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COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE FOR COASTAL LANDSCAPE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT

The Agro Pontino Coast Contract

Abstract

The paper investigates the synergies that contractual – collaborative tools build within landscape planning and a wide system of regional governance. The Agro Pontino Coast Contract is discussed as a best practice for touristic governance capable of delivering a multi-level, integrated strategic vision for the sustainable development of coastal landscapes. The Agro Pontino is the result of the “Great Land Reclamation” that in the 1920s has deeply changed the landscape of the area, which is now undergoing a deep transformation due to intensive exploitation for touristic, agriculture and urban proposes. In this context, the Coast Contract aims to oppose the fragmentation of responsibilities and the lack of cooperation between territorial actors by activating synergies and sharing specific solutions for an integrated and responsible management of the coastal landscape that balances natural environment, local culture protection and economic development.

Keywords: collaborative governance; sustainable tourism; coastal landscape

Introduction

Tourism is a key driver of economic development. This is topical when referring to coastal tourism, which has been defined as such by the European Commission’s Blue Growth Strategy. According to EUROPARC, coastal and marine nature-based tourism employs over 3.2 million people and generates €183 billion per year in gross added value in the EU¹. Despite being a source of social and economic development, excessive tourism brings additional challenges to coastal landscapes, which are already stressed by climate change vulnerability, environmental pollution and resource depletion.

A focus on the Mediterranean Region allows to emphasize how the environmental balance of coastal areas is affected by an interconnected set of problems, which also plays a role in economic and social trends. The Mediterranean Sea is characterized by an exceptional cultural and biodiversity richness. Its landscapes make it a depository of biodiversity that is regrettably threatened by synergistic anthropogenic stressors. From the socio-economic standpoint, the Region appears to be bursting of contrasts too, since it includes countries with very different levels of income and social development. On one hand, land use changes, industry and population growth combined with the growth of coastal urban regions, rapidly



Fig. 1. Participatory process of the Agro Pontino Coast Contract (photo credits: Stefano Magaudda, Carolina Pozzi).

evolving tourism and changes in consumption patterns are heavily impacting landscape and the environment [1]; on the other hand, Sea-Sand-Sun dependency, cultural alteration, climate change vulnerability, geopolitical insecurity and social instability are raising issues that threaten the long-term sustainability of the touristic sector itself [2]. Global warming will have direct consequences on ecosystems and human well-being, since a rise in temperature from 2 to 6 °C by 2100 is expected in the Mediterranean, which has been classified as one of the most responsive regions to climate change [1].

Seaside tourism in the Mediterranean is still the primary model, directly responsible of coastal landscape overexploitation and negative social impacts. This trend is leading into the paradox of places that will soon be no longer attractive because too degraded in terms of environmental quality and services provided by ecosystems, or because they will no longer possess the natural and landscape assets that made them attractive and that resulted in the willingness to pay from tourists [2]. This paper stresses the importance of taking into account the outlined set of interconnected problems in decision-making processes concerning both coastal landscape and its linked development trends. It will thus focus on the touristic sector governance, and on the need of embedding sustainability and multi-

level integrated principles into a strategic vision capable of shaping a sustainable future for coastal landscapes and local communities. The fragile coastal landscape is frequently characterized by a fragmentation of responsibilities and competences that often turns out jeopardizing the balance between environment preservation, local culture valorisation and economic development. The general lack of cooperation among those different actors can in fact be effectively addressed via better governance mechanisms [3]. It is now clear that governance is a challenging issue when dealing with sustainable tourism, because of the numerous policy domains it spans and of the high complexity involved. Also, the capacity of tourism to underpin regional development and enhance competitiveness, while in parallel prioritising social, cultural and environmental concerns makes it a crucial sector (*Ibidem*). Considering all this issues, it is possible to define tourism governance as a measurable practice of government whose aim is to effectively manage the tourism sector, through efficient, transparent and accountable forms of coordination, collaboration and/or cooperation, for the pursuit of goals of the collective interest, which is shared by networks of actors impacting on the sector with a view to develop



Fig. 2. Interreg MED Coasting project: pilot areas (source: elaboration of the authors).

solutions and opportunities on the basis of agreements that recognize interdependencies and shared responsibilities [4]. In this framework, many initiatives aimed both at studying and testing a coordinated, innovative, integrated, participatory approach to sustainable tourism governance are being developed worldwide. In the Mediterranean Region an important contribution comes from the projects being co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg MED Programme under the umbrella of the Sustainable Tourism MED Community¹. This paper presents as best practice the Interreg MED Coasting project² (Coastal integrated governance for sustainable tourism), that applied an innovative multi-level governance tool based on strong collaboration and commitment of local stakeholders, who sign a contractual-binding agreement to foster sustainable tourism. Coasting started in February 2018 and run until January 2020, with the aim of capitalizing the experience of the *Contrat de Baie* of Marseille, mainstreaming a shared methodology - in line with the Integrated Coastal Zone Management principles (art. 9 - 11) - for applying integrated multi-level governance to sustainable coastal tourism in the MED area.

This governance tool was introduced in France in the early 80's as *Contrat de rivière* with the aim of organizing a coordinated maintenance of the river banks. River Contracts have then spread in Italy since the early 2000s as negotiated programming tools [5] and are currently applied also to lakes, coasts, wetlands and landscapes governance (e. g. Coast Contracts). They were officially included in the Italian legislation in 2015 (Environmental Law art. 68-bis) and are different from other governance approaches because of the contextual presence of voluntariness, inclusion, collaboration and obligation [6]. According to the National Charter⁴, they can be defined as a shared and active commitment that engages different public and private local actors in environmental restoration and socio-economic regeneration of the area. Thus, they act in accordance with the European Landscape Convention (ELC) that states: "landscape is a key

element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone". Coasting partners mainstreamed this tool in each of the 7 target areas (Fig. 2) by organizing participatory workshops engaging both public and private stakeholders and developing strategies to boost the collaborative governance process at local level.

This paper focuses the experience developed by Lazio Region in the Agro Pontino coast, namely the Agro Pontino Coast Contract, the first practice transferring the River Contract tool to a coastal area in Lazio region.

Synergies between contractual tools and Italian Regional Landscape Plans

By reflecting on the contractual tools capable of integrating landscape planning with regional governance in the Italian context, this paper aims at contributing to the debate on the implementation of the Italian Regional Landscape Plans and their policies.

The principles of the ELC promote a new approach to landscape planning, specifying the traditional concepts of protection and valorisation of landscape heritage. According to Sciuillo [7], following the renewed approach and in relation to each identified area, the plans must attribute "adequate quality objectives", address the "restoration of landscape values", the "requalification of compromised and degraded areas", the "safeguarding of landscape features", and the "compatibility with the recognized and protected landscape value of the urban development trends".

For the practical realisation of the foreseen objectives on the territory, the plans refer to the subordinate implementation tools (plans and programs at provincial and local level), and during this operational phase, political, procedural, administrative and economic barriers often prevent the transformation of the policies into concrete interventions.

In this perspective, the Italian experience shows that River Contracts allow to overcome these barriers thanks to a collaborative and strategic approach capable of combining multi-

objectives, multi-level and multi-stakeholder decision making processes [8] and further efficiently moving from policies and plans to actions.

The synergic benefits that contractual tools bring to landscape planning have been acknowledged by several Italian regional authorities that actually integrated those tools into their landscape planning policies. Piedmont Region recognises River Contracts in the Regional Landscape Plan as tools for the in-depth management of landscape protection and valorisation (art. 44). Apulia Region has included the River Contracts among the governance tools promoted by the Regional Territorial Landscape Plan (art. 23) and has made them equivalent to a Regional Programme Agreement. Umbria Region's Regional Observatory for Landscape Quality has promoted Landscape Contracts as tools of negotiated territorial programming, falling in the category of inclusive decision-making tools for the protection and valorisation of the territory.

From a methodological and procedural point of view, the Agro Pontino Coast Contract lays on the principles expressed by articles 55 (Plan implementation tools and incentive measures) and 56 (Intervention programmes for landscape) of the Lazio Regional Landscape Plan, which identify and promote integrated tools for ensuring territorial sustainable development and landscape management and valorisation through fit-for-purpose projects and recovery actions.

Therefore, the Coast Contract can be assimilated to this kind of landscape integrated programmes since it: i) concerns territorial scopes both internal and external to areas subject to landscape constraints; ii) identifies actions, measures and interventions aimed at enhancing, restoring and maintaining landscape assets; iii) identifies the financial resources (public and private) for the implementation of foreseen actions and measures. In this sense, this tool implements a collaborative governance identifying a strategic vision to foster sustainable tourism based on two key principles: i) apply an integrated approach combining biodiversity, soil protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation - all aspects composing the modern concept of landscape - with social and economic development (multi-objectives); ii) develop a collaborative process engaging actors in all phases, from the construction of the knowledge framework to the management of interventions (multi-level and multi-stakeholders).

The Agro Pontino Coast Contract

The Agro Pontino is an extensive coastal plain located in the southern Lazio between the Lepini-Ausoni Mountains and the Tyrrhenian Sea. The area concerned by the Coast Contract includes four municipalities for approximately 440 square kilometres. The area is divided between the coastal strip - with the dune cordon and the retrodunal lakes falling within the Circeo National Park - and the Agro Pontino itself. The inland is exposed to strong environmental pressures impacting on water quality and quantity that clearly reflects also on the coastal environment. Moreover, coastal erosion and summer period high touristic flow contribute to endanger this fragile landscape and its biodiversity.



Fig. 3. View of Circeo Promontory and retrodunal lakes (photo credits: Carlo Perotto).



Fig. 4. Pontine coast, view of exploitation for urban purposes and coastal erosion effects (photo credits: Carlo Perotto).



Fig. 5. Pontine coast, view of coastal sand bar and dunes in relation with beach tourism (photo credits: Stefano Magaouda).

The necessity to deal with tourism, agriculture and urbanization as key factors impacting on the coastal landscape becomes essential also in the climate change context. Thus, the Coast Contract process has been centred on the synergic connection between biodiversity, landscape, climate change and tourism with the aim to develop an integrated strategy to enhance the productive conditions of the tourism sector, by maintaining the coast from erosion, and the overall environmental quality of the area, that can benefit tourism as well.

The Agro Pontino Coast Contract process started in March 2019 promoted by Lazio Region who organized a series of participatory meetings and workshops in the context of the Coasting project (Fig. 1). The meetings aimed at discussing the main topics (water quality, nature and biodiversity; climate change, soil and coast protection; landscape protection and valorisation, and sustainable tourism) with local stakeholders (private and public) in order to build a common knowledge and a strategy for the sustainable integrated management of the coastal area. Among others the involvement of the following actors was pivotal: Provincial and Regional authorities, 12 municipalities, 1 National Park, land reclamation managing authority, water managing authority, associations of commerce, tourism and agriculture sectors, environmental and cultural associations.

In accordance with the guidelines released by the Italian Ministry of the Environment [9], the

Coast Contract process follows the phases: i) subscription of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) listing the reasons for starting the process and the preliminary objectives; ii) development of a Context Analysis on environmental, social and economic aspects; iii) drafting of a Strategic Document defining the medium-long term scenario; iv) definition of an Action Program with a limited time horizon (three years) listing for each action: objectives, commitments of the involved stakeholders, timing, and financial resources; v) subscription of a legal-binding commitment (Contract) formalising the decisions shared during the participatory process.

In this methodological framework, the first step of the governance process was to set up the managing structure - Technical-Scientific Committee (TSC), Coast Forum, Managing Board (MB) - under the coordination of the Province of Latina. The Province is also the coordinator of two River Contracts activated in the region since 2016, confirming to be a key player for the implementation of integrated governance in the area [10].

Three thematic workshops were then organized to update the Context Analysis and to jointly define medium-long term thematic scenarios with the aim of laying the foundation of the strategy for the Coast Contract. What emerged as a primary request from the stakeholders was the need of a better coordination between the territorial actors, the integration between agriculture and tourism sectors, and the combination of coastal and inland areas to face tourism seasonality and to foster the economic development of the whole territory.

An important turning point was the subscription of the MoU in July 2019 by both private and public key stakeholders. By signing the MoU, they agreed to implement a coordinated integrated management of the Agro Pontino coastal landscape as a base of a tourist-economic recovery process directly related to the environmental quality of the territory. They have committed in following the process that will eventually lead to the subscription of the formal agreement (Coast Contract), by pursuing an integrated approach (e.g. integrate water management policies with those for soil and biodiversity protection and socio-economic development) and a

collaborative multi-level approach to build a common strategic vision.

Then, the TSC and the MB collaborated in drafting the Strategic Document by systematising the objectives of the territorial planning tools with needs and ideas emerged during the workshops. This Document - articulated in strategic axes, specific objectives and measures - defines the medium-long term scenario and constitutes the framework of the Action Program (Tab. 1).

Conclusions and future perspectives

The Agro Pontino Coast Contract process is not concluded yet, nevertheless, some of the elements highlighted along this work have already demonstrated that it can effectively address coastal landscape management in terms of environmental sustainability, climate change resilience and responsible tourism development. Firstly, since it integrates landscape planning into a regional governance system characterized by a high representativeness of actors and issues at stake, the tool will help moving from policies and plans to actions, which has been proven to be a critical concern in the context of Italian landscape planning. A direct consequence of this procedural setting is the capability to systematise the objectives of different regional, landscape and urban planning tools and create synergies with local actors that are not engaged in traditional planning. The virtuous circle closes and opens with the tool's capability to trigger a concertation process leading key local stakeholders (public, private, associations) to share the vision developed in the Contract itself and to commit to implement a coordinated strategy for the sustainable development of the landscape in its broadest sense.

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Theme A: WATER QUALITY, NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY	
STRATEGIC AXIS	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE
A.1	A.1.1 Protection and improvement of the quality of surface and ground water.
	A.1.2 Sustainable use of water resources.
A.2	A.2.1 Improvement of Governance and management of natural protected areas.
	A.2.2 Protection of the dune ecosystem.
	A.2.3 Safeguarding biodiversity and the environmental system.
A.3	A.3.1 Enhancement of the green and blue infrastructures of the Agro Pontino.
Theme B: CLIMATE CHANGE, SOIL AND COAST DEFENCE.	
STRATEGIC AXIS	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE
B.1	B.1.1 Awareness raising and monitoring of the phenomenon of climate change.
	B.1.2 Increasing local resilience.
B.2	B.2.1 Contrast of hydrogeological risk.
B.3	B.3.1 Prevention and monitoring of the phenomenon of coastal erosion.
Theme C: LANDSCAPE PROTECTION AND VALORISATION, AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM	
STRATEGIC AXIS	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE
C.1	C.1.1 Reduction of anthropic pressure.
	C.1.2 Improving accessibility and usability of the coastal area by the enhancement of sustainable infrastructures.
	C.1.3 Diversification of tourism offer and promotion of sustainable tourism.
	C.1.4 Improving governance and local cooperation for sustainable development of the territory.
C.2	C.2.1 Conservation and enhancement of the historical, cultural and natural heritage.

Tab. 1. - Strategic axes and specific objectives of the Strategy of the Agro Pontino Coast Contract (source: elaboration of the authors).

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NOTES

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