

TOURISM IN THE PHLEGRAEAN FIELDS

Public perception and framing agenda of territorial public initiatives

Abstract

Over the past few decades the Phlegraean Fields - which extend into the municipalities of Pozzuoli, Bacoli, Monte di Procida, Quarto and include the Phlegraean islands of Ischia, Procida and Vivara - have been affected by a series of policies aimed at urban redevelopment and tourist relaunch which, with different intensity, impacted on the territory.

Starting from these considerations, the paper has two objectives: on one hand, to identify the territorial and tourist policies implemented in the Phlegraean Fields to which the media system has given greater prominence in the last 5 years and, on the other, to analyze the public opinion on territory management and tourism market. In order to answer these questions, the linguistic corpora of about 300 articles published on the topic in the period between 2015 and 2020 are analyzed through text mining techniques on the main online local newspapers that deal with topics related to tourism and territorial policies for the Phlegrean area and the readers' comments that have been published. The conclusions indicate some possible policy guidelines.

Keywords: Phlegrean fields; territorial policies; public opinion; urbanization; World Heritage Site

Introduction

The Phlegraean Fields are a vast volcanic area located in the Gulf of Pozzuoli, west of the city of Naples. They include the municipalities of Pozzuoli, Bacoli, Monte di Procida, Quarto and the Phlegraean islands of Ischia, Procida and Vivara. From a geological-scientific point of view, it is one of the most interesting volcanic territories in the world for the presence of active craters [1] [2]. The area is affected by bradyseism, caused precisely by volcanic activity [3]. It is a phenomenon that consists of a periodic lowering or raising of the ground level which is very fast compared to geological times [4].

The Phlegraean Fields have a history of great value. In Roman imperial times, they were the second urban-territorial system in the world. After a period of decline in medieval times, the Phlegrean Fields flourished again as an important thermal center. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the Phlegraean Fields hosted many travelers from all European countries who chose them as a destination during their Grand Tour [5]. The huge historical, landscape and territorial

heritage present in the area has made Phlegraean Fields a very important tourist destination [6]. Nowadays, the Phlegrean tourist offer is vast and varied. Thanks to the volcanic nature of the area, there are excellent quality thermal waters, natural harbors, good building materials such as tuff and pozzolana, unique vines in the world. The Phlegraean Fields also host numerous commercial, catering and accommodation activities, as well as an unparalleled archaeological and historical heritage. Among the many beauties of the Phlegraean Fields the most famous are the thermal complex of the Bacoli Archaeological Park, the submerged Archaeological Park of Baia, the Rione Terra of Pozzuoli, the Castle of Baia, the Borbone complex of Lake Fusaro, the Archaeological Park of Cuma, the Archaeological Park of Lake Averno and the Cocceo cave, just to name a few [7].

Over the past few decades, the Phlegraean Fields have been affected by a series of policies aimed at urban redevelopment and tourism revival that have been able to impact only partially on the territory due to problems still unresolved or that have not yet been addressed in an appropriate way. The Phlegrean Fields have undergone a wild, uncontrolled overbuilding over time. In fact, since the 1960s, the urbanization process has intensified [8]. The result was the creation of a poor-quality building stock [9]. In addition, the population density is very high [10]. For all these reasons the management and the enhancement of the territory is very complex and difficult [11]. Difficulty connecting from one side to the problem of giving an harmonic sense to the natural tourist vocation of the territory, the other to natural disasters arising from the phenomenon of bradyseism, with "Emergency territorial plans" that led to the creation of satellite neighborhoods, then degraded, considered a "negative experience" [12]. Starting from these considerations, the paper has a double objective: on one hand, the work intends to identify the territorial and tourist policies implemented in the Phlegraean Fields to which the media system has given greater newsworthiness and, on the other, to analyze the sentiment of the public opinion. In order to answer these questions, the linguistic corpora of about articles published on the topic in the period between 2015 and 2020 on the main online local newspapers dealing with topics related to tourism and policies are analyzed through text mining techniques territories intended for the Phlegrean area and the readers' comments that have been published.

In general, the blogosphere dedicated to information and local debate has gained importance as a result of several factors, the main ones being the reduction of the digital divide (due to a greater literacy and diffusion of cheaper communication tools such as mobile devices), the crisis of mainstream newspapers and the more general change of habits in the community [13]. Following the evolution of some newspapers such as Pozzuoli21, CronacaFlegrea, - in particular the space for debate that these have offered to readers over time -, it is almost possible to verify the "democratic potential" [14] of the political discussion that took place there carried out, and which has certainly fueled new forms of civism. It is no coincidence that through the web a movement of opinion led to the election (and re-election) of the youngest mayor of the Campania region in a Phlegraean municipality.

Methodology

The analysis proposed in the following pages aims to be a compromise between statistical synthesis and hermeneutic analysis of the text. Thus, in order to explore the main initiatives that have been implemented in recent years for the tourist qualification of the Phlegraean Fields and to understand the orientations of public opinion, the results of an analysis of the content that has been carried out through the use of T-Lab textual data analysis software are presented. The analyzed materials were collected online. All the articles published online in the last 5 years on the main newspapers that simultaneously contained the words "Campi Flegrei" and "Turismo" were included in the analysis. Readers' comments were also collected for each article.

Data mining is an analysis technique widely used in the scientific literature [15] that allow bring out the most significant information from a statistical point of view [16]. They are then subject to subsequent hermeneutic analysis by researchers. In particular, two different types of analysis were performed on the collected material. To easily identify the main tourism policies to which the media system has great given visibility in the last 5 years, the collected material has been represented in graphic form in a system of Cartesian axes, to then be, in a subsequent phase, object of qualitative interpretation [17].

However, on the users' comments, a sentiment analysis was performed to automatically associate the words contained in the collected posts with different types of emotions [18]. Before proceeding with the analysis of the

collected text corpus, the material has been subject to automatic normalization.

Results

In the last 5 years, the articles published online by the main local newspapers that contained both the words “Campi Flegrei” and “Turismo” have been about 300. In order to identify the initiatives to which the media system has given greater prominence and visibility on the text a thematic analysis of the elementary contexts was carried out. This made possible to map the isotopies, so to isolate the main macro-themes that have been treated in the various articles and to project them on the Cartesian plane [19]. In other words, the different clusters identified by the system share similar semantic features. Specifically, the analysis of the articles considered has allowed to identify, on the basis of the first two main factors that explain a total of about 74% of the variability, four clusters, each of which has a different weight in percentage terms because they have in it a different number of elementary contexts (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. The 4 clusters emerged from the analysis (source: authors’ elaboration).

Cluster	Label	Elementary Context	%
1	BACOLI	550	26.67%
2	PARK	570	27.64%
3	UNESCO	618	29.97%
4	VILLAGE	324	15.71%

The representation on the factorial plan (Fig. 1) highlights that in relation to tourism, the themes that have obtained the highest newsworthiness are essentially 4. The first and most discussed cluster (No. 2) is that relating to the will of the Phlegraean Fields to be recognized as a UNESCO heritage site. This request had already been made in 2006, but without success. It had been refused by the World Heritage Committee because the territory did not fully respect the state of conservation of the assets present in it and their presentation to the public [20]. During 2019 the Campania Region made a commitment to assist the Municipalities of the area to start the practice and to make the Phlegraean Fields recognized as a UNESCO heritage site. From a sociological point of view, it appears as a strategy aimed not only at recognizing value to the rich heritage owned by the territory, but also and above all at making the resources present in it known internationally, through an important and prestigious certification. The Convention adopted by UNESCO in 1972, now ratified by 183 states, is aimed at identifying and protecting sites of exceptional and universal historical or naturalistic value, which thus belong no longer only to a specific territory but to all the inhabitants of the planet: the protection and enhancement of these places, even in times of war, becomes a collective mission, which challenges the international community as a whole [unesco.com]. The presence of a site in the World Heritage List triggers the so-called “UNESCO Effect”: it determines great visibility for the site, increasing its tourist flows and the interest of the international community [21].

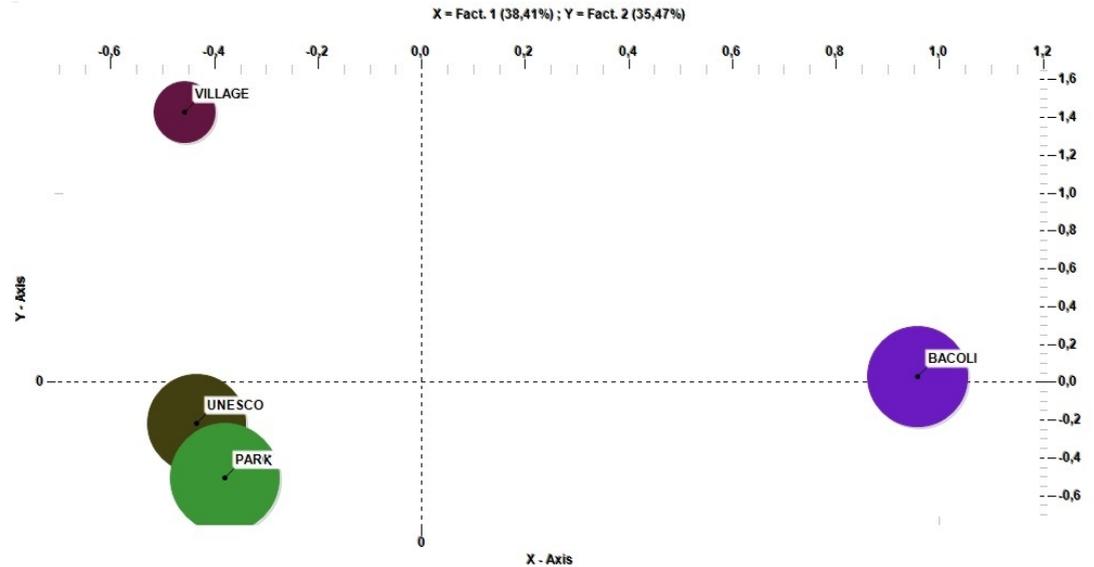


Fig. 1. Factorial plan.

However, the community awarded the recognition must undertake to properly manage and maintain the site since UNESCO can revoke this status.

The second most discussed cluster (No. 2), which partly overlaps the first for the vocabulary used, has the word “Park” as its label. Thus, in 2016 the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism established and provided with special autonomy the “Archaeological Park of the Phlegraean Fields”. It is a great tourist attraction, which had been much discussed in previous years. It was created with the aim of safeguarding the Phlegraean heritage and contributing to the enhancement of the many sites and monuments present in the area, integrating them into a single large widespread park. The Archaeological Park of the Phlegraean Fields contains 25 archaeological sites and monuments that are located in the Municipalities of Pozzuoli, Bacoli, Giugliano in Campania and Monte di Procida. The third cluster by weight in percentage terms is the number 1, which has the label “Bacoli”. In fact, the Municipality stands out from the others, to the point of merging all the articles that concern it into a single group, for the rich offer of tourist and cultural initiatives. A few years ago it hosted a 3-day event dedicated to philosophy, organized by the Municipality of Bacoli with the University Consortium “Mediterranean Civilization”, and in collaboration with the Institute for the history of philosophical and scientific thought of the CNR of Naples, the philosophical studies section of Naples “G. Vico” and the Philosophy Department of the University of Naples “Federico II”. Moreover, since several years the city has been hosting the so-called “Spring Rally”, an event dedicated to vintage cars, which welcomes citizens, but also travelers from all over the world to admire or show off their vehicles. Bacoli is also the site of the Expo in the sea of Campania boating, Navigare. It is an event organized by the Campania Regional Nautical Association, which offers visitors the opportunity to do sea trials, with over 100 boats, 70 at sea and 30 on land, and to visit a hospitality village with over 40 stands displaying local products from over 250 companies. The latest cluster concerns the “Literary Village” initiative, hosted in 2019 by Pozzuoli. It

collects about 16% of the elementary contexts analyzed. It is an annual cultural review aimed at attracting travelers interested in reading and discovering and participating in exhibitions, reviews, vernissages. Some studies have highlighted that territorial festivals are a device that has long been used in the Phlegraean Fields to attract tourists, but also to create a sense of belonging among the citizens who take part in the initiatives [22]. In the second part of the research, using a specific tool, a sentiment analysis was carried out on the comments left online under the analyzed articles. The words of the comments have been normalized and associated with an emotion.

From Figure 2 it is possible to note that, net of “neutral” comments, the remaining posts are essentially attributable to three different sentiments about the territory management and tourism market that are:

- Anger (43%);
- Pride (32%);
- Interest (25%).

Almost half of users’ experience feelings can be associated with “anger”. It is an emotional state that can be considered an adequate response to different forms of injustice. This feeling can motivate action and stimulate social change too [23].

From the comments analysed it is clear that the interventions and initiatives aimed at enhancing the Phlegraean Fields are not considered effective, sufficient or of good quality.

In several comments, some users complain about the state of care, maintenance and conservation of the artistic and archaeological heritage present in the area. Users seem to be aware of the area’s rich tourist potential, but at the same time complain about the lack of programming.

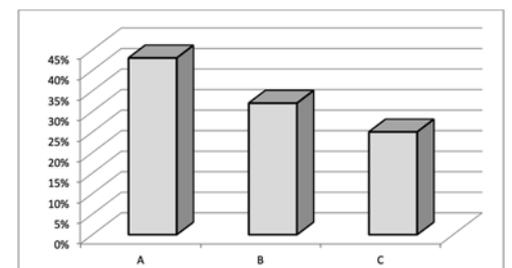


Fig. 2. Sentiment analysis (source: authors’ elaboration).

They believe that the Phlegraean Fields have nothing to envy to other Italian realities and in the world. Not even nearby Naples, which has always been recognized as one of the most flourishing cities from an artistic and landscape point of view, according to some users, would not compare if the Phlegraean heritage were valued differently. Finally, some of the “angry” users accuse administrators of using “tourism” as a tool to capture attention and visibility. Even during the election campaign, some politicians had promised a tourist reevaluation that was never realized. In addition, other users accuse some of the administrators of organizing events to attract travelers, without worrying about the failure of the purifiers that is devastating the sea or the piles of waste that increase in the streets during some periods of the year. These elements represent serious problems that citizens have to face in their everyday life and they discourage tourists to remain for a while in the area. The awareness of owning a rich and important heritage is also a source of “pride” for many network users. Many people commented on the beauty of the cultural resources present in the Phlegraean Fields, which represent a source of pride and collective identification. From a sociological point of view, the pride of own territory enriches the community and reconfirms the system of values that it shares, enhancing the collective awareness [24]. Among all, the comments that refer to the dimension of pride are those that mainly refer to landscapes and natural, thermal and marine resources. So the analysis reveals an ambivalent attitude on the part of the commentators of the articles: the value of the Phlegraean heritage is appreciated and recognized, but people seem displeased with how they are managed. The textual analysis of the comments suggests that the territorial and tourist policies that have been implemented in the last 5 years have not won the favor of citizens and tourists. The last emotion that emerges from the comments is that relating to “interest”. Some of the commentators look with curiosity at the various tourism initiatives proposed during the year, get informed and ask for advice and opinions from those who have already lived one or more experiences in the Phlegraean area. In this sense, the tourist experience appears to be a good attractor, capable of capturing the attention of a portion of citizens and visitors who seek other forms of tourism different from the mass tourism and who seem to prefer visiting small areas rather than large cities. In particular, the most assiduous commentators who have expressed interest are those who want to practice cultural tourism to experience and explore local beauties, get in touch with the local culture, tasting typical foods and attending experiential or laboratory activities.

Conclusions

The analysis conducted allows us to argue that in recent years in some way the tourist boom has also affected the Phlegraean Fields, which have ended up in the attention of many travelers. The sensation of pride that many people have declared to feel in reference to the Phlegraean Fields and to the tourist attractions that are present in the territory are however hampered by some critical aspects. Thus, although the territory is made up of

several municipalities, from a tourism point of view this appears to be uneven. The online articles that have been analyzed almost never speak about the Phlegraean Fields as a unicum. So, it is appropriate to highlight there is still no single and unified image of the Phlegraean Fields, although some initiatives have been implemented in this sense (such as the institution of the “Archaeological Park of the Phlegraean Fields” and the request to recognize the whole area as an UNESCO heritage site). Today, the Phlegraean cultural heritage is still fragmented, just as its promotion and use that appear not entirely adequate. In the articles published in the last 5 years on the main local online newspapers, little or nothing is said about the internal municipalities. These municipalities, their territorial resources and the carried-out initiatives there are not sponsored. This also represents a factor of “anger” among users, who feel that the Phlegraean Fields as a whole are losing the opportunity to position themselves as a competitor in the international tourism market. Another consideration to make is that the cultural and scenic beauty of the Phlegraean Fields collides with a low level of maintenance and preservation of the heritage, denounced by articles, inhabitants and travelers [25]. Summerizing, the spatial distribution of infrastructure, services and cultural offers, with wild uncontrolled urban growth and environmental problems are the key critical elements to understand the public perceptions and why such a substantive percentage of people online express “anger” when talk about territory management and tourism market. This critical scenario on one hand can help also to comprehend some of the structural difficulties that local administrators encounter in imagining and implementing interventions for the territorial and tourist development of the Phlegraean Fields; on the other hand, they could be the starting point to imagine improvements to meet the needs of citizens and tourists. Thus, on the basis of the analyzes carried out, for an effective territorial and tourist revival it appears necessary to work simultaneously on several fronts, intervening on situations of degradation and building illegality, preparing an integrated tourist offer, which involves all the Municipalities present in the territory, enhancing the heritage cultural, natural and landscape of the Phlegraean Fields. Nowadays tourist and accommodation offer is mainly concentrated in some areas near the sea, including Pozzuoli and Bacoli [26]. This particularly penalizes the hinterland Municipalities, which despite having a cultural heritage of great value, live in the shadow of the coastal area, in the absence of strategic integration among the different territorial portions. All the described purposes can be pursued through the creation of study and promotion centers in the territories and by encouraging the creation and consolidation of cultural and naturalistic associations at the local level.

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