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13

CBT IN RURAL PERIPHERAL AREAS

An Italian case study of territorial engagement and requalification

Rita Salvatore, Emilio Cocco and Anna Mines

13.1 Community-based tourism in peripheral areas: theoretical issues

In the last century, and mostly after WWII, rural regions have been increasingly marginalized by the effects of emigration and abandonment. Inner areas have been virtually cut off from top-down development processes and modernising policies that tend to focus on the coast. This is especially true for the inner areas of the Southern Italian peninsula, where the abandonment of the inner villages occurred alongside tourism-driven coastal urban sprawl. Since the middle of the 20th century, this portion of the Mediterranean coast has witnessed a large and intensive process of coast colonisation, otherwise known as “littoralisation” (Voiron-Canicio, 1999; Bramwell, 2004). The “informal component” was an essential feature of this process, characterized by deregulation, unlawfulness, spontaneity and self-determination outside urban planning. As a result, a number of crowded but marginal urbanised areas flourished across southern Italian coastlines. Today, seasonal beach tourism in these areas coexists with low numbers of permanent residents and weak cultural roots, turning them into ghost towns during the winter. At the same time, inner-area communities, where traditions and family ties have been stronger historically, are also undergoing depopulation and face the risk of extinction.

However, new developments in tourism studies (Kachniewska, 2015) provide insight on how we might combat these processes. In particular, because of a new sensibility towards both cultural and environmental preservation, rural areas are interesting destinations for carrying out sustainable and responsible management of “tourism-making”. Sustainability here means both the incorporation of an ever-evolving set of needs from various stakeholders, as well as the recognition that, at times, the enhancement of places might mean a complete reinvention. From this perspective, the concept of community itself has to be completely revised in order to favour and manage CBT processes. Rather than to be meant as an indigenous and endogenous phenomenon – that is to say a group of resident people whose identities are bound in terms of traditional values and local features – the community turns into a “place-based hub” whose identity is continuously in the making.

The sociological debate around community is a long-running one, starting from Tönnies (2001) and his notions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as a way to conceptualize the modern
development of social ties from ascribed, collective bonds to individually determined social contracts. Although the scholarly tradition is a rich one and there have been many attempts to define prerequisites and the necessary dimensions of community, the questions around this concept are still quite open. As more recently stated by Alleyne, community is a term impossible to define with any precision (2002). In our research, the primary interest is to work out an operational definition of community that could explain the social dynamics involved in tourism encounters in peripheral areas where old settlers, returning migrants and newcomers co-construct a sense of place.

From this standpoint, as Barth stated back in 1994, it is crucial to remember that “communities cannot be created simply through the act of imagining” (1994). Therefore, the leading research questions could be framed in the following terms: What does it take to socially construct and, more importantly, maintain a community in space and time? Accordingly, what is the role of tourism in this process?

An interesting example of such a research perspective comes from the recent work of Beaumont and Brown (2018), focussing on the local surfer interactions with the wider rural community in Cornwall. Their work is based on a qualitative ethnographic study of a small rural village where a long-term, semi-resident surfer community encounters and establishes significant relationships with the autochthonous countryside. The authors bring together a large set of theoretical references, from Victor Turner’s notions of spontaneous, normative and ideological *communitas* (1969) to Whol’s dynamic notion of experiencing and communicating an ever-changing sense of community based on shared (co-constructed) aesthetic judgements (2015). As a result, their research suggests that the notion of community cannot be restricted to a geographically bound and static institution. On the contrary, contemporary rural communities might work as hubs of close and wider de-territorialized social relationships, as local identities that are not necessarily tied to a specific physical or geographical place. Thus the “experience of community” does not depend on the constraint of living near one another.

Interestingly, Beaumont and Brown (2018) show how communities can exist both within and beyond territorial boundaries because contemporary local identities are highly mobile both for the intensification of migratory movements (inbound/outbound) and for the reliance on IT for creating and maintaining long-distance identities. Their notion of community refers to a “stable population associated with a delimited area, who shares experience and aesthetic judgements over unifying traits and common interests” (Beaumont & Brown, 2018: 65). Thus, community is neither a limited, territorially determined concept nor a completely delocalized one. The existence of social and spatial boundaries is a recognized feature of community but the fundamental questions are more about their changing nature in time and, most of all, on the ways group interactions create and maintain those same boundaries. For our specific scope, the interest is in the way tourism-mediated encounters enhance the co-construction of a sense of place, which is a process very close to the sharing of experience and aesthetic judgements suggested by Beaumont and Brown. We aim to understand how it is possible to use community-based tourism to make a geographically, peripheral community an open frontier, that is to say a mobile hub that stretches beyond its cultural and physical limits.

In this framework, tourism-mediated encounters provide some significant space for local identities, which play an essential role for the implementation of social development and sustainability, especially in terms of “cultural equity” (Maretti & Salvatore, 2012). Local identities become an added value for tourists who appreciate social meaning behind the process of “localness making”. Meanwhile, for local populations, the re-making of local
identity sets the stage for new processes to protect, enhance and improve their natural and cultural heritage. As Maretti and Salvatore phrase it, “The same site where they live and/or work will have to be shared with new travelling communities that will consider it not only as a space for ‘ordinary way of life’ but also for ‘extra-ordinary’ experience” (Maretti & Salvatore, 2012).

According to this perspective, community-based tourism (CBT) emerges as the result of an encounter and a constant contamination between past and future living conditions, between those who have roots in that place and never moved, those who have returned and those who choose to move and live there from elsewhere. The encounter and the nexus are the stimuli for (re)creating better living conditions by taking care of the environment, social relations and cultural heritage, ultimately favouring social innovation (Bock, 2016).

Such expectations are not completely unknown as they have been largely discussed in the field of urban renewal and gentrification processes. For instance, CBT addresses concerns and goals that animate culture-led regeneration projects, especially in decaying urban areas. Following Kennel (2011), if on one side governments are likely to spend more on culture because they assume it would have an impact on other significant policy areas (such as criminality, employment, well-being, public health, etc.), on the other side, in spite of a general ambiguity with regards to the meaning of culture, regeneration is certainly based on one essential resource: the people, along with their motivations, imagination and creativity. Thus, tourism, like any other creative industry, becomes part of development and competitiveness strategies based on the use of culture as a tool to promote regeneration of territories through the people.

Not surprisingly, a fundamental aspect of such a cultural regeneration strategy is the mobilisation of social capital around the emotional significance of a place, which is always culturally mediated and socially co-constructed (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). More specifically, besides the physical features of a place, meanings and interpretations are rooted both in wide, socially constructed cultural representations and in the ways people experience particular environments. When it comes to rurality, it is generally recognized that since the 19th century there has been a radical shift in the representations of rural spaces, which have undergone a process of iconic manipulation and imaginative redefinition. Rural areas that traditionally were associated with harsh conditions and widespread poverty (frequently leading to migration) have been progressively turned into nostalgic and idyllic sites in the collective memory (Villa, 2005; Moss & Glorioso, 2014). Due to literary and artistic mediations, the representation of rural spaces functions as a counterpart for the urban world, an ideal “otherness” to be desired and culturally consumed. However, such a dichotomy does not necessarily mean that the sense of place is adequately described and does not guarantee that the communities involved are well integrated into the process of development. Truly, the socially co-constructed sense of rurality and its romantic portraits are instrumental to tourist consumption of the countryside (Aitchison et al., 2000) but it is probably not enough to mobilize the creative potential of the people, both residents and visitors.

Our CBT analytical framework, under a (new) rural development paradigm and with special reference to the Garrod’s concept of “countryside capital” (Garrod et al., 2006), distinguishes four different assets: settlements, agriculture, culture and natural environment. With each asset we associate a set of tools to be activated within the “encounters” and used to mobilize social capital in order to tackle weaknesses and obstacles to development, such as fragility and remoteness. The following sections show the potential and the hardships of CBT as a way to mobilize social capital through a co-constructed “sense of place”, shared within community-based encounters. The one-case-study research design method has been
used to perform an ethnographic and qualitative investigation in the Southern Italian inner area of Castelmezzano, in the Basilicata region.

13.2 Methodological notes: a case study in Southern Italy

As already pointed out, since the end of the 1990s, Italian villages along the Apennines mountains have gone through a meaningful process of change, focussed on the possibility of them turning into new rural tourist destinations after being victims of abandonment, decay and territorial marginalisation (Salvatore et al., 2018). Both public institutions and private entities have started new associations such as the “Borghipiù Belli d’Italia” Club, the Orange Flags from Italian Touring Club and the “Borghi Autentici” Association, aiming at reusing and requalifying local architectural heritage for both tourist purposes and empowering local communities. Within this issue, a quite popular and paradigmatic case is represented by the Lucanian town of Matera (in Basilicata region) (Ceci, 2003; Bernardo & De Pascale, 2016). After being evacuated in the 1950s, due to squalid and unhealthy living conditions of the peasants living in the Sassi (the traditional historical dwellings carved into the rock), UNESCO named Matera a World Heritage Site in 1993. Owing to the uniqueness and anthropological, historical value of the site, Matera has gone through an interesting process of cultural and tourist transition, which over time has led to its selection as European Capital of Culture 2019. This change has also involved the rest of the region whose different elements of natural, cultural and historical heritages have been highlighted for its destination competitiveness (Aquilino et al., 2018).

The Basilicata Region is located in Southern Italy between the Apulia and Campania regions and it touches both the Ionian and Tyrrenhenian coasts. Its rich and wild natural landscape has been safeguarded by two national parks (the Pollino and the Appennino Lucano Val d’Agri–Lagonegrese), a regional park (Gallipoli Cognato–Piccole Dolomiti Lucane) and several other small reserves. This landscape also shows the traces of historical milestones that have shaped the archaeological, historical and cultural heritage of Basilicata. This situation has attracted new tourists’ interests, making tourism an increasing economic driving force, in Matera and its surroundings. If Matera represents the focal attraction, by proximity other villages might have benefitted in terms of an increase in the demand and in the offer of tourist services. In other words, “Matera 2019” is about creating opportunities for the region beyond the town, showing how tradition can be integrated with new displays of culture and performances (Aquilino et al., 2018).

In order to assess the sense of this transition in the areas surrounding Matera, and to deeply analyse the role of local community within this process, this chapter focusses on the main highlights of a research project conducted in accordance with the case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) in the small village of Castelmezzano (less than 100 km away from Matera). The choice of Castelmezzano is related to different aspects that drew our attention during our preliminary fieldwork in the nearby town of Matera, such as the:

- popularity of a very particular tourist attraction, known as “Volo dell’Angelo”
- engagement from young people in the process of tourist development
- participation of the local community as a whole
- commitment from institutions
- uniqueness of the natural landscape and architectural settlements

Given that the process under observation is still in progress and closely related to a contemporary context, we have chosen a particularly flexible method in terms of research techniques
CBT in rural peripheral areas

and data collection. The specificity of this case is clearly far from showing any statistical representativeness but at the same time it highlights new elements of qualitative interest (such as the mobilisation of social capital, the contemporary revitalisation of old food traditions, the role of “big attractors”, the integration among different assets, young people’s involvement and the commitment from institutions) that are worth being analysed in depth.

In this research, Castelmezzano has represented a sort of “bounded system” (Creswell, 1998) by time and space to be explored in detail through an in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. In particular, we conducted the study according to different phases that continuously overlapped one another in order to favour the principle of triangulation and internal validity (Diehl et al., 2011). During the first phase, we went through a literature review with the specific objective of focussing on the theoretical framework that eventually guided the fieldwork (second phase), that is the collection of documents, interviews with key informants, field notes and cognitive maps. During the third phase, we went through a secondary data analysis in order to better understand how both demographic and tourist structures have changed over time. The analysis of the qualitative data (fourth phase) was conducted with the CAQDAS Nvivo. All the info in the following sections are the results of the different data collected.

13.2.1 The case of Castelmezzano

Castelmezzano is a small village at the foot of Dolomiti Lucane, in the province of Potenza and in the protected area of the Regional Park Gallipoli Cognato – Piccole Dolomiti Lucane. As we learned from the mayor of the town, in the aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake that hit in 1981 the near region of Irpinia, most of its historical houses were completely restored according to specific rules and a coherent landscape plan. Due to these interventions, the village today appears as an aesthetic amenity and a very picturesque hamlet. Furthermore, this helped in addressing the risk of decay of the settlement (caused by emigration) and in favouring destination competitiveness. The commitment from both local institutions (the municipality in particular) and an active group of young people has made the local community vibrant and well prepared to take on new development projects. According to the mayor,

I started working on these projects almost 20 years ago and our ‘best practice’ is partly related to this long-lasting institutional commitment. In 2001, 37 mayors from small municipalities of inner areas and I decided to start this association named ‘I Borghipiù Belli d’Italia’ on the basis of a successful French experience named ‘Les Villages plus beaux de France’. We thought that it might have been a good idea to share and communicate information about less popular Italian places… over time we can definitively say that the idea has been fruitful. Today there are about 280 villages as members of the Club all over Italy. That was the beginning of this village’s development path. When I first became mayor in 1999 the last shop (a butcher’s) was going to close down. Today we still have that butcher shop, plus 22 young people working for the Volo dell’Angelo, about 20 B&Bs, almost 200 beds, 3 restaurants... That was also thanks to the Volo dell’Angelo and YouTube, because people started recording their flights and so this place started being very popular. In 2008, the American magazine Budget Travel named Castelmezzano as the most beautiful place in the world among the less known ones. Being mayor for so long has allowed me to give continuity to a project and to build up trust from my community. People here have always recognized me as their leader.
The biggest draw to the area is the Volo dell’Angelo (Flight of the Angel, to be referred to as the Volo), an innovative experiential tourism attraction that sends participants flying on a zip line from the village of Castelmezzano to Pietrapertosa once and back again. Developed in 2007, the Volo has evolved over the years with the introduction of paired flights and accommodations for disabled people. The attraction has contributed to the economic and cultural growth of the local population and has also been a driving force for other minor attractions, such as the Via Ferrata (fixed rope routes for climbers), Il Percorso delle Sette Pietre (The Path of the Seven Stones) and Il Ponte Nepalese (the Nepali bridge).

In reference to our analytical framework (see Figure 13.1), the Volo is an eco-tourism tool that relies primarily on the assets of the natural environment. The suggestive views and the dramatic rock formations were important to drawing tourists, from our interviewees’ standpoint, but Castelmezzano has also developed an integrated offering for every other asset in our framework (agriculture: agritourism, typical foods and restaurants; culture: events; aesthetic care for the settlement: many lodging possibilities, Borghi Piu Belli d’Italia, requalification, etc.).

![Analytical framework]

**Figure 13.1** Analytical framework
Castelmezzano now has 789 inhabitants but since 2001 it has lost almost 19% of its population (ISTAT – Italian National Institute of Statistics). This is a higher rate compared to the regional one, where Basilicata has lost only 4% of its population and the town of Matera has gained 4.5% in the same period. Despite this loss of inhabitants, the hospitality capacity has constantly and meaningfully grown over time, even in comparison with Matera and the rest of the region.

As shown in Table 13.1, the total number of accommodation establishments of the region in 2001 was 450 and it has tripled so far, with Matera showing a shocking rate of growth, both in the number of tourist establishments and in the number of beds.

However, if we look at Figure 13.2, we realize that in relative terms Castelmezzano has also had a growth over time worthy of mentioning. Its tourist function (an index measuring the relation between inhabitants and hospitality capacity) is one of the highest in the inner areas of the region (21.5 in 2018). Even Matera’s rate is lower, at 7.8 in 2018 (partly due to its population growth).

It is particularly interesting how the tourist function index of Castelmezzano peaked in 2013. We can assume it is closely related to the successful opening of the Volo tourist attraction in 2007.

Looking at the tourist fluxes over the last four years (2014–2018), there has been a widespread meaningful growth all over Basilicata region (54% in arrivals, 24% in overnight stays). Compared to these regional rates, Matera has had a much better performance (125% growth...
in arrivals; 124% in overnight stays), whereas Castelmezzano shows a lower growth rate than the regional one (21% in arrivals) and a decline in the overnight stays (−21%). The average stay in fact has decreased from 2.1 to 1.3 days. More people are coming to Castelmezzano, but they are spending less time there, suggesting that people visiting Matera and Basilicata on the whole might be deciding to spend a shorter break there.

13.3 Sense of place in the Castelmezzano community

In order to assess the shared sense of community in Castelmezzano, we conducted fieldwork in the area and interviewed six community members (see Table 13.2). Regarding the analytical framework, Castelmezzano exhibited all of the assets and a large variety of tools to mobilize those assets. The main findings reported here are the results of a qualitative analysis of these interviews through the use of the CAQDAs Nvivo. In Table 13.2 the main characteristics of interviewees are listed.

When choosing the case study, Castelmezzano was considered for its strong commitment from the community to the tourism development process, as well as for the fact that it is situated in a fragile, protected area. This meant that community was assumed to be a strong theme in the interview data at the outset. The intention of our interview questions was then to test this assumption, to ascertain the particular roles in that community that supported the development of the Volo and to understand the mechanisms at play that made it easier (or more difficult) for the community to partake in the tourism venture.

Our assumption was confirmed, especially in regard to the involvement of young people in building the Volo. Considering the issues that were present in Castelmezzano when the venture took off, primarily depopulation, we know that tourism that is designed for this community incentivizes young people to stay, primarily by providing a source of income. The Volo succeeded in doing just that. One interviewee, a young person involved in the venture at the onset while still in high school (and who continues to work there), expressed that the mayor of Castelmezzano made the effort to involve young people since the beginning (Tour Operator). This was confirmed by the mayor who remarked that the success of the Volo allowed for all young volunteers (25–30 years old), including the aforementioned interviewee, to be paid within the first year after its launch, and that it today employs 22 young people (Mayor).

Another administrator involved in management told us that providing income to these young volunteers at the beginning was crucial: “Not everyone is satisfied by just volunteering. And of all those people [...] they don’t do things if there is no economic return” (Administrator). The venture employed local young people who were not only motivated by employment, but also saw this as a chance for self-realisation. For the aforementioned interviewee and long-term employee, the Volo kickstarted her career in tourism. She said:

My entire path revolved around the Volo, because when I started this training [for the Volo] I was still in high school. But after, I decided to go to university and then also decided to study Tourism Science [...] then my decision to return was strong because I have an attachment to the Volo, maybe because, yeah, I was there when it was born and saw it grow. But not only me, all of us who work there. Especially those who have been there since the start [...] People told me, ‘what are you going to do with a degree?’ and I always responded, ‘but sorry why can’t there be a qualified person working in the Volo ticket office?’ The quality of service is changed for the better when they hire people who are prepared.

(Tour Operator)
### Table 13.2 Interviewees and key informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent appellation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Children (no.)</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Status (in-out the community)</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator (key informant)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Returned (moved away for university/work/etc. and came back)</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor (key informant)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Castelmezzano and Potenza</td>
<td>Returned (moved away for university/work/etc. and came back)</td>
<td>Post-laurea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Returned (moved away for university/work/etc. and came back)</td>
<td>Trade school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agri-tour Operator</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Potenza</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Returned (moved away for university/work/etc. and came back)</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour Operator</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Potenza</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Returned (moved away for university/work/etc. and came back)</td>
<td>Laurea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant owner</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Potenza</td>
<td>Castelmezzano</td>
<td>Never moved away</td>
<td>Trade school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Compiled by author.*
The community of Castelmezzano also had the opportunity to partake in the success of the venture second hand. In other words, the increase in visitors encouraged locals to establish or grow other tourist offers such as lodging, restaurants and gift shops, as clearly demonstrated by secondary data (see Figure 13.2). All of our interviewees expressed the possibility for community members to be involved in tourism, whether that be in running or working for a tourism-related business, or through casual interactions with tourists:

In Castelmezzano there’s a beautiful reality from this point of view, we are really welcoming and nowadays we even love to be stopped by tourists, to interact with them and tell a story, talk about our traditions.

(Tour Operator)

I have a nice relationship with tourists, I have to say… I stop a lot to speak with tourists, when there’s time.

(Restaurant Owner)

If you try to ask for information from anyone from here, whether that’s a middle-aged person, a kid, or the elderly, everyone will make themselves available to help you in whatever you need […] That’s because over the years a micro-economy has grown and diffused in all of the families. More than 40 B&Bs have been established, not to mention the restaurants, bars, etc. Every tourist could be a hypothetical client to a person. So, everyone respects everyone else, without competition. It’s fantastic, because people really feel at home here […] an elderly person that’s sitting on a bench in an empty town is sad. In Castelmezzano, an elderly person can exchange a few words with tourists, with people… because there’s movement in the town. Regarding quality of life, they also benefit […]

(Administrator)

Each family has its own economic business within this project being either a B&B, a bar, a restaurant, or a shop… therefore the redistribution of opportunities has been one of the biggest satisfactions for me and definitely one of the base conditions for success.

(Mayor)

Another important tool administrators and stakeholders used to integrate the main attraction of the Volo with the development of the whole community was a finalized reorganisation of the urban spaces and city planning (Tour Operator, Administrator 01, Mayor, Restaurant Owner, Artisan). As our interviewees assessed, the decision to set up the ticket office in the city centre rather than near the departure point of the zip line was made to encourage tourists to visit the village and encounter local people. One reason to do that was also related in part to the layout of Castelmezzano, because the town is small and has one road running through the middle. Such a design lets the clients of the Volo visit local businesses (restaurants, B&Bs, etc.). For example:

One has to pass by every commercial activity, whether that is a bar or a bakery, a souvenir shop… where 20,000 people pass, maybe 1,000 people buy a coffee or a bottle of water. Instead, the rest take a photo, take a walk through the town and that good memory remains. So, it is not only economic, but also important because it gives visibility to the town […] this is also value added for tourism.

(Administrator)
Others remark that the high number of accommodations in lodging, restaurants and bars makes people stay awhile (Tour Operator, Mayor). Additionally, they say that the restoration of old buildings and an overall attention to aesthetic appeal of Castelmezzano was important for attracting visitors (Tour Operator, Mayor) to the historical centre of the hamlet.

In Castelmezzano, the participation of young people and the community as a whole was supported by charismatic local leaders: the mayor and the president of the Pro Loco (a non-profit organisation that promotes a particular place at the service of its inhabitants). The former played a crucial role long before the establishment of the Volo, when he was introduced to the concept of the zip-line attraction in France. He went to visit FantastiCable, as it was called, and shortly thereafter proposed a similar attraction for Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa. In 2004, the mayor purchased the rights to the Volo for both municipalities, an important decision for its later success. The rights allowed for them to establish the attraction exclusively until 2012. When asked about the impact of the Volo on the neighbouring municipality, Pietrapertosa, an interviewee said that they did not have a figure like the mayor of Castelmezzano, and that made a difference. They went on to speak about him in high regard:

In my opinion, the figure of the mayor was very important for Castelmezzano, because he was a person capable of realising this project […] He won votes every time from a large number of supporters […] he believes in a lot of things, in everything he does. And above all, he believes a lot in us young people. He always tries to include us in everything. He’s not a dictator, rather he gives you a lot of freedom to choose […] he guides us but at the same time he listens.

(Tour Operator)

Our interview findings suggest that such a project was able to occur in part thanks to the affinity for the mayor at the time, to the longevity of his administration and to the commitment of young people. The now ex-president of the Pro Loco acknowledged this longevity as “fundamental” to the success of the development of tourism:

A group of young people that were on average between 25 and 30 years old took hold of the municipality for the first time, after 50 years of the Christian Democrats! And they radically changed the way of thinking and living in a community and were fortunate to stay for 25 years. It was very fundamental because the projects that we had started, we followed through with […] If every five years there’s a change in administration, everything that one has done, even if it’s good, gets erased.

(Administrator)

The ex-president of the Pro Loco was also an important leader for Castelmezzano, first for having established the Pro Loco in 2000 but also for using the it as a way to change the locals:

Tourists don’t have to be a person that is ‘bothersome’ but instead an opportunity, economic and social, especially social, for a community that suffers from depopulation.

(Administrator)

In our interviews, we found that the CBT in Castelmezzano was also partly due to a “Matera effect”, which refers in particular to the city of Matera and its effect on tourism elsewhere in the Basilicata region. When walking through Pietrapertosa for the second leg of our zip line, we met an American couple in their 60s who told us that they had only researched and
considered visiting Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa after reading about Matera in a *New York Times* article a year and a half previously (Maxwell, 2017).

Furthermore, one tour operator of the Volo spoke about how the number of Chinese and Japanese tourists has grown in the last couple of years “thanks to Matera” (Tour Operator). When asked if tourists can find Castelmezzano through Matera, they responded:

> When they do research on Matera, yes, there are lots of references to us because, anyway, Basilicata is definitely a very rich region, but also very unknown. So, [when searching] about Basilicata, you find only a few other things besides Matera.

*(Tour Operator)*

This observation was noted by an interviewee who said that “all of these charter buses of people that you see are all on the way to Matera” (Administrator) and another that said in the Spring, thanks to Matera, 12–13 charter buses come every week (Mayor). One business owner noticed an increase in tourism in Castelmezzano since Matera was inaugurated as one of two European Capitals of Culture for the year 2019 (Restaurant Owner). They went on to say:

> You feel it because lots of organized groups arrive that are going to Matera and stop through the Dolomites, so we have seen a lot of people pass by in the spring that were not there before. So tourism has constantly changed and grown. For me, it’s changed in that I’m always more tired, because we work more [laughs].

*(Restaurant Owner)*

Matera has played an interesting role in attracting tourists to other towns in Basilicata. But on a smaller scale, something very similar has occurred with the Volo and Castelmezzano and neighbouring areas. Since the Volo was established, as mentioned above, jobs opened up and more young people chose to stay. But it also brought attention to a town that had more to offer than this eco-tourism attraction, such as its food culture (Administrator). When discussing the culture and food-based projects and events in the town, the mayor of Castelmezzano was asked if these projects would have had been able to happen if it was not for the Volo. His response was an immediate no and that this attraction reinforced the capacity of this territory to communicate the beauty of the place, which has always been there but was previously unrecognizable (Mayor). He went on to list the communication that occurred “thanks to the attraction” including TV transmissions and films: “The Volo became a chance of redemption for a community that was dying”.

### 13.4 Conclusions

Castelmezzano demonstrates a strong case of successful CBT thanks to the combination of a variety of factors, from a focus on endogenous assets (such as the natural landscape beauty, and historical, cultural and geological heritage), to the active and chance involvement of community members in developing the tourism offer. The data collected in the second phase of this research especially highlighted the importance of involving the community in reversing the trend of depopulation and in ensuring a rich and sustainable tourism offer that benefitted all. Such involvement manifested itself in a variety of ways, through the active hiring of young people, requalification from institutional actors and business owners, or a willingness from locals to engage with tourists. Some intentional and some inadvertent, the
end result was a shared communal identity that enhanced the tourism experience, going beyond the eco-tourism venture of the Volo and towards a comprehensive type of destination that offers food and culture experiences as well.

This shared community identity is also referred to in the literature on rural development as “double coherence”, where both internal and external observers of the rural have a consistent understanding of place (Ventura et al., 2008). We might say that the community of Castelmezzano was “congruent and unified” in their perception of what they had to offer (Halfacree, 2006, p. 52). Such unification would not have been possible without frequent encounters between tourists and locals. A CBT approach should focus on the potential of tourist encounters as a way to generate shared meanings in the process of creating a sense of place across social and spatial boundaries.

In order to achieve such a goal, it is important to bear in mind the relational dimension conveyed by tourism and try to conceive it perhaps as “mediator of meanings” if not a “means of communication” tout court (Nogués-Pedregal, 2019). Therefore, a CBT approach should move beyond an established hegemony of the business perspective in the field of tourism and try to maintain a perspective grounded in the socio-cultural processes involved in the creation of meanings. So, if culture is easily turned into a heritage asset because it can be used as a source of income, our interest revolves more around the processes through which tourist encounters mediate the co-construction of the sense of place in an equitable perspective. It goes without saying that tourists are an essential part of these processes as they are co-creator of the sense of place. However, their involvement in the process is often unclear. Accordingly, the case study analysis presented in this chapter shows that the border between residents and tourists is much more blurred when social capital is properly mobilized to allow the practice of “encountering”, which might turn a peripheral destination into a frontier (hub) for sustainable, responsible tourism. In this context, the notion of community reflects a more flexible, liquid and permeable social entity.

References


