montalbano; Terre di Pisa*. Anyway, if we consider that at regional level, as already underlined at national level, the main sport practised by these tourists is cycling, followed by trekking. The development of the Bike hub and, possibly, its extension, could increase the attractiveness of the area.

Figure 5. The four main tourism types by attractiveness in the tourist areas Terre di Valdelsa e dell'Etruria (21) and the attractive areas for sports tourism.



Data source: Toscana Promozione Turistica, 2020. Infographic created by the author

Conclusions

- 28 The project Terre di Casole Bike Hub has raised interest at domestic and international levels and has received numerous awards from Italian, English and French magazines, including the latest by LUXlife Magazine, which has recognised Terre di Casole Bike Hub as the best cycling destination of 2020²⁶. From a tourist standpoint, Casole d'Elsa until 2019 recorded more than 100 thousand presences²⁷ among cyclists and other tourists, figures that were drastically reduced in 2020, precisely because of Covid-19 and its tight restrictions. Generally speaking, according to the estimates of the Tourism Studies Centre of Florence, the arrivals in the accommodation facilities of Tuscany in 2020 were 5.7 million, with a decrease of -60.6% if compared to 2019. The drop in the number of domestic tourists should be of -32.4%, while, for international tourists, it is estimated at -76.1%²⁸. Even though no specific data are available yet for Casole d'Elsa, we imagine that the losses for the year 2020 will not be far from the average losses registered for the Tuscany Region.
- 29 According to the Tourism Studies Centre of Florence, the trends of the sector for year 2021 in Tuscany lead tourists to apply for last-minute and flexible bookings, due to the uncertainties and the alternation of openings and closures of the Regional borders, and to prefer lesser known locations, that can guarantee physical distancing, once again away from popular destinations. Moreover, as already happened in 2020, tourists opted for outdoor holidays and slow tourism, with a preference to visit small villages and do sports activities, including bicycle tourism, in particular. These forecasts see the prevailing characteristics of Casole d'Elsa, a small village that offers itself on the

market as the Tuscan "capital-city" of bicycle tourism, a place that favours slow holidays in contact with nature, culture and traditions of the territory. The "Terre di Casole Bike Hub" structure is ready to welcome customers, thanks to the experience gained over the years and, therefore, it is also proposed as a model for the development of other territories, that wish to rethink their tourist offer. For example, the Union of Municipalities of the Savio Valley has taken up the challenge of Terre di Casole to create a new bike hub²⁹ in Emilia-Romagna Region. Considering the current situation dictated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to rethink the tourism model, Terre di Casole bike hub is configured as a prototype for the tourism development, with a positive growth outlook. Many other Italian villages can develop similar projects, promoting healthy holidays, based on physical activities and, in particular, on the use of bicycles, considering the growth potential that the bicycle tourism sector has shown in the recent years in Italy.

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NOTES

1. For example, the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS) is continually monitoring air quality in Europe and provide specific information in the context of the worldwide COVID-19 crisis (<https://atmosphere.copernicus.eu/european-air-quality-information-support-covid-19-crisis>).
2. TCI is a non-profit association founded in 1894 in Milan, with the aim to promote the tourism in the Italian territory. For further information, visit: www.touringclub.it
3. Pro Loco in Italy are local organizations that promote and develop towns and small villages.
4. Cycling is preferred by 38% of tourists who do sports during the holidays, followed by skiing (29%), trekking (19%) and other sports (15%) (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020).
5. Isnart - Istituto Nazionale Ricerche Turistiche, is a National Tourist Research Institute born thanks to the incentive of the Italian system of Chambers of Commerce (Camere di Commercio) for the analysis and study of the tourism sector. Periodically, Isnart carries out an analysis about the tourist offer and the tourist behaviour on a national basis, aimed at Italians and foreigners.

From these data, the specific information concerning cyclists was extrapolated to prepare the *Report to bicycle tourism in Italy*, in collaboration with Legambiente, one of the main Italian environmental associations.

6. The Report analyses the *cycling tourist* as an ideal type, which includes the *bicycle tourist*, who considers the bike a real means of locomotion to live holidays within a destination, and the *touring cyclist*, for which the use of the bike is not the end of the trip but a means to do physical activities and sports, make excursions, etc.

7. It corresponds to the percentage of foreign cycling tourists in the total number of cycling tourists per region. It has only been calculated for 2019 due to Covid-19 restrictions that have significantly reduced the number of foreign tourists in Italy in 2020.

8. In correspondence to a modest contribution to national cycling demand, Sardinia shows a foreign impact of 84% on the presence of cyclists (Isnart-Legambiente, 2020).

9. For further information about the Low Touch Economy, visit: www.boardofinnovation.com/blog/what-is-the-low-touch-economy/

10. Based on the calculation model prepared by the European Cyclists' Federation, bicycle displacements in the EU28 (in total 134,231,025,984 km pedalled) have produced a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector of 15,248,644,552 kg of CO₂. The kilometres pedalled in Italy represent 4.28% of the total km pedalled in the EU28, therefore the bike displacements in this Country produce CO₂ savings equal to 652,641,987 tons on the total (15,248,644,552 kg) (Legambiente, 2017, p. 26).

11. On April 8th 2021, a satellite image entitled "Air pollution in Europe returning to pre-pandemic levels in March 2021" was published on the website of European Copernicus Programme, showing a comparison among three satellite images of March 2019, 2020 and 2021, in which there is a large reduction in areas with high levels of NO₂ in March 2020, which returned to their maximum levels in March 2021, <https://www.copernicus.eu/en/media/image-day-gallery/air-pollution-europe-returning-pre-pandemic-levels-march-2021>

12. For further information, visit the WHO website (<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/publications-and-technical-guidance/noncommunicable-diseases/stay-physically-active-during-self-quarantine>) or the website of the Italian Ministry of Health (<http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/nuovocoronavirus/dettaglioContenutiNuovoCoronavirus.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=5392&area=nuovoCoronavirus&menu=vuoto>).

13. The bonus was reserved for adults residing in towns with a population greater than 50,000 inhabitants, in regional and provincial capitals (even with less than 50,000 inhabitants), in metropolitan cities and surrounding towns (even under 50,000 inhabitants) (Law Decree August 14th, 2020, Experimental mobility voucher program - year 2020).

14. With regard to the environmental impact that the increase in cycling tourism may have, it is not possible to go into detail here, since the research carried out by ISNART and Legambiente only collects information on the period spent in the tourist destination, but does not collect information, for example, on the type of means of transport (train, plane, car) used by tourists to reach their holiday destination.

15. In particular, in August 2020 numerous articles were published by local and national Italian newspapers, that denounced an "invasion" of the mountains by tourists, also recording some clashes with residents, as occurred, for example, in Valcamonica (Lombardy), where some vandals slashed the tires of hikers' cars parked near the beginning of a path (February, 2020).

16. In this regard, a very interesting example is the network of "Borghi del respiro" (www.borghidelrespiro.it). The initiative was born in 2020 (although the idea dates back to 2015) to support the environment preservation and the sustainable tourism in districts where the quality of the air is conserved for the human respiratory well-being, identified on the basis of the

Legislative Decree 155/2010 and implemented by the European Clean Air Plan COM (2013) 918. Currently, the association includes fifteen Italian burghs in Umbria, Lazio and Abruzzo.

17. The term "white roads" refers to rough terrain roads, typical of the Tuscan countryside, sometimes covered with a layer of stones or gravel, which became famous thanks to the homonymous race. "Strade Bianche" is a road bicycle race that takes place on March in the province of Siena, especially characterised by the presence of these white roads, which make it unique in the Italian and International panorama.

18. For further information about the Orange Flag, visit: www.bandierearancioni.it

19. All information about the project and the involved structures are available on: <http://terredicasolebikehub.it/>

20. The International Tourism Exchange is the most important Italian exhibition in the tourism sector. It has been held every year in Milan since 1980.

21. There are a total of 77 structures in Casole d'Elsa: 10 guesthouses; 31 agritourism; 7 hotels; 1 campsite; 3 holiday homes managed by non-profit associations (holiday homes); 21 holiday homes; 2 residences; 2 others (data from the Tuscany Regional Statistics Office, 2020).

22. Tuscany is in fourth place for the number (6) of cycleway in Italy; ranks second for number of bike hotels (10) (Izzo *et al.*, 2021).

23. Agency for tourism in the Tuscany region.

24. Defining what is meant by sports tourism is not easy, due to the diversity of definitions: those who practise sport on holiday, those who attend a sports event, those who accompany those who attend the event, those who visit sports facilities, sports museums or significant places, fans who gather, etc. (Izzo *et al.*, 2021).

25. Regional Law No. 24 of 18/05/2018 supplemented the *Testo Unico in materia di turismo* (Regional Law 86 of 2016), with the definition of the *Ambiti territoriale omogenei*, i.e. the supra-municipal bodies in charge of tourist organisation. There are a total of 28 Tourist Areas.

26. The British bimonthly magazine recognises a wide range of awards covering all aspects of the high-end lifestyle, including the best foods, wines, hotels, resorts and tourist destinations worldwide. For further information, visit: <https://www.lux-review.com/luxlife-magazine-announces-the-winners-of-the-2020-resorts-retreats-awards/>

27. In 2019, there were 108,342 tourist presences at municipal level, 33,034 arrivals, which brought 198 thousand euros of tourist tax into the coffers of the municipality (Tourism database in Tuscany, 2020, <https://www.regione.toscana.it/statistiche/banca-dati-turismo>).

28. Born in 1975, the Tourist Studies Center of Florence is a non-profit association, composed of public and private operators, and carries out studies, researches, trainings and consultant activities in the tourism sector. The estimates for 2020 are published on: [http://centrostudituristicifirenze.it/blog/turismo-in-toscana-nel-2021-stimate-47-mln-di-presenze-in-piu/#:~:text=Secondo%20le%20stime%20del%20Centro,tourists%20\(%2D55%2C8%25](http://centrostudituristicifirenze.it/blog/turismo-in-toscana-nel-2021-stimate-47-mln-di-presenze-in-piu/#:~:text=Secondo%20le%20stime%20del%20Centro,tourists%20(%2D55%2C8%25)

29. Project sheet "Valle del Savio Bike Hub", https://www.unionevallesavio.it/documents/1484590/6299542/Valle+Savio+Bike+Hub_IT.pdf/9716ed76-8f4f-4264-a583-a9a8458b985f

ABSTRACTS

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns have impelled us to question and reconsider our standards, schedules and lifestyle. One of the market sectors that was most

affected by the mobility reduction was tourism. Its demand in 2020 showed indeed a significant change: tourists opted for unusual destinations, presumably less crowded, favouring smaller villages and mountain areas. Moreover, tourists have chosen destinations that feature the possibility to do sports, especially trekking and cycling. Considering these trends, this paper focuses on the bicycle tourism in Italy and analyses its development potential. More specifically, it analyses the "Terre di Casole Bike Hub" project as an example of best practices to promote the territory through cycling, aiming to support the territory recovery in the post-pandemic tourism.

L'apparition du Covid-19 et les confinements qui en ont résulté nous ont amenés à questionner et reconsidérer nos standards, échéances et modes de vie. L'un des secteurs du marché le plus affecté par la réduction de la mobilité a été le tourisme. Les demandes en 2020 ont en effet considérablement changé : les touristes ont opté pour des destinations inhabituelles, censées être moins fréquentées, avec une prédilection pour les petits villages et les zones montagneuses. Les touristes ont également privilégié des destinations offrant la possibilité de pratiquer un sport, en particulier le trekking et le cyclisme. Partant de ces constatations, cet article est consacré au cyclotourisme en Italie et à son potentiel de développement, plus précisément autour du projet « Terre di Casole Bike Hub » en tant qu'exemple de pratiques visant à promouvoir le territoire à travers le cyclisme, dans le but de soutenir la réhabilitation du territoire dans un tourisme post-pandémie.

INDEX

Mots-clés: cyclotourisme, bike hub, mobilité durable, tourisme post-pandémie, petits villages, Toscane, Italie

Keywords: bicycle tourism, bike hub, sustainable mobility, post-pandemic tourism, small villages, Tuscany, Italy

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