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Cultural resources as an important asset in sustainable tourism development in the area of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato (Piedmont, Italy)

Case Study Analysis and Policy Recommendations

Abstract

The area under study is the vineyard landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato". The aim is to design territorial development strategies that include tourism as one of the main pillars with the purpose of helping envision more sustainable policies and actions.

This study reflects tourism development within the case study area, considering the pressure generated by increasing tourism flows and the innovative perspectives and possible tools in a collaborative and sustainable turn with specific concentration on protection and valorisation of environmental, landscape and cultural values of the area.

We carried out an analysis of the case study area and considered different stakeholders with different points of views. We did an SWOT analysis to clarify the main points in the case and as a result, we have some policies and recommendations in order to achieve the goal of this project. The problems that we focused on, are related to cultural values which are: lack of cultural experiences, and existing cultural elements are not well promoted.

We try to propose actionable policies to solve the problems. We want to promote the existing cultural elements that already have the potential and also illustrate the importance of the experiences related to cultural aspects while mentioning the actors that can implement and support the policies in each possible way.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Local Culture Valorisation, Smart Tourism, Cultural Preservation and Promotion.

Theoretical and methodological framework

Aim of the report

To dynamize and promote the cultural resources present in the Langhe-Roero and Monferrato area, in order to give value to the authentic traditions and local products and develop a more sustainable tourism. Also, include the participation of the local businesses and community.

Literature review

MacLeod (2006), affirmed that culture is about attracting tourists to a particular place or providing an experience: the impact of tourism on culture and cultural reproduction is widely discussed, especially when specific identities enter the consumer circle and influence cultural differences. The impact is characteristic of the community in which it is located. With this definition of culture, a short introduction regarding the study area will be given and examples of cultural elements about the Langhe-Roero and Monferrato region will be given.

According to Assumma et al. (2022) the vineyard landscape of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato is a famous wine region located in Northern Italy, between the provinces of Asti, Cuneo and Alessandria. This area is also located in southern Piedmont and counts 100 Municipalities with about 300,000 inhabitants (Assumma et al., 2022). This landscape was modelled for centuries by the local communities for the cultivation and production of excellent and certified wines, like “Barbera” and “Nebbiolo”, for which there is a high demand all over the world (Assumma et al., 2022). In 2014 the vineyard landscape of Piedmont was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL) in 2014 for its natural and cultural components (Assumma et al., 2022).

The area of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato is characterized by important and well-known vineyards, by producing fine wines and the assortment of very particular local products such as the white truffle of Alba (Rech & Migliorati, 2021). The local tourist attractions are characterized by a rural environment and related products. The area is also represented by a specific form of intangible heritage in literature: at the turn of the 20th century, this area gave rise to many famous intellectuals who lived, wrote and in some cases even fought in the Liberation War in this part of Italy (Rech & Migliorati, 2021). Enhancing sustainable tourism in rural areas involves different economic, social, and cultural practices than urban areas.

Secondly, the term can be linked to economic, social, and cultural practices. This means, for example, that production organisation and existing circumstances are characteristics of rural areas. Typically, rural areas like the vineyard landscape of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato, are characterised by primary activities and other natural resource-based businesses.

This is still the case to some extent, but in line with industrialisation and transformation, the corporate structure has also transformed significantly, with an increased scope of service establishment and the municipal sector in line with urban areas. At the same time, rural areas are increasingly a field for leisure, consumption, and regeneration. Same as this study case takes place in the vineyard landscape of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato, is democratic associated to many other countries, it is still the case that living circumstances take different procedures and adaptations understood from a rural-urban perspective.

In rural areas the local community could benefit from developing cultural activities in a sustainable form. Europarc (1994) claims that sustainable tourism is defined as a way of planning and developing any type of tourist activity that respects and preserves natural, cultural, and social resources and makes a positive contribution to the economic development of the local population (Europarc, 2001). According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), sustainable tourism is very useful in tourism areas with unlimited activity, which are able to maintain social and cultural pillars and economic development without harming the environment of the resident population.

Methods

The main methodology which was used for the research project is qualitative approach. With this methodology we first tried to understand the main characteristics and issues and then we proceeded with finding the solutions. Initially, the expert lectures and seminars were provided to acquire the base knowledge of the study area for the development of a project. We were informed how to do a stakeholder analysis, SWOT analysis, and policy development.

Then we had a site visit. Having a comprehensive overview of the case study area is fundamental. We got to visit Piedmont, which offers several advantages for a complete cultural assessment. We reached the place through private transport, and explored the area. Under the visit we got to talk to the locals. Interaction with inhabitants contribute to a multiple perspective vision, clarifying the needs, interests and possible conflicts between social and economic groups, especially with the political administration. Then we started with the analysis. First we started with the “stakeholder analysis”. The stakeholder analysis helps us to understand behaviour, intentions, relations and the influence of the people and what they can bring to the project. Then we did a SWOT analysis. At this stage of the empirical process, the definition of processes as positive and negative according to their location reveals the actual and possible future trends of the case study area. With this tool we determined internal trends as strengths and weaknesses and external ones as opportunities and threats.

Case study analysis

Case study area

The present document illustrates the case study and it's about the vineyard landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato. Piedmont reflects a slowly developed association between a diverse range of soils, grape varieties that are often native, and suitable winemaking processes. According to the World heritage convention (UNESCO, 2022) piedmont offer panoramas of carefully cultivated hillsides, following ancient land divisions punctuated with buildings that lend to the cultural resources, like, hilltop villages, castles, Romanesque churches, farms, cellars and storehouses for cellaring and for the commercial distribution of the wine in the small towns and larger towns on the margins of the vineyards. Piedmont has an extraordinary legacy of cultural resources, like, art and history, culture and nature.

As a starting point we got presented with the topic “tourism and protection and valorisation of environmental, landscape and cultural values”. The promotion of the culture and the cultural diversity is one

of the problems we identified when we talked to the local stakeholders. The main problem is that cultural aspects of the area are not very well promoted, while there are some potentials that can be retrieved.

Stakeholder analysis

To build and sustain a successful plan we need to pay attention to the stakeholders that have some relationship with the project. It is about those who have an interest in the project, and can be affected by or can affect the project (Freeman & Miles, 2006). To analyse the stakeholder we can understand where stakeholders stand and to ensure successful outcomes for the project. This analysis helps the project to maximize stakeholder positive input and minimizes any potential detrimental impact (Jepsen & Eskerod, 2009). The first step in the Stakeholder Analysis was to identify “who the stakeholders are”. Next we worked out what their power and interests are for the project, and rated them from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest rating and 10 is the highest one.

Table 1: The power and interest of the stakeholders.

No.	Name of Stakeholder	Power (1-10)	Interest (1-10)
1	Local People	5	7
2	Suppliers and Distributors	10	9
3	Tourist	10	9
4	Competitors	2	6
5	Municipalities	7	6
6	The Media	7	5
7	Investors	10	10
8	Researchers	4	4
9	Foreign Companies	3	3

Source: own elaboration.

Local people are occasionally in the southern Piedmont, Langhe-Roero and Monferrato, and represent the companies, people, landowners and the wine and goods producers area. They have both financial and emotional interest in the project, because they will get affected by the outcome of the project, that's why we placed them in 7th rate. They do not have much power or influence over the project, that's why we rate them at 5, meanwhile we really need to take them into consideration and account during the project. It's important to inform these people about the plan, and talk to them to ensure that no major issues are arising.

Suppliers and distributors are the hospitality owners and service providers, for instance the hotels, restaurants, markets, bars, cafeteria, Transportation companies and the artists, both local and foreign. The distributors are the IT managers- and marketing team and the management of tourism organizations. These

are the stakeholders we need to fully engage with, and make the greatest efforts to satisfy. That's why we placed them in 10, of the power and 9 of the interest. These people are the main resources to improve the project and get it done. It's important to fully engage these people, and make the greatest efforts to satisfy them.

Tourists are occasionally in Piedmont. This region is the most popular during summer and autumn. They have a high level of power because the suppliers, distributors and the municipalities can earn money because of them. Tourists have a high level of interest because it is important to them to have many more facilities and information during their holidays. The tourists can be families, tasters, students, singles and pairs, poor and rich, impulsive or planners.

Municipalities are the local government. Their decisions related to the law, taxes, planning activities and promotion of the land have medium impact on the project. Under this category we can find UNESCO, the ministry of culture and the municipalities planning organization. Another stakeholder that has medium power and interest is, The media are the communication channels through which we convey news, music, films, education, advertising messages and other data. It can be physical and online newspapers and magazines, TV, billboards, telephone and of course the Internet.

Investors are the people who put money into financial schemes, property, etc. with the expectation of achieving a profit. They have the highest and the most interest in this project, because they are responsible for the funds and money, essential to beginning the changes in the project. The investors can be public and private funds, for example banks, Trenitalia, EU and UN.

Researchers are scholars from different fields of knowledge who try to protect the environment e.g., environmental planners, historians, etc. They can be the university and experts in different fields. Researchers do not have much power or interest in the project, but on the other side they can be involved, so it's important to monitor them. This also relates to the foreign companies, and means any company or body corporate incorporated outside Italy. Competitors also don't have any power and interest in the project and can be defined as all the organizations or countries that are engaged in the commercial or economic competition with this project.

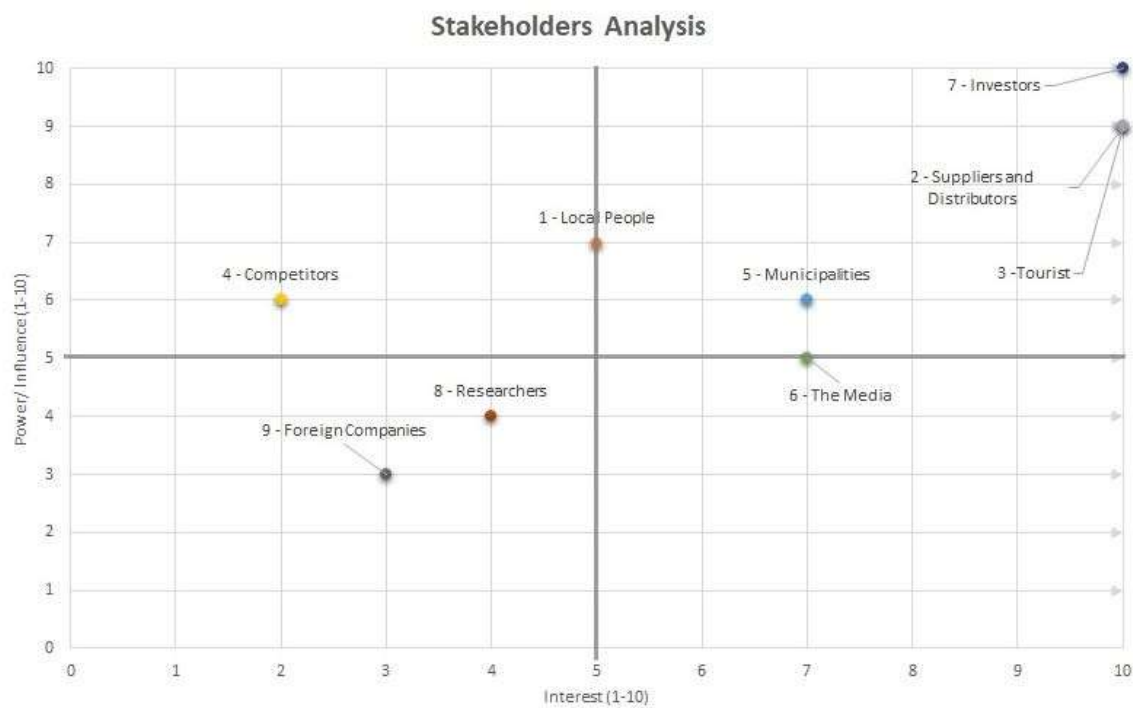


Figure 1: The map of the stakeholders influence and interest.

Source: own elaboration.

As you can see (Figure 1) there are three stakeholders who the project most fully needs to engage with, and make the greatest efforts to satisfy them in the process. These are the investors, suppliers and distributors, and tourists.

SWOT analysis

To understand the business environment, it is central to do a strategic planning process, a SWOT analysis. It helps to gain a better understanding and insight of the internal and external business environment when making strategic plans and decisions. To analyse and position project resources and the environment we will look at the internal strength and weaknesses, and the external opportunities and threats.

The cultural resources study most remarkable strengths are the wine production heritage, local gastronomy, multi-seasonal tourism, national and international tourism, and profitable production. The weaknesses are the lack of cooperation and community, marketing issues and short-term visits. These are the controllable factors that support and obstruct projects to achieve their mission respectively. The opportunities are valorisation of culture elements and multiple experiences for tourism and the threats are over dependence on wine production and tourism, foreign company domination and climate change. These are the external uncontrollable factors that enable and disable projects from accomplishing their mission.

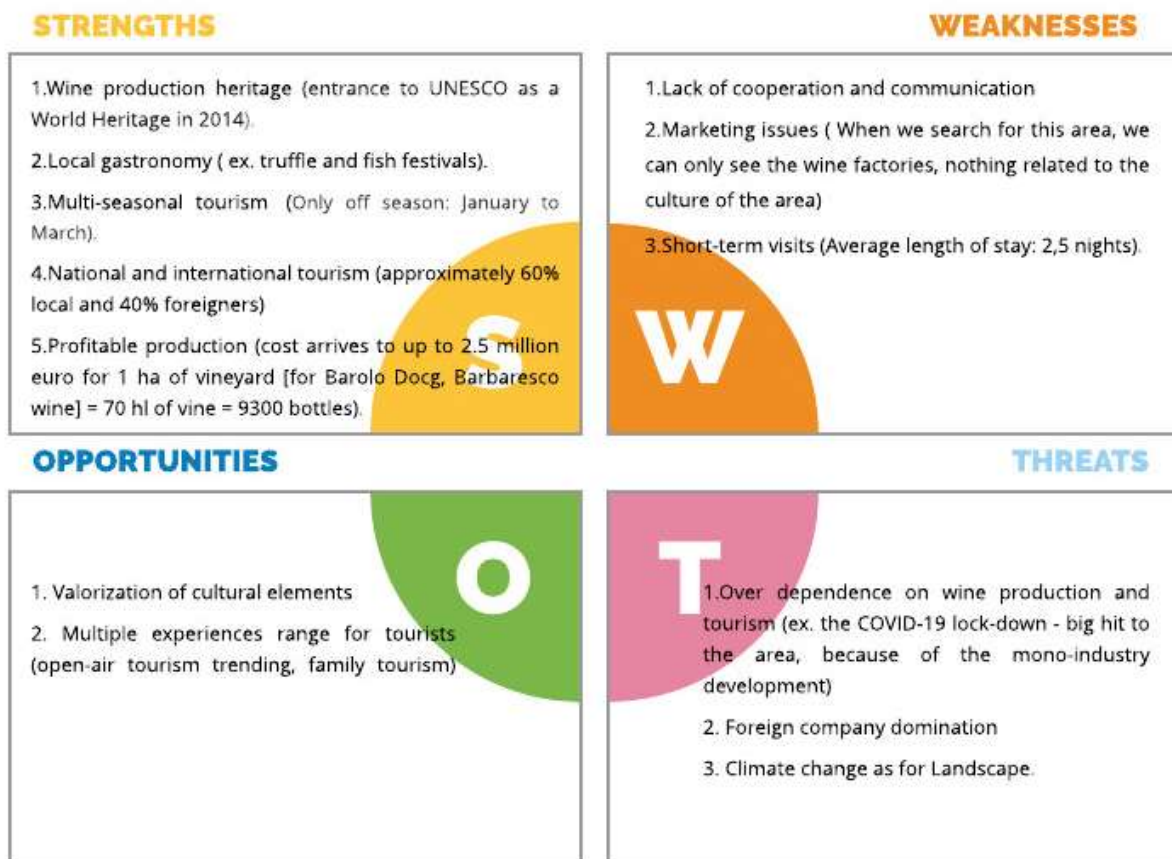


Figure 2: SWOT analysis.

Source: own elaboration.

Policy recommendations

Problem definition

Targeted problem: the lack of the integration of the local culture in the regional activities for sustainable tourism development.

Taking into account the research we have done and the stakeholders interview results we have defined the main problem for the sustainable tourism development oriented to the inclusion, protection and promotion of authentic cultural resources. According to collected data the root cause of the problem is located in the shadowing the potential of cultural resources behind the main economic activity in the region which is wine cultivation and production.

In the previous chapter, we defined that the potential threat is the dominance of the mono-industry over other development opportunities of regional tourism. While one of the strongest points for opportunities

was the presence in the study area of a large number and range of cultural resources. Thus, it is a given that exploration and smart development of local cultural resources together with existing economic and social activities is the only sustainable way to not only develop but as well valorise and preserve the authenticity and richness of local culture – smart tourism is what we want to achieve in the long run.

The project is targeting almost all stakeholders presented in the area as directly or indirectly the overall beneficial potential will affect the regional sustainable tourism development therefore the social and economic need of the society as a whole.

Policy recommendation

Proposed policy: Beneficial policy which promotes and supports local production of goods and service as well as society activities willing to implement, promote and preserve in the their work and life authentic local cultural resources.

The area of the implementation of the policy is included but not limited by the borders of the Langhe-Roero and Monferrato UNESCO site area, registered in 2014. Main tool for the implementation of the policy is mobile online application ‘MERGE’ (mind this is draft name for the testing period of the application).

Project proposal as a tool for policy implementation

For implementation of the policies in the area of tourism and at the same time for the valorisation and preservation of cultural resources in the study creative solutions must be taken. New approaches to sustainable and smart tourism are developed every day, therefore, we are proposing the new application as a platform for cooperation between producers and culture, between tourists and history of the place – the combinations which will motivate people to look at the cultural potential of the place from a new perspective. Project profile:

- Application Name: ‘MERGE’ (the name is chosen for testing period of the application with further possible change).
- Main Concept: integration of local cultural elements into activities.
- Main Goal: to promote and preserve the local cultural resources and to build stronger connections between society and local culture.
- Benefits – short term (1-5 years): wider range of services for all; development of cooperation skills; growth of small businesses.
- Benefits – long term (6-10 years): multidimensional development as a strategy for sustainable tourism; platform as a model for other fields; smart sustainable tourism.

Timeline and milestones of the project implementation:

- Development of the test-application from the IT team – duration 2 months.
- Presentation of the policy to the main actors and sponsors – duration 2 days.
- Organization of the test sessions with producers – duration 3 months.
- Launch of the draft version of the application – done in 6 months after the start of the project.

- Analysis and monitoring of the project progress and redesign(if needed) – constant process.
- Launch of the final version of the application with large marketing team support and the media coverage – after 1 year from the start of the project.
- End of the project – 1.5 years after the official start.

The application is a simple 2-interface platform that is mainly targeting 2 users groups: tourists and producers of goods and services. Any producer can register and use the application in 3 simple steps: create an account, create your activity proposal and find the perfect match for your activity. For the creative service to be posted in the application two or more producers have to collaborate in order to include their proposal service and integrate some local cultural elements(from the list provided by Municipality and Ministry of Culture). The cooperation between two producers could be done throughout the platform in one click by either accepting proposal of services merge or denying it. Only merged activities could be then published as a creative experience proposal for the tourist's interface. Equal distribution of services in the region and collaboration is a key in creating new creative services.

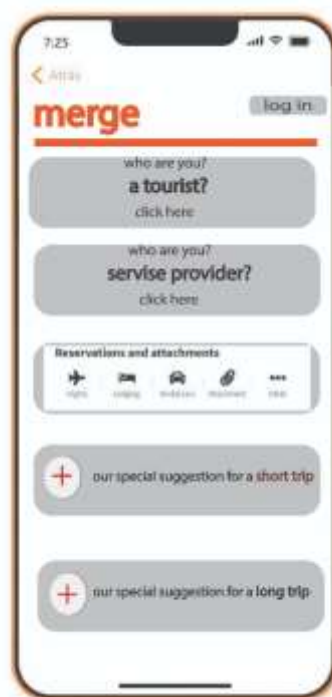


Figure 3: Test model of application interfaces.

Source: own elaboration.



Figure 4: Test model of application interfaces.

Source: own elaboration.

The visitor/tourist interface is on the other end of service provision. The interface are going to show to the visitors and/or locals willing to experience new kinds of experience only from already merged activities from 2 or more providers of diverse services. Important to note that at least 1 of the producers should integrate into the activity the cultural element, will it be the folk music concert, architectural guided tour or open lessons of local dialects. The users could register to the activities if the spots are so far available, map the route, find accommodation nearby (as one of the type of merged activity), provide payments if needed, get all information about activity and providers in the description and invite friends to join them.

Main pro:

- Ease of collaboration and communication for both producers and visitors and active promotion of local culture.

Policy actors:

- Direct group: producers, tourists/visitors, municipality, investors, IT and marketing teams.
- Indirect group: local inhabitants(non-users), transportation companies, planning organizations.

Policy beneficiaries:

- Direct group: producers, tourists, locals, municipality, regional administration, transportation companies, artists and cultural organizations.
- Indirect group: universities, other touristic destinations, neighbouring territories.

Resources needed:

- Intangible: human resources (IT management and marketing team, local community, producers), volunteers for the trial of application and feedback collection, IT domain.
- Tangible: money, equipment for the application development and management, spaces for workshops and presentations.

Expected income of resources from:

- Funds and sponsorship programmes, producers, suppliers, media channels.
- Potential sponsors are local producers as main beneficiaries.
- Potential funds are Virtual And Smart Cultural Tourism (by The European Regional Development Fund), Digital Europe Programme, Music Moves Europe (by Europe Union).

The main strength of our project is its creativity approach. For that reason as well as for its technological essence we potentially could be a candidate for diverse funds for smart tourism development, as one of the Agenda 2030 perspectives, as well as for creative solutions grants. Furthermore, our main beneficiaries are local producers of goods and services and according to the data with a proper delivery of the project goals and ideas they could be the main sponsors of the project realization.

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