

# **MAINSTREAMING OF SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES IN TOURISM POLICIES IN SICILY**

within the project

RESTART MED! Ref. n. C\_A.1.3\_0054, financed in the framework of the ENI CBC  
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## **TECHNICAL REPORT**

### **ON THE RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP “POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM” IN THE TERRE SICANE AREA**

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## FOREWORD

This work, conducted between February and March 2023, was part of a consultancy provided to the Restart Med! Project<sup>1</sup> to produce a policy review on the status of sustainable tourism in Sicily and build a roadmap for local policymakers to mainstream sustainability challenges in tourism policies, in continuity with what has also been done in the other countries of implementation of the project.

## ROADMAP

The consultancy can be seen as consisting of three connected steps:

### 1. Desk analysis

A desk analysis on the main trends, policies and developments from a national and regional perspective was conducted as a first step to build the methodology and identify key focus areas of the work. This phase is built on output projects such as the *Tourism Sector and Policy Development Framework in Italy* research and other documents relating to the specificities of tourism policy-making in Italy and Sicily.

### 2. Consultations with local stakeholders

The consultations with local stakeholders, in the form of focus groups as described in this report, were carried out in order to shed light on the main challenges for sustainable tourism development in the region and understand how to tackle them.

### 3. Policy Review

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<sup>1</sup> ITB “Consultancy for mainstreaming of sustainability challenges in tourism policies in Sicily” in the framework of the ENICBCMED Project RESTART MED! Ref. n. C\_A.1.3\_0054 (Service Contract) External consultancy - Rome, 23rd December 2022 - Issued by CISP

The results of the consultations and of the desk analysis were then gathered and analysed in a policy review paper, addressing the main tools and strategies to advance the sustainability agenda in local tourism policies

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE CONSULTATION PHASE

With regards to the consultation phase, to which the content of this report refers to, the consultant and CISP (the contracting authority) agreed on a common strategy on how to organise the consultation with local stakeholders, of which the key features can be summarised here:

### Geographical focus

It was decided to widen the scope of the research from the implementation area - which aimed at consolidating the results of the [CROSSDEV](#) project in the Terre Sicane area, Via Selinuntina, in particular - to other areas in the region. This decision was motivated primarily by the need to understand how different contexts affect sustainable tourism development, hence moving from a regional to a local dimension. The specificities of the economic, social and environmental local ecosystems in the three areas selected - Terre Sicane, Iblei area and Etna - vary greatly and are symptomatic of different stages of tourism industry development, thereby returning a comprehensive and truthful picture of a varied and inhomogeneous regional ecosystem.

### Thematic Focus

In terms of thematic focus, particular attention was placed on understanding how the phenomenon of *cities of identity* in Sicily affects tourism development. The largest of such associations in Sicily is **Strade del Vino**, which organises promotional activities using the



strengths of gastronomic and agricultural products to valorize the identity of rural areas and optimise the investment of more municipalities in joint actions. Another association promoting the idea of *cities of identity* in the **Borghi Più Belli d'Italia** initiative, promoted by the Italian government through the Ministry of Culture, by allocating large sums to small municipalities, in the initiative Italian "BORGHI" (about 760 million euros), to promote, as less-known destinations several forms of sustainable tourism, where the village represents the ideal representation of the sustainable urban concept and expression of the Italian lifestyle. Finally, the impact of **UNESCO sites** (7 in total in the region) was also factored in in the territorial analysis. The table shows the degree to which each of the geographical focus areas selected reflects this identitarian dimension:

Geographical Area	Strade Del Vino	Borghi Più Belli d'Italia	UNESCO Sites
Terre Sicane	Strade del Vino Terre Sicane	Sambuca di Sicilia	
Iblei area	Strade del Vino Val di Noto <sup>2</sup>	Ferla <sup>3</sup>	Ragusa and Scicli
Etna Area	Strade del Vino dell'Etna		Mount Etna

## COMPOSITION

In terms of composition, each of the consultation conducted aimed at engaging a heterogeneous set of stakeholder, such as: tourism operators, both traditional and sustainability-driven; institutional stakeholders, such as municipalities, public-private

<sup>2</sup> Representative could not participate in consultations

<sup>3</sup> Representative could not participate in consultations



partnership programmes and administrative bodies; the research sector, both universities and private research institutes and territorial associations.



## INTRODUCTION

This document describes the content of the exchanges and stimuli of the focus group of the Working Group on Policies for Sustainable Tourism within the ENI CBC Med Restart Med! capitalisation project, which took place on the 25th of January 2023, from 12:00 to 13:00, at the Sustainable Tourism Library of the cultural Routes at Palazzo Panitteri, Sambuca di Sicilia. The Focus Group was attended by 11 experts, with transversal skills in the tourism sector in the Terre Sicane area.

For reference, by Terre Sicane, this report addressed what is defined as the “Area Interna Sicani” located in the centre of Sicily and composed of 12 municipalities:



Alessandria della Rocca, Bivona, Cianciana, San Biagio Platani, Santo Stefano Quisquina, Burgio, Calamonaci, Cattolica Eraclea, Lucca Sicula, Montallegro, Ribera and Villafranca Sicula, but that could be extended to other municipalities in the Valle del Belice area. The area in question includes a large portion of territory located in the central-southern part of the region, assuming a central position in the province of Agrigento.





This focus group was part of a series of three rounds of consultations that explored the state and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in three different areas of Sicily, namely: Terre Sicane, Iblei and Etna. The results of the consultations will feed into a final policy review paper that will propose policy actions at the local level to boost the environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability of the local tourism sector.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The participants who took part in the conversation were as follows:

1. **Gunther di Giovanna:** president of the Strade del Vino Terre Sicane association
2. **Toti Piscopo:** editorial director at Travelnonstop.com
3. **Fabrizio Giacalone:** environmental educator Palma Nana Palermo
4. **Girolamo Cusimano:** ordinary professor in geography at Università di Palermo
5. **Leonardo Ciaccio:** mayor of Sambuca di Sicilia
6. **Calogero Impastato:** ex mayor of Montevago
7. **Giacomo Glaviano:** president of Federazione Internazionale Giornalisti e Scrittori di Turismo
8. **Francesco Valenti:** ex mayor of Contessa Entellina
9. **Marilena Mauceri:** mayor of Menfi
10. **Antonio Purpura:** professor of Applied Economics University of Palermo (and former Regional Councillor for Cultural Heritage)
11. **Anna Fucarino:** president of the Vivere Slow association

## OBJECTIVES

The general objective was to stimulate the participants to propose ideas, comments, visions regarding the construction of a vision of sustainability for the tourism sector in the Terre Sicane area, and which could be translated into a political vision.

## METHODOLOGY

The content of this report is the result of a collective interview structured as a focus group, for the qualitative collection of data. The conversation on the proposed topics was facilitated and lines of communication were created between the various participants, from which suggestions, comments and opinions could be extrapolated. The meeting developed following a three-questions outline, that the facilitator proposed during the course of the focus group. The facilitator was supported by an observer, who had the task of assisting the facilitator in recording comments and opinions expressed by the participants and in observing the climate and dynamics of the group. The facilitator, at the beginning of the meeting, introduced the topic, defined the rules of intervention and its duration, and steered the discussion through the stimulus-response technique. Specifically, the questions proposed during the meeting aimed to explore the following 3 dimensions related to the sustainability of the tourism sector: **Territorial Assets, Vision** and **Policies**.



## FIRST DIMENSION - TERRITORIAL ASSETS

The first question brought to the participants' attention aimed at exploring the degree of maturity of the territory to accommodate and migrate towards a model of sustainable tourism, using what it already has and strengthening the lacking elements. The question was the following: **How can the territory's assets be put at the service of a more sustainable tourism model on a sociocultural, economic and environmental level?**

This first question addressed sustainability as a means of mitigation, in a dualistic relationship with a touristic industry that entails certain negative externalities in terms of environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects. Answers from the participants highlighted the importance of **integrating the model of tourism with that of the main productive sectors of the local economy**, namely agriculture and vinification, to strengthen the existing territorial assets, rather than creating new ones.

The dominant perception in regard to territorial assets underlined how the region of Terre Sicane already abounds with qualities that, per se, could lead to a more sustainable model of tourism. These qualities are particularly favourable in facilitating a **seasonal adjustment of tourism**, which proves necessary to reduce environmental and socio-cultural stress caused by heavy flows of tourism in the summer season and to allow for economic sustainability in the tourism industry. **The assets of greater prominence identified by the participants are in fact bound to the land:** agriculture, wine, and landscape. These assets are not enjoyable solely in coastal tourism models and are not restrained to fruition in the summer months. Various of the views expressed regarding the topic underlined how a strategic transition from traditional touristic assets (coasts, famous historical and archaeological attractors) to territorial assets is a key priority for the tourism sector in the



region, not only to foster sustainable growth but also to enhance the competitiveness of the local tourism industry in the global market.

Evading this mono-thematic model of coastal tourism in favour of an integrated model, based on culture and territory, opens up the possibility of attracting niche, high-level marketing segments: **on coastal tourism, in fact, competition with other destinations is predominantly based on price. Enogastronomic and cultural tourism, on the other hand, enables the creation of a unique qualitative touristic offer.** It is therefore encouraged to pursue a model of tourism which is capable of strengthening the existing productive capacity of the region, rather than creating a parallel industry. Therefore, in the Terre Sicane region, where agriculture constitutes the economy's engine, tourism must embrace a perspective that aims at the reinforcement of this industry.



## SECOND DIMENSION - VISION

In contrast to the first question, the second question aimed to overturn the dichotomous relationship between tourism as an extractive practice and sustainability as a mitigation tool. It, therefore, encouraged participants to reflect on tourism as a vector of a local development model, and thus to consider virtuous land-use models such as community-based tourism. The question posed to participants was as follows:

### **How can tourism become a lever of social, cultural and economic development for the territory?**

Coherently with the first question, the considerations that emerged confirmed the necessity to diversify the touristic offer and proposed **an idea of tourism which does not detach itself from the social and economical substratum in which it operates**. This new idea of tourism is seen as an opportunity for valorization and empowerment of the productive sectors of the territory and of the social fabric.

These considerations imply, however, that strategic and coordinated actions must be taken by the actors in play in the territory. They also imply an involvement of the private sector which can not be confined solely to touristic operators. In fact, new micro-attractors, especially in the post-covid era, are expressions of the territory which stretch beyond the tourism industry in itself. **Building a sustainable model is thus inherently bound to a bottom-up process of awareness generation regarding the intrinsic qualities of the Terre Sicane area** and the consequent development of virtuous initiatives by local actors. In this model, politics should take on the role of facilitator and amplifier of the territory's expressions, rather than that of the key actor in the identification of strategic priorities based on a top-down model. **It was frequently suggested that the main target of**

**tourism strategies should be identified with the local community rather than with the visiting one**, to nurture a territorial identity which can generate quality-driven, touristic interest. Such territorial identity develops through diversity and integration. Diversity, or uniqueness, draws attention to the specificity of one location as opposed to another and constitutes the main touristic asset of a territory. At the same time, in order for individual identities to generate a scalable and sustainable model, as opposed to static and self-centred ones, they need to be in dialogue and integrate contemporary values and identity values which go beyond territorial specificities. To propose a tourism model without banality, knowledge of the territory must be exasperated and contextualised from a global perspective.

To reinforce this convergence between the touristic offer of a territory and its local development, interventions by the participants highlighted how tourism can be seen as a mirror to society. When visiting a destination, the tourist – who, during the conversation, was referred to in various terms, one of which being *temporary citizen* – looks for the same things a native, such as functioning services, social cohesion and cultural dynamism. **The creation of a touristic offer to be credible and sustainable should start by responding to the needs of the local community and creating outlets for the expression of its identity.**

Nevertheless, some concerns regarding the viability of completely converging touristic strategies with local development strategies were expressed. Tourism is primarily an economic activity, and to assume that it follows the same logic of local development threatens to lead to an unsuccessful and unscalable model. Suffice it to think that such a model is unthinkable in more complex settings, such as urban ones, characterised by a multi-layered social substratum and often diverging specific interests. In such contexts, the idea that tourism should be shaped on a bottom-up model based on specific and varied



social interests, rather than on market logic, remains an extremely harmful utopia for the economy. It would exclude a very profitable segment of the economy aimed at increasing the volume of the touristic offer. These considerations open up the possibility that the **political vision on tourism should be adaptable and scalable**, from a model focussed on local empowerment aimed at strengthening local assets towards increased touristic production aimed at creating new market opportunities.

## THIRD DIMENSION - POLICIES

The third question prompted participants to focus on political actions and strategies undertaken in the area and asked:

**How do you evaluate the effectiveness of policies related to sustainable tourism in Sicily? In your experience, have there been measures at the local or regional level that have produced observable results in terms of reducing environmental impact and supporting local communities?**

The focus of the conversation around the third question was not so much on already existing politics as it was on the identification of strategic priorities with a view to sketching the guidelines of a political program. Starting out from the idea of constructing a bottom-up touristic model, the interventions of the participants found common ground in particular in regards to two key tasks:

### **1 - To revitalise the attractiveness of the territory for the younger generations.**

The primary obstacle to the development of a rich and performative tourism industry is the absence of initiatives and agency from young people. It has frequently been highlighted that the absence of awareness in the local community with regard to the cultural, natural and human heritage of the territory perpetrates an idea of the Terre Sicane region as a place devoid of growth potential. What follows is a widespread and scarce desire to invest in the valorization of its assets and unexpressed potential. **The primary targets identified for overcoming this deficit are schools and younger generations.** On one hand, a more sensible school program should aim at encouraging the youngest to pay more attention to their territory and gain awareness of its potential. On the other hand, **the private sector should be encouraged to create new territorial narratives** based on excellence, and opportunities for younger generations to actively engage.





Although not specifically mentioned by the participants, both the focus on education and the increased strategical networking among private actors figure among the key priorities of the 2020 strategy for the “Area Interna Sicani”

**2 – To improve already existent networks and strategies between the municipalities of the Terre Sicane, which would enable the overcoming of strictly administrative boundaries and promote a vision of belonging to the territory based on the creation of a shared identity.**

In particular, the participants stressed the **fundamental role of local authorities** in facilitating the construction of a vast area, which involves all the municipalities of the territory in the pursuit of a shared political program. Among the actions proposed are in particular the creation of specialised networks but also of large manifestations, festivals and projects aimed at increasingly engaging local communities in a process of cultural identification with the territory, in which specific differences of a municipality, as opposed to another, converge in a shared territorial identity.

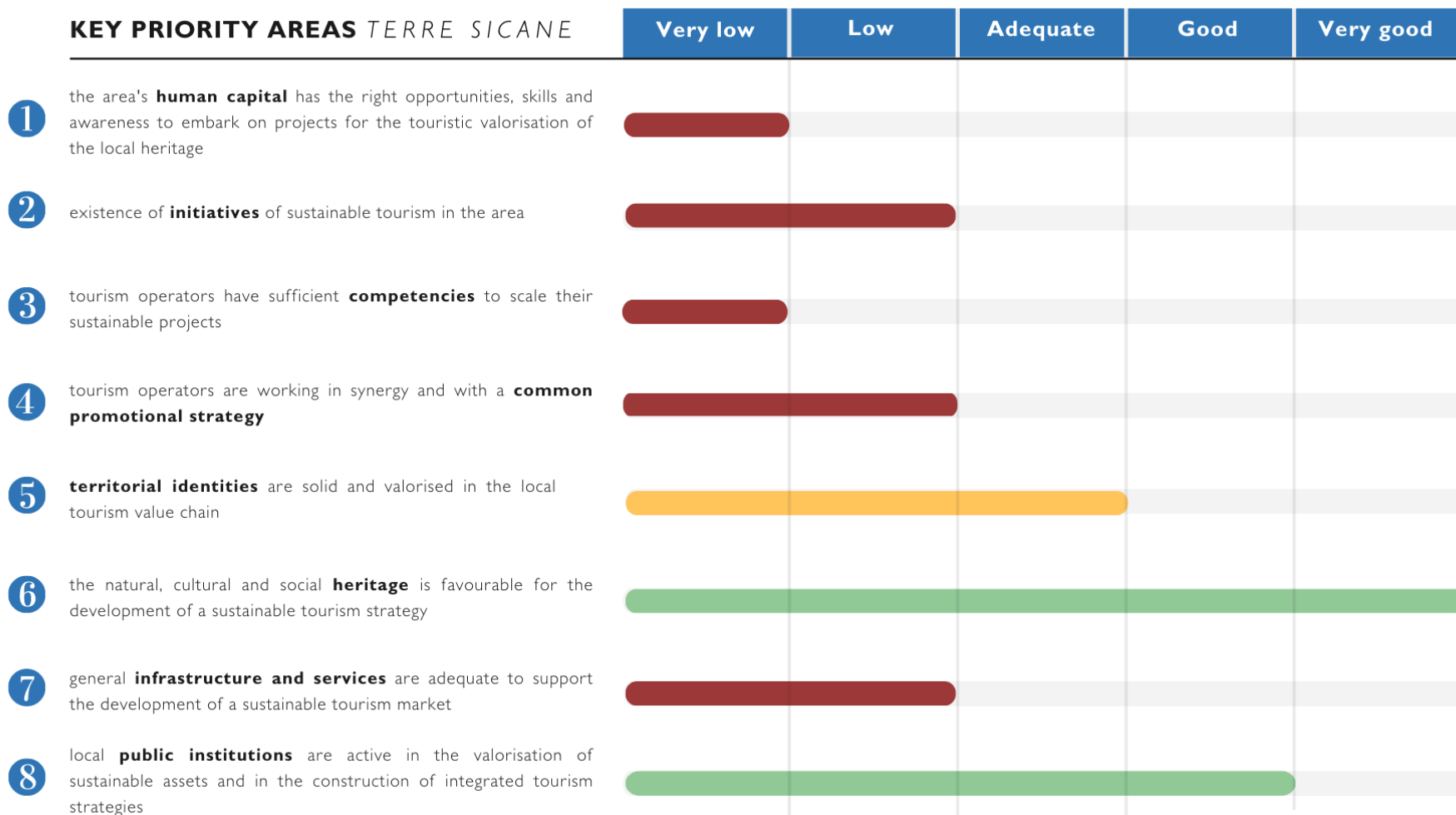
## CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the various stimuli that emerged from the various rounds of consultations conducted in the various geographical areas under consideration, a matrix was elaborated that conveys the common key priority areas identified by the local stakeholders with respect to sustainable tourism development.

The table below provides a short visual account of how well the Terre Sicane area performs against this matrix, on the basis of the results of the focus group.



## KEY PRIORITY AREAS *TERRE SICANE*



**1. the area's human capital has the right opportunities, skills and awareness to embark on projects for the touristic valorisation of the local heritage**

This was recognised as being one of the weakest aspects in the Terre Sicane area. In particular, this is linked to the poor attractiveness of the region for the younger generations, who often decide to leave to look for better opportunities. As such the area is undergoing a trend of depopulation, with the consequent loss of human capital. This is also why investing in schools and education emerged as a key priority in the focus group.

**2. existence of initiatives for sustainable tourism in the area**

Various initiatives have been implemented in the area, in particular with regard to cultural itineraries and wine routes. However, these initiatives are mostly supported by territorial associations and implemented through projects. The private sector, on the other hand, is mostly relying on traditional tourism business models.

**3. tourism operators have sufficient competencies to scale their sustainable projects**

Capacitation and engagement of the private sector were identified as key priorities for the area.

**4. tourism operators are working in synergy and with a common promotional strategy**

Notwithstanding that the area nurtures a strong identification with the wine production culture, also strengthened by the presence of *Strade del Vino Terre Sicane*, territorial narratives were not treated so as to result in strong promotional strategies, with most traditional operators working in isolation and on a small scale.



## **5. territorial identities are solid and valorised in the local tourism value chain**

With respect to territorial identities, stimuli from the focus group suggested that there is a lack of awareness in the local community which prevents local identities to be fully valued as a territorial asset. In particular, local communities have not internalised those territorial narratives on which shared identities can be built. Nevertheless, there was indeed a common vision among the participants on what this territorial identity should be and how it should be leveraged.

## **6. the natural, cultural and social heritage is favourable for the development of a sustainable tourism strategy**

In terms of opportunities for sustainable tourism, the results of the focus groups restituted a promising picture. In particular, the participants agreed in clearly identifying the wine and agricultural sectors as the key drivers for sustainable tourism.

## **7. general infrastructure and services are adequate to support the development of a sustainable tourism market**

The lack of services and infrastructure was mentioned in the course of the focus group as a systemic hindrance to the development of sustainable tourism, particularly acute because of the remoteness of the area, the distance to and from airports and the lack of major road arteries. In particular, participants highlighted that the development of a robust tourism sector should go hand in hand, and start with, the provision of functioning public services to the local community.

## **8. local public institutions are active in the valorisation of sustainable assets and in the construction of integrated tourism strategies**



The participation of representatives of public bodies in the focus group was wide and enthusiastic. The small scale of the administrative areas also means a lesser disconnect between the public sector and the realities of the local communities. The public sector has supported multiple initiatives regarding sustainable tourism, which is perceived as a key opportunity for the economic and social development of the area. The 2020 strategy for the “Area Interna Sicani”, which sees various municipalities working in synergy and with common objectives, identifies sustainable tourism as a key focus area.





