

Tourism consumption and opportunity for the territory: Exploring the case of Matera, 2019 European Capital of Culture

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Abstract

Purpose. Matera is an ancient city, located in the South of Italy and known all over the world for the famous Sassi; the city has been recently seen an increasing in flows of tourism thanks to its nomination to acquire the title of 2019 European Capital of Culture in Italy. The aim of the present work is to investigate about the level of services offered to tourists, the level of satisfaction, the possible improvements and the weak points to strengthen in order to realize a high service quality, to stimulate new behaviours and increase the market demand.

Methodology. The methodology applied makes reference to an exploratory study conducted with the content analysis; the information is collected through a questionnaire submitted to a tourist sample, in cooperation with hotel and restaurant associations, museums, and public/private tourism institutions.

Findings. First results show how important is to study the relationship between the supply of services and tourists behaviour to create value through the identification of improving situations, suggesting the rapid adoption of corrective policies which allow an economic return for the territory.

Practical implications. It is possible to realize a competitive advantage analyzing the potentiality of the city to attract incoming tourism, the level of touristic attractions, studying the foreign tourist's behaviour.

Originality/value. The originality of the work is the study of tourist behaviours, preferences and perception of delivered services offered to tourists in this area, which has recently become a flourishing tourism destination. In particular, its cultural nomination represents an opportunity to understand the potentiality of the territory and improve some aspects that tourists consider important. In this way it is possible to enhance the management system, to facilitate service innovation, to guarantee a better tourist experience, realizing a smarter tourism destination.

Keywords

tourist behaviour; tourism; quality services; tourist experience; service improvement

1. Introduction

Matera is one of the oldest cities in the world, whose territory is a proof of human settlements from the Paleolithic era to the present day. Matera is known for its historic centre, “the Sassi”, the original urban nucleus excavated in the rock and later modelled in complex structures within the Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano (<http://www.basilicatanet.com>).

In addition to the ancient landscape, similar to the Grand Canyon, the Natural Archaeological Park of the Rupestrian Churches, also known as Murgia National Park, composed by churches, monasteries and hermitages built into the natural caves of the Murgia (<http://whc.unesco.org>).

This landscape appears unique in all over the world and, for this reason, in 1993 UNESCO declared the Sassi of Matera as “World Heritage of Humanity”.

The recent candidature as 2019 European Capital of Culture has contributed to make the city famous and to register a tourism development, attracting visitors from all over the world; in particular, the Italian and foreign tourists flows will be significant during next years, with a great peak in 2019 (<http://www.sassilive.it>).

The success of Matera depends also on the great number of films which has been shootted in the Sassi location: the usage of movie images is essential to promote a territory, with a significant impact on tourism (Bencivenga et al., 2015). The development of tourist flows is in part determined by this phenomenon: the desire to visit the location is driven by the need to find emotions that binds the film (Evans, 1997). In fact, different studies have demonstrated the existence of a positive relationship between the promotional effects of movies and the increasing in tourist flows to a specific location (Hudson and Ritchie, 2006).

From a strategic point of view, the city has not experienced a tourists flows management in the last years, so it is necessary to develop a tourism plan to manage the accommodating capability of inhabitants, to favour the correspondence between offer and demand, to encourage sustainable tourism, to face managing changes in advance, minimizing weaknesses and inefficiencies and maintaining the efficiency of the services offered to customers (De Giacomo, 2013).

The present work is the first result of an empirical analysis aimed at investigating about the development of tourist flows in Matera, highlighting the ability of the city to attract tourist flows, thanks to the potentialities of the territory. The aim is the study of the kind of services offered, the type of hotel solutions proposed, the kind of accommodations which are preferred, the identification of weaknesses to improve in order to realize a high services quality, to stimulate new behaviours and increase the market demand.

2. Territorial marketing: a strategy to generate tourism opportunities

The advent of Matera as 2019 European Capital of Culture represents a great opportunity to improve the economy of the country, reinforcing the tourism, improving quality, efficiency and mobility of the territory. The initiative of Matera 2019 is an important chance to promote the territorial image and reinforce the brand identity, increasing the territorial value: Matera has been implementing initiatives and cultural projects, involving people in building quality services and social opportunities (Corinto and Nicosia, 2015).

In a great number of cases, cities that have played the role of European Capital of Culture have seen an increase in the number of tourists: there have been cases of cities that have increased the number of visitors, attendance and arrivals. On the contrary, for other cities it is verified the decrease in the number of arrivals or attendances in the year of European Capital of Culture (Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, 2016).

From a practical point of view it is very difficult for cities to put into practice long-term transformation effects in the tourism field, because it is necessary to promote and add value to places, cultural events and tourist interest, increasing the number of available beds, improving infrastructures and connection with other adjoining cities. This kind of change needs to be put in practice not only in the period of election but with reference to a long term period.

Increasing the number of tourists, overnight stays and their duration are essential element to improve social and economic aspects of a touristic city but it is not enough. If the tourist will have the opportunity to make a new kind of experience, being emotionally involved, it is much more likely that long-term effects can continue.

National and international events are considered not only as a marketing tool for promoting products and services of a specific territory, but also as a business activity to increase the attraction of tourists. Some authors define an event as a “tourist attractions” (Getz, 1997) and classify them in four main types: mega events, special events, hallmark events e community events. The “European Capital of Culture” belongs to the category of “mega events”, which are events whose organization has territorial effects, with significant impact on public and private investments. A mega event is the result of innovative projects aimed at reinforcing the local development and the territory image, facilitating the infrastructure development and producing economic, cultural and social benefits (Bencivenga et al., 2016.)

The phenomenon of promoting assets and places is known as “marketing city”. As Ward said, “place asset is the process of identifying place-specific advantage or attractiveness, and place promotion is the process which makes use of attractiveness” (Bifulco et al., 2009).

The term “marketing city” refers to rules that are applied for the promotion and development of an urban environment. In other words, it is the study of marketing applied to a territory, appreciating the urban environment and the territory. Marketing City is part of the largest macro-area of territorial marketing, that is, the marketing rules applied to a territory united by historical, economic, social, environmental and natural factors, in which tangible and intangible assets are characteristic factors: the inhabitants, the Culture, the history of the people and the territory, urban and artistic heritage, infrastructures, localization (Kotler et al., 1993).

To promoting a territory, it is necessary the development of different factors:

- Structural factors, which are networks which facilitate the transfer of goods and people and the exchange of information (roads, highways, ports, airports);
- Functional factors, which are prestigious activities and services that enhance the opportunities for developing local activities (finance, R&D, culture, management, administration);
- Territorial factors, which are represented by localization opportunities, enhancement of areas, environmental quality;
- Economic factors, which are represented by high quality and relations between economic territorial operators and external ones, realizing cooperative activities and networks, international co-operation, external activities;
- Demographic factors, represented by the increasing presence of foreign populations;
- Cultural Factors, which are linked to local traditions of its inhabitants (Zucchetti, 2008).

3. The case of Matera, 2019 European Capital of Culture

3.1. Methodology

The methodology used is the case study technique, which includes qualitative and quantitative tools, such as the direct observation, interviews, descriptive documents, statistics and questionnaires, which help the researcher to explain the reason of the occurrence of a certain event, so as it appears (Yin, 2014).

The interest in tourism sectors derives from the territorial opportunity for the candidature of Matera as European Capital of Culture, so that it is very interesting to study the tourism flows, the capacity offered by hotel facilities, accommodation facilities, touristic infrastructure and their ability to recognize this change. The aim of this paper is to investigate this field trying to understand the receptive capacity of the territory, impressions and preferences of tourists, trying to understand the inefficiencies of the territory that could be improved for the nomination in 2019.

For this purpose, national and international contributions, public documents, institutional web sites, portals, conference papers, report have been analysed. Data have been collected from official statistics and surveys published by APT of Basilicata, in order to seek to capture changes and growth opportunities resulting from the increasing tourism.

To study the impressions and preferences of tourists, the content analysis is based on data acquired by Matera City Tour questionnaire and observation method.

3.2 Capability of accommodation facilities

One of the most important factors to understand the improvement and the growth of the city is represented by the consistency of the accommodation facilities. The data are provided by Apt Basilicata and make reference to the period 2013-2016; the tourist offer of Matera is compared with provincial and regional analysis.

Matera's accommodation capacity is characterized by the presence of a large number of extra-hotel establishments: tourists who visit Matera choose hotels few times. Analyzing the data, this preference is shared also in the province of Matera and in the entire region.

Table 1. Total number of receptive exercises by type – Matera, Province, Region

Matera								
Type	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hotel solution	26	16,25%	27	14,67%	27	8,97%	26	5,39%
Non Hotel solution	134	83,75%	157	85,33%	274	91,03%	456	94,61%
Total	160	100,00%	184	100,00%	301	100,00%	482	100,00%

The province of Matera								
Type	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hotel solution	82	25,15%	83	23,31%	83	17,22%	81	11,95%
Non Hotel solution	244	74,85%	273	76,69%	399	82,78%	597	88,05%
Total	326	100,00%	356	100,00%	482	100,00%	678	100,00%

Basilicata								
Type	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hotel solution	237	31,64%	231	28,59%	227	23,72%	224	19,06%
Non Hotel solution	512	68,36%	577	71,41%	730	76,28%	951	80,94%
Total	749	100,00%	808	100,00%	957	100,00%	1175	100,00%

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

The number of non hotel solution has increased in the last four years; in particular way, considering the 2014, 2015 and 2016 period, there is a higher level of non hotel solutions, generally it is recorded an improvement of 5% per year. The increase corresponds with the election period of Matera as European Capital of Culture in 2015.

In the last four years, the number of beds available has risen; obviously the phenomenon is more effective for non hotel accommodations. In this case, data show the lack of correspondence between the offer of Matera with territorial and regional ones: the number of beds has improved in hotel facilities.

Table 2. Total number of beds by type of receptive exercises – Matera, Province, Region

Number of beds – Matera								
Type	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hotel solution	1628	59,26%	1643	56,50%	1645	45,78%	1597	35,28%
Non Hotel solution	1119	40,74%	1265	43,50%	1948	54,22%	2930	64,72%
Total	2747	100,00%	2908	100,00%	3593	100,00%	4527	100,00%

Number of beds - The province of Matera								
Type	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hotel solution	14126	57,55%	14137	58,12%	14139	56,25%	14063	53,10%
Non Hotel solution	10418	42,45%	10186	41,88%	10995	43,75%	12423	46,90%
Total	24544	100,00%	24323	100,00%	25134	100,00%	26486	100,00%

Number of beds – Basilicata								
Type	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Hotel solution	23640	60,44%	23202	60,05%	23022	58,40%	22867	56,03%
Non Hotel solution	15473	39,56%	15438	39,95%	16397	41,60%	17948	43,97%
Total	39113	100,00%	38640	100,00%	39419	100,00%	40815	100,00%

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

The opening of new non hotel accommodation in Matera highlights a new phenomenon related to tourist preferences. As a result, tourists prefer to stay in non hotel solutions. Analyzing the data in details, it is interesting to study the types of accommodations which are offered.

As regard the hotel facilities, new solutions have not been observed, considering the territorial and regional context.

Table 3. Number of receptive exercises and beds by type of accommodation – Matera, Province, Region

Matera						
Year	5 and 4 stars		3 stars and TR		2 and 1 stars	
	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds
2013	12	955	10	559	4	114
2014	12	949	11	584	4	110
2015	12	949	11	586	4	110
2016	13	972	11	586	2	39

The province of Matera						
Year	5 and 4 stars		3 stars and TR		2 and 1 stars	
	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds
2013	32	7694	42	6208	8	224
2014	33	7688	42	6229	8	220
2015	33	7688	42	6231	8	220
2016	34	7708	42	6231	6	124

Region						
Year	5 and 4 stars		3 stars and TR		2 and 1 stars	
	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds
2013	54	10513	123	11319	60	1808
2014	54	10391	121	11133	56	1678
2015	55	10460	119	9218	53	1558
2016	57	10502	121	11050	46	1315

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

Otherwise, with reference to the number of non hotel accommodations there is an increasing number in the last four years; in particular way, it has been recorded a great number of guest houses, followed by bed & breakfast. In fact, in 2015, there have been 89 new guest house solutions in the city of Matera, followed by 140 new solutions in the last year.

Table 4. Number of receptive exercises and beds by type of non hotel accommodation – Matera, Province, Region

Matera														
Year	Camping		Camping Village		Guest house		Holiday farm		Hostel		Holiday homes		Bed & breakfast	
	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds
2013	-	-	-	-	4	418	6	122	1	12	3	148	17	419
2014	-	-	-	-	65	540	6	122	-	-	4	163	82	440
2015	-	-	-	-	154	1076	7	152	-	-	4	163	109	557
2016	-	-	-	-	294	1864	7	168	1	20	4	163	150	715

The province of Matera														
Year	Camping		Camping Village		Guest house		Holiday farm		Hostel		Holiday homes		Bed & breakfast	
	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds
2013	9	6190	3	1042	61	1023	58	1075	3	106	6	418	104	564
2014	8	5440	5	1325	84	1164	61	1210	2	150	6	311	107	586
2015	8	5240	5	1622	178	1728	62	1221	2	150	6	311	138	723
2016	8	5240	6	2087	327	2561	62	1140	3	170	6	311	185	914

Region														
Year	Camping		Camping Village		Guest house		Holiday farm		Hostel		Holiday homes		Bed & breakfast	
	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds	Nr.	Beds
2013	10	6790	7	2512	135	1658	141	2527	4	182	10	630	205	1174
2014	9	6040	9	2797	170	1850	146	2673	4	271	9	483	230	1324
2015	9	5840	9	3084	273	2475	146	2661	4	271	9	478	280	1588
2016	9	5840	10	3549	437	3409	146	2577	5	291	9	478	335	1804

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

It is possible to verify how the non hotel compartment is characterized by an increasing number in guest houses and bed and breakfast. In particular, in the city of Matera in 2016, the 61% of non hotel solutions is represented by the guest house accommodations, followed by the 32% of the Bed & breakfast solutions.

From a territorial point of view, the 55% of non hotel solutions is represented by guest houses, followed by the 31% of Bed & breakfast solution. So the same preferences are confirmed at city level.

Data correspond to the regional level, where the 46% of preferences are concentrated on guest house and the 33% on Bed & breakfast.

3.3 Customer's flows in accommodation facilities

Another important aspect to take in consideration is the study of customer flows and their provenience, to study if the nomination of capital of culture has a direct impact on customers.

In particular, it has been studied the affluence of tourists in the city for the period 2013-2016. The data show that in 2016 there is a raise of 16% of arrival in the city of Matera and the increase of 16,77% of tourist presence between the 2015 and 2016. In the following tables it has been presented the phenomenon comparing the results with reference to the city, the province and the entire region.

Table 5. Number of tourist flows: arrivals and tourist presences – Matera, Province, Region

Matera

Tourist Flows	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Arrival	131423	38,87%	153005	38,46%	214924	37,80%	250093	37,92%
Tourist Number	206687	61,13%	244847	61,54%	353645	62,20%	409421	62,08%
Total	338110	100,00%	397852	100,00%	568569	100,00%	659514	100,00%

The province of Matera

Tourist Flows	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Arrival	313976	18,74%	338132	19,16%	424393	21,08%	470361	22,11%
Tourist Number	1361079	81,26%	1426940	80,84%	1589167	78,92%	1656964	77,89%
Total	1675055	100,00%	1765072	100,00%	2013560	100,00%	2127325	100,00%

Basilicata

Tourist Flows	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Arrival	532666	21,46%	579111	21,62%	674461	22,64%	717270	23,42%
Tourist Number	1949123	78,54%	2100083	78,38%	2304393	77,36%	2345593	76,58%
Total	2481789	100,00%	2679194	100,00%	2978854	100,00%	3062863	100,00%

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

In the city of Matera the tourist demand is formed principally by national flows, as represented as follows: the indicator of attractiveness is represented by the tourist arrivals and shows as the tourism grows, concerning the whole territory of Basilicata, both in terms of arrivals and attendance. The growth regards the entire region, not just the city of Matera.

The Italian tourists flows are the majority: tourists from Apulia, Campania, Lazio and Lombardy choose Basilicata as vacation destination. In the last period, the growth of the foreign component: France, the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom are the major countries of origin.

Table 6. Number of Italian tourists flows: arrivals and tourist presences – Matera, Province, Region

Year	Matera		The province of Matera		Region	
	Arrivals	Presence	Arrivals	Presence	Arrivals	Presence
2013	91.277	136.278	264.083	1.248.681	462.116	1.776.900
2014	104.956	159.546	280.757	1.295.711	497.535	1.885.072
2015	153.572	242.515	353.224	1.440.315	578.581	2.075.771
2016	186.028	297.933	392.818	1.479.500	613.546	2.094.014

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

Table 7. Number of stranger tourists flows: arrivals and tourist presences – Matera, Province, Region

Year	Matera		The province of Matera		Region	
	Arrivals	Presence	Arrivals	Presence	Arrivals	Presence
2013	40.196	70.409	49.893	112.398	70.550	172.223
2014	48.049	85.301	57.375	131.229	81.576	215.011
2015	61.352	105.130	71.169	148.852	95.880	229.168
2016	64.065	111.428	77.543	177.464	103.724	251.579

Source: ISTAT, Apt Basilicata.

Another important aspect of this research is characterized by the study of tourist preferences. A great number of tourists prefer to reach Matera through the use of your own machine, camper or buses, while the use of train or flay to reach Matera is not a preference for the difficult connection.

The bus represents the most favorite means of transport, because tourists appreciate organized trips. In fact, it is resulted that often tourist organize their trip three months before the departure, making reference to the travel agency, which best organize the travel for a group of people.

More often, tourists prefers to stay for a short period of time, which can generally vary from one to 2 days. As regards the type of tourism it is a cultural one, because it is particularly appreciated the natural landscape of Murgia, the Sassi, the visit to monuments, museums (MUSMA, Casa Cava, Casa Noha, Archeological Ridola Museum), the cathedral and ancient churches, the visit to caves. During the winter, the tourist is also attracted by the “Presepe Vivente” (the Living crib), which represents the nativity scene in the suggestive landscape in natural caves of Matera.

During the summer, tourists are attracted by patron festival; in particular the Festa della Bruna is the principal festival of the town as well as the Maggio festival in the village of Accettura. Tourists are also attracted by the “Volo dell’Angelo”, a dive between sky and heart in the wonderful landscape of Dolomiti Lucane.

The initial analysis shows that the prices regarding food services and overnight are too high. So tourists think that the prices offered are too high and so it represents a weakness to review: to increment the tourist demand it is necessary to review the economical and social policies to improve the affluence and to guarantee a constant incoming flow in a long term vision. On the contrary, price is considered cheap especially for the access price to tourist guide, to the ancient churches, to the souvenirs.

4. Conclusions

The designation of European Capital of Culture could represent a key tool of territorial marketing strategies (Evans, 2003) by integrating the territorial supply, reinforcing the city brand, the visibility and the valorization of tourism and investments activities.

Some experts think that Matera is a city without a future: often coffee bars are closed on Sunday and the number of hotels is very small. In the city there is not a hospitality culture, so this kind of tourism is “improvised”: it is necessary to have an organized system, allowing the tourist planning activities and the cooperation with public institutions. It is necessary to guarantee the continuity of tourist flows and to encourage a longer period of stay (De Giacomo, 2013).

To realize a sustainable cultural tourism, it is essential to realize a strategic plan in order to get more benefits, such as the integration of tourism policy into the regional and provincial plans, promoting the communication between the public and private sectors, optimizing the tourism offer from the economic, environmental and social points of view, improving the level of services and facilities offered, defining and sharing the guidelines for monitoring the tourism phenomenon and to realize effective planning activities for the future (De Falco, 2007). To make a strategic plan it is necessary to make an accurate analysis of the territory, to know the type of resources available, using dynamic previsions (De Giacomo, 2013).

The designation of European Capital of Culture will conduct the improvement of tourism in the city and will attract more tourists thanks to the development of a new image of the city, combining the landscape of the city with the services/events offered (Dogan, 2010).

Matera represents a good example as how a cultural resource, the Sassi, has the capacity to create socio and cultural value for tourists. Probably, in the next future, the tourist flows will raise. For this reason, it is now necessary developing synergic relations between public and private operators, developing new economic activities (not only coffee bars and restaurants but also cultural services) adopting successful initiatives, managing the resources efficiently (Aiello and Ferri, 2014).

From the study realized, areas of improvement have been identified: first of all, some studies report a lack of dialogue between tour operators and those of the cultural sector; there exists a lack of connections between hotels in the urban area but also in the near Apulia. It should be necessary to develop connections with places near to Matera, such as the medieval “Melfi Castle”; the city of Venosa, which is the native land of Oratio; Miglionico, with the “Malconsiglio” castle; the literary park “Carlo Levi” of Aliano; the literary park “Isabella Morra” in Valsinni. Moreover natural landscape as the Pollino National Park; the Ionian coast (Metaponto, Pisticci and Policoro), which is perfect for seaside vacation; Maratea, which is known as “the pearl of Tyrrhenian”.

In the next future, to guarantee a constant growth of tourism it would be advisable to promote cultural walks and sport activities, propose narration-related holidays, promoting food, such as Matera bread IGP, the olives from Ferrandina, the “Pecorino of Moliterno”, Sarconi beans, Senise pepper, mineral waters from Mount Vulture, the DOC wines of Vulture.

Another important aspect is the widespread of the culinary tourism through the association of the Matera image with typical productions such as oil, wine and food production (Bencivenga et al., 2016): in this way it would be possible to spread the brand identity of the territory.

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