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Preservation of paths for a sustainable tourism in the Amalfi coast

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The Amalfi coast, inscribed by UNESCO in the world heritage list, is an important cultural area, where the combined work of nature and man has produced a unique environment, intended as a cultural landscape. The mountainous conformation of the area represents one of the most picturesque aspects for the steep faces falling sheer to the sea, but caused at all times difficulties in the access. In the past, the whole area could only be reached by sea or by mule tracks or pedestrian paths. Even now, there is only one carriage road, very tortuous, which is one of the main causes of inconvenience during Summer, producing an unsustainable tourism for the environmental balance. Research carried out on the Amalfi coast focused on a deep pedestrian path network, marked for centuries by local inhabitants to connect the built-up areas, the main religious sites, the farms, and to carry goods from the hills to the sea. The preservation and reutilization of these paths could be the opportunity to preserve a heritage of inestimable historical and natural value, and to attract tourists proposing a sustainable use of the cultural and natural environment.

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Introduction

The history of the Amalfi coast is closely connected with the history of its accessibility. The mountainous conformation of the area caused, as in many other Mediterranean regions, an inevitable vertical development of urban centers, and consequently of the connection roads, prevalently constituted by steep roads, tortuous paths, mule tracks and stairways (Società di studi geografici, 2001). Until the Eighteenth Century, due to the absence of communications, the Amalfi coast was unknown to the Grand Tour travelers, who used to stop in Naples. In that time only the historic memory of the famous Amalfi Maritime Republic was left. At the half of the XIX century, overcoming many technical difficulties, was built the carriage road from Amalfi to Salerno across Vietri sul Mare.

The new carriage road and the cultural change in the concept of beauty in the landscape, enabled the Grand Tour travelers to "discover" the Amalfi coast. Strangers began to travel on the new road, admiring the sublime landscapes, corresponding to the romantic ideal of locus amoenus, as we can read in many travel descriptions of the Nineteen century. The old carriage road corresponds to the present State Road 163 Amalfitana, a tortuous route of about 50 Km. with one lane for each way. The road follows the coast from Vietri sul Mare, crossing all the cities, and reaches Meta di Sorrento, where it leads to the state road 145 Sorrentina. This is the only asphalt road for most of the cities, while the other streets are long and narrow steps, or paved roads interrupted by steps, so that it is impossible to use means of transport (Proto, 1992).

Unsustainable tourism

By "sustainable tourism" we mean a tourism which respects the rules laid down by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) starting from the First World Conference on tourism held at Lanzarote in 1995. On that occasion, it was affirmed the principle that "tourist development should be based on sustainability criteria, in the sense that it should be ecologically sustainable in the long run, economically convenient, ethically and socially fair for local communities" (World Tourism Organization, 1995).



Figure 1. The State Road 163 near Atrani.

No one of these principles is respected today in the Amalfi coast: tourism lasts only few months in few coastal areas, where the number of tourists is too high to be well managed, and causes damages to landscape, soil and vegetation, as well as acoustic and environmental pollution. It is difficult to provide for the supply of facilities such as fresh water or waste disposal. This is not economically convenient, since most stays last only one day, while for longer stays private houses are preferred. This is not fair for local communities, which are invaded without any attention and respect for their culture.

Another indicator of sustainable tourism concerns the choice of the means of transport. Also in this case, the present situation is quite critical, due to the excessive number of private vehicles on the single narrow route, also used by the population for commercial exchanges, with in addition the risk of landslides and fall of rocks and without any parking area.

To make tourist activities more sustainable it is not only necessary to control and manage the impact of tourist activity on resources and ecosystems but also to think of a new model of tourist enjoyment, where economic development and environmental safeguard integrate each other (United Nations Environment Program, 2005).

The pedestrian road network

Studies performed on the Amalfi coast show the presence of a very thick network of pedestrian paths, that are not well known and almost completely absent from the proposals of tourist enjoyment of the area. The idea is to use these paths to reconvert today's tourism, which is essentially oriented to bathing and "short visits", into a sustainable cultural tourism, in accordance with WTO's principles (UNEP and WTO, 2005).

The evaluation of UNESCO inscribing the Amalfi coast in the World Heritage List is about a cultural landscape, "combined work of nature and man". The pedestrian road network has been created by the combined work of nature and man, and represents the best way to reach the hidden clean places of the coast with a sustainable enjoyment and respecting the environment. It is a road network of more than 100 kilometers with various difficulties and a varied landscape, so that it is possible to find routes suitable for different necessities and interests.



Figure 2. View of Amalfi.

The classification suggested here, based on previous literature and on the prevailing use by the local population and observed through visits on the site, is essentially aimed at proposing specific offers to tourists, among which they can choose according to their own interests. In fact, all the paths might fall within the category of historic paths, since they had always been used in the past, and are sometimes used still today by local inhabitants (Camera, 1836).

3.1 Mountain paths

The mountain paths were used to connect with the terrace cultivation, the woods, the folds and the mountain pastures. The longest path is the Alta Via dei Monti Lattari, the only path really demanding for excursions. As it presents different accesses it is possible to cover the route just in part. The Lattari Mountains, which dominate the Amalfi coast, is a short dolomitic limestone chain with a series of deep valleys and precipices which plummet into the sea. Part of this territory is now included in the Lattari Mountains Park, founded with the aim to safeguard biodiversity and to promote a sustainable development according to the balance of an environment having lush vegetation. As it is a mountain route, the interest of this path is especially naturalistic, but as it is also a historical path there are many ancient architectures, like the little Church of Santa Maria del Castello, often used as the start point for the route. The Church is located on the site of an old fortification, used for centuries to control the pedestrian road to Positano and the Amalfi coast (WWF Penisola Sorrentina, 2007).

Parallel, at lower altitude, there is the Path of the Gods, the most famous route of the Amalfi coast. The path is less demanding, and hikers can enjoy marvelous views of the coast from Praiano to Capri. It is marked by the CAI (Club Alpino Italiano) so that it is easy to orient yourself. It is the most frequented path from excursionists, and is very appreciated by stranger tourists. The path is an ancient mule track crossing caves, pastures and terrace cultivation, ancient houses, woods and viewpoints, connecting Boomerano (Agerola) with the village of Nocelle, from where it is possible to reach Positano (Tippet, 1994).

3.2 Historical paths

Other paths are more interesting for their historical value, like the Via Maestra dei Villaggi, the ancient pedestrian path used by local people as the main coast road, to reach the hamlets and villages from Amalfi to Agerola. Even if the ancient path is interrupted by the new carriage road, it is still a path of high historical value, where you can find many ancient architectures. The tabernacles, chapels and churches, bridges and stone seats, the characteristic vaulted roofs, the terrace cultivations, the little balconies on the sea, were all points of references to move without a map or a system of road signs. This path was very

appreciated by the romantic travelers, and it represents still now a tangible and intangible heritage to be preserved, as memory of local traditions and identity (Pansa, 1724).



Figure 3. The "Path of the Gods".

3.3 Transport routes

There is a deep network of local roads used to connect farms with cultivated lands, and mule tracks and cattle tracks. Even if the roads have inevitably developed upwards, these paths are surprisingly wide, because since the middle ages these lanes have been the transport routes for goods and raw materials being taken from the mountains toward the sea (Capasso, 1846). Even today the tortuous lanes of the coast are trodden by mules with panniers carrying lemons or grapes, because many farms are situated in steep sites, impracticable by mechanical transports.

Another traditional way to transport goods is a rudimentary kind of telepherage, still used in the area between Positano and Nocelle. The village of Nocelle has been recently connected by the asphalt road, that ends out of the built area, which can be reached only by foot across stairways. The telepherages connect the farms with the main road to carry the goods.

3.4 Cultural landscapes

The characteristic feature of the whole coastal landscape is the terracing supported by dry stone walls, locally known as "macere", built by local laborers over the century to recuperate farmable land from the mountain slope. These cultivated terraces are the famous "lemon gardens of the Amalfi Coast", accessible only by way of steep steps. The lemon cultivation is documented since the Middle Ages, but in the XIX century it gained an economic and social value, and became a characteristic feature of the landscape. The species of lemon cultivated, the "sfusato", so called because of their elongated shape like a spindle, has obtained official European protected geographical indication branding (IGP) with the name of "Lemons of Amalfi Coast". The cultivations preserved the characteristic landscape, and also the local traditions, like the art to build a kind of coverage for the pergola, locally named "pagliarelle", using chestnut wood and straw. The wood comes from the local coppice, according to ancient balance between nature and man. The lemons come to fruit from November to June and it is for this reason that they are protected from the elements during the winter months by large, dark awnings. There are many paths to walk around the lemon gardens: one of the most picturesque descends from Villa Cimbrone at Ravello to Civita and Atrani (Douglas, 1909).



Figure 4. A telepherage near Nocelle.

3.5 Traditional handicrafts

Amalfi is also known for the traditional paper mills, where using rags, linen and hemp, artisans produced the famous handmade paper, repeating an Arabian technique. Visitors can see the old paper mills, factories and watermills walking on the path of the "Valle delle Ferriere". In the narrow valley between Amalfi and Scala torrents and damp sea breezes have created a particular sub-tropical microclimate, perfect habitat for fern species as old as the tertiary period such as the woodwardia radicans and the pleis. At the end of the valley, in the narrowest point, a waterfall for 40 meters creates magic effects of light and colors. This unique habitat is protected as a Nature Reserve (Gregorovius, 1861).

3.6 Religious routes

Chapels and monasteries were often built in isolated sites, and today are still connected only by pedestrian paths. For example, the Monastery of San Liberatore, on the homonymous mountain, dominates the gulf of Salerno and can only be reached by a tortuous mountain path. It is one of the most important religious centers of the area, usually visited by local people. The walk is very picturesque, and visitors can see the characteristic Mediterranean vegetation, in an absolute silence. Another route very popular for local people is the path connecting to the sanctuary of Avvocata on the Falerio Mountain. The path begins from Maiori, and goes across luxuriant woods, ilex groves, and Mediterranean flora, like myrtle, rosemary, walnut, capers, and offers great views on the coast.

Models of sustainable tourism

Cultural tourism is one of the widest market segments of European tourism, and is constantly evolving; however, the main risk of this kind of tourism is to propose similar cultural products in different areas, thus making the destinations neither typical nor innovating (Richards, 2001). That is why it is important to rely on the identity of a unique territory such as that of Amalfi coast, suggesting an innovating enjoyment, consisting of:

"Travel aiming at an engaged and authentic experience, with participatory learning in arts, heritage, or special character of a place. It provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture". (World Tourism Organization)



Figure 5. Pergola to cover the lemons.



Figure 6. A dry stone wall along the "Path of Mad Bats".

The paths described are just a part of the deep network of pedestrian roads in the Amalfi coast. Research focused on the possibility to define innovative models of sustainable tourism preserving and reusing the ancient pedestrian paths. Excursions and cultural tourism have the first advantage to prolong the tourist season beyond Summer. The second advantage is the possibility to extend the tourist area, also including interior cities. The interior areas have much to offer to excursion and cultural tourism, but at present are no longer included among the usual routes, while coast cities are too crowded. Walking is the best way to observe, appreciate and preserve the places with their colors, sounds, perfumes. There are paths connecting all the cities, so that it is possible to leave from Salerno or from Cava dei Tirreni walking to Positano through the whole coast, and even continue to Sorrento (Carreri, 2006).

4.1 The model of sustainable tourism in "Cinque Terre"

A model of tourism like the one proposed has been experienced for many years in the Cinque Terre Coast in Liguria (Italy). The Cinque Terre is also inscribed by UNESCO in the world heritage list. Tourists have to leave their cars in the parking areas at the beginning of the coast, and can move through the five cities by foot or using public transports. The National Park of Cinque Terre proposes different paths and mule tracks through the cultivated terracing supported by dry stone walls, overhanging the sea. In this area this kind of tourism has been accepted, and many visitors choose this coast to make an excursion and cultural journey. In this case it is easier to apply this model because the coast is very short (only 16 kilometers) and there is a fast transport by rail. Nevertheless, the same kind of tourism could be applied to the Amalfi Coast, subdividing the extension in two or three areas which can be visited by foot, and taking a bus to move to another area.

4.2 The actual conditions in the Amalfi Coast

In the Amalfi Coast, as the paths are minor roads, they are often ignored by local authorities. Except for a few paths managed and marked by the CAI (Club Alpino Italiano), there aren't road signs and indications, and the paths are often in bad conditions, blocked by trunks or brambles.

The preservation and reutilization of these paths could be the opportunity to preserve a heritage of inestimable historic and natural value, and to attract tourists by proposing a sustainable use of the cultural and natural environment. Therefore way, it is positive that the Amalfi Coast has been inscribed in the world heritage list by UNESCO in 1997, and that has been founded the Regional Park of the Lattari Mountains in 2003. In recent years, even the tourist industry has proposed new kinds of travel for excursionists, hikers, naturalists; and maps and tourist guides have been published with the indication of itineraries, even if it is still difficult to find the access to the paths without road signals and indications (Mezzacasa, 2009).



Figure 7. Indications at the access of the "Path of the Agave".

Conclusion

A lasting development of tourism can only be achieved by identifying and implementing models focusing on the territory and its resources. The impacts that can result from tourism at the environmental, social and economic level impose a profound cultural and project revolution involving operators, visitors and hosting communities.

According to the operators, the Italian tourist system in general, and the one analyzed here in particular, have not been planned and oriented in the last years towards quality and sustainability, as was instead the case in other European States. However, there is a strong increase in the sector of cultural tourism, due to an increase in economic resources and in the education level (Notarstefano, 2008).

The Amalfi coast might offer a lot to this tourist segment, which is desirable since it has a greater expenditure capacity and is less invading for the local community.

A new sustainable tourist trend in the Amalfi Coast should respect the Park objectives and UNESCO directives. The sustainable tourism should preserve the natural and cultural heritage, local traditions, the ancient balance between resources and territory, ensuring a better life environment. Farm tourism, hike tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomical tourism, religious tourism should be an economic resource for the territory, also developing other activities like craftsmanship (ceramics, textile, paper), or typical products.

It is essential to offer to these tourists, who are also interested in the culture and image of these territories, a high level of quality at all stages of their travel, as well as investing in information services to make known the potentialities and itineraries suitable for the specific needs of these categories (Groth, 2000).

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