EXPERIENCE, DISCOVER & VALORISE HIDDEN TREASURE TOWNS AND SITES OF THE ADRIATIC AREA

EXCOVER – LOCAL SWOT REPORT

ALFONSINE AND OSTELLATO

DELTA 2000 CONSORTIUM

OUTLINE

Sommario

1. Residents' willingness to participate

Alfonsine and Ostellato joined the EXCOVER Project aiming at improving its residents' life and economic conditions, while preserving the local cultural identity and environmental resources, through the development of sustainable tourism. To reach this goal, the participation of the local community in the tourism development planning and implementation phases is fundamental, in fact it is one of the main characteristics of tourism development processes to be sustainable. Thus, before going into the residents' survey-based SWOT Analysis, main topic of this report, the willingness to participate in the local tourism development of the interviewees is investigated by means of a participation index, developed to meet the informative needs of EXCOVER.

The resident's participation index is built with information of different kind, both direct (retrieved from the answers to specific questions) and indirect (making use of response rates), collected during the SWOT survey. The index is a weighted average of 5 components:

- "1_COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION": the evaluation of the extent to which the respondent's local community is willing to participate in the local tourist development (directly asked in the questionnaire and measured with the reported level of agreement, in the range [1, 7]);
- "2_MAIL LEFT": the actual willingness to be more involved and active in the tourism development planning (estimated indirectly with the rate of respondents who left their personal e-mail address to be contacted in the near future to provide further information about their town);
- "3_PERSONAL SHARING ATTITUDE": the self-reported willingness of the respondent to make use of sharing economy platforms to share something of his own with visitors (directly asked in the questionnaire).
- "4_WELCOMING COMMUNITY": the assessment of the extent to which tourists and people with different cultures are welcomed by the respondent's local community (directly asked in the questionnaire and measured with the reported level of agreement, in the range [1, 7]);
- "5_RESPONDENT ENGAGEMENT": the manifested intention to participate in the local tourism development by providing information (indirectly retrieved from the average response rate to the SWOT open-ended questions, that require a considerable involvement and effort, compared to closed-ended ones);

As the first 2 components of the index are expressed on a scale ranging between 1 and 7 (while the other components are rates), they are normalized by dividing the average level of agreement by the maximum value possible (that is 7), to facilitate comparisons. The 5 components are weighted based on their relative

importance in the context of EXCOVER, especially in view of the forthcoming activities of the next working packages:

- weight of 1_COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION = 0.4
- weight of 2_MAIL LEFT = 0.2
- weight of 3_PERSONAL SHARING ATTITUDE = 0.2
- weight of 4_WELCOMING COMMUNITY = 0.1
- weight of 5_RESPONDENT ENGAGEMENT = 0.1

By construction, the minimum value of the participation index is 0, the maximum is 1.

1.1 Analysis of the participation index

In Alfonsine and Ostellato, the participation index and its 5 components, described above, take the following values:

The components that take the highest value both for Alfonsine and Ostellato are "WELCOMING COMMUNITY" and "COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION" as shown in Fig. 1; WELCOMING COMMUNITY is referred to the extent to which tourists and people with different cultures are welcomed by the respondent's local community, while COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION is referred to the inclination of the local community to participate in the local tourist development. WELCOMING COMMUNITY, particularly high in Ostellato, is an extremely positive element as it can impact upon the way tourists perceive a destination. It can be assumed that tourists visiting destinations where residents are more positive to tourism receptiveness are possibly going to be more satisfied with the tourist experience.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION is higher in Alfonsine, probably because residents collaborate with more than 100 local voluntary associations, active in different sectors as social services, culture, recreation and sports. Community participation creates a relationship, established by the members of the community, through their collaboration in achieving common goals and making the community   a   better place in which to   live. As sharing economy could be explained as a wide collaborative consumption practice, the high level of community participation both in Alfonsine and Ostellato, with an average rate of 0.7, is a positive signal that could led to not only to social, but also to economic benefits in certain sharing situations, such as accommodation sharing or knowledge sharing. The component PERSONAL SHARING ATTITUDE has a positive value for both destinations, with an average of 0.66, confirming the positive attitude of residents towards goods' and services' sharing. Also, the component RESPONDENT

ENGAGEMENT indicates a positive value for both destinations, with an average of 0.64, which reveals a manifested intention to participate in the local tourism development by providing information and by showing a proactive and enthusiastic attitude towards the EXCOVER project.

The component "MAIL LEFT", namely the actual willingness to be more involved and active in the tourism development planning, is the only negative component for both destinations, with an average rate of 0.33.

The respondents did not leave their personal e-mail address to be contacted in the near future to provide further information about their town probably because it is commonly known that email remains a primary target for those who wish to acquire confidential data.

It can be affirmed, to the greatest extend, that respondents' manifested intention to participate in the local tourism development and depicted their fellow villagers with a positive attitude towards participation to tourism development.

In general, the future development of sharing economy in selected destination could respond, on the one hand, to the needs of travelers looking for personalized approach, authenticity and contacts with local citizens and, on the other, it may represent a supplemental income opportunity for residents.

To participate in the sharing economy, citizens need to have access to and be able to use the respective digital platforms. In some instances, these uses can be quite complex, requiring significant skill sets. Sharing economy in selected destinations must face the challenges related to access to reliable and affordable Internet service and the use of a computer or smartphone, basic communication and digital literacy skills, as well as more specific skills, i.e. knowing how to successfully present and manage their listing on the platforms.

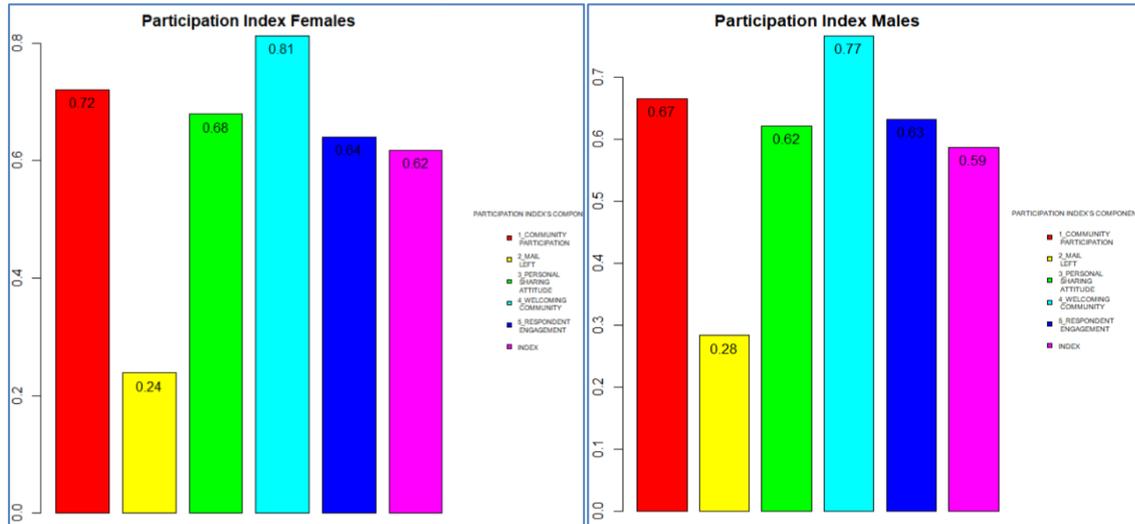Figure 1 - Participation Index for Alfonsine and Ostellato
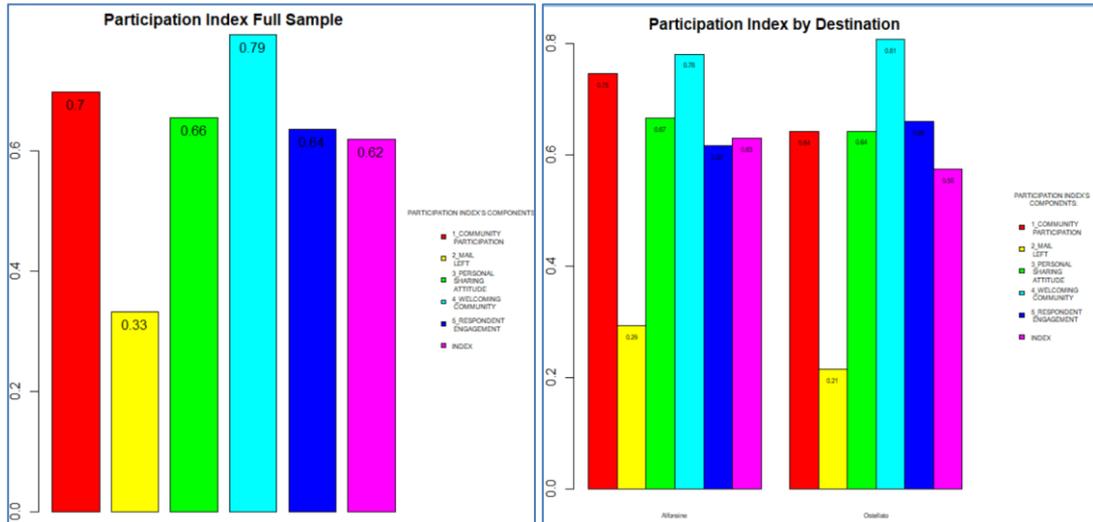
The graphs in Fig. 2 illustrate the differences in the respondents' availability to participate between males and females.

Although there seems to be no profound gap between males and females, women have shown to be willing to participate more actively probably because narratives in the sharing economy are based on values of equality, mutuality, openness, or care, which are more feminine.

In addition, the sharing economy offers flexibility that can benefit all workers, but especially women. Much of the language used to describe the possibilities of the sharing economy for workers is that of liberty from the restrictions of the traditional workaday and freedom to create one's own productive experience, which might be particularly important to women workers. The idea that work can be done mostly outside of a standard workplace, and often at home, might been seen to be a particularly good opportunity for workers with significant family care responsibilities, who are overwhelmingly women.

Figure 2 - Participation Index Male/Female

The graphs in Fig. 3 illustrate the differences in the respondents' availability to participate between Juniors and Seniors.

Although there seems to be no profound gap between Juniors and Seniors, the rate of Juniors who left their personal e-mail address to be contacted in the near future to provide further information about their town is higher, with a rate of 0.38, and could suggest a deeper motivation in the involvement of tourism development planning, but also an overall higher usage of digital technology.

The failure to provide the email address by older residents, with a rate of 0.22, should not necessarily be associated to a feeble motivation in the involvement of tourism development planning, but could be attributed to the digital divide between younger and older, especially referred to residents over 70. Many interviewed seniors do not possess an email address and don't use online applications and mobile technologies that allow participants to interact with each other and facilitate exchanges of goods and services connected with sharing economy. It has to be stressed that, in selected destinations, elderly people, who could contribute to tourism development with knowledge about traditions and heritage or with lodging facilities, have limited digital access and skills; it follows that Seniors with no digital literacy should be trained and supported in order to give them access to digital technologies and create awareness for social and economic benefits linked to sharing economy.

The WELCOMING COMMUNITY value is very positive for both components, but Seniors expressed a higher sense of hospitality, which means they think the community is very open to tourists and deeply welcoming.

Local hospitality is an essential and necessary element of tourism development even if it is not a satisfactory condition for influencing a destination competitiveness that requires complementary elements as attraction, transportation, promotion, services and information.

COMMUNITY PARTECIPATION, the evaluation of the extent to which the respondent's local community is willing to participate in the local tourist development, has a positive value both for Juniors and Seniors, while the RESPONDENT ENGAGEMENT, the manifested intention to participate with involvement and effort in the local tourism development by providing information, shows a slightly lower value, but without a relevant discrepancy.

The results indicate that residents will be more likely to support tourism development if they are involved in planning and development decisions and if they understand the benefits that tourism can bring.

Community participation in local tourism development processes related to Alfonsine and Ostellato must be considered an important support and uphold to local culture, tradition, knowledge and skill, and can create pride in community heritage. Community involvement leads to partnership working, decision making and representation in community structures.

Figure 3 - Participation Index Junior/Senior
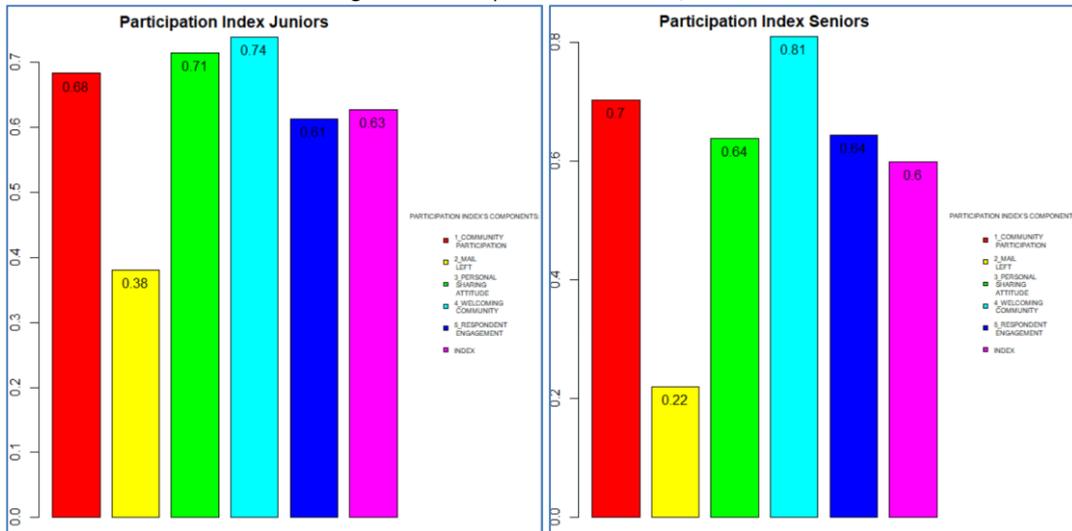
Self-employed category reveals more willingness to make use of sharing economy platforms, which suppose they are willing to share something of their own with visitors, with a value of 0.84, while non-self-employed seem more hesitant about sharing economy, with a value of 0.58, as shown in Fig. 4.

The overall results are optimistic for the prosecution of the EXCOVER project, as intrapreneurs are willing to participate probably because the project represents a chance to develop their existent businesses and an opportunity to create new businesses through diversification. Even if It is often assumed that entrepreneurs are adverse to sharing economy, because they see it as a dangerous source of competition, the data collected in Alfonsine and Ostellato do not confirm this assumption, probably because self-employed or entrepreneurs are more prone to value collaborative platforms as an alternative as they are more conscious of the changing nature of economic exchange.

Figure 4 - Participation Index Employed/Self Employed
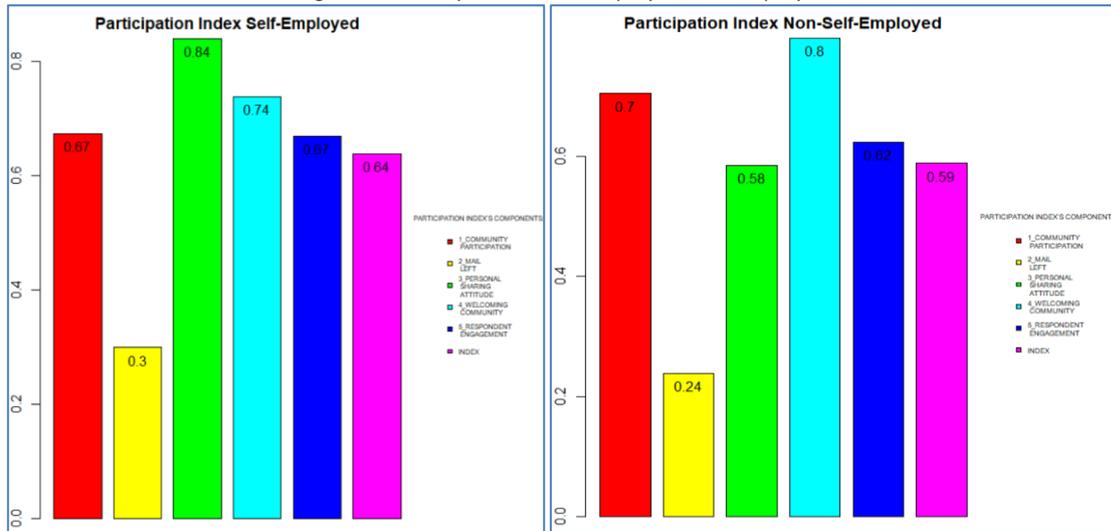
2. Residents' attitude towards the sharing economy

Since EXCOVER aims at developing sustainable tourism in Alfonsine and Ostellato, where the local natural and cultural heritage constitute potential tourism attractions, but many tourist services and facilities are missing, a crucial phase of the project is dedicated to the construction or strengthening of the local supply chain. But the EXCOVER budget does allow to make big investments for building accommodation structures, restaurants, transportation services and the like. Therefore, a pivotal idea of the project is to

invite the local community to put into play their unused assets to deliver tourist services, by exploiting the new opportunities offered by the sharing economy. 'Sharing economy' means sharing something of a private's own with another person temporarily, in exchange for some money, through the web. Then, for the prosecution of the project, it is essential to understand on which private unused assets the construction of the supply chain can rely. To this aim, the SWOT questionnaire included 2 specific questions:

- In your opinion, what may your fellow villagers be willing to share?
- What would you share?

From the analysis of the correspondent answers, it emerges that respondents think their local communities are mainly willing to share knowledge about territory and traditions, with a rate of 38%, followed by accommodation and skill knowledge sharing, with a value of 25%, while home restaurant and transportation show respectively a rate of 16% and 9%.

The rates of what interviewees are themselves willing to share show a 30% rate regarding accommodation, followed by skill knowledge with a rate of 25% and territory knowledge with a rate of 16%, while transportation and home restaurant show respectively a rate of 14% and 3% as shown in Fig. 5.

While respondents both in Alfonsine and Ostellato declare their willingness to share accommodation and skill knowledge, their opinion on their local community willingness to share is mainly referred to territory knowledge, with a rate of 41% in Alfonsine and 35% in Ostellato.

Indisputably, accommodation sharing and knowledge sharing related to skills and territory are the assets that local communities, both in Ostellato and Alfonsine, are more available to share; the preference accorded to accommodation sharing is probably related to the fact that this form of collaborative consumption has rapidly gain popularity thanks to online platforms as Airbnb, which represents a transformative innovation within the tourism accommodation industry and a growing number of travelers have changed the way they purchase and consume accommodation, with consequences on both the demand side and the supply side. It is important to underline that sharing accommodation choice has extrinsic motivations and intrinsic motivations. The first group of motivations might be related to economic
benefits, while the second group is related to intrinsic aspects such as enjoyment, unique and local authenticity, social interaction and sharing experiences.

The incentive measures and the support provided by EXCOVER to the development of a group of local citizens willing to share their accommodation with tourists would probably have positive effects on selected destinations for different reasons. Firstly, tourists looking for unique character and homely feel of the accommodations, personalized service and personal interaction with the hosts, the opportunity to

receive useful local knowledge from the host, would have more options in selected locations. Secondly, sharing accommodation on popular platform may bring tourists to Alfonsine and Ostellato, that were previously less popular. Especially in Alfonsine, where the lodging activity is very poor, with the only presence of 2 small hotels and 1 farmhouse, the presence of sharing houses and rooms would represent an important increase in local tourist offer. As far as Ostellato, sharing accommodation would probably not overlap the existing offer for different reasons. Firstly, during fishing competitions, which take place very often, from spring until autumn, all hotels and accommodation facilities are fully booked, and travelers must choose accommodations in nearby destinations. Secondly, shared houses and rooms could attract new targets and segments of travelers looking for the opportunity to interact with locals and to have an authentic local experience or whose travel motivations are linked to sharing economy ethos, as spend money that go to locals and be environmentally friendly.

The willingness to share knowledge linked to traditions and territory is a very interesting asset which should be developed with sharing economy platforms as selected destinations present a lack of official local tours and guides. Sharing knowledge represents a reliable way to bring local people with their knowledge and expertise together with travelers who are looking for an authentic cultural experience and do not overlap with any local businesses. Travel consumers are increasingly experimental and willing to try the type of new and unique tourism experiences which the sharing economy can offer. This growing desire for authentic and engaging experiences is resulting in the fragmentation of tourism markets and the emergence of new niche markets, facilitated by technology platforms.

Both destinations offer natural and tangible cultural heritage, but also intangible cultural heritage related to traditions, history, customs, cuisine and handicrafts that is preserved and transmitted by local inhabitants, who are very proud of its value. Sharing economy related to knowledge would allow residents to use their local knowledge to provide personal and customized experiences to tourists, in either individual or group settings as an alternative to traditional tour operators, typically at a lower cost.

Figure 5 - Willingness to share by individual/whole community
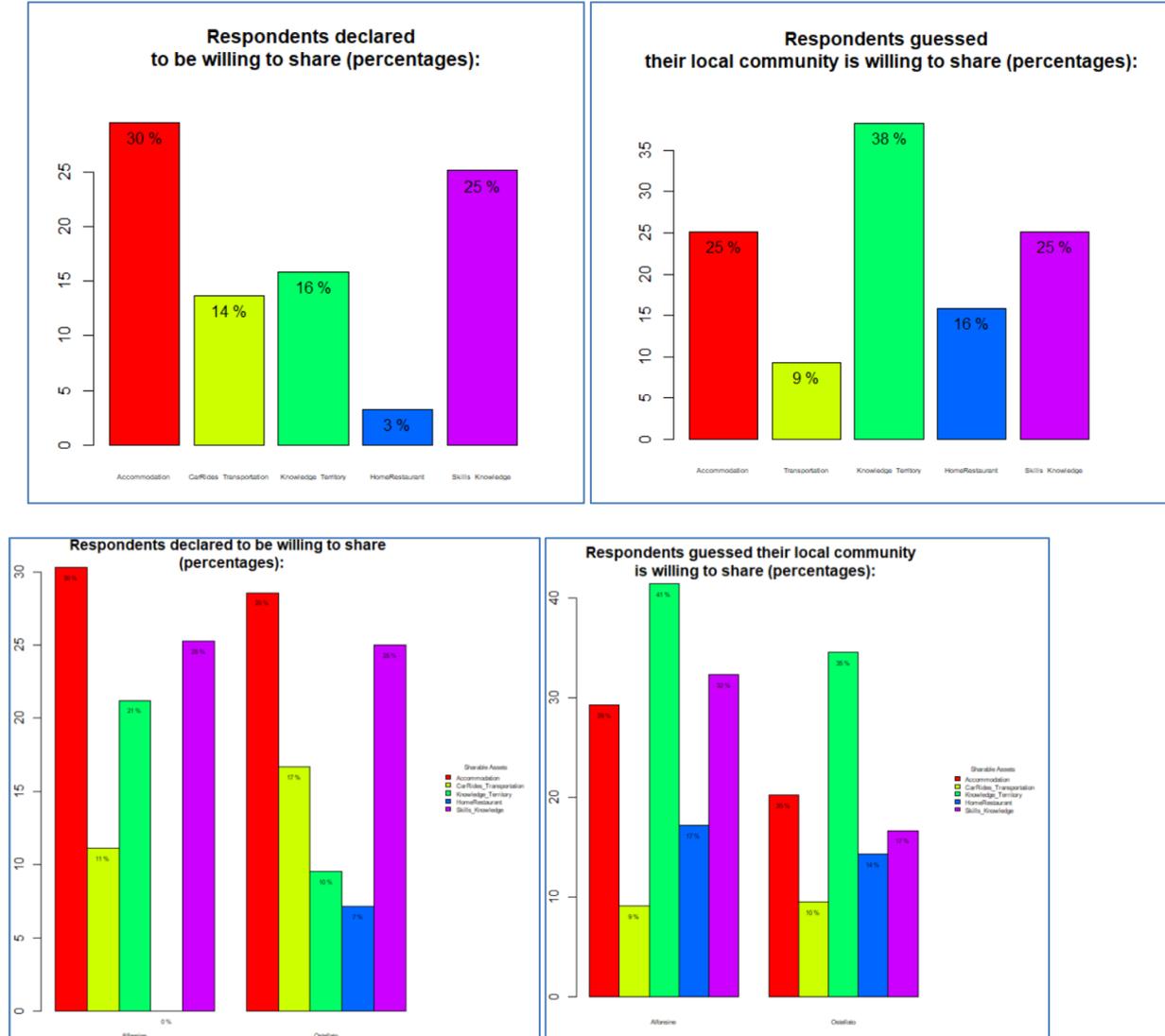
3. Swot Analysis of the local tourism system

Although Alfonsine and Ostellato can lever on some tangible and intangible assets that are potentially attractive for tourists, to boost a sustainable tourism development, the tourism sector and its economic

potential is still scarcely unfolded (as described in the Preparatory Local Report attached). Whence the need to deeply investigate how the local resources can be effectively employed to attract and create value for visitors, why they are not currently source of economic growth, which opportunities should be caught, also in terms of valorizing underutilized or neglected assets, and which risks may arise. To this aim, the SWOT Analysis shown in the present Report was conducted. The SWOT factors were identified through a semi-structured survey on the opinions of 84 residents in Ostellato and 99 residents in Alfonsine, as the involvement of the locals is crucial to co-construct a tourism development consistent with their vision of the future of their own territory. The face to face survey interviews were carried out from May until September throughout Alfonsine and Ostellato, with a special focus on the city center and sites of tourist attractions. The resulting SWOT matrix was discussed with policy makers, who assigned a relative importance score to each SWOT factor, so that the subsequent strategic interventions can be effectively prioritized, and financial resources can be efficiently allocated. The resulting weighted SWOT matrix is reported below.

OSTELLATO

STRENGHTS	WEAKNESSES
Vallette area	Little investment in tourism products, development, natural resources enhancement, also due to a low return on investment
Sports activities (cycling and fishing)	Ruinous Museum of the territory
Natural environment	Closed-minded residents.
Cultural heritage (Spina - archaeological area)	Lack of collaboration between local actors (institutions, entrepreneurs, associations)
Strategic geographical position	Mosquitoes.
Birdwatching	Environmental degradation caused by pollution
Morphology characteristic of the territory	Lack of coordination and communication between local entrepreneurs and public institutions
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
Increasing sports tourism market	Possible loss of the image of fishing destination
School tourism	Loss of species and stocks of fish
Potential of the Museum of the territory	Bureaucracy
Potential for a public-private path to enhance Vallette area	Pollution (consequence of climate change)
Increasing green and naturalistic tourism market.	Depopulation and aging
Delta Park	Competition with cultural and naturalistic tourism destinations.
Potential for a fruitful collaboration with nearby destinations	Regulation of seasonal work

3.1 Strengths of the local Tourism System of Ostellato

Vallette has been a nature reserve since 1975. It was transformed from a saltwater environment into fresh water wetlands by the influx of water from nearby canals. Here, the original halophyte vegetation dominated by the Salicornia ceded its place to the typical plants of freshwater marshes, in particular reeds. Vallette area covers around 250 hectares; it is ideal for nature trails and birdwatching among reed beds, hygrophilous woods and green spaces. The area is loved by residents and therefore is considered one of the main strengths for tourism growth and development as it is already well-equipped for tourists, and it offers accommodations, places to eat, excursions, sports activities, especially fishing competitions, an astronomical observatory and a permanent exhibition of sculptures by local artists. Furthermore, there are stopping places for camper vans and a nearby swimming pool.

Sports activities are closely related to Vallette Natural Reserve and Ostellato surrounding areas that offer akin experiences as fishing, biking and birdwatching. Ostellato area is rich in ecological and natural diversity and local community is aware of the potential opportunities offered by **natural environment**. Nature tourism is a growing key segment and travellers are interested in new and authentic experiences, increasingly at non-traditional, long-haul destinations. Furthermore, tourists looking for natural landscapes, seems to be interested in active and direct experiences related to nature as cycling, fishing and birdwatching.

According to residents, cultural heritage, namely the **archaeological site of ancient Spina**, is a positive asset for touristic development in Ostellato area. **Spina** was an ancient Etruscan port on the Adriatic coast of Italy, now about 10-15 km inland. Spina was founded at the mouth of the Po River toward the end of the 6th century BC and was one of two main ports of entry for the rich Greek commerce with northern Etruria. Soon after 400 BC Spina was sacked by the Gauls, and, with the collapse of its market and the silting of its port, it rapidly lapsed into obscurity. Currently, the old city of Spina cannot be visited as the archaeological area, located between Ostellato and Comacchio, is closed for archeological digs since 2007, while some information about the old settlement can be found in the small local museum - Museo del Territorio.

The Spina project, which aims at the creation of an archeological park under the administration of Ostellato and Comacchio, will be a powerful attractor for visitors and tourists when it will be completed, but, since the diggings have been going on for more than 10 years, the completion of the work will be within years, which means that this asset will have to be considered a strength in the future.

Ostellato is in the hearth of Po Delta Natural Reserve, a vast area rich in flora, fauna and historical and cultural sites; furthermore, Ostellato is half way between Ferrara, the renaissance city, Ravenna, the byzantine city and the Adriatic Coast of Comacchio and its seven beaches. The strategic **geographical position** is one of the strengths considered from residents, but in order to be exploited, it might be necessary to create and develop products' and marketing' strategies with all nearby locations. A collaborative strategy approach has the potential of increasing the attractiveness of the area as a destination by either offering the same benefits and targeting the same market segments or providing complementary products which increase the consumption value of consumers as well as a market segment differentiation. It is necessary that stakeholders recognize the real value of collaboration and the benefits of working together and exclude excuses of political, economic or administrative nature.

3.2 Weaknesses of the Local Tourism System of Ostellato

Residents of Ostellato affirm that the main weakness is related to **little investment in tourism products and natural resources enhancement**, probably due to **a low return on investment**. Natural resources and **environment degradation caused by pollution** is also considered a weakness. As natural environment is considered the major strength for tourism development, its enhancement and protection should be considered a priority both for local administration, private stakeholders and citizens.

Pollution might be related to the biogas plant located in San Giovanni di Ostellato, built on a former sugar mill, which closed in 2005 and was in a state of collapse. The former sugar factory was converted to a biogas plant in 2011 and includes four plants of 1MWe capacity each to produce electricity from biogas using agricultural biomass. Specifically, each plant will use 23 thousand tons of agricultural biomass per year divided into 80% of by-products of chard, suppressed pulps and molasses and 20% of cereals. Environmental impact of biogas, both in benefits and negative impacts, should be further investigated and discussed with residents.

Little development of tourism products and **lack of natural resources enhancement** could be interpreted in two different ways; in may be referred to poor maintenance of bike and cycling paths, minimum maintenance of pattern vegetation in streets verges and water verges, poor or missing mowing and pruning on bike paths. On the other side it can be deducted that natural environment is not effectively considered a means to develop new tourism products, as sports tourism, birdwatching, etc.

Lack of communication and coordination between local institutions, stakeholders and citizens is also considered a weakness for tourism development in Ostellato. The coordination between the public and the private sector, and among private enterprises is a challenging task, however, and requires the development of new mechanisms and processes for incorporating the diverse elements of the tourism system. It looks like the local institution approaches tourism planning with a top down strategy not completely shared and understood by residents. Collected data from interviews and focus group suggest the redefinition of local institution in tourism planning with the aim to encourage the establishment of institutional architecture based on communication and collaboration that supports co-operation and capacity building within and between institutional and non-institutional stakeholders.

Museum of the territory is a small museum established on June 13, 2006 that illustrates the evolution of the Earth and Man in history. Starting from the origins of the universe and from the birth of the Earth to the present day, it traces the stages of the relationship between Man and the Environment. It offers an interactive exhibition dedicated to the evolution of the universe, to the history of human settlements in these "middle" lands, to the Etruscan period and the city of Spina, to history of hemp cultivation aat the beginning of the 1900's etc. Even if Ostellato Museum can be considered a journey into archeology and history that should show both the identity of Ostellato area and the cultural exchanges that have contributed to enrich the evolution of the human species, it does not offer to visitors any archeological material evidence. Even if it was completely renewed in 2015, audience is very low, especially among tourists.

The SWOT, generated collecting the results of 85 interviews to residents together with the outcomes of a focus group with citizens and institutions of Ostellato, has come to a definition of the Museum as **ruinous**. Probably the lack of a strong chronological framework disorients the narrative structure, while direction signs, which should support visitors as they make their way to and around the museum, are not clear enough. Furthermore, the shortage of advertising and SNS, which are vital to attract visitors and tourists, might be attributed to the lack of time and resources of the Museum.

3.3 Opportunities for Tourism Development of Ostellato

Sports tourism market, school tourism market and nature-based and green tourism market have been identified as main opportunities, which are positive and external factors that Ostellato can take advantage of. Sports tourism is a growing niche tourism market which has potential economic, social, and environmental outcomes for individual participants and host communities. Sports Tourism is defined as a specific travel outside of the usual environment for either passive or active involvement in competitive sport where sport is the prime motivational reason for travel and the touristic or leisure element may act to reinforce the overall experience. Fishing activities and competitions are very popular in Ostellato, especially in the Vallette Natural Reserve. The area is repeatedly chosen as competition group by FISPAS (Federazione Italiana Pesca Sportiva e Attività Subacquee) - Italian sport fishing association, that, for years, has elected Vallette as one of the main locations for national and international competitions. Ostellato offers also a unique venue for Carpfishing and, in general, leisure fishing which can be practised not only at the Vallette but also in many nearby canals. Based on the seriousness towards fishing tourism, different groups with different needs can be identified: hobbyists, active tourist anglers, and occasional tourist anglers. Therefore, the destination may only gain a competitive advantage with benefit segmentation if preferences of different market segments are fully understood and recognized in order to offer the best fishing and touristic experience.

Nature based and green tourism are often in relation with sustainable tourism and eco-tourism and represents a segment of tourists in pursuit of leisure activities in the countryside. Green tourism activities are likely to be small scale, locally owned with consequentially low impact, leakages and an elevated percentage of profits preserved locally. Furthermore, green tourists pay considerable attention to negative environmental and social impacts and choose destinations that maximised linkages to other sectors of the local economy, such as agriculture and involvement of local community. The EXCOVER Project, aiming at improving its residents' life and economic conditions, while preserving the local cultural identity and environmental resources, represents a pivotal occasion to increase the participation of local community and preserve and protect local heritage and natural environment.

In this perspective the **public-private strategy to enhance the Vallette Natural Reserve** can be considered as an opportunity to renovate visitors' attractions and services and to develop a special sense of place sensitive to this unique natural environment both for visitors and residents.

Ostellato is in the hearth of **Po Delta National Park**, Italy's largest wetland with a unique identity, that is rooted in territorial and environmental characteristics and is highly regarded due to its biodiversity and

its productivity. Po Delta Park offers plentiful and diversified attractions and facilities to visitors and tourists with varied products experiences for different type of recreational tourism: bike paths, walking trails, rural farming, long beaches, boat excursions and historic villages, only to mention some. Po Delta Park, with a concentration, in a relatively small area, of culture, nature, landscape, water, beaches, wildlife, rural traditions and religious trails, is a natural attraction with a high potential for emerging tourism niche segments. Besides being in such a privileged area, Ostellato lies within short distance from Ferrara (25km), gem of Renaissance, with sumptuous palaces and an enchanting medieval quarter and Ravenna (50km), capital of mosaics dating back at the byzantine Empire.

Residents identify in **collaboration with nearby destinations a potential** for tourism growth and development. It is increasingly difficult for individual destinations to make decisions without taking other surrounding destinations' interests and products into account and small neighbouring destinations with limited tourism products and resources should collaborate to enhance product portfolio, gain access to new knowledge, markets, and technologies and spread the cost of marketing activities. A collective strategy has the potential of increasing the attractiveness of the area as a destination by either offering the same benefits and targeting the same market segments or providing complementary products which increase the consumption value of visitors. Destinations in one area should, therefore, realize that they are interdependent and that they should work together to offer a total product that is attractive and satisfying in order to improve their individual positions in the marketplace.

3.4 Threats to Tourist Development of Ostellato

Competition with cultural and nature-based tourism destinations is considered a thread by residents of Ostellato. As discussed above, all destinations in Po Delta Park should put more effort into working interdependently and collaborating in promoting their destinations together. As collaborating might be challenging, it is crucial to be aware of critical factors in the process of creating and supporting collaborative relationships as facilitating factors, inhibiting factors, outcomes forecast etc.

Possible loss of the image of fishing destination and **loss of species and stock of fish** is a thread which must be considered very seriously by local institution as fishing activities represent the main touristic trend and the principal source of income and occupation for Ostellato lodging facilities and restaurants. Unfortunately poaches and **water pollution** are decimating fish stocks at the Vallette and nearby canals and fishing associations as FIPSAS and individual fishermen report the low abundance of fish in articles (http://www.fipsas.it/news/4007-facciamo-il-punto-su-ostellato) and blogs on the web, which spread very quickly and damage the image of Ostellato as best fishing destination.

Local administration should take serious initiative to robustly challenge the illegal activities associated with all forms of fish poaching and pollution, but local waters of Canale Circondariale and Vallette are managed by different bodies, as Region, Local Land Reclamation Authority and Arpae (Regional Agency for Prevention, Environment and Energy), which means that the challenges of sustainability call for a wide collaboration along with a **decrease of bureaucracy** among multiple stakeholders. Once again, the concept, methods and tools developed with collaboration can facilitate the engagement and interplay of the multiple stakeholders in any effort towards sustainability.

ALFONSINE

STRENGHTS	WEAKNESSES
Museums. Excursions by bicycle, in the countryside and along the river. Natural environment. History and local traditions. Initiatives of environmental education. Food & Wine. Birdwatching.	Closed-mindedness of the local community, especially of young people. Shortage of funds to make investments. Lack of collaboration and communication between institutions and local businesses. Lack of promotion and marketing initiatives. Lack of education about tourism and local culture, especially in young people. Not enough accommodation structures. Inadequate infrastructures.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Growing Cultural tourism market. Growing Green tourism market. Demand for Niche tourism. Growing Slow tourism market. Delta Park. Growing Food & Wine tourism market. School tourism.	Security problems in the adjoining valleys (especially thefts). Tax policy penalizing for redevelopment and change of use of existing unused facilities. Predominantly seaside interest of coastal tourists. Credit rationing. Competition from stronger destinations. Temperatures too hot in summer. Pollution, also due to biogas industries.

3.5 Strengths of the Local Tourism System of Alfonsine

Museums, history and local traditions and the **Gothic line represented by Senio River** are considered the main strengths by residents of Alfonsine. The destination is closely related to the Italian resistance during

World War II; between December 1944 and April 10, 1945, Alfonsine was the scene of bloody battles between Germans, allies and partisans who fought on the front, the famous Gothic Line also renamed Grüne Linie, located on the Senio river. World War II has left an indelible mark on the small village, both in landscape and memories. The old Alfonsine, situated on the right bank of Senio River, was destroyed during the 4 hard and strenuous winter months of Resistance so that the actual town, with is simple and essential architecture, was built in a small amount of time on the other side of the river. Many people, mostly civilians, lost their life during those hard days, and the memory is kept alive by local elder inhabitants. Museo della Battaglia del Senio, opened in 1981, collects and preserves memories, documents and evidences of alterations in the territory and the living conditions of the population during the war.

A few kilometres away from the Museum it is also possible to visit Agnese's house, a rural farmhouse of the late nineteenth century, intact in the main structures (brick and mortar walls, floors in reeds and tiles, etc.), which was the set of the movie "Agnese goes to die" shot in 1975. It is the story of Agnese, written by Renata Viganò in 1949, a childless, elderly, peasant washerwoman, and her Resistance experience. Agnese might be considered a symbol of the 35,000 female partisans who helped in the violent national revolution against fascism and nazism.

Alfonsine is a site of memory, both topographically and metaphorically, a place that has a collective 'memory function' which should be transmitted to as many visitors as possible is also a perfect location for students on school trips. Battaglia del Senio Museum and Alfonsine are included in an itinerary, proposed by Resistenza Mappe, a website created to remember and celebrate, on the 70th anniversary of the Liberation, the places and events of the Second World War and the Resistance, designed and developed by the Historical Institutes of Emilia-Romagna.

Museo Casa Monti was the birthplace and childhood home of notorious Neoclassical poet and writer Vincenzo Monti, born in 1754. The house was transformed in a Casa Museo (House Museum), which, on the first floor, showcases furniture, original documents and memorabilia of Monti's family, while the ground floor houses the **Environmental Education Centre**, whose goal is to spread environment and sustainable education among residents and visitors. The centre offers different typologies of visits, educational programs, activities and excursions to schools, groups and individuals. Casa Monti can be considered both a cultural and a natural attraction, being a farmhouse situated in the open countryside, in an area that today is part of Po Delta Park.

Alfonsine area is rich in ecological and natural diversity and local community is aware of the potential opportunities offered by **natural environment** and all activities related to nature as cycling in the countryside and along Senio River and birdwatching. There are three small distinct oases halfway between

the Argenta and Comacchio Valleys, with a strategic role for environmental education and for the conservation of the lowland landscape linked to water, which, unfortunately are open only on request and are not equipped with facilities for visitors as benches, tables, toilets and drinking water fountains.

3.6 Weaknesses of the local Tourism System of Alfonsine

Residents of Alfonsine affirm that the main weakness for tourism development is related to **close-mindedness of the local community, especially of young people**. The affirmation could be related to two connected reasons: first, the destination has a solid and strong agricultural and industrial vocation, while tourism has not yet been exploited as an economic, social and cultural driver. Second, local people generally do not consider Alfonsine an interesting or equipped location for tourists and furthermore it can be affirmed that touristic development has probably never been a priority for the administration.

Moreover, among weakness, inhabitants indicate also the **lack of tourism related promotion and marketing activities**, followed by the **lack of education about tourism and local culture, especially among young people.**

Inadequate infrastructures and **low amount of lodging facilities** are also considered weaknesses by locals. Tourism infrastructure includes many services, necessary to meet the needs of tourists and increase satisfaction during their stay at the destination and are the basis of tourism development, indispensable for long-term tourism growth and the general progress of tourist destinations. Transport infrastructure, which should provide destination access to tourists from the international and domestic markets, include roads and especially connections which are not excellent in Alfonsine, especially train connections that consist on one single railway line from Ferrara to Ravenna served with a local regional train.

Social infrastructure as accommodation facilities in the form of rooms to accommodate tourists, hotels, restaurants, shops, information points and other necessary facilities and environmental infrastructure in natural reserves in the form of benches, water fountains, refreshment areas, indication signs etc are very limited in Alfonsine. As Alfonsine is up to now a business travellers' destinations due to the presence of Fruttagel (Cooperative Society that specializes in the industrial transformation of fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals and legumes) and Marini spa (provider of cement, aggregates, ready-mixed concrete and concrete products world-wide), the shortage of hotel and housing should be further investigated.

Lack of collaboration and communication between institutions and local businesses is also considered a weakness for tourism development in Alfonsine. The collaboration between the public and the private sector is a challenging task and requires the development of new mechanisms and processes for incorporating the diverse elements of the tourism system. It looks like the local institution approaches planning with a top down strategy not completely shared and understood by owners of local businesses. Collected data from interviews and focus group suggest that local events 'strategy and agenda should be defined with the proactive involvement of local stakeholders.

3.7 Opportunities for Tourism Development of Alfonsine

Cultural tourism market, **school tourism market**, **slow and green tourism market and food and wine tourism** have been identified as main opportunities, which are positive and external factors that Alfonsine can take advantage of. They can all be considered niche products where **niche tourism** is seen to be a response to an increasing number of more sophisticated tourists demanding specialist tourism products. The term niche tourism refers to today's tourist who wants to dive into the experience, taste, feel and relate to local customs, traditions, history and cuisine.

Cultural tourism is certainly related to Vincenzo Monti Museum and to Battaglia del Senio Museum. Alfonsine is a place of memory that offers to the contemporary tourist historical understanding of WW2 events and partisan resistance that focuses on education and the quest for knowledge. The **tourism of memory** is mainly perceived as an "educational" tourism supposedly responding to the need to understand and interpret the battle spaces and places of memory, the meaning of which couldn't otherwise be grasped by contemporary generations, and therefor represent an ideal product for **school trips**. Moreover, the significance given to historical tourism not only forms part of a relationship with the past and a memorial construction related to the WW2, but it is also anchored in some - idealised - conceptions of tourism as a factor in the development of closer ties between peoples. In order to create a product for tourism of memory, spaces and places of memory, narrations, battlefield landscapes and historical evidences must be researched, evaluated, prepared, preserved and processed in a marketing manner, so that these well-managed resources can become the true bearers of a possible further development of historical tourism. Moreover, the construction of tourism attractivity and desirability implies the involvement of the inhabitants as "testimonials" who act both as ambassadors and guides: the inhabitants of Alfonsine should be involved through their stories and testimonials in a more personalised discourse about the places by mobilising their experience of historical events.

Slow tourism and green tourism are often in relation with sustainable tourism and eco-tourism and represents a segment of tourists in pursuit of leisure activities in the countryside. Green tourism activities are likely to be small scale, locally owned with consequentially low impact, leakages and an elevated percentage of profits preserved locally. Furthermore, green tourists pay considerable attention to negative environmental and social impacts and choose destinations that maximised linkages to other sectors of the local economy, such as agriculture and involve local community in the decision-making process. The EXCOVER Project, aiming at improving its residents' life and economic conditions, while preserving the local cultural identity and environmental resources, represents a pivotal occasion to increase the participation of local community and preserve and protect local heritage and natural environment.

Alfonsine located in the hearth of **Po Delta National Park**, Italy's largest wetland with a unique identity, that is rooted in territorial and environmental characteristics and is highly regarded due to its biodiversity and its productivity. Po Delta Park offers plentiful and diversified attractions and facilities to visitors and tourists with varied products experiences for different type of recreational tourism: bike paths, walking trails, rural farming, long beaches, boat excursions and historic villages, only to mention some. Po Delta Park, with a concentration, in a relatively small area, of culture, nature, landscape, water, beaches, wildlife, rural traditions and religious trails, is a natural attraction with a high potential for emerging tourism niche segments. Besides being in such a privileged area, Alfonsine lies within short distance from Ravenna (20km), capital of mosaics dating back at the byzantine Empire and the Emilia-Romagna coast (24km).

Food and Wine tourism is considered an opportunity for touristic development. Today, eno-gastronomy is a relevant component in travel choices and tourists take into consideration the presence of food and wine experiences when choosing the destination.

Alfonsine has both food and wine excellences, with small local companies producing cured meats, cheese, liquors, wines, saffron etc. Le Romagnole and Randi Vini are wine cooperatives that offer myriad wines of fantastic value and quality produced, with a policy of control over the environmental impact and through the recovery of autochthonous vine variety and of long-standing cultivation. Furthermore, Chiacchere di Gusto, a local association with the aim to promote local products and lifestyle, organizes every two year a tasting event experience hosted in Casa Monti Museum, where food and wine producers offer honeys, cheeses, cured meats, wines, vinegars, juices, jams, chocolate, liqueurs, truffles, etc.

Food and wine can play a key role in influencing the overall branding and positioning of a destination and should be considered part of the destination marketing mix, because they contribute to give a sense of place and allow tourists to literally taste the destination, coming directly into contact with local culture. Moreover, food tourism can be linked with other visitor products such as cultural and natural heritage attractions, thereby providing a comprehensive offer, while, in the meantime, rural area of Alfonsine

could be provided with an alternative: the development, maintenance and/or even revival of local food products. Niche scale food and wine products can represent a route to the future, but cannot be taken for granted and need experience economy strategies and policies to be adopted, as: collaboration across different stages of wine-food value chains, exploration of niches in the wine-food sector that have potential to generate new innovative products and services and finally collaboration among local actors-

3.8 Threats to Tourist Development of Alfonsine

Competition with stronger destinations and sea side destinations is considered a thread by residents of Alfonsine. Ravenna, the stronger destination, is a city of fascinating Byzantine suggestions and sea side destinations starts from Lidi Ferraresi to Milano Marittima-Cervia offering sandy beaches, resorts, restaurants and plenty of touristic attractions. While Alfonsine presents a limited number of tourism resources and stakeholders, neighbouring destinations have different key products that could be integrated with Alfonsine historical and cultural resources to enhance global regional tourism portfolio. Moreover, it is necessary to underline that the fast pace of social, economic, and technical changes force destinations to adapt their offerings to meet the needs and expectations of sophisticated consumers, thus gaining and maintaining their competitive advantages as competitors. Instead of competitors, nearby destinations should, therefore, realize that they are interdependent and that they should work together to offer a total product that is attractive and satisfying in order to improve their individual positions in the marketplace.

Tax policy and **credit rationing** are national problems, the second one especially related to the credit crunch, which means that firms and companies have less access to credit, a lower capacity to maintain a long-lasting bank relationship and finally a lower propensity to invest. Sharing economy, with its disruptive innovation made possible by micro entrepreneurs eager to show an alternative way to traditional commerce due to several newly available tools, such as digital technology, seems to be an answer to economic depression, to high tax policy and credit crunch.

4. Concluding Remarks

The face-to-face interviews conducted in selected destinations and addressed to residents have revealed important insights for the prosecution and development of the EXCOVER Project. Ostellato presents itself as a WELCOMING COMMUNITY, an extremely positive element as it can impact upon the way tourists perceive a destination. It can be assumed that tourists visiting destinations where residents are more positive to tourism receptiveness are possibly going to be more satisfied with the tourist experience.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION is very high in Alfonsine, probably because residents collaborate with more than 100 local voluntary associations, active in different sectors as social services, culture, recreation and sports. Community participation creates a relationship, established by the members of the community, through their collaboration in achieving common goals and making the community a better place in which to live. As the Excover Project is based on sharing economy principles, community participation both in Alfonsine and Ostellato is a positive signal that could led to not only to social, but also to economic benefits in certain sharing situations, such as accommodation sharing or knowledge sharing. The components PERSONAL SHARING ATTITUDE and RESPONDENT ENGAGEMENT show positive values for both destinations, confirming the proactive attitude of residents towards goods' and services' sharing along with a manifested intention to participate in the local tourism development. The results indicate that residents will be more likely to support tourism development if they are involved in planning and development decisions and if they understand the benefits that tourism can bring.

In conclusion, assess the availability of the local community to participate in the local tourism development and to share own underutilized assets, as emerged from the SWOT survey, making explicit reference to the effects on the prosecution of the project.

Indisputably, accommodation sharing and knowledge sharing related to skills and territory are the assets that local communities, both in Ostellato and Alfonsine, are more available to share; the preference accorded to accommodation sharing is probably related to the fact that this form of collaborative consumption has rapidly gain popularity thanks to online platforms as Airbnb, which represents a transformative innovation within the tourism accommodation industry. Lodging facilities shortage, especially in Alfonsine, could be balanced out by shared rooms and houses provided by locals. Moreover, tourists looking for unique character and homely feel, personalized service and personal interaction with the hosts, the opportunity to receive useful local knowledge from the host, would have more options in selected locations.

The Excover Project can be a jump-start to encourage the establishment of institutional architecture based on communication and collaboration between between local institutions, stakeholders and citizens that supports co-operation and capacity building within and between institutional and non-institutional stakeholders. Many citizens of selected destinations declared to have knowledge of territorial history, traditions, environment. The willingness to share knowledge linked to traditions and territory is a very interesting asset which should be developed with sharing economy platforms as selected destinations present a lack of official local tours and guides. Sharing knowledge represents a reliable way to bring local people with their knowledge and expertise together with travelers who are looking for an authentic cultural experience and do not overlap with any local businesses. Furthermore, both destinations offer natural and tangible cultural heritage, but also intangible cultural heritage related to traditions, history, customs, cuisine and handicrafts that is preserved and transmitted by local inhabitants, who are very proud of its value. Sharing economy related to knowledge would allow residents to use their local knowledge to provide personal and customized experiences to tourists, in either individual or group settings as an alternative to traditional tour operators, typically at a lower cost.

Should we expect local businesses to suffer from the competition of the sharing economy? Do self-employed residents seem to fear such a competition, based on the survey?

The overall results are optimistic for the prosecution of the EXCOVER project, as intrapreneurs are willing to participate probably because the project represents a chance to develop their existent businesses and an opportunity to create new businesses through diversification. Even if It is often assumed that entrepreneurs are adverse to sharing economy, because they see it as a dangerous source of competition, the data collected in Alfonsine and Ostellato do not confirm this assumption, probably because self-employed or entrepreneurs are more prone to value collaborative platforms as an alternative as they are more conscious of the changing nature of economic exchange.

Moreover, sharing accommodation on popular platform may bring tourists to Alfonsine and Ostellato, that were previously less popular. Especially in Alfonsine, where the lodging activity is very poor, with the only presence of 2 small hotels and 1 farmhouse, the presence of sharing houses and rooms would represent an important increase in local tourist offer. As far as Ostellato, sharing accommodation would probably not overlap the existing offer for different reasons. Firstly, during fishing competitions, which take place very often, from spring until autumn, all hotels and accommodation facilities are fully booked, and travelers have to choose accommodations in nearby destinations. Secondly, shared houses and rooms could attract new targets and segments of travelers looking for the opportunity to interact with locals and to have an authentic local experience.

Nature based tourism, green tourism and slow tourism are perceived as potential opportunities for touristic development both in Alfonsine and Ostellato. These niche products are often in relation with sustainable tourism and eco-tourism and represents a segment of tourists in pursuit of leisure activities in the countryside. Green tourism and slow tourism activities are likely to be small scale, locally owned with consequentially low impact, leakages and an elevated percentage of profits preserved locally. The EXCOVER Project, aiming at improving its residents' life and economic conditions, while preserving the local cultural identity and environmental resources, represents a pivotal occasion to increase the participation of local community and preserve and protect local heritage and natural environment.

Ostellato and Alfonsine are in the hearth of Po Delta Natural Reserve, a vast area rich in flora, fauna and historical and cultural sites; furthermore, they are half way between Ferrara, the renaissance city, Ravenna, the byzantine city and the Adriatic Coast of Comacchio and its seven beaches. The strategic geographical position is one of the strengths considered from residents, but in order to be exploited, it might be necessary to create and develop products' and marketing' strategies related to nature-based tourism, slow tourism and green tourism with all nearby locations. Unfortunately, competition with nearby destinations is considered by locals one of the major threads for touristic development. Competition should be replaced with a collaborative strategy approach that has the potential of increasing the attractiveness of the area as a destination by either offering the same benefits and targeting the same market segments (i.e. birdwatching tourism, bike tourism, slow tourism) or providing complementary products which increase the consumption value of consumers as well as a market segment differentiation (historical tourism, fishing tourism). It is increasingly difficult for individual destinations to make decisions without taking other surrounding destinations' interests and products into account and small neighbouring destinations with limited tourism products and resources should collaborate to enhance product portfolio, gain access to new knowledge, markets, and technologies and spread the cost of marketing activities.

The consensual understanding of the importance of cooperation in this area, as well as the generalized awareness of the benefits and constraints of this cooperation, lead to understanding the urgency of continuing to raise awareness of this issue among the various stakeholders (economic agents and public entities, but also in the community, among others) which could be supported by the Excover Project.