ALBERGO DIFFUSO

THE SILENT AWAKENING OF RURAL ITALY

Identifying key features

and threshing main impacts

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Giving my invaluable and endless thanks…

> …to Jordi Casassayas Cabanas, for supervising and orienting me on writing this paper.

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"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness…
Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in
one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

Mark Twain

(1)

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand what brought me to write this paper should be considered a personal background that, even not necessary, will be expressed likewise in order to contextualize the subjectivity of the qualitative analysis. The first stone, apart from being an inhabitant in Costa Brava, could be found at my parent's inquisitiveness for nature, cultural and heritage tourism, which permitted me to witness a broad range of interesting places and touristic offers that, unless never expecting to be focused on tourism in future, were kept in my mind.

One year ago we were travelling around Menorca when a peculiar little fisher village was on our way: Binibèquer Vell. This is a purely artificially built complex imitating a traditional fishing town of the region where every door brings to a hotel apartment/room; however, even though it is a copy, it looks impressively cosy and breaths a different atmosphere than the rest of villages. From my Business Administration background, I was shined for this concept and wanted to learn more about, thinking that it is an original and aesthetically sustainable way of offering tourism and how it could be applied in other environments. A seed was planted, and during this travel I decided to be specialized in tourism.

During the post-grade studies I discovered some touristic dimensions that were unknown for me till this moment, arising my inquisitiveness about sustainability (and ecolabels), tourists' motivations, alternative tourism and purchasing choices, as well as provided me with a mind shift about what quality is (at least, what satisfies your customers). However, while discovering good practices, innovative products, incredible places, and the tourism weight in the economy and so on, those always came hand by hand with a warning advice: globally, tourism is not sustainable due to its actual volume and the expected growth of its demand (especially on long-distance travel, which has a great effect due to aircraft fuel consumption) (UNWTO, 2011; Gössling, Hansson, Hörstmeier & Saggle, 2002; Gössling & Peeters, 2007), jointly with the way that tourism is offered (Cohen, 2008; Bowman, 2011); therefor efforts must be done from the inside at the smallest scale pursuing to naturalize the good green practices and transform those into common practices in the sector. Those practices have been tried to award by certifications (ecolabels), however, due to that whether

bad management, wrong use, or excess of offer, those have lost its initial good intentions and have become into usefulness and meaningless (Bowman, 2011). Apart from good practices (never contemptible), it is also claimed a shift on the conceptualization of tourism, on the actual system of irresponsible resorts, exogenous great buildings, mass destinations and standard products, and thus alternative variants have appeared; from voluntourism to agrotourism, backpackaging or ecotourism, all of them praiseworthy attempts for walking on the path aforementioned. However, unless literature recognizes the importance and value of such activities, dysfunctions have been detected between this literature and the current practices (Ross & Wall, 1999; Cohen, 2008).

Nonetheless those new trends, the sector's weight keeps being mostly held by mass tourism in traditional destinations, which is characterized by corporate-owned attractions (thus unfair income distribution), its impact on the place (regarding aesthetics, its inhabitants, local culture, and environment) and the overwhelming excess of carrying capacities (both social and ecological) (Ross & Wall, 1999; Davis & Morais, 2004).

On the basis of the current situation and context of the touristic sector, and with Binibèquer Vell in mind, I started to imagine if such an accommodation concept driven locally and sustainably could be a proper alternative touristic offer in order to counteract the negative impacts of tourism on further destinations developments. This inquisitiveness brought me to discover Albergo Diffuso, an Italian model that (surprisingly for me) is mostly fitting and expressing the model that I had in mind. Needless to say that this pretty mature concept goes great beyond than mine, therefore I decided to study it throughout instead of trying to figure out a model by myself.

However, the literature reviewing about Albergo Diffuso revealed some gaps that I had to fill up with complementary literature. In this line, although Albergo Diffuso is held on a sustainable approach, was necessary to look for a wider frame of sustainable principles which was most properly fitting with, being the variant of Geographically Sustainable Tourism the subjectively chosen one.

Professor Dall'Ara, the visionary of the studied model, brought me to know about his Three (Four) Generations of tourists which, far of being globally applicable, needed to be complemented with a wider perspective of social evolution as for example the dichotomy Modernism-Postmodernism, concretely focused on tourism. I did so after identifying another gap in literature: it is considered that the essential motivation for

staying in an Albergo Diffuso is visiting the place itself but, till these use to be located within rich natural environments, there may be a segment valuating it just as a regular hotel room with quality services. In this line, it is also studied from the Rural Tourism approach.

After the literature review was done, were tried to summarize all the considerations that should be taken into account for further implementations of Albergo Diffuso's, acknowledging that every case and situation is different and that this model, precisely, claims for being moulded to the special needs of each destination regarding environment, community and heritage. This was built up through literature reviewing and participant observation, such qualitative method that is also applied for the analysis. According to the chosen methodology, and the need of handling it with indicators, two differentiated tools are adopted firstly to frame the data collection, and secondly to drive the discussion and argumentation through the analysis of impacts.

Once all above it is said, can be deduced that there is not one clear research question to be answered, but there is the aim of gathering the "big picture" and an in-depth description of what Albergo Diffuso is and represents as a hospitality concept, how it works, which are its origins, which are the customer's segments, how they behave, what makes it sustainable, how have it impacted on the destination, and a large etcetera boosted by the own inquisitiveness. Nonetheless, three different objectives have been defined for this paper:

- To demonstrate the sustainable character of an Albergo Diffuso and if it have an effective impact on the destination.
- To identify the meaningful considerations to be taken into account in further implementations.
- To verify the capacity of Albergo Diffuso to be extrapolated in other circumstances.
- To thresh the impacts that an Albergo Diffuso can imply on a destination.

On this pursuit, this papers aims to be a useful framework for all private and public sectors, and academics and practitioners, on the performance of such idea or similar, through a widely related literature reviewing and the analysis of the successful case study of Santo Steffano di Sessanio. At least, it desires surprise, interest or inquisitiveness to be arisen, at somewhat extent, on the reader.

(2)

LITERATURE REVIEW:

FRAMEWORK

2.0.- A FIRST REFLEXIVE APPROACH: POST/MODERNITY, CULTURE AND AUTHENTICITY:

This section is about a research in the academic touristic field intended to show up a kind of tourism accommodation (Albergo Diffuso, as known as, distributed hospitality) which frames and tries to adopt the fittest sustainability values in order to diminish at maximum negative impacts of the activity, as well as to enhance the positive ones. On this pursue, it becomes mandatory the acknowledgment about the multifaceted contemporary tourist (nowadays a midway between modern and post-modern tourist, and all possible sets in between), its motivations and inquisitiveness (focusing on segments beyond sun, sea and sand) and the sustainability principles which fits in-between those tourists' expectations and this kind of business. Nonetheless, this acknowledgment would not be comprehensive if it is studied only the current context instead of the background and historical evolution which lead regarded concepts into the meaning of today.

At this introduction it is aimed to set and clarify some terms that will be used henceforward in the literature reviewing. The first consideration is the use of the **modern** and **post-modern** terms, which express a qualifying gap between two different understandings about offering and demanding tourism. The second consideration is about **culture** and **authenticity**; those are not topics of this thesis by themselves, but they become central in regard of the motivations of each segment and, as well, the products targeted to those segments.

Modernity is so tied to our lifestyles and to the history of our (contemporary) life that it has become easily recognizable when looking straight under its "normality": from the Enlightenment principles of predominance of the reason to Fordism, "McDonalization" and "Disneyfication", all of them being present in the (western) society where we grew; the prevailing of the scientific method, people-as-machines in order to take maximum profit from industrial production, the standardization of products, the usage of marketing for flocking the masses, the built need of consumption for fitting society, the

fall down of nature on behalf of artificiality… summing up, the money's power on hands of a few who run great corporations and mould the society with the unique pursue of becoming even richer and more powerful. That is the modern society.

However, post-modernity (simply, after modernity) has become a bone of contention discussed (in the tourism field) barely at the same time the modernity was (Cohen, 2008; Oakes & Minca, 2004; Uriely, 1997; Franklin, 2003). Till few years ago, and still nowadays, post/modernity in tourism, and the post/modern tourist (adopting Oakes & Minca terminology), have been discussed from the opposition between the branches represented by D. J. Boorstin (whose belief is that post-tourism is not more than a "simulacra", simulational, a trade of pseudo-events) and, in response, D. MacCannell (who understand "the other" post-modern tourism as a quest for authenticity, which is missing at the tourists' phony, alienated own world; a modern world). Then, Urry (1990), under a quite more post-modern approach (since diversity is, precisely, a post-modern quality), accepted that both can coexist without losing its own meaning and validity; this post- era is the eclosion of tastes and preferences, all of them different and linked to the subjectivity. This is the era of abandoning the "*either-or*" statement on behalf of the "*both-and*" perspective (Uriely, 1997).

Due to the broad divergences and the no-consensus on framing post/modernity (even the denying of the post- era interpreting this new scenario simply as the growth and maturation of the same age), and all the alternative proposed terms and interpretations such as liquid modernity, new/old modernity, renewed modernity (or an Unfinished Project) and so on, it is considered that for this thesis is not necessary to adopt one perspective neither to accept the predominance of one of them, but would be useful to use those terms in order to distinguish between two undoubtedly different attitudes regarding tourism.

Nonetheless the ambiguity, and sometimes ambivalence of the terms, usually touristic activities are relatively easy to distinguish between both extreme terms. Uriely (1997), states:

> Since the late 70s and the early 80s, a growing number of scholars have addressed various tourism-related activities as expressions of post-modernist rather than modernist culture. Contemporary trends in tourism, such as the rise of small and specialized travel agencies, the growing attraction of nostalgia and "heritage tourism", the flourish of nature-oriented tourism, and the increase of simulated tourism-related environments, are labeled as aspects of "post-modern tourism". (Uriely, 1997; p.2).

From this statement can be fathomed that post-modern tourism includes all those activities which come after, and in response to, modern tourism, which can be expressed in terms of, for instance, standardized services, predominance of big corporations and hotel chains, "traditional" destinations and flocked tourists, the home-comfort at holidays, and trip relationships based on the interaction with other travelers instead of locals. In this line, can be considered as post-modern tourism those activities which represent a change of attitude regarding environment and local communities, as well as the pursue of new and *authentic* experiences. Amongst them, backpackaging, voluntourism, adventure tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, and all those which hold on sustainable attitude and personal growing.

According to the nature of our object of study – Albergo Diffuso -, and linked with one of the pillars of post-modern tourism, this introduction is shifting into the aforementioned second consideration: culture and authenticity.

What is culture? Due to that perhaps literature have mulled over this question excessively, a "purer" definition for meeting the meaning can be found in dictionaries; it is at least curious the conceptual divergence that is found at this kind of sources, therefore some first-entries for **culture** from several prestigious dictionaries have been chosen to be quoted:

- Oxford Dictionary (Culture. (2016). *Oxford Dictionaries*): "*The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively*".

- Cambridge Dictionary (Culture. (2016). *Cambridge Advance Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*): "*The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time*".

- Diccionario de la RAE (Cultura. (2014). *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*): "*The set of knowledge as a whole that allows for developing an own critical judgment*" (own translation from: "Conjunto de conocimientos que permite a alguien desarrollar su juício crítico").

However their approaches are far from each other, each one emphasizes on a different aspect which, from my own standpoint, are all of them necessary to get a wider and straightforward meaning of the concept **culture**. Both British definitions express culture as a suitable touristic object, due to both are important travel motivations for the tourist of today (issue that will be discussed in the following sections). Nonetheless,

the Spanish definition is deeper and quite more abstract by understanding culture not as a performance, but as the knowledge behind the decisions that leads to a performance (of a person in a particular group and at a particular time). Considering that historical baggage is part of this knowledge, a deduced logical assessment would be that post-modern tourists could be considered as amateur sociologists. In other words, cultural tourist would not be interested only in learning from the artistic and architectural performance and production of a society (in a particular group, at a particular time), as well as their "way of life", their customs and beliefs. In addition, nowadays cultural tourists would be also interested in the intra-history which shaped the unique collective character of a society, some shared and distinguishing personality characteristics that are heterogeneous amongst cultures around the world. This heterogeneity is, precisely, the feeder of the quest for authenticity, jointly with the feeling of living in unauthenticity.

All cultures (and linked regions) of the world have developed at a different pace and manner, even in the current century of globalization and technologies of information and communication, due to that each background, each historical baggage, influenced on the way that each culture entered to this age and reacted to the evolution (including the internationalization of tourism). Anyway, this reaction and the therefore adopted attitude (reluctant or predisposed) are part of a society's culture. The paradox holds on the inverse relationship between the predisposition degree (of trading with own culture) and desirability of this culture from the tourist perspective (for consuming cultural-regarded production). Tourists interpret that as more reluctance in a society when sharing its culture with foreigners, more authentic this society remains and, therefore, more desirable it becomes (Cohen, 2008; Oakes & Minca, 2004; Uriely, 1997; Urry, 1990). But, what should be understood as "authenticity"? What is "authentic", at least, on the tourists' eyes?

Authenticity is nothing more and nothing less than something real, true, genuine, not a copy. If culture is dynamic, "daily" built, being homogenized when getting in contact with other cultures, also authenticity is "daily", thus different every day, every year, and will be different every day now. Obviously, both current culture and authenticity are holding on themselves of yesterday, and the day before yesterday and all the ages before (historical baggage). But in the touristic field, authenticity is closely linked with tradition, something past-related, the "original" way. According to this conception, a

cultural tourist on the quest for authenticity is more interested on cultural heritage than in the current culture by itself.

In this line, it becomes mandatory to distinguish between the cultural tourist (pursuing for the real, actual authenticity) and the cultural heritage tourist (who is looking for the past, genuine historic-based products, in societies of nowadays). In order to set a clear distinction, an example is taken: the city of Berlin, which attracts both (completely different) segments. One of them is mostly interested in living from within, and on-site, the well-known history of the city (the past and its impact on the present); meanwhile the other is interested mostly in the artistic expression and the way of life (the present and, sometimes, how it has been shaped by the past). Both are about a cultural trip, but from perceptually different approaches; the first is known as the cultural-heritage segment, and the latter use to be named and framed as leisure tourism. Paradoxical, is not it?

In order to provide a sense to the terminology, for this paper **authenticity** will be understood as a quality of anything (products, materials, buildings, procedures, people, environment…) which seems to be of a pre-modern age, before modernity. Anyway, should be pointed again the adopted post/modern inclusive approach of "both-and", being aware of the multifaceted profile of tourists.

2.1.- ALBERGO DIFFUSO: ACCOMMODATION DISPLAY AND CONCEPT EXPLORATION.

Professor Giancarlo Dall'Ara was the first in defining the concept Albergo Diffuso and has been considered the father of the model behind this type of accommodation distribution, which spontaneously appeared after the Friuli's earthquake of '76 in order to simply get a use and take a touristic profit from the recently empty houses in rural Italy after the proper restoration (Dall'Ara, 2015). At this first stage, regional development and homeowner's expectations were taken into consideration, but was not tourists' expectancy. Over the path of time, the particular display of this kind of accommodation have appeared to be more than a "properties' fulfillment" for becoming an important touristic activity which brings dynamism and revitalizes depressed rural zones, but, what is an argument of capital importance, always from an special caring of the whatever current assets available (material and immaterial), the enhancement of locality (the people and their culture and heritage), and the

preservation of the natural environment in a way that only local communities can beware.

This concept has been translated in some ways trying to express basically the particular form of distribution: spread hotel, enlarged hotel, horizontal hotel, widespread accommodation, distributed hospitality... are some of the attempts found in English related articles. However those terms were good marketing tools, some years were needed to shape the original model of horizontal and sustainable hotel that represented a hospitality philosophy, till the actual model which is not offering only beds to tourists but also the chance of living the real village's lifestyle by being visitors staying in homes spread amongst residents' homes (Dall'Ara, 2015). Precisely, the fact of being a "no-built hotel" is the main characteristic of Albergo Diffuso on the place, but looking forwards this implies a shift in the visitors mind from "tourists" to "guests" or "temporary residents" (Sheehan & Presenza, 2012) (however holding close similarities, do not confuse this terminology with the term used by other authors to define the neo-Bohemians (Quaglieri & Russo, 2010; Donaire, 2014)).

In a *National Geographic Traveler* article, Murphy (2011) recollected a Dall'Ara's comment which is intended to clarify the current concept of Albergo Diffuso: "*I think of an* albergo diffuso *as a novel that tells the story of a culture. Guests are brought into the story temporarily so they can better understand the way of life.*"

The broad literature regarding this widespread concept of accommodation show coincidences in some aspects which are unquestionably linked to the nature and essence of this Italian model. Taking off from the recent evolution of tourists' motivations from having relax vacancies till living stays full of experiences, Albergo Diffuso's market segments are those considered as post/modern travellers (Russo, Lombardi & Mangiagli, 2013; Orlandi, Vallone, De Toni & Cecchetti, 2012) or third- and fourth-generation tourists (Dall'Ara, 2015; Dichter & Dall'Ara, 2007; Sheehan & Presenza, 2012).

This aforementioned grouped-segment is leading the growth of touristic sustainable products and is purchasing for not only accommodations with good green practises but also expecting a globally sustainable development behaviour from the management of those products as most of Albergo Diffuso do (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012; Dropulic, Krajnovic & Ruzic, 2008; Mandelli & La Rocca, 2006; Orlandi et al., 2012; Dichter & Dall'Ara, 2007). As part of this sustainable attitude, distributed hospitality claims for the creation of strong local networks by looking for the

collaboration of residents whatever the way; sometimes the initiative is brought by a translocal starter, and sometimes is born from the own village residents. Whatever, it is expected engagement and involvement from local community, maybe as hotel's workers, maybe in the management, but also as artisans selling traditional products, as local guides, creating new entrepreneurship businesses and building synergies (Russo et al., 2013; Sheehan & Presenza, 2012). Anyway, sustained on antecedents of success, it is always expected a positive and revitalizing impact on the well-being and dynamism of the destinations where such a touristic offer is established (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012; Orlandi et al., 2012; Dropulic et al., 2008; Mandelli & La Rocca, 2006; Dichter & Dall'Ara, 2007; Russo et al., 2013; Sheehan & Presenza, 2012; Dall'Ara, 2015).

Usually, Albergo Diffuso projects are established in places where there is important cultural heritage with the aim of preserving it, its architecture, its monuments, its style and its essence (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012; Dropulic et al., 2008; Dichter & Dall'Ara, 2007; Dall'Ara, 2015; Russo et al., 2013); nonetheless, it can be expressed in form of great and valuable cultural assets, historical interest or rich landscapes, but the common denominator is always found in the locals' awareness about the wealth and importance of their assets, taking maximum care to preserve them thus they are usually jeopardized. Under all variations, it have been identified the key of keeping being "authentic" and enhancing a particular character. The other key holds on providing a high quality service in order to meet the tourists' expectations, more related with a warm treatment and feeling at home than in professional procedures and protocols (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012; Mandelli & La Rocca, 2006; Dropulic et al., 2008; Orlandi et al., 2012; Dichter & Dall'Ara, 2007; Dall'Ara, 2015; Russo et al., 2013).

As fathomed during all long this section's discourse, Albergo Diffuso could be drawn as a central point holding a cloud of related theoretical concepts, as it has been built for this paper (Figure 1). In this cloud can be observed the interrelationships between some topics which are directly and indirectly related with Albergo Diffuso, at least there are those which have been and will be studied in this paper. However, looking for framing the wide of the discussion, some concepts have been left out such are commodification of culture, accommodation's management, stakeholders and networks creation or divergences amongst several variations of Albergo Diffuso.

Albergo Diffuso is a model thought and born for rural depressed villages, so rural tourism is an intrinsic part of it; sustainability in both community and environmental

sense is mandatory for this kind of accommodation since these are the main assets of this offer, trying to preserve the natural exceptionality and culture of the place at the most authentic manner. This is so because post-modern travelers (as well as third and fourth generations of tourists) are on their quest for authenticity whether expressed on the place or on the community.

Figure 1: Concept's cloud of related topics to Albergo Diffuso
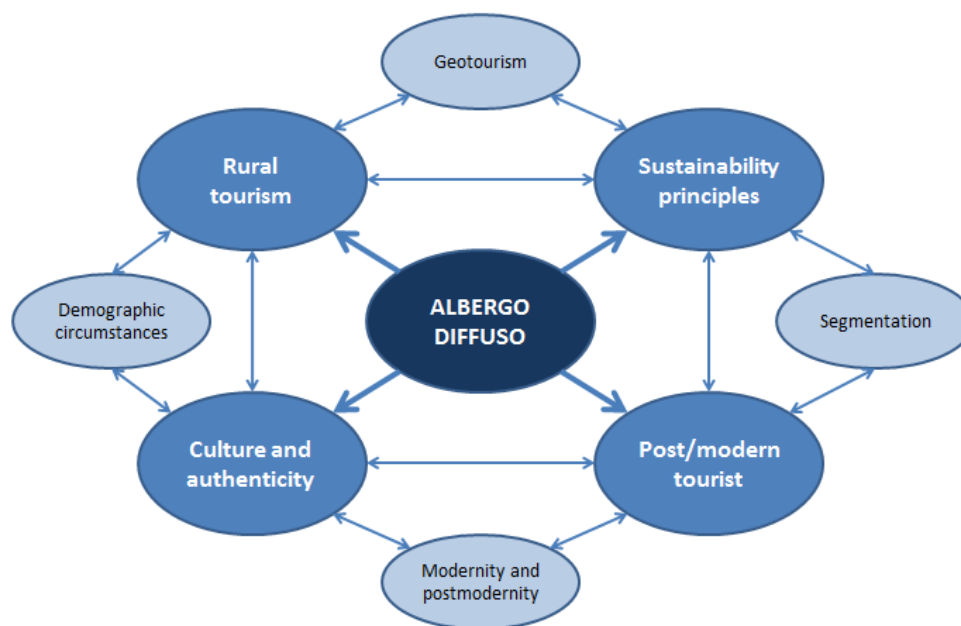
*Source: own elaboration.

2.2.- RURAL TOURISM: EVOLUTION, CIRCUMSTANCES AND SEGMENTATION:

The rural tourism's, and rural tourist profile's evolutions are central to this thesis due to it is necessary to understand what the nowadays tourist is looking for, what it is expected from and which are the motivations behind for engaging vacations at harder-access places. There are evidences about this metamorphosis when this topic has been discussed since the very beginning of modern tourism, being aware that there are segments pursuing for a post-modern way of offering and demanding tourism. First of all, must be stated what might be considered as rural tourism and whether our study object Albergo Diffuso fits in the definition or it does not. Taking a simple approach, rural tourism is understood as any touristic activity performed in a natural or rural environment non accessible to the masses (Turespaña, 2014), therefore undoubtedly distributed hospitality would be comprised within.

Coming back to the roots of rural tourism, those can be found on the romantic landscapes' sightseeing, activity undertaken since nineteenth century by those who

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wanted to escape from the noise of the urban industrialized societies, with its inherent values of shark capitalism and constant dynamism based on resources optimization and profits maximization (to simplify, modernity). Those values were expressed as social and economic inequality and the overexploitation of all resources and natural capital; besides, the spread feeling of being overexploited, both people and places, especially since the post-Second World War mass tourism boom. Consequently, tourism was only performed by those who hold the capital and the capacity, without caring on the possible mid- and long-term impacts on the environment neither the consequences on destination's community.

Anyway, rural tourism is considered to be popular since 1970s, setting a difference between pre- and post- this age. According to Lane & Kastenholz (2015), there have been three different phases which are complicated to frame by dates, due to that the evolution has not been the same in each region neither in each country. The *first phase* is considered since the breakpoint date stated above and represents an emergence stage of the sector. In those times, tourism in the countryside was considered as a sustainable alternative in responding the declining of the farming sector which was not able again to assure an income for part of rural population across developed countries (Collantes & Pinilla, 2011). It was expressed mostly on farming, but often also on historical buildings and warm, cosy places, being the natural environment a key where it is shown as stunning, rich, biologically and/or geologically interesting, a place with historical sense or with curious natural assets as, for instance, thermal springs.

From Lane & Kastenholz's (2015) research, it is also identified a countercurrent migration flow of educated and skilled population from cities to rural villages, who were seeking to create businesses and be established in the countryside (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). This evolution in a destination represented to be comprised in the *second phase,* which was one of consolidated growth. Rural population also was transformed in a behavioural way, from being members of a "Short Distance Society" to members of an "Open Society" (Persson, Westholm, Fuller, Bollman & Bryden, 1997). By the offer side, according to the migration of skilled entrepreneurs, rural tourism became an umbrella concept for a multi-faced sector which was developing to a broad range of niche markets; Activity tourism, Agritourism and Cultural and Heritage tourism are few of them, being *"the enjoyment of rural ways of life as a form of cultural experience"* included in the last branch. Due to this wide spectrum, Lane & Kastenholz (2015) identify some common denominators of the second phase of rural

tourism, which are still remaining in the next phase as key features for tourism in the countryside.

> (1) The recognition of the importance by both the demand and supply sides of the enjoyment of experiences which are special to the countryside, and often special to villages and small towns in the countryside.
>
> (2) The importance of personal contact with local people, a feature of particular value to small scale enterprises.
>
> (3) The importance of physical activity and environment - people interaction in many of the activities.
>
> (4) "Accidental" informal partnerships between accommodation and attractions that have sometimes created simple, unplanned "destinations".
>
> (5) The ability of rural tourism to invent numerous new products from within its rich heritage. It is no longer an activity just for dedicated older walkers, and those taking scenic drives. It has multiple market appeal. That is true in terms of attractions. It is also true for rural accommodation. (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; p. 7).

One of the most popular ways for innovating was the offer of luxury rural tourism, which seems incongruous but makes a lot of sense when contrasting with the demand profile, looking always for high quality services (i.e., Naturaki (Naturaki Reserves S.L., 2016)). One last important consideration about this phase is that the increasing amount of small touristic firms hand by hand with, and consequently to the demand growth, involved the creation of support groups and entities to put some order and to strength the sector, especially in the marketing field.

Nowadays, the *third phase* of rural tourism have appeared in some destinations in developed countries, in some has not. This stage is represented by the presence of some threats that set the sector walking on the tightrope, on a critical point from which the destination could be precipitated to the declining on one hand, or be regenerated through innovation on the other. On this point, destinations are aware that keeping innovative is mandatory unless a marked business has a sufficient amount of loyal customers purchasing its services (usually a relaxation and retreat offer, not about providing experiences). The main threats that are being faced in this phase are comprised by:

- the increasing competition: must be highlighted cruise ships providing awesome experiences in exotic places and the rise of urban tourism (with highly skilled people working hard on its promotion, easy access to cheap

flights and the revalorization of cities' heritage by creating museums and cultural routes);

- the lack of funds in small destinations, which cannot lead a necessary investment in infrastructures,;

- the ageing of the (till now) consolidated small rural businesses and infrastructures; and, lastly

- the diminishing presence of support marketing groups. It leads a subordination of the rural businesses to international Internet-based reservation systems, and consequently the loss of purchasing power.

Rural tourism destinations in the third phase are struggling to survive the circumstances, but indeed the key of the success holds on the association and collaboration capacity to overcome the weakness of being a fragmented sector based on small businesses (Bramwell & Lane, 1999). The sector in Spain can be considered in this phase, and some of the effective attempts can be found at the instauration of a quality rating system (1 to 5 spikes emulating the stars' hotel system; was implemented in whole Spain by ASETUR (Rural Tourism Spanish Association)) and the increasing adoption of ecolabels (i.e. CeresECOTUR) , as well as the growing amount of focused-topic webpages as selling channels through which the isolated businesses can be present during the pre- and post-stay tourists' decision-making and rating (i.e. www.toprural.com, www.turismerural.com, www.escapadarural.com, www.catalunyarural.info, etc).

Nonetheless, as stated above, the pivotal cornerstone to survive is innovation; tourists motivations is a topic of following sections, but can be anticipated that there is an important segment which is weighting every year pursuing for living new experiences, being surprised, learning from other cultures and getting in touch with other traditions, being the access to Internet and social media omnipresent. Rural tourism cannot compete in this line against urban tourism due to its slow-pace dynamism in comparison, but other assets are hold; there is more tangible cultural heritage and historical baggage, traditions are more carefully preserved, and nature is a distinctive element amongst destinations that cannot be found in every day more homogeneous metropolis. A key value for countryside is the coming back to the roots, what sometimes is confused as authenticity.

After this section's discussion have been closed, and before the next one is started, it seems necessary to make a brief digression here because, according to Collantes &

Pinilla (2011), no one countryside have developed equally than another, and Spanish rurality (and tourism) is an special case in Europe. Those authors drive a throughout investigation about the evolution of the countryside in this country during the whole past twentieth century by analyzing the demographic movements and the related economic and political causes and effects. Isolated and ruled by a long dictatorship period, Spain has developed at a different pace than the rest of neighboring countries due to its political and (consequently) economic situation. In this study it is observed the presence of a great interval of rural exodus comprised between 1950 and 1991 which was caused basically by two factors: on one hand the pull effect of Spanish cities (and its industry job opportunities), and on the other hand the hard and capital-exclusive access to land by poor rural population, besides the strong decrease in real wages during the 1940's post-war period. Anyway, this rural exodus and the rise of cities slowly changed the glasses through which Spanish population looked at the countryside, giving a different perspective and building an improved image about; thus, becoming it more attractive for tourism. Quoting Collantes & Pinilla (2011: 6):

> Unsatisfied with the social transformations brought about by industrialization and urbanization, these discourses emphasized the cultural and moral virtues of traditional rural communities and traditional rural populations (Lynch, 2010). They did so by distorting the past of rural communities and manufacturing romantic and idealized images of the countryside that had more to do with the problems of the emerging industrial societies than with the reality of the countryside past and present." […] "The depopulation of rural Spain belonged to a broader process of economic development that critically raised the living standards of the populations involved. (Collantes & Pinilla, 2011; p.6)

According to the market analysis driven by Instituto de Turismo de España (Turespaña, 2014), rural tourism in Spain was exposed to an exponential growth during 1990s (concurrently to the turning over of rural exodus) being interpreted as an alternative solution for the revitalization of some rural areas. Nonetheless, till 2007 offer and demand grew proportionally, but at this point the offer kept increasing meanwhile demand was shrunk. For this reason, product diversification became mandatory to be aligned with tourists expectations of experiential vacations, as well as reaching international markets was a need to compensate the stagnated domestic

market, focusing on mature European countries which already knew the destination Spain but used to consume more "traditional" products regarding sun, sea & sand, such they are United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland or Portugal.

Following the same analysis (Turespaña, 2014), the segmentation focused on abovementioned countries reveals the preferential segments for rural tourism in Spain; the chosen umbrella sector is Rural-Nature, being comprised within the branches Cultural-vacation (interest on natural environment and cultural richness pursuing to have relax and disconnection), Discoverer (subjects who want to know about new cultures and places in order to have new experiences and learn from locals) and Vital/Active (subjects as well interested on natural environment and cultural richness but aiming to live experiences by undertaking active tourism, risk activities and/or pursuing pure enjoyment). By job occupation, the biggest proportion in each country's demand is Qualified worker, without underestimating Intermediate managers and Retirees. In this line, there are two important considerations about which to be aware: the first is that the main profiles are mostly high qualified, holding superior studies around the 50% and having at least secondary formation around the 90%; the second is about the age, due to in the most of countries more than 50% is older than 45 and the senior market (more than 55 years) become pretty appreciable. Finally, regarding motivations, the main decision factors are price, landscapes, environment and nature, as well as the treatment and tranquility. Anyway, depending on the target country, amongst those factors also can be found good weather, accommodation quality and heritage.

2.3.- EVOLUTION OF TOURISTS' TENDENCIES: THE TOURIST OF TODAY:

As seen in the previous section, rural tourism faced a turning point at 1970s, but when taking a global tourism whole-sector approach this point can be set on the post-Second World War period due to, till then, taking vacations was a luxury .

The tourist of today is supposed to be post-modern, fact that implies (under the shift from the "*either-or*" statement to the "*both-and*" one) that post/modernity includes all new kinds of tourism as well as that accepts the presence of the former modern ones (Uriely, 1997). Therefore, today's post-modern theory accepts a touristic sector with a multi-faceted demand (and thus offer), where all tastes and preferences are valid and have place in the market.

In this line, can be said that the main characteristic of the contemporary tourist is that it cannot be generalized and homogenised; this appears obvious since both academics and businesses have tried to draw down an endless range of segments in order to express the several kinds of motivations of today's consumers of tourism, but such is the diversity that, on practice, each tourist represents a different segment. Even thought, it is even said that another post-modern tourist characteristic is the capacity and predisposition of jumping from a segment to another which, in the business context, implies a shift on the creation perspective.

Accordingly, this section is focused on the evolution of generally tourist's mind, behavioural mainstreams and common interests (being always aware that former ways may still remain, at whatever the degree). Looking from the past through the present is the only way to figure out the future trends, even thought otherwise that's not a purpose of this paper. Some have talked about this evolution regarding the post/modern transition, few have stated different phases to explain this evolution, and jus Dall'Ara did so applying to (and extracting from) Albergo Diffuso accommodations (acknowledging that, consequently, conclusions are on Italian market).

Talking about *stages* or *phases*, indeed, implies to order it in time and set breakpoints, for this reason Dall'Ara (at Ditcher & Dall'Ara, 2007) talks about tourist's *generations* by being aware that generations can coexist and that the first use to slowly submit to the latter along time. Starting from the first and primitive generation, till the personality-complex third generation. Few years later on (at Dall'Ara, 2015), another generation is added: the "liquid generation". Step by step:

- The *first generation* was the one which at 60s, simply, conquered "the right to take vacation", without caring about anything else than the fact of being or being not in vacation; the accommodation just determined by budget, and the destination by the access to transport means. In this context of demand's degree of expectancy and thoroughness, mass tourism was born and developed in the terms that it is known regarding standardized services and sustainability carelessness.

- But when mass tourism was maturing, *second generation* was born without asking for a change to, and reinforcing the accommodation offer model: this generation was still interested in standardized services and in finding elsewhere the same comforts found in home. It meant the rise of travel agencies, tour operators, travel packages and "all-included" stays; organized

vacations with no risk ("*The best surprise: no surprises!*") and sameness of products everywhere. No urban planning, no care for the environment and no conscience about the future generations. Summing up, it was a fight for the biggest profit with no perspective on sustainability; municipalities, entrepreneurs, capitalists... all of them boosted the touristic sector without fostering it on the – nowadays considered– right and necessary values.

- But tourists kept developing and the *third generation* was born under the effects caused by post-modern minding. This generation is targeted by Dall'Ara as the fittest for Albergo Diffuso, and taking his own words:

> This new tourist […] has the desire of living unique vacation, experiencing new and different places, receiving personalized services and looking for authenticity and immerging him/herself within the local cultures, in unique situations, difficult to be replicated. He is not only interested in visiting a new place, but also in living it. The third-generation tourist wants to experience the possibility of establishing new relations, not only with the other guests of the hotel, but mainly with the residents of the locality, adding the search for warm and sincere relations to the privacy anyone of us wants when times come to relax and spend free time. (Quoted from Ditcher & Dall'Ara, 2007; p.3).

- Afterwards, Dall'Ara (2015) adds a *fourth generation*; this generation awakes from the third and being the result of the fragmentation of the touristic demand such it is today: a whole constellation of holidays' preferences with misty and ephemeral limits amongst them. Fourth-generation tourists pursue newness and innovation, even regarding accommodation and performance of activities; they are attracted by sustainability, authenticity, locality and originality, but always being in contact with contemporaneity (furniture and amenities) and technology. They expect quality and excellence from simplicity, easily shifting from a vacation style to another. Travelers of this generation are also named as "*augmented tourists*" and "*permeable tourists*": *augmented* terminology because of their need of permanent Internet connection, searching all the necessary information by themselves, comparing prices, options and opinions in order to auto-organize their own vacations taking off from their unique set of motivations, tastes and preferences till shaping their perfect travel. Access to information is used before, during

and after the stay as a key asset for taking decisions and, even or especially, sharing all their experiences online. It is also said that they are *permeable* in regard to their attitude during the stay: avoiding standardized services, they are looking for the essence of the place, for engaging relationships with locals, they need to be "on the field" for pursuing new and original experiences, unique situations and moments to be shared. They have the key motivation of *permeability*, due to they do tourism not for fulfilling needs, but expecting for personal growth, trying to face the culture of the place and the moment.

This evolution is a story of responses; after Second World War people desired to take vacations, and the offer responded by creating easy-access and relatively cheap standardized services at "traditional" destinations for the home-comfort of tourists at sea, sun & sand places, being this response the rise of mass tourism. In response to this phony, alienated, simulacra and meaningless kind of vacation, inquisitiveness awoke amongst tourists and looked for something authentic, not artificial or man-created, usually pursuing cultures and societies which were "purer" than their owns, always departing from the upset at home country/city. The offer responded by appearing in lots of exotic places, in remote spectacular landscapes where unexpected warm places, interpreting cultural heritage and selling differentiated services. But, especially, "authentic" experiences were sold; cultures, rituals, local particularities, regional characteristics, historical characters... all was commodified to be sold, some caricaturized, some adopted from neighbouring and different regions; "paella" is not from Galicia and "sevillanas" are not from Madrid, but those products were adopted in exogenous touristic destinations after a process of "negotiation".

Tucker (2001), instead of "responses", uses the terminology "negotiation" to express the process in which offer and demand invisibly agrees about the products and services to be sold and delivered, negotiating both the "traditional" identity of locals (in presence of tourists) and the kind of quest and experiences that tourists are pursuing. This, in fact, implies that there is a constant and perpetual exchange of ideas, opinions, requests, improvisations and fulfilment of needs from the both sides. Therefore, from this perspective, there is not anymore one claimer (demand) and one respondent (offer), otherwise can be observed two proactive agents having an impact one on each other. In this line, the proper "respond" to the rise of the fourth generation of tourists (from the offer side) would be being likely and predisposed to negotiate the new

needs, starting by providing online services and trustful Internet infrastructures to the customers, as well as feeding social media about the virtues of their place. Adopting former and well-known terminology, tourists should be "pulled" to this services without being necessary to be "pushed" due to they hold this seeking inquisitiveness on their own.

Tucker's negotiation is a necessary procedure for all destinations in order to make their customers satisfied, but it is also a warning about the risk it implies, especially the fact that if it is excessive, generosity may lead to a loss of essence and thus attractiveness.

2.4.- GEOTOURISM: GEOGRAPHICALLY SUSTAINABLE TOURISM:

Since early 1960's awareness and recognition of the potential impacts of mass tourism were arisen amongst tourism industry and beyond, but was not till the 1990's that the **sustainable tourism** concept was born hand by hand with, and consequently to, the growing feeling of need to be sustainable as post-industrial societies (Swarbrooke, 1995).

All long those last decades, sustainability has become a focus for tourism, involving NGO's, enterprises, citizens and even governments and other national and supra-national institutions. Adopting an authority's source, sustainable tourism is defined by The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as *"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"* (quoted from UNEP & UNWTO, 2005; p.11-12).

Anyway, the concept have been defined by lots of institutions and authors and, being no one equal to other, there are close similarities amongst all of them; particularly, the difficulty to frame and limit the definition. In response, lots of new terms have appeared to embody the new tourism' trends based on the respect for the natural environment and the native society and economy: ecotourism, voluntourism, agrotourism, green, soft, and responsible tourism… are some of the abovementioned concepts collected by Juganaru, Juganaru & Anghel (2008).

One tourism tag has been considered by the author as the fittest for this project, which is Geotourism; nonetheless, two different viewpoints are hold by this tag, both within a sustainable tourism scheme, which are needed to be clarified (Wikipedia, 2016a):

    1.   From a genuinely Geological approach, the definition followed in most
           of the world; was defined by Hose as: "*The provision of interpretative facilities and*

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services to promote the value and social benefit of geological and geomorphological sites and their materials, and to ensure their conservation, for the use of students, tourists and other recreationalists" (Wikipedia, 2016a). And,

2.   From a more widely Geographical approach, and focused on the sense of a place in general, this banner was stated by the National Geographic Society on their aim of spreading its sustainable values and its managerial principles around the world for the profit of locals, tourists and the whole destination in general. The term Geographically Sustainable Tourism (G.S.T) can be used as a synonymous and is the variety of Geotourism adopted for this project.

The heading definition is simply stated as *"Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents"* (National Geographic Partners, 2016a). Nonetheless, it is complemented by being described as environmentally responsible, culturally responsible and synergistic. Here are the 13 defining principles considered in the Geotourism Charter:

> **1. Integrity of a Place:** Enhance the geographical character of the destination by developing and improving it in ways distinctive to the locale. Encourage market differentiation and cultural pride in ways that are reflective of natural and cultural heritage.

> **2. International Codes:** Adhere to the principles embodied in the World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and the principles of the Cultural Tourism Charter established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

> **3. Community Involvement:** Base tourism on community resources to the extent possible, encouraging local small businesses and civic groups to build partnerships to promote and provide a distinctive, honest visitor experience and market their locales effectively. Help businesses develop approaches to tourism that build on the area's nature, history, and culture, including food and drink, artisanship, performance arts, and the like.

> **4. Community Benefit:** Encourage micro- to medium-size enterprises and tourism business strategies that emphasize economic and social benefits to involved communities, especially poverty alleviation, with clear communication of the destination stewardship policies required to maintain those benefits.

> **5. Tourist Satisfaction:** Ensure that satisfied, excited geotravelers bring new vacation stories home and send friends off to experience the same thing, thus providing continuing demand for the destination.

6. Conservation of Resources: Encourage businesses to minimize water pollution, solid waste, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and overly bright nighttime lighting. Advertise these measures in a way that attracts the large, environmentally sympathetic tourist market.

7. Protection and Enhancement of Destination Appeal: Encourage the destination to sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, aesthetic appeal, and local culture. Prevent degradation by keeping the volume of tourists within maximum acceptable limits. Seek business models that can operate profitably within those limits. Use persuasion, incentives, and legal enforcement as needed.

8. Planning: Recognize and respect immediate economic need without sacrificing long-term character and the geotourism potential of the destination. Where tourism attracts in-migration of workers, develop new communities that themselves constitute a destination enhancement. Strive to diversify the economy and limit population influx to sustainable levels. Adopt public strategies for mitigating practices that are incompatible with geotourism and damaging to the image of the destination.

9. Land Use: Anticipate development pressures and apply techniques to prevent undesired overdevelopment and degradation. Contain resort and vacation-home sprawl, especially on coasts and islands, so as to retain a diversity of natural and scenic environments and ensure continued resident access to waterfronts. Encourage major self-contained tourism attractions, such as large-scale theme parks and convention centers unrelated to character of place, to be sited in needier locations with no significant ecological, scenic, or cultural assets.

10. Market Diversity: Encourage a full range of appropriate food and lodging facilities, so as to appeal to the entire demographic spectrum of the geotourism market and so maximize economic resiliency over both the short and long term.

11. Interactive Interpretation: Engage both visitors and hosts in learning about the place. Encourage residents to show off the natural and cultural heritage of their communities, so that tourists gain a richer experience and residents develop pride in their locales.

12. Market Selectivity: Encourage growth in tourism market segments most likely to appreciate, respect, and disseminate information about the distinctive assets of the locale.

13. Evaluation: Establish an evaluation process to be conducted on a regular basis by an independent panel representing all stakeholders' interests, and publicize evaluation results. (Quoted from National Geographic, Center for Sustainable Destinations (n.d.a)).

The emphasis on the sense of place, the aim of synergies' creation and the enhancement of the place's character, was a key aspect for the author when adopting G.S.T.'s principles, being the implementation of The Geotourism Charter a recommended step

for establishing and managing an Albergo Diffuso. The template can be downloaded and filled up by applying prospects such nations, provinces, states or smaller jurisdictions. Anyway, there are two of the thirteen which should not be considered for this kind of project since those hold a contrary sense: those are the number 9) Land use and 10) Market diversity. On one hand Albergo Diffuso shows a more respectful intention regarding land use and, on the other hand, it holds one of its strengths on restricting the diversity of products to the local ones.

(3)

MODEL PROPOSAL:

Considerations for establishing an Albergo Diffuso

This section is intended to -from literature reviewing- capture all considerations to be taken into account for the establishment of an Albergo Diffuso. Therefore, it will be tried to express a holistic perspective from a business approach regarding planning and management of the whole touristic project, not just about the hotel itself. However, should be pointed out that what is concluded here have been analysed through personal own glasses, so dysfunctions between this and another perspective would never imply exclusion or improperness.

Nonetheless, this is about drawing down the master lines, noting some crucial issues on the pursuit of creating an environmentally and community responsible, sustainable and synergistic touristic product which involves a whole immature destination. Consequently, there will be a wide range of topics to be addressed and, therefore, a simplistic but useful structure will be used by following the key questions.

WHERE and WHY

Since this model is considered to be applied aiming to revitalize little rural villages which have never been touristic destinations before, it cannot be applied wherever; thus, first of all should be stated some inclusive and discriminatory criteria, always aligned with the expected impact.

In this line, the model is not addressed to mature destinations neither to dynamic villages where currently can be found tourism or other/s economic activities which drive the wellbeing of the residents, neither in those villages that have been constantly renewed and show a modern appearance. Demographically, young residents need to relocate in order to get a job at least not related with farming, average age is higher every year and the number of births is few or none. Villages that are economically depressed, where subsistence economy is predominant and barely there is any trade. Target villages are those in a stagnation situation, decrepit, at some abandonment extent, with a great proportion of household's emptiness due to rural exodus and/or negative natural growth.

Those must look authentic and unaltered during a lot of years, or contrarily, where the former style has been preserved; it means narrow streets, stone flooring, ramps and stairs, few passable roads by mechanic means... Along this paper is used the terminology "thematization"; this should be understood as "enhancement" of iconic characteristics, as well as planting vegetation and flowers around the village (always in convenient flowerpots) in a coherent way, caring about the precedence of the chosen plants and their natural environments. On behalf of this coherence, it is not a bad idea to have one person (or team) that drives and frames the general style and states discriminatory criteria. These considerations should be also applied about in-home decoration; restoring old furniture, choosing place-related objects, paintings… always following a style in order to express a sense of place.

However, such isolation can become an asset if implies that there remains some well-preserved cultural heritage, comprising from ancient architecture to former productive procedures, performance of old traditions or being place of historical events. In addition, natural environment must be attractive, peculiar or biologically/geologically interesting. Summing up, it is mandatory that at least one cultural asset is hold in the village on which will be sustained all the afterwards "thematization"; at least, one cultural reason or argument on which the rest will pivot around.

Under those considerations of the WHERE, it is easy to deduce the WHY; simply, turning over the economic and social undesirable conditions in order to revitalize and invigorate the life in those villages and preserve them. Being in those circumstances intrinsically implies that heritage, culture and assets have not been exploited, so paradoxically this is the best outset to begin touristic activity and being it driven by sustainability and consciousness. This chance is similar to the opportunities faced by developing countries, but in a more convenient political and economic context.

WHO

Once having a "where" and after being sure that it is fitting, a closely linked variable must be considered: the "who". Depending on the answer the rest can be altered significantly, being two the main possibilities: on one hand the project can be engaged by locals by themselves or on the other it could be brought by a translocal (a third possibility, a foreigner capitalist, is excluded due to that in order to engage a business

so much linked to the place it is necessary to hold any linkage or feeling for such place). In both assumptions there are some common points and others may vary slightly, but what is mandatory is that there must be a leadership (personified or collaborative), as well as that consensus must be met regarding the establishment of an Albergo Diffuso in the village, thus it literally, physically involve the whole village. Regardless the involvement degree of each resident (even none), a great majority should agree with, accept the running of the project. If not, it would be unfair on the basis of considering that a village and its culture is property of all its residents, and undoubtedly both will be affected by foreigners and tourism activity. Apart of this, such a consensus is needed to provide the experience of familiarity and feeling-at-home that tourists are pursuing. Anyway, Albergo Diffuso works in lowering those negative impacts of being invaded by foreigners (use of actual buildings and just few rooms are recommended) and Geotourism principles try to engage the entrepreneurship in order to create synergies.

Assuming that the project is engaged from inside by locals, the most probable case is under the form of a cooperative society rather than one local starter (considering the investment and managerial capacity), but anyway the premises considered in the paragraph above are still valid. From the cooperativity it is expected an easier alignment of all stakeholders interests, considering amongst them all the residents who does not want to be partners. A crucial issue that must be aware is that the leadership and management of such a project require some degree of formation and experience, something that could be missing in the targeted villages. In this case, also, one local starter could represent an ignition point for the beginning of tourism in the villages, but could never provide all services needed without engaging strong entrepreneur synergies amongst locals.

In the other assumption (that the project is brought to the village by a translocal/foreigner), agency problems are more probable to arise if communication and agreement are not strong and in both directions. In this case, are expected more entrepreneurship initiatives with which the central agent (Albergo Diffuso) should create synergies and even partnerships at some extent. This leadership should be completely aware about the current assets and the needs of the village and its locals, and take care of it as those were the owns.

Mandelli & La Rocca (2006: 14) conclude that "*The role of the network leader is more in terms of building opportunities for the entire network, than in the form of authority. The management of the network is more a matter of "cultural proposal" than of "organizational decision""*.

WHAT and HOW

What Albergo Diffuso proposes is turning over these undesirable circumstances of the village by taking advantage of, precisely, these circumstances by themselves: of being an antiquated society, of having about-half of houses unoccupied, of using obsolete procedures… What this paper, this project proposes is just a framed tool for further implementations, without going throughout to the detail but drawing the master lines due to every situation and every people that could be involved are particular and different.

This "tool" has been conceived thinking on the wellbeing of the place and the people, thus looking for minimizing the negative effects of tourism activity and maximizing the positive ones. It comes through the respect, the sustainability and the enhancement of the locality in order to lower the touristic environmental footprint and preserving the culture and tradition of the place. For this reason it looks suitable the adaptation of Geotourism principles, as well as joining a Geotourism Stewardship Council (National Geographic, Center for Sustainable Destinations, n.d.b) or, if it is absent, and the project's starter/s are capable, creating one (most probable case since nowadays the unique one in Europe is located at Western Balkans (National Geographic Partners, 2016b). Anyway, according to Bowman (2011), the acquisition of an external ecolabel (under payment) is considered practical usefulness and thus not recommended.

From my own standpoint, the success in the establishment of an Albergo Diffuso holds on a pair of abstract principles which are contrary to the business approach:

- **Non ambition and solidarity**: it goes in line with sustainability, whether regarding community or environment. An Albergo Diffuso should be born modest: considering the most probable starter's profile and the accommodation display, this concept permits an organic growth; starting with few rooms and amplifying the offer depending on capacity and availability. It has no sense to

start the activity with twenty rooms if it is not known if will be possible to deliver a good service neither to afford the investment; would be better to start with (let's say) 4 rooms and keep increasing this number according to demand and capacity. Thus, the impact on village is lower and more gradual, with an adaptation period for whole community. This low ambition degree permits the rest of locals to create adequate synergies and other necessary services in the village; in addition, it lowers the financial risk and eases the access to credit.

- **High quality experience, whatever the service**: probably, due to this model is thought for immature destinations, there are not high skilled people to deliver a quality service as we are used to in traditional destinations. However, leaving besides protocols, details and standardized procedures, the most important issue for travellers when staying in an Albergo Diffuso is the fact of feeling at home, of being treated as authentic home-guests instead of clients. On this pursue, attitude and intention are more valuable than formation and professional skills when delivering a personalized and warm service. Obviously, tourists are not likely to sacrifice conveniences, a minimum is necessary to attract customers and, as more quality is achieved, higher income segments would be reached (what should be an objective since the volume is low due to the number of rooms).

Another issue must be reminded: regional enhancement. Regionalism and locality must be a principle and a common denominator for all offered (gastronomy, products, handcraft, culture, heritage…), but always remarking the strengths and avoiding the weakness; for instance, if there is a large gastronomic tradition and poor heritage, be focused on one instead on another, and vice versa. Nonetheless, nowadays tourist is quite sybarite, so in case of holding poor gastronomy, would be recommended for restaurants and food offer to be more flexible and compliant in this regard. What would not be negotiable is the presence and preservation of traditional architecture and decoration in rooms and whole village, so it would diminish the particular environment and the sense of place.

Pursuing to reach all that have been stated above, it becomes mandatory the creation of strong networks with all stakeholders, from the possible business created by synergies to the information touristic office. The destination where an Albergo Diffuso is

established should be managed as a whole, being always aware of the impacts that one own action could have on other aspects of the destination and under the solidarity principle aforementioned. It becomes an issue of capital importance to have a clear and shared identity and vision for the whole destination, both based on the place itself and local people and tradition.

Should be kept in mind the profile of potential tourists, which are those considered as post-modern travellers and the Dall'Ara's third- and fourth-generation, who are expecting a warm, familiar, non-standard service not just in the hotel but also in whole destination; even it is said (Dall'Ara, 2015) that, additionally to the traditional hall or reception, distributed hospitality has a second external hall: the neighbourhood. Must be reminded their inquisitiveness for being in touch with the place and local communities, for learning about the culture, customs, the way of life… on their quest for authenticity, which should be driven in balance with their "augmented" needs of being permanently connected to Internet. In the same line, locals should not be afraid to take profit of synergies by creating innovative products based on nature and culture, without underestimating the active segments. Even though Albergo Diffuso is innovative by itself, this entrepreneur attitude should be maintained and expressed on all aspects of the network.

Lastly should be reminded the main characteristic of Albergo Diffuso, which is its particular display of "hotel that is not built"; apart from the fact that rooms are located in several living units at different distances one from another, those should be at a distance of no more than 200 or 300 meters from the central building (reception), and should be created representing a "symbolic relationship" with the place and the rest of homes (Dall'Ara, 2015; Russo et al., 2013).

WHEN

The optimal WHEN is parallel to the WHERE and the WHY; thus, the perfect moment is when local population face the need, hold the capacity and they are ready for starting this avenue.

Under this question, other issues can be considered regarding time, basically planning; unless the first initiatives appeared spontaneously, a good planning is mandatory for

success. Restoring buildings, finding suppliers, creating networks, developing an image, choosing selling channels … are key aspects for the success of a complex project such that. In this line it becomes evident again the need of a leadership and skilled participants/stakeholders. Obviously, it is not coherent to expect a mature and good-running business since the beginning, but would be convenient to be aware of several possible scenarios and be prepared for each one.

Anyway, whole project should be triggered from a territorial analysis on the basis of acknowledging all assets hold, its state and necessities of restoration, the intrinsic needs of natural environment and community and identifying strengths and weaknesses.

Can the Albergo Diffuso concept be extrapolated?

Albergo Diffuso is intrinsically linked to rural Italy; however, it does not imply that it cannot be applied abroad, in other countries, in different circumstances. Our model proposal is never discriminatory by place; it is focused on the basic characteristics that such place (and its community) should hold, but always reminding that the project must be moulded to the destination's capacities and necessities.

Some authors have studied the concept and proposed it to be implemented in other rural regions for its revitalization on a sustainable basis; Avram & Zarrilli (2012) proposed it for Girucuta de Sus (Romania) situated in the middle of a natural protected area, and Dropulic et al. (2012) for Motovun, an attractive historical hill-town in Croatia. Even though, other authors have studied Albergo Diffuso to demonstrate its capacity to be implemented abroad as a sustainable way of development, without concreting about the place; Sheehan & Presenza (2012) and Russo et al. (2013) are good examples.

The model proposal has also established similar criteria for further implementations, restricting especially on the WHERE. Some characteristics are pointed out such as the attractiveness of the natural environment, the village appearance and the depressed economic and social situation. However, those are common denominators of current Albergo Diffuso's, but indeed it does not imply that they are necessary. From my own standpoint, there are other considerations even more important for the success on

further establishments (understanding success as the fact of offering tourism in a sustainable way which minimize negative impacts and enhance the positive ones). Those are about community attitude, hospitality's philosophy and the intention to be respectful with the environment, the society and the heritage or other assets. In this line, Albergo Diffuso concept could be shifted from its rural environment to even urban emplacements. Such establishments could be positive also for city tourism, sharing the aim of giving the chance to tourists to live the local lifestyle and thus be considered as "temporary residents" instead of "visitors".

Obviously, the impact and the built atmosphere would not be the same than in little rural villages, but it could be adopted otherwise after the proper moulding. It could even lose the consideration of Albergo Diffuso as it is known, but its particular display and the intentions behind are a good outset point from which innovate on tourism, whatever the place and the circumstances.

(4)

CASE STUDY:

Santo Steffano di Sessanio

Although Albergo Diffuso's can be counted by dozens in Italy, there is a choice opted by some authors as an example for embodying the concept: this is the hill town of Santo Steffano di Sessanio (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012; Russo et al., 2013), concretely Sextantio Albergo Diffuso (Sextantio Ospitalità Diffusa Srl., 2016), about which it is even said that "*is unquestionably one of the most innovative and sophisticated examples of AD*" (Orlandini et al., 2014). Shined by its wonders, I decided to plan a short travel there in order to personally recollect on-site insights about the performance of such accommodations, the community's lifestyle, the tourists' behaviour, the village's environment and the region in general. Unfortunately, due to budget restriction, I could not stay in Sextantio, but I did in a near Bed&Breakfast "*La Bifora e Le Lune*" located within the old quarter too.

Santo Steffano is a little medieval village placed at 1250 meters in altitude within a broad protected area of the Apennines, the *Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga,* Province of L'Aquila, Abruzzo Region, Italy.

Although in the old quarter there are remaining many structures dating from XIth through XVth century, the first information about the emplacement is dated back from VIIIth and seems to be historically linked with the Roman Age (Abruzzo Up n'Down, 2013). Concurrently with the fall of the Empire, the fortification process was started through reinforcing and interconnecting home-structures comprising a protection wall in order to be defendable against bandits and barbarian invasions (IntoHistory, n.d.); the project was completed (previous purchase of the town) by Medici's Family in XVIth century when was built the iconic defence tower on the top of the hill as well as the fortified entrance portal. Under their governance, the golden age was arrived basing the economy on the sheep-breeding (and the famous transhumance through Apennines) and the wool production; this was considered a high quality product sold through Florence and, being the emplacement located on the road of commercial routes, the commerce became the main economic activity. The wealthy period was hold till the Unification of Italy, when the polemic privatization of pastures paralyzed the economy and led the village into poverty. Since then rural exodus and economic stagnation defined the town's (un)development till the tourism arrival. Already in this

new prosperous era, the catastrophe came: in 2009 all Abruzzo Region suffered a violent earthquake which destroyed some, and compromised the rest of old structures and architectural heritage (Donadio, R. & Povoledo, E., April 6, 2009). Focused in Santo Steffano, the two main heritage icons were collapsed: the famous landmark of The Medici's Tower and the Church of Madonna del Lago. Even more, most of the ancient structures of the old quarter were damaged and compromised, being the town still nowadays in a restoration process.

Being considered amongst The Most Beautiful Villages of Italy ("*I Borghi Piu Belli D'Italia*"), with a current population of 111 inhabitants (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT), 2016) after a (known) maximum of about-1500 pax in 1901 (Wikipedia, 2016b), and in the middle of an incredible nature environment, it was targeted by the Italian-Swedish entrepreneur Daniele Kihlgren for the establishment of the Sextantio Albergo Diffuso at 1999 (Popham, P., April 18, 2010). Actually, could be said that the entrepreneur was targeted by the village, due to his idea came after visiting this medieval nest of heritage and rural culture. Already in 1999 Kihlgren bought the first house in Santo Steffano and kept buying and restoring, some intended to the hotel, some for sale at high prices. By 2004, after an investment of €4'5m, when the hotel finally threw open its doors, Sextantio held few rooms and sold up to 285 room-nights; the amount kept increasing and in 2008 the number was up to 7300 room-nights (Popham, P., April 18, 2010). Nowadays it has "*29 unique and elegantly furnished rooms*" (Sextantio Ospitalità Diffusa Srl., 2016).

Being Sextantio the first, nowadays there are 12 accommodation businesses in the village, one the mentioned Albergo Diffuso and the rest are B&B and similar. Anyway, under different strictness degree, all of them are following the Sextantio model's stele regarding aesthetical coherence, region-based products, local-theme approach and sustainability principles. All of them are "hotels that are not built" through taking profit of former structures in the village and of the synergies ignited by the starter.

Created through this synergistic process, in the old quarter also can be found some other facilities as handicraft shops (offering basically regional agri-food products, local wool, and other hand-made souvenirs as a "worries-away" miniature kitchen's toolkit), an Information Office and a Museum about whole Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso, an ice-cream shop, a Bar (and tobacco store) in the main square, and a wine shop-bar. It should be said that, even all businesses are run under the same coherence, all of them are managed by different locals; the unique exceptions are the Sextantio's

complementary activities: apart from the accommodation, they hold four businesses more and a broad set of activities (Sextantio Ospitalità Diffusa Srl., 2016).

- *Locanda sotto gli Archi:* this is their restaurant open to everybody, offering regional and kilometre-zero food and receipts. We had the chance of taking dinner there: really warm treatment, old-fashioned furniture with minimal restoration (our table had a curved board and some protruding nails), candle's light, huge ceramic plates and glasses, and the dog walking around. At some moment during dinner, a waitress left to the terrace and took some leafs from an aromatic local herb ("*timo*") planted there; *"Chilometro zero!"* she exclaimed under our inquisitive gaze, and took another piece to show us while explaining its high-lands origin.

- *Cantinone:* using a domestic former "*Cantina*" (usually at the ground floor, a lock-closed room where to store the wine and the food for overcoming the harsh winters), this is an space for wine tasting and enjoying non-elaborated meals based on cheese, sausages, marinated vegetables and other traditional local simple dishes.

- *Tisaneria:* this is basically a cosy Tea-room where to taste regional herbs and enjoy other non-native healthy plants as well, always accompanied by hand-made cakes and bakery.

- *Bottega dell'Artigianato domestic:* this nice shop located at the main square sells from woollen yarns to wool cabbages or even wool garments. Anyway, the main attractive of the place is the great spinning frame located in the middle of the store and the show it represents to see the owner using it.

- Exclusive activities for Sextantio's customers: the Albergo Diffuso has also a great offer of activities as a way for tourists to learn firsthand about the traditions and the lifestyle of the region. One can live a day journey with a local shepherd, Mimì, and his sheep's flock around near pastures including a typical pastoral lunch. Regarding gastronomy, tourists can purchase for several kinds of cooking classes, bread or pastry making, as well as for a weaving course or soap making class. Additionally, the hotel can prepare picnic baskets with local products or offer a session in the wellness space.

Looking at Sextantio's offer, can be observed the clear intention to bring tourists closer to Santo Steffano's traditions and culture through leisure activities; this represents a

key value for the hotel and the unquestionable Albergo Diffuso's pursue of preserving local culture by respecting and enhancing it.

Santo Steffano di Sessanio breaths tradition and authenticity, its walls seems to explain tales from ancient ages and its people represent a former "slow pace" lifestyle hard to find in nowadays societies. Once there, becomes difficult to remember that it is a village intended to tourism; dogs, cats, locals and tourists, all together chilling out under a shadow, sitting on stairs, chairs, street benches or at the square's bar. Narrow streets, stone walls, abundant flowers and the environment itself seems to claim you just for taking relax, sitting anywhere or strolling around its labyrinthine alleys. Streets are thick of several flowers and vegetation, theme decoration and a lot of details everywhere; could be said that whole village is a broad set of nooks and crannies. For instance, poetry and poetic phrases can be found on boards, doors and benches, most of them claiming for respecting nature and living in harmony.

Yet on the curvy road, arriving to the village, it is possible to guess that there is dynamism in this place due to the six construction cranes that stress its landmark. Already on site, the endless of scaffolds and braced buildings set a doubt on me: is such dynamism according to the actual economic growth (i.e. increase of accommodation offer) or contrarily is it because of the 09' earthquake which led them to the obligation to restore most of structures? Or perhaps are both the reasons behind? Probably the latter is the correct answer reminding the characteristic organic growth of this kind of destinations, growing at a sustainable pace according to the balance between capacity and necessity.

The whole village is fully intended to tourism, even remaining primary economic activity does. At the current moment, international tourism is a minority on behalf of a domestic customers' basis focused on city-breakers, rest & relax tourists and nature/active segments. However its location relatively close to great cities as L'Aquila, Pescara and even Rome has favoured these more or less stable and loyal domestic segments, the promotion of the concept Albergo Diffuso through national and international media (special mention to National Geographic, Murphy (2011)) has begun to bring different kinds of segments regarding heritage, culture and history; these tourists use to be defined by being high qualified, inquisitive, curious, aiming to learn firsthand about the place they are visiting, about people, history and cultural divergences.

Under the defining regional principle, Santo Steffano's restaurant menus are restricted to traditional cuisine which, must be said, is quite poor. Regarding product, its quality is undoubtable, but the available spectrum is considerably tight and the elaboration (excluding bakery) is limited to very simple techniques.

Anyway, this gastronomic poorness is part of Santo Steffano's history, culture and tradition, and works on enhancing the expression of authenticity; former locals of the village led their lives around gathering food enough to maintain the family and be able to overcome the harsh winters. Such are the historical conditions that bring societies' differences and define the societies of future.

Gastronomy, however, is not the unique expression of this authenticity; whole village seems to be tied to the past. For instance, in Santo Steffano can be observed the former tradition in little villages of leaving the keys in the out-door lock to announce visitors that in this moment there is nobody at home. Bicycles, toys, tables and chairs, tools, everything is suggestible to be left on the street with the certainty that nothing will be stolen; not by residents, nor visitors. The success for observing this behavior on both sides lies on the shift from "tourists" to "guests", or even "temporary residents"; the philosophy of Albergo Diffuso's hospitality permits and gives cause on offer and demand for feeling this different consideration, which diverges from the feeling at most of "traditional" destinations.

(5)

METHODOLOGY

The paper's aim to provide the "big picture" and an in-depth description of Albergo Diffuso phenomenon encourages using qualitative methodology. This approach is sustained on the inspiration from Strauss & Corbin's (1990) grounded theory guideline "Basics of qualitative research" and following the useful resumed considerations stated by the California State University Long Beach (CSULB, n.d), "Data Collection Strategies II: Qualitative Research".

First of all a qualitative exploratory research have been run in order to gain an understanding of underlying knowledge about the concept Albergo Diffuso. From the paper's aim, through the literature review, the participant observation was planned for data collection to be applied on two differentiated tools provided by Ashley & Mitchell (2010) "Tourism and Poverty Reduction: Pathways to Prosperity", and Ap & Crompton (1998) "Developing and Testing a Tourism Impact Scale". Therefore, once on-site, data was systematically recorded considering general meaningful insights and focusing on the items provided by Ap and Crompton. These observations were in line of analysing the impacts produced by tourism (offer and demand) on the destination since the establishment of Sextantio Albergo Diffuso towards today; undoubtedly, when building grounded theory, there is an important component of subjectivity on figuring out the causes and consequences of such impacts. However, those are tried to be lied on the theory review, as well as every affective consideration is filtered using "sustainability glasses" and its values (concretely, the adopted approach of Geographically Sustainable Tourism). At each sub-section analysis there is considered further information about the methodology applied in each case.

Through the analysis of the Self and the Others, running the role of observer-participant (more than participant-observer in order to avoid misunderstanding due to language restrictions) for the construction of the model proposal as well as for the description of the case study and the driving of the analysis, it implied that the empirical material recollected is showing insights from the mere observation but also from my background, life history, personal experience and historical baggage. Also, great part of the abstracts and own opinions have been contrasted with colleges, friends and familiars, taking profit from both qualified and not-qualified perspectives.

Anyway this characteristic is part of qualitative analysis, but it is stated along the paper when information is non-validated.

Indeed, those subjective components bring a validity trouble but, from my own standpoint, feelings, impressions and sensations are key issues when describing in-depth a concrete event, even more when social behaviour (on tourists and on locals) is intrinsic, central and transversal along the paper.

(6)

ANALYSIS:

Threshing Albergo Diffuso's impacts

After learning in-depth about the whole concept of Albergo Diffuso and some of its closely related topics, as well as identifying the main considerations for successful further implementations, and pointing out some of its impacts on destination, this section is intended to qualitatively analyse "How" those effects are reached by leaving apart the quantitative "How much". The interest is focused on explaining the argumentation behind one positive or negative impact; threshing Albergo Diffuso's impacts for the revitalization of the place on the basis of the case study Santo Steffano.

On this pursue are used two different tools provided by, on one hand, Ashley & Mitchell (2010) and, on the other, Ap & Crompton (1998); the former drives a large discussion about the ways for reducing poverty through tourism exploitation, and the latter develops and tests a methodological scale for measuring perceived impacts of tourism.

"Three Pathways to Prosperity":

Mitchell & Ashley (2010) draw down three differentiated pathways for figuring out how several case-sensitive variables affect the final output, especially on the economic sense and focusing on the poor communities in Third World. These pathways are: 1) Direct effects of tourism on the poor, 2) Secondary effects (indirect and induced) of tourism on poor, and 3) Dynamic effects in the economy and growth trajectories. This framed tool will be approached on Santo Steffano's case through the perspective suggested by the authors.

1ST PATHWAY: DIRECT EFFECTS

This direct pathway is defined by the straight direction of foreign resources from tourism to poor households through suppliers (considering hotels, restaurants and B&B); under an economic approach, should be considered Labour income, Non-labour income and Non-financial impacts on livelihoods.

Labour income comprises both wages and self-employment, and it is the straightest impact for Santo Steffano: most of residents work nowadays in the service sector, which is basically intended to tourism. Due to synergies ignited by Sextantio, villagers have been able to take profit of the direct source of income that tourists are, through providing complementary accommodation or establishing craft or agri-food stores. This effect is enhanced by the preference for local recruitment, at least regional, but foreigners are not a choice under the Albergo Diffuso's aim of enhancing locality; therefore the community's welfare mostly origins by improving the welfare in each household.

Mitchell & Ashley (2010) highlight a pair of threats that are missing in our case study; firstly, they state: *"The key comparison when assessing tourism wages is how these compare with the opportunity cost of labour – or what other kind of jobs would be available should workers leave the touristic sector."* (p. 38). Secondly: *"The key idea is that the more time and money tourists spend outside resorts, the greater the opportunities for MSEs to respond to this demand."* (p. 46). Santo Steffano, as an Albergo Diffuso destination, holds the circumstance that, before its establishment, working opportunities were none in the village except following the family's activity of farming or stockbreeding. Additionally, the shared aim of preserving the village essence has blocked the possibility of resorts in the area, even more being located in a natural protected zone.

Non-labour income lies hidden behind the strength of labour income, but it is present and important to keep the dynamism in the village; locals have taken great efforts for restoring their properties and running businesses there, but apart from the global streets' appearance, there is remaining public heritage which represents a good motivation for some segments, some ancient monuments which need for caring and (after 09' quake) also restoration. Through tourism activity local public sector has been seen benefited too, increasing tax recollection and, consequently, improving financial power to maintain village's attractiveness and preserve heritage, infrastructures and environment.

Regarding Non-financial impacts on livelihoods, must be considered all direct impacts which do not represent an income, but better conditions for locals' livelihood. In Santo Steffano can be identified an improvement of infrastructures and services: since locally there is not healthcare or police and fire services, renewed roads and new communication channels connecting neighbouring villages represent a great improvement for residents' life, especially during harsh winters.

In this last classification could be confusions and overlaps with the dynamics effects, therefore a wider explanation is developed there since, from my own standpoint, I consider that most of the Non-financial impacts attached as direct by Ashley and Mitchell (at local level) are more about consequences at the background.

2ND PATHWAY: INDIRECT AND INDUCED EFFECTS

The second pathway expresses the secondary benefit flows by indirect effects (defined through inter-sectorial linkages in the supply chains) and induced effects (represented by the re-spending of tourism wages in any local sector).

Within Santo Steffano, practically all residents who do not work in the touristic sector hold their livelihood on crafting, farming and stockbreeding; for them, the main selling channel is the touristic sector of the village by offering the wanted regional kilometre-zero goods and products.

Nonetheless at most of capital-intensive destinations usually the indirect effects become highly important for a fairer distribution of income to the poor (even more than direct ones), these are not the circumstances in Santo Steffano. Mitchell & Ashley (2010) forecast that *"Indirect effects are more muted in destinations where there are very significant direct pro-poor impacts"* (p. 72), situation that is observed in our case study.

Regarding induced effects, those are lowered by the village's offer composition intended to tourism; locals spend a few proportion of their income in Santo Steffano, they are pushed to purchase the most of diary life necessities (goods and services) in neighbouring towns as Barisciano, Calascio or Castel del Monte, provoking induced effects not locally but regionally. Anyway, there are some more specific goods and services that should be found at the province capital, L'Aquila (roughly 30 Km away).

3RD PATHWAT: DYNAMIC EFFECTS

Dynamic effects are all those long-term structural changes caused not only by the establishment of the Albergo Diffuso, but also by its management on time and the consequent destination's responses. At this step, Ashley and Mitchell focus on macro-economic variables through which analyse the possible risks; for instance, considering any Third World country, how an increase of tourism can show economic growth on GDP but, behind, it means an increase of exportations, thus an appreciation of the local currency, and consequently the loss of purchasing power of rural poor communities.

Remembering that Santo Steffano's population (in the European member state Italy) is about 111 inhabitants, it seems logical that such effects cannot be observed there. However, hand by hand with the impacts mentioned in the above sub-sections, can be observed that in about fifteen years the economic structure of the village have shifted from the primary sector based on farming, stockbreeding and subsistence economy to the tertiary sector focused on tourism. The good point is that, due to the nature of the project, this change has not represented a trauma for the destination; tourism activity conquered Santo Steffano, but did so through preserving and enhancing its local culture and traditional economic activity smoothing in this way the most of perceived negative impacts of tourism on community.

The diversification that tourism brought has lowered pressure on grazing lands and the competitiveness for them; now shepherds are able to enlarge their flocks and easily sell their products to touristic businesses of the village, probably at a higher price than ever. Agricultural sector has also found a direct selling channel which does not imply transport costs neither the supply chain leakages; therefore, more income remains in the village, being a part of it for restoring buildings and improving village's appearance. Moving on another issue, is remarkable the use of traditional domestic and non-labour activities for taking a profit through craftsmanship; knitting, spinning and canned food home-making have become now suitable touristic products instead of subsistence activities, through both selling finished products and teaching traditional procedures.

Nevertheless, as stated in Non-financial impacts in the Direct effects, Ashley and Mitchell draw down some other non-economic effects that tourism could provoke on poor destinations and communities; directly or not is a perception issue. First of all, must be remembered the already-mentioned improvement of infrastructures and access to public services. Regarding community's capacities, the workforce was defined by traditional knowledge and unskilled individuals, but now (whilst informally and not perfectly) locals have acquired languages and other services skills on restauration service and contemporary ICT-based business management, skills that could be applied on other sectors if needed. Anyway, the success is mostly hold on the preservation of the rural-Italy traditional home-hospitality, an "inherent" characteristic defined by their historical baggage.

Additionally, must be said that the establishment of the Albergo Diffuso provided the chance (and the obligation) for land planning and resources management, which led to

a sustainable management of the destination since the very beginning at private and public level. This outset has permitted to avoid environmental threats and tourism negative impacts on nature.

Nonetheless, other negative impacts are also identified, but only under a warning form (by the moment): on one hand, there is the risk of being dependable of tourism; being the village fully intended to tourism, this becomes the key for their livelihood which thus must be carefully planned and performed in order to avoid the fall down that the end of the activity would represent. On the other hand, there is the possibility of intra-community tensions; obviously, since the project is highly capitalist and not community-based, touristic both positive and negative impacts are not perfectly distributed amongst population, circumstances that could be arising envies and conflicts. For this reason, our model proposal claims for the avoidance of ambition and the democratic agreement on the establishment of such a project.

Finally, should be highlighted that, due to the limited current economic structure, the establishment of the Albergo Diffuso in Santo Steffano (and the consequent flourish touristic activity) has spread the positive impacts of tourism around the region by using services and purchasing necessary products of neighbouring bigger towns, as well as performing as a platform for tourists to reach those immature destinations too.

"Ap & Crompton's Perceived Tourism Impact Scale":

The second tool provided by Ap & Crompton (1998) will be shifted from its quantitative nature to a qualitative approach as a discussion's basis for analysing the impacts of Sextantio Albergo Diffuso based on first-hand observation and through sustainability glasses.

Abridging their methodology in developing the scale, first of all they identified a comprehensive list of 147 items by literature reviewing and from 38 personal interviews in order to be confident that all possible dimensions were captured in the initial item pool. After item wording, pretesting, and purifying the scale, it was judged to have content validity. The dimensional distinctiveness and stability was confirmed by a factor analysis, and the instrument was proved to show acceptable levels of internal consistency and relatively high convergent validity. Pursuing for an instrument to be globally applicable, the final output of 35-items scale was tested in

three destinations facing diversity of host and visitor populations, size, kind of attractions, and impacts.

The differential point of this scale holds on item wording, which tries to be neutral instead of a positive or negative statement (i.e. "Live and vitality of the community"), which implies a different approach for its evaluation. Therefore, those are applied to an index resulting from the multiplication of two components asked on a 1-to-5 Linkert-type rating scale: a belief component (asking for the level of change associated with each item; 1="large decrease", 5="large increase", 0="Don't know") and an evaluation component (asking the level of liking or disliking regarding each item; 1="dislike", 5="like"). In this line, on the quest for perceived impacts, the instrument tries to avoid ambiguity on responses; maybe a respondent observes an increase on "Live and vitality of the community" (rating 5) but such increase is not considered positive by him/her (rating 1).

This instrument was thought to be delivered amongst residents under a survey format, but for this paper it is approached differently; it have been used to frame the data collection pursuing to provide a qualitative argumentation for each of the 35 variables based on the personal observation to answer the belief component (level of change from before tourism arrival in Santo Steffano towards today), to be complemented with a subsequent affective analysis through sustainability principles.

Therefore, the analysis develops from a qualitative argumentation for each variable (Figure 2) to a summarizing output table (Figure 3) considering the consequent ratings.

Figure 2: Qualitative treatment of each 35 variables of the scale:

(*Source: own elaboration.)

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION
1) Demand for historical activities and programs: it has increased but smoothly; apart from the regional museum and the war memorial on the church wall, along the village is not possible to find historical references, such as related with the iconic monuments built by Medici's Family, the Fascism age or the demographic evolution. Through sustainability principles, it is a gap on approaching tourists to the place.
2) Demand for cultural activities and programs: it has increased largely, being offered all kind of activities regarding the traditional procedures on crafting and livelihood, as well as connection with the natural environment. Maybe could be missing references to the religion linkages, but considering that the greatest is the domestic segment (from bigger cities) it makes sense that the offer is focused on rural tradition. Geotourism valuates it positively.

3) Variety of cultural facilities and activities in the community: linked to the previous variable, cultural activities have increased in number and diversity, but facilities are still few apart from the museum. Undoubtedly, signal and informational posting would erase the medieval appearance and thus its attractiveness, but relating this issue with the tourists' profile would be interesting and clearly enough the building of a specialized informational webpage supported by Internet connection infrastructure.

4) Opportunities to learn about other people and cultures: Santo Steffano's community is always predisposed to engage a talk and fulfil tourists' curiosity about customs, tradition or what else more. Indirectly, their lifestyle is a good learning source for people coming from large cities who (adopting former terminology) "live for working" instead of "work for living". Probably this contact intention is higher nowadays than before the tourism arrival, due to that (as seen in Rural Tourism literature review) rural "Short distance societies" have shift to "Open societies". The residents' proximity and the sharing of the peculiar culture is good for preserving them and maintain the special atmosphere of the village and its residents. Perhaps a discriminatory issue could be the low variety of cultures.

5) Awareness/recognition of the local culture and heritage: this variable has undoubtedly increased, being a meaningful example the consideration of Santo Steffano in the travel guide "I Borghi Piu Belli D'Italia". This impact is considered positive by sustainable principles, but if and only if this does not represent a crowding and carrying capacity trouble. Nowadays, it is not the case.

6) Variety of entertainment in the area: now, contrary to before tourism arrival, it is possible to find bars where to taste regional products, field excursions and hiking trips, the annual village festival and other events scheduled during the year, and cooking and handcrafting classes. Although there is not a wide variety and more innovation would be better, this topic-focused offer is well valuated by Geotourism; introducing exogenous and strange activities would imply lowering its authenticity and sense of place. Negotiation process should keep moving on, but always framed as it is today.

7) Opportunities to restore and protect historical structures: those opportunities have appeared and have been taken, so opportunities keep appearing nowadays. Construction and restoration dynamism can be observed in the village, as well as several "On sale" posters all around. Apart from the private initiative, the public sector is also on this pursuing by restoring iconic monuments and infrastructures. Those initiative are sustainably good under the considerations of aesthetical coherence and (in depth) preservation of old building procedures and raw materials.

8) Opportunities to meet interesting people: as stated before, the peculiar (or at least different) lifestyle of villagers permits tourists to meet people with interesting life-perspectives. Even more, it is said that some artists (few quite famous) have a second residence in the village, what could be interpreted as such an opportunity to meet interesting people by some. On the other side, as discovered in the literature review, this kind of places attracts high qualified tourists with interest on heritage and history, so the opportunities keep increasing. The presence of these "interesting" people (the consideration depends on the own preferences) is valuated positively by sustainability since they perform a respectful kind of tourism regarding environment and social dimension.

9) Understanding of different people and cultures by residents: again sustained on the shift from "Short Distance Society" to "Open Society", the residents' background in the tourism business has let them be in touch with several kinds of people and cultures, bringing logically a better understanding of their customers. Anyway, differently than in "traditional" destinations, in Santo Steffano are mostly visitors who change their behaviour once at place, being themselves adapted to the context. This bias, jointly with the language restriction, seems to be lowering the impact, fact that from the Geotourism perspective is positive for preserving the culture and the authenticity.

10) Live and vitality of the community: the increase on this variable is probably the clearest of the whole dimension, due to before the Albergo Diffuso establishment (and the consequent tourism arrival) the village was depressed, stagnated in both economic and therefore social sense. Nowadays locals have jobs and motivations, children are playing in the street, young families are growing and lots of informal meetings can be found in squares and thresholds. The clear increase of this variable is the main indicator that the village have been revitalized through tourism. Since this is the Geotourism's reason to be, must be valuated positively. May be noticed that an exacerbated dynamism would be counteracting the positive done before.

ECONOMIC DIMENSION

11) Revenue generated in the local economy: this variable is probably the cause of some of the other social and economic variables. There is a clear increase, nonetheless should be reminded that the outset situation was so depressed that a decrease was difficult to figure out. The increase is clearly positive, even more since the more income is re-invested in assets to keep increasing, but always framed to the place's sustainability; Albergo Diffuso concept leads to this organic growth that permits to keep considering the revenue generated as sustainable.

12) Number of jobs in the community: understanding "job" as any self-employment business and any working position linked to a contract (excluding out-the-law jobs), this variable has largely increased since, before tourism, there was an important subsistence economy. Although not at the same extent, the number of people working has also increased, being a part of it imported from neighbouring towns. Could be said that everybody from Santo Steffano can have a job if it is desired, and if the person is available (considerable rate of seniors). The jobs' amount is slightly seasonal sensitive. This variable is closely related to the two previous ones, due to that the fact of working every day brings live into the village and that employers are capable to increase job positions when revenue increases.

13) Personal income of local residents: this variable is consequently related with the two previous, and has a lot to do regarding some others. This is the key indicator of the (fair) economic growth of the village and, therefore, the welfare of its residents. Should be remarked again the importance of the distribution of the total income, because at place can be observed a considerable number of persons in retirement age; however everybody have been benefited indirectly, the capitalist form of this Albergo Diffuso case leads to an irregular distribution of income. Actually, could be that some retirees have lost purchasing power due to the in-village increase of prices; however, it could be counteracted by property selling (at high prices) or renting. Excluding those possible exceptions, the increase on personal income is considered positively by Geotourism on its aim to revitalize destinations, but the warning point erases the maximum punctuation.

14) Amount of income going to local businesses: since roughly local businesses could be equated to local residents, and that all businesses are intended to tourism, the amount of income going to local businesses is the whole amount recollected. Excluding precisely the Sextanto Albergo Diffuso, the rest of businesses are family-run and all revenue remains in the villages. Sextantio, contrarily, has a higher capital and equity which is hold by foreign shareholders. Anyway, its workforce and suppliers are local or regional, thus also a great part of its revenue remains in the village too. Local/regional products and in-site synergies' creation are key values for Geotourism, so must be positively rated.

15) Variety of shopping facilities in the area: must be said that the variety of shopping facilities (understanding variety as both amount and diversity) is pretty low but, answering strictly, this have clearly increased after the Albergo Diffuso establishment due to that, accordingly with the former economic structure, exchange and informal purchases were regular. However, the fact of facing a low variety is seen as positive by Geotourism through avoiding excess of offer and exogenous products.

16) Investment and development spending in the area: this variable has clearly increased, it is enough a superficial gaze to notice so, but under Geotourism perspective it becomes necessary to know from who/where those investments are brought. Tourism came to Santo Steffano after a foreign investment, when Daniel Kilhgren purchased some buildings to develop Sextantio there. Sustainable principles are against the invasion of outsider's capitals; this fact leads to an unfair distribution of income which, even more, provokes leakage's flows outside the locality depressing thus synergies and development. Anyway, most of development spending came from the region itself (comprising local and supra-local public sectors, especially after 09' earthquake) and its people by reinvesting revenues. Therefore, the restriction (whether imposed or not) of foreign capitals has permitted the characteristic organic growth that has been largely beneficial for the village's development and its inhabitants; economic development has gone hand by hand with social development, thus affective valuation must be positive.

17) Variety of restaurants in the area: again, understanding variety as both the amount and the diversity, this variable has increased. Up to five restaurants can be found in the old quarter, and a pair more at the surroundings; all those in the historic center are ruled by the Albergo Diffuso's stele, offering only the same traditional regional dishes, so the diversity is pretty low (even more considering the poorness of the region's gastronomy). One is pushed to go at the surroundings to eat a pizza or fried chips with the steak. Thus, this variable has slightly increased, but this restriction on diversity is positively valuated by Geotourism.

CROWDING AND CONGESTION DIMENSION

18) Level of traffic congestion in the area: the only mean to reach the village (apart from walking) is by car, thus the amount of cars has clearly increased in the zone. Anyway, this increase is only reflected on the surrounding parking areas, due to just few streets are transport accessible and are used only by residents and businesses under necessity to. Parking areas are unavoidable, but in our case study have been well managed, for this reason the affective component is neutral.

19) Size of crowds that restrict what activities do in public areas: the amount of people on the streets have undoubtedly increased, being a great difference between weekend days and weekdays, but not enough to reach the consideration of "crowds". Again, the organic growth defined for using only current buildings becomes the perfect tool for controlling the carrying capacity of the village. Being this respected, it is not possible to finds crowds that could restrict locals' activities; even during the village's annual festivities, the tight square was more than sufficient to embrace all the spectators. Therefore, unless the "size of crowds" has increased, the increment is low enough to be valuated positively by Geotourism, because if there is not this limited increase there is not choice for the village to be revitalized.

20) Size of crowds that affect your enjoyment of activities in public areas: the reasoning behind this variable is exactly the same than the previous one, even more; the small increase of spectators brings more dynamism and makes activities more enjoyable.

21) Noise level in the community: this variable is difficult to analyse since it is hard to figure out how much noise there was before tourism. Anyway, after staying there, I can assure that the ones who increased the noise level in the village were the villagers themselves and that it never became annoying. However, lying on the uncertainty, both belief and evaluation components are valuated neutrally.

22) Number of driving hazards created by tourists: first of all, in-village roads are not accessible. Regarding the connecting network, those high-mountain roads were in good state and never crowded; could be supposed that, like in everywhere, sometimes there are accidents, but the context does not seems to indicate that the increase of tourists imply an increase on driving hazards. Therefore, it is considered that there have been no change, and it is positively valuated by Geotourism due to this no-change has not brought distortions on environment and community.

ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

23) Natural environment: actually I do not know exactly how to interpret an increase or a decrease on natural environment, instead of its welfare. Anyway, answering logically, I suppose it is a surface issue. In this line, the natural area is practically the same on the basis of using current buildings instead of erecting new ones. Thus, it must be considered positively by Geotourism since it has not represented a reduction of the natural environment.

24) Wildlife (plants, birds, and animals) in the local area: fortunately, this issue has been well managed since the instauration of the National Park which dates from as largely before as ten years than the tourism arrival in Santo Steffano. There, tourists are respectful with flora and fauna, and even could be that this special caring brings an extra protection degree than when the zone was basically exploited by locals. Anyway, a neutral belief component is stated. Regarding the evaluative component, considering that the previous state of wildlife was good, the no change should be valuated positively.

25) Quality of natural environment: in line with the two previous variables, natural environment has been highly respected. In this case, but, I dare to say that the quality of it has increased, basically because the former economic structure was highly land-based and now this pressure has been lowered. Undoubtedly, this shift on the livelihood mean, and the consequent impact on the environment, is positive from the Geotourism perspective.

26) Level of urbanization (city-type development) in the area: urbanization has not been spread in surface terms, but has increased considerably in the old quarter; before tourism, a great part of buildings were empty, abandoned and in ruins. Albergo Diffuso brought the opportunity to restore them and take a profit from. Unless it will be considered as a increase, this increase should (paradoxically) be considered positive by Geotourism, due to it becomes more important the type of urbanization than the fact itself; this increase has been respectful with environment and community, "organic", not detrimental in any sense.

SERVICES DIMENSION

27) Physical ability of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities): these were not, and still are not found in the village. Unless now the coverage is better, locals still need to move to neighbouring towns for some services. It seems clearly not positive but, thinking deeper, holding these services in the village would represent some important costs as well as the necessity to erect new buildings in this pursue. Therefore, it is not a positive fact, but neither negative for the destination.

28) Quality of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities): considering not local but regional services, intuitively its quality has increased in terms of available means and coverage. Additionally should be pointed out that the main tourist's profiles are not highly healthcare consumers as in others beach & party destinations. Geotourism, worrying about locals' welfare, considers this improvement clearly positive although it could be better.

29) Financial resources of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities): I definitively do not hold the necessary data to answer for this variable. Intuitively, an improvement of the regional services' quality seems to indicate an increase on financial resources; however, thinking on the global financial crisis, it is well known that public budgets have been constrained. Due to the remaining uncertainty, the belief component will be rated with 0="Don't know", and the affective neutrally.

TAXES DIMENSION

30) Amount of local taxes collected: as mentioned in the analysis of the economic dimension, the arrival of foreign incomes and the flourishing of local businesses have brought a clear (and probably very considerable) increase on taxes collection. This must be considered positive through sustainable principles, even more if afterwards this increase of available income is rightly re-invested for the welfare of the village and its inhabitants.

31) Amount of local property taxes collected: from the public sector perspective, the increase of occupied households directly implies an increase on the amount of local property taxes collection. Apart from these living households' incomes, there is the pertinent tax collection from local businesses. As mentioned previously (due to that both last variables are closely related), this increase on the total amount of taxes collected jointly with its re-investing use, are positive through Geotourism.

32) Amount of local sales taxes collected: due to that the tourism arrival brought the fulfilling of households for both living and business purposes, the increase on the revenue collected by local businesses, and a tourism-intended economic structure, all variables regarding tax recollection are closely inter-related. This variable, thus, gets the same rate than the previous two.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDE DIMENSION

33) Positive attitudes of local residents toward tourists: villagers, at the proper moment, decided to take profit from the synergies created by Sextantio, although the spectrum of choices was not that wide. As seen till now, it has changed their lives into better conditions, into a softer livelihood mean. For this reason, additionally to the fact that they know such a positive attitude is necessary for keeping in this way of attractive touristic product, they keep treating tourists as guests instead of visitors; it can be observed at any moment and any place of the village. As a rural society, it may represent an effort at the very beginning, but they have already adopted this sympathetic and warm attitude towards tourists. In this line, it has been a key the fact that social carrying capacity has been always respected (related with the organic growth and the care of the physical carrying capacity). Such increase on the positive attitude is greatly valuated by Geotourism, due to it is a key indicator that tourism has been developed being environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

34) Community spirit among local residents: rural life has always been represented by ancestral families' conflicts, but also by the strong community spirit during bad times. The adaptation of tourism under its ferociously capitalist form may have diminished this spirit; as commented in the analysis of dynamic effects, tensions and conflicts could be arisen among locals. Honestly, such troubles are not evident at the tourist gaze, but it is expected from such conflicts to remain hidden as personal problems. Undoubtedly, Geotourism would opt preferably for collaborative and community-based forms.

35) Pride of local residents: once in Santo Steffano, just hearing locals talking about their place is enough to know that they are pride of it. If more or less than before the tourism arrival, it is not easy to say. However, they are people, and human nature make oneself to feel pride of the own especially when outsiders greatly valuate it. Writers, painters, students, researchers... everybody use to be pride of the own work, but it is emphasized when others tell that there are reasons to be pride of it. In line with this reasoning, I will dare to rate an increase on the pride of local residents. From the Geotourism perspective it is positive since a pride host feeling the guests' respect becomes a better host.

Every argumentation has led to the consequent ratings in the Figure 3. Additionally, there is calculated the Index results from the multiplication of both components, belief and affective. Due to its form, punctuations fluctuate from a minimum of 1, to a

maximum of 25. Should be pointed out that variable 29) have been the only one rated with DK="Don't know", thus it is excluded for further analysis.

Figure 3: Perceived impact scale and outputs after analysis

DIMENSION	ITEMS	Level of change	Level of liking/ disliking	Index results
Social and cultural	1) Demand for historical activities and programs	3	2	6
	2) Demand for cultural activities and programs	5	5	25
	3) Variety of cultural facilities and activities in the community	4	4	16
	4) Opportunities to learn about other people and cultures	4	5	20
	5) Awareness/recognition of the local culture and heritage	5	5	25
	6) Variety of entertainment in the area	4	5	20
	7) Opportunities to restore and protect historical structures	5	5	25
	8) Opportunities to meet interesting people	5	5	25
	9) Understanding of different people and cultures by residents	4	5	20
	10) Live and vitality of the community	5	5	25
Economic	11) Revenue generated in the local economy	5	5	25
	12) Number of jobs in the community	5	5	25
	13) Personal income of local residents	5	4	20
	14) Amount of income going to local businesses	5	5	25
	15) Variety of shopping facilities in the area	4	5	20
	16) Investment and development spending in the area	5	5	25
	17) Variety of restaurants in the area	4	5	20
Crowding and congestion	18) Level of traffic congestion in the area	4	3	12
	19) Size of crowds that restrict what activities do in public areas	4	5	20
	20) Size of crowds that affect your enjoyment of activities in public areas	4	5	20
	21) Noise level in the community	3	3	9
	22) Number of driving hazards created by tourists	3	5	15
Environmental	23) Natural environment	3	5	15
	24) Wildlife (plants, birds, and animals) in the local area	3	5	15
	25) Quality of natural environment	4	5	20
	26) Level of urbanization (city-type development) in the area	4	5	20
Services	27)Physical ability of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities)	3	3	9

	28) Quality of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities)	4	4	16
	29) Financial resources of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities)	DK[a]	3	#######
Taxes	30) Amount of local taxes collected	5	5	25
Taxes	31) Amount of local property taxes collected	5	5	25
Taxes	32) Amount of local sales taxes collected	5	5	25
Community attitude	33) Positive attitudes of local residents toward tourists	5	5	25
Community attitude	34) Community spirit among local residents	2	2	4
Community attitude	35) Pride of local residents	5	5	25

[a] Due to its unknown valuation, will not be considered in further calculations.

*Source: own elaboration.

The data gathered in the table above has definitely no statistic validity or research relevance, but it will be useful to summarize, organize and understand in a graphical sense the output reached through our analysis, for our case study.

After the discussion is done for each variable, some figures and graphically descriptive data are extracted on the basis of Figure 3 ratings in order to condense and summarize the output. In the following Figure 4 has been calculated the average rate amongst all variables and expressed on a per cent basis (considering that the minimum punctuation is 1 and the maximum 25).

Figure 4: Percentage of rating over the possible total:

Total points	667
Valid variables	34
Average rating	19,6176471
% of rating over total	78%

*Source: own elaboration.

In the previous table can be observed that the 78% over the total punctuation is reached based on the analysis of our case study. However, since a "decrease" can be "liking", and an "increase" may be "disliking", this is not representative about the positivism or negativism degree of impacts. Thus, the following outputs are focused more on the affective rather than the belief component.

In Figure 5 there have been captured all observed rating bundles and its frequency have been counted. Afterwards, rating bundles are threshed and assembled in Positive impacts, Neutral impacts or Negative impacts.

Figure 5: Rating's frequencies and threshing of impacts:

Criterion	Frequency			
5&5	14			
4&5	9			
3&5	3			
5&4	1			
4&4	2	Positive impacts	29	85%
4&3	1			
3&3	2	Neutral impacts	3	9%
3&2	1			
2&2	1	Negative impacts	2	6%
DK	1		34	100%
Total	35	*Source: own elaboration.		

Contrasting with the 78% obtained previously, Figure 5 reveals up to 85% of positive impacts over the total, and just 2 impacts have been given the consideration of negative.

The same rating bundles have been graphically expressed and situated on a map according to the two axes: Level of change (belief component) at the X, and Level of liking/disliking at the Y. Therefore, the general positivism is expressed with the higher weight of the upper side. The size of the bubbles represents the frequency, and it is detailed by the number inside.

Figure 6: Map of rating bundles
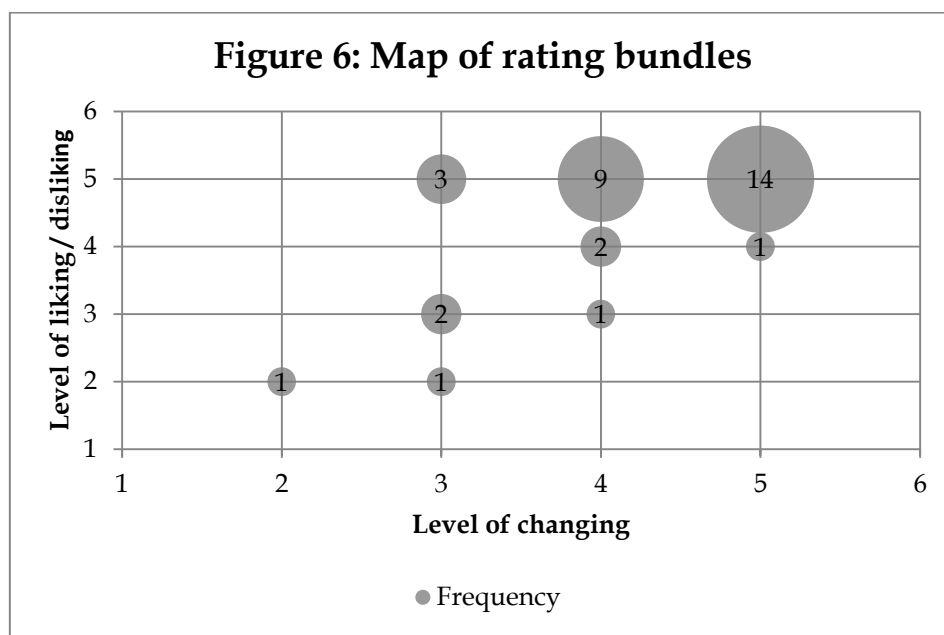
*Source: own elaboration.

Concretely, the impacts and its consideration are expressed at Figure 7.

Figure 7: Impacts classification:

POSITIVE IMPACTS	
Demand for cultural activities and programs	Variety of restaurants in the area
Variety of cultural facilities and activities in the community	Size of crowds that restrict what activities do in public areas
Opportunities to learn about other people and cultures	Size of crowds that affect your enjoyment of activities in public areas
Awareness/recognition of the local culture and heritage	Number of driving hazards created by tourists
Variety of entertainment in the area	Natural environment
Opportunities to restore and protect historical structures	Wildlife (plants, birds, and animals) in the local area
Opportunities to meet interesting people	Quality of natural environment
Understanding of different people and cultures by residents	Level of urbanization (city-type development) in the area
Live and vitality of the community	Quality of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities)
Revenue generated in the local economy	Amount of local taxes collected
Number of jobs in the community	Amount of local property taxes collected
Personal income of local residents	Amount of local sales taxes collected
Amount of income going to local businesses	Positive attitudes of local residents toward tourists
Variety of shopping facilities in the area	Pride of local residents
Investment and development spending in the area	
NEUTRAL IMPACTS	**NEGATIVE IMPACTS**
Level of traffic congestion in the area	Demand for historical activities and programs
Noise level in the community	Community spirit among local residents
Physical ability of local services (e.g., police, fire, medical, and utilities)	*Source: own elaboration.

Lastly, should be paid special attention on the few negative impacts; undoubtedly, considering that the main segments are cultured and high qualified, fulfilling the gap on the offer of historical information would be a leap on the quality of the experience. Interconnecting different fields of knowledge would rather satisfy tourists' (guests') inquisitiveness, leading them to acquire a deeper sense of the place and its communities. This statement is fed on the interesting history of our case study; nonetheless, every project should design its offer focusing on its strengths and avoiding the weakness that could not satisfy its customers.

The last consideration, the possible negative impact on the community spirit among local residents, could be approached from the legal form of the project: in the analysis

of this variable is observed that, due to the capitalist nature of tourism in Santo Steffano, the impacts' distribution could become unfair for part of the residents, arising thus personal conflicts and tensions amongst the population. However, it is difficult to figure out if a collaborative form would perform better on this indicator. Such organizational form seems to lead to a fairer distribution of both positive and negative impacts, but on the basis of the impacts identified as negative (Figure 7) it is not that clear; probably, the fact of holding a common, shared business among residents, could even arise more conflicts, tensions, and agency problems. Even more, it is different to face and manage conflicts between neighbors than between partners. For this reason, the preference for one or another organizational form should derive from (as everything in this model) the capacities hold by the villagers and its particular circumstances.

(7)

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been gathering the "big picture" of Albergo Diffuso on the aim of providing an in-depth description of this Italian touristic phenomenon through different perspectives. Definitively, it has been shown as a way of offering tourism *"that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"* (definition of sustainable tourism by UNEP & UNWTO, 2005; p.12). The point is that (almost for our case study, Santo Steffano di Sessanio) the sustainable character of Albergo Diffuso and its effects are spread from the hotel to not only the destination but on the neighbouring villages too, performing mostly positive impacts through direct and indirect pathways. But that is not all, this concept shines for its capacity to lower, counteract and avoid the most of negative impacts.

This capacity to create local synergies and, even more, by enhancing the regional characteristics, makes it perfectly fitting with Geotourism principles (excluding the specified incongruences). Amplifying the theoretical basis in this line, as well as regarding the tourists' main profiles and motivations, and the tourism at the countryside, has permitted to acquire a wider knowledge about this phenomenon. Afterwards, by contrasting the theoretical background with first-hand observation has become possible to identify the meaningful considerations and the key features for building up the model proposal without essential leakages.

The participant observation, framed with tools found in current literature, has also permitted to identify, study, and qualitatively evaluate the main impacts and how those are reached. Those considerations could be useful for the management of future implementations in order to maximize benefits on the environmental, social and economic dimensions of a destination.

Albergo Diffuso represents a hospitality philosophy that becomes very attractive for the pushing new generations of tourists, and it has been rightly applied in the countryside with greatly praiseworthy intentions. Nonetheless, indeed, Albergo Diffuso is innovation in the tourism field, and invites to keep being developed in other innovative ways. In this line, this paper sets different paths through which drive future

research: for instance, analysing the factors that make a destination fitter for a capitalist or rather collaborative/cooperative organizational forms. Could also be studied a concrete destination for the establishment of an Albergo Diffuso in our country, or also how this phenomenon has impacted on Italian macroeconomics.

The model proposed in this paper is focused on the countryside due to its revitalizing aim for depressed rural villages, whatever the country, region, and particular needs; however, the door is left open for the model to be extrapolated to other circumstances.

Nevertheless, remains in my mind the possibility to adapt and apply the model in an urban old quarter such there is in Girona. Could an owners' association in the neighbourhood join efforts and assets to drive a real competence for the hotels' sector and platforms as AirBnB? Would it be favourable for the city? Would be possible to hold the same sustainability degree regarding all dimensions in an urban environment? The future research's lines keep alive on each own inquisitiveness.

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