A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SICILY

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the debate about the development model of Sicily had tourism as a key driver. Observing data about tourism sector, in Sicily it’s possible to see a huge gap between Sicily and the other Italian tourist areas, but also there is a gap between Sicily and the other European regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea that are direct commercial competitors of Sicily.

In this situation, we can imagine a real development for tourism in Sicily. For this reason, many people argue that the tourism development in Sicily may be oriented to sustainable tourism because the region has many natural features, including several marine protected areas, a lot of smaller islands, in order to diversify the tourism offer, and, finally, an accommodation system of small size.

So in this perspective the Sicily tourism offer may be changed very speedily towards sustainable tourism principles allowing to intercept new tourists.

About the definition of sustainable tourism, the international literature has discussed a lot in the last twenty years. The term “sustainable tourism” emerged in the scientific debate in the 1990s to describe tourism development without such negative environmental or social impacts (Nelson et al., 1993; Burns and Holden, 1995; Coccossis and Nijkamp, 1995). This definition of “sustainable tourism” is used to make a difference from the term “ecotourism”. Ecotourism generally refers specifically to recreation in natural landscapes or threatened ecosystems such as rainforests or coral reefs. However, studies have suggested that ecotourism may actually accelerate land degradation, or not represent local communities in development (Cater, 1993; 1995). In addition, ecotourism is generally a niche product appealing only to a small proportion of the market. Wheeller (1994) has labelled ecotourism “egotourism”.

In a recent paper Forsyth (1998) has listed the principles for sustainable tourism: 1) Using resources sustainably; 2) Reducing over-consumption and waste; 3) Maintaining diversity; 4) Integrating tourism into planning Tourism development; 5) Supporting local economies; 6) Involving local communities; 7) Consulting stakeholders and the public; 8) Training staff; 9) Marketing tourism responsibly; 10) Undertaking research. Starting from this issues, the paper analyzes the gap between Sicily and the other Italian tourist areas, by observing the principal data of the tourism market, and by comparing the areas by population structure, distribution and structure of accommodation. After observing the difference between the areas, the paper estimates the tourism flow that Sicily may generate to reduce the gap with other regions.
The estimate of this flow is very important. In fact the growth of tourism in Sicily may have a great impact on the economy, developing the labor market and the whole economy that is, directly and indirectly, linked to tourism sector.

This new flow of tourism could be three times bigger than the actual flow of tourist; it may have a great impact on the environment, too. This impact is generated by people, who could come to Sicily, and by the production of consumption and waste, but also by the development of the infrastructure necessary to accommodate the new flow of tourists. In this case estimations focus on the impact on the environment by considering the consumption of energy and water, the waste and the cost of increasing public services.

Keywords: Tourism in Sicily, sustainability, sustainable economic development, ecotourism