

«*Un' immensa campagna avvolta dal verde*»¹ – REINVENTING RURAL AREAS IN ITALY THROUGH TOURISM PROMOTIONAL IMAGES

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Abstract: During the last decades marginal rural territories of Europe lost a great part of their productive character, acquiring nowadays new functions, roles and social meanings which, in turn, are leading to their perception as consumption places. Among the new roles and functions, environmental protection, nature conservation, tourism and leisure activities seem to be the most significant. Tourism, in particular, has an increasing role in the production of a *certain* image of rurality, through the use of powerful specific (although global) symbols such as green landscapes, authenticity and typicality, contributing to the reinvention of remote rural areas. Based on a preliminary content analysis of promotional materials from Italian rural tourism units, this paper aims to discuss the way rural areas and rurality are presented and sold to tourists and to debate some implications for local development. Empirical evidence suggests a lack of correspondence between the *real* rural and the *promoted* rurality.

Key Words: Rural tourism, promotional materials, social representations on rurality, rural reconfiguration processes.

Resumo: Ao longo das últimas década os territórios rurais marginais da Europa perderam uma parte importante do seu carácter produtivo, adquirindo actualmente novas funções, novos papéis e novos significados sociais que, por sua vez, conduzem à percepção daqueles territórios como espaços de consumo. Entre os novos papéis e funções das áreas rurais remotas, os mais relevantes parece ser a protecção do ambiente, a conservação da natureza e as actividades de turismo e lazer. As actividades turísticas, em particular, têm uma crescente importância na produção de um *certa* imagem da ruralidade, através do uso de poderosos símbolos específicos (embora globais), tais como as paisagens verdejantes a autenticidade e a tipicidade, contribuindo assim para a reinvenção das áreas rurais marginais. Com base numa análise de conteúdo exploratória dos materiais promocionais de unidades de turismo

¹ This expression is used in one of the promotional materials analysed. It describes the view from an agro-tourism unit of San Giorgio La Molara (Campania, Italy) and it could be translated as «*an immense countryside wrapped up in green*». The research was funded by CNR through the short-term mobility programme for the year 2008 (contract 140.4). The data was collected with the precious help of Francesca Ugolini (CNR-IBIMET), Laura Caruso (Proloco San Marco dei Cavoti) and Danilo Marandola (CNR-IBAF), to whom the authors wish to express their gratitude.

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rural Italianas, procuramos debater o modo como o rural e a ruralidade são apresentados e vendidos aos turistas, bem como algumas implicações para o desenvolvimento local. A evidência empírica sugere a inexistência de correspondência entre a *realidade* rural e a *promoção* da ruralidade.

Palavras-chave: turismo rural, materiais promocionais, representações sociais sobre a ruralidade, rural processos de reconfiguração.

Sommario: Nel corso degli ultimi decenni in Europa i territori rurali marginali hanno perduto gran parte del loro carattere produttivo, acquisendo nuove funzioni, ruoli e significati sociali che, a loro volta, hanno portato a percepirla come luoghi di consumo. Fra i nuovi ruoli e funzioni, la protezione dell'ambiente, la conservazione della natura, e le attività legate al turismo e al tempo libero sembrano essere le più significative. Il turismo, in particolare, ha un ruolo crescente nella produzione di *una certa* immagine della ruralità, attraverso l'uso di simboli specifici (benchè globali) potenti come paesaggi verdi, autenticità e tipicità, contribuendo così alla reinvenzione delle aree rurali remote. Sulla base di una analisi preliminare dei contenuti del materiale promozionale di unità turistiche rurali italiane, la ricerca presente intende discutere il modo in cui le aree rurali e la ruralità sono presentate e vendute ai turisti, e le relative implicazioni per lo sviluppo rurale. L'evidenza empirica suggerisce la mancanza di corrispondenza fra il rurale *reale* e la ruralità promossa.

Paroles chiave: turismo rurale, materiale promozionale, rappresentazioni sociali sulla ruralità, processi di riconfigurazione rurale

1. Introduction

During the last decades, many rural territories of Europe lost a great part of their productive character. Although common both to central and peripheral European countries, this situation was particularly evident in Southern regions given their historic, economic and social contexts and, mainly, the geographical isolation, the specific environmental conditions and the limited average dimension of farms in many marginal areas.

The continuing loss of economic and social relevance of agricultural activities, together with the undeniable environmental impacts of industrial agriculture and with the wider awareness of the environmental and social functions rural areas can provide to society as a whole, contributed to the conception (at least at the political level) of the rural as a *multifunctional* space. In this sense, it is currently expected that rural areas could have part in environmental protection and nature conservation, and host tourism and leisure activities. Particularly evident in remote rural areas, these changes portray a rural that is now *beyond agriculture* (e.g. Marsden, 1995; Oliveira Baptista, 2006), an expression that well summarizes much of the post-productivism theories (e.g. Marsden, 1995, 1998), whose success has soundly contributed to diffuse the sense of negligibility of production in rural areas (e.g. Ward, 1993).

Following these transformations, new symbolic values and social meanings are being attributed to rural areas, based on their (real or idealised) qualities and giving them new roles and functions mainly oriented to consumption activities. As Halfacree (2006: 57) refers, many peripheral rural areas are nowadays considered "*consuming idylls*", directly opposing "*super-productivist*" spaces, where the "*key spatial practices are consumption-oriented, notably leisure, residence and attendant migration (counter-urbanization)*". Even if a large number and variety of agents and sources can be identified as responsible for the current social representations and consumption on rural areas and on rurality, tourism operators and agents seem to play a prominent role.

Despite little evidence of its general positive impacts in rural development, tourism is often considered (particularly by politicians, as Ribeiro and Marques (2002) demonstrates) as the panacea for the problems peripheral rural areas are facing. At the same time, tourism has

a major role in the promotion of a *certain* image of rurality, through the use of specific (although, to a certain extent, global and hegemonic) symbols and signs (such as *green landscapes*, *immensity*, *remoteness*, *authenticity* and *typicality*), contributing to *reinvent* rural contexts, not only in the *minds* but also in material terms. This kind of reinvention may have profound effects on local contexts and identities, transforming the physiognomy of places, apparently more in accordance with urban constructs and ideals than with local values and needs.

Based on an exploratory content analysis of the promotional materials from 50 rural tourism units located in five municipalities of two Italian regions (Campania and Tuscany), this paper aims to analyse how rural areas and rurality are being presented to tourists trying, at the same time, to discuss the discrepancy between the images being promoted and the *reality* of local contexts.

2. Rural Areas as Reinvented Places

In the few last decades, particularly in *marginal* or *remote* regions of Europe, rural areas experienced important transformations not only in terms of their economic character and functions (mainly associated with agriculture), but also in terms of their social roles and meanings⁴. Nowadays rural areas increasingly seem to play a role of recreational and leisure reserves (both in environmental and cultural terms) essentially for urban or non local populations (e.g. Figueiredo, 2008a; 2008b). The new roles attributed to rural areas directly emerge from the so-called rural *crisis* which (although dressing differently from one place to another) possess common characteristics, the most visible being the loss of social and economic relevance of agriculture (e.g. Mormont, 1994a; Jollivet, 1997) In spite of the central role still retained by the production of food, and of the political emphasis on competitiveness in a global market (Evans et al., 2002), in urban representations and in political discourses and strategies, particularly peripheral rural areas have been transformed from places of *food production* to *places of consumption*. Farming is increasingly seen as a multifunctional activity, in which agricultural productions have to be combined with a variety of other activities, playing at the same time diverse roles and functions: environmental protection, landscape maintenance, cultural traditions preservation and rural tourism organization (e.g. Butler and Hall, 1998; Cudworth, 2003).

Although “*nature as long been a keystone in the social construction of rurality*” (Woods, 2003: 272) “*nowadays the natural and environmental issues have gained a central role in the redefinition of the ‘remote’ rural areas*” (Figueiredo, 2008a: 27). This redefinition is carried essentially by the population of the more developed and urbanised societies which tend to represent the rural as *natural* and in a quite *idyllic* manner. Images and symbols of idealised ways of life, landscape features, architectural characteristics and local food productions authenticity play a central and increasingly important role in reconfiguring rural territories. Moreover rural areas are still represented in opposition to the urban centres, if no longer (as in the past) in terms of geographical and social values’ remoteness, at least as very distinctive places (e.g. Jollivet, 1997; Shucksmith, 2006). Despite some *anti-idyllic* narratives, a dominant perspective and discourse is that the rural way of life is the epitome of the *good life*, representing the antithesis of change and of modernity (e.g. Halfacree, 1993, 1995; Phillips et al., 2001; Figueiredo, 2003; McCarthy, 2008). All these aspects contribute to form the *countryside of the mind*, to reinvent Pahl’s formulation (1966).

Together with the above mentioned changes affecting many rural territories within developed countries, and despite the diversity of their impacts, three main narratives and perspectives emerged, shaping both social perceptions and scientific analysis (Murdoch, 2003; Gamache et al., 2004; Halfacree, 2007):

1. Pre-modernity or *rural crisis* discourses,

⁴ Since more than three decades ago these dramatic changes have been well documented and debated. Therefore it is not our intention to recreate and discuss them in the ambit of this paper. For a detailed analysis and debate on the transformations of European rural areas, see the works of Mormont (1994b); Ramos Real (1995); Jollivet (1997); Figueiredo (2003); Oliveira Baptista (2006) and Shucksmith (2006).

2. Productivism perspectives and

3. *Pastoralist or rural renaissance* approaches.

In the first, rural areas are perceived as less developed and backward, needing transformation and development. In the second, rural areas' images and perspectives are strongly associated with development itself, due to the modernization processes in agricultural and food production functions. Finally, in the third approach, rural areas can be understood as repositories of the *traditional* cultural values, of an *untouched* nature therefore needing to be preserved mainly for leisure and tourism activities.

In this third perspective, tourism activities play a relevant role, not only because they are often presented as the panacea for rural areas problems and constraints, but mainly because they give a major contribution to the current material and symbolic reconfiguration processes. In fact, bearing in mind the common (yet very broad) definition of rural tourism - the entire tourism activity in a rural area (Keane 1992; OCDE 1994) motivated by features of *rurality* – its potential contribution to local development seems rather clear. Yet the connection between tourism and local contexts proved to be faint, therefore the impact of tourism on local development is often limited to a few sectors and groups while it seems unable to revitalize other traditional activities (e.g. Kastenholz and Figueiredo, 2007; Ribeiro and Marques, 2002). At the same time, tourism may have relevant impacts on rural contexts by inducing important changes in local features and character. As Macnaghten e Urry (1998: 191) described, rural tourism activities often imply *“that the countryside will be increasingly consumed as spectacle. Potent images and symbols become readily transformed into saleable commodities”*. One of the most important consequences of this situation is *“associated with the ‘divorce’ between the marketable qualities of the rural and its historical and social contexts, as well as to the loss of authenticity”* (Figueiredo, 2004: 2), characteristic that is, however, a powerful symbol in the narratives and discourses about rurality. Therefore, rural areas where this predicament is observed become managed by market strategies and established as attractions in which the environmental qualities and the cultural aspects become *commodities*. As again Macnaghten and Urry (1998: 191) state, *“this scenario may help to explain the recent appeals to ‘green’ tourism by corporate interest and government tourist boards, and the apparent ease and slight effort involved in presenting a ‘green’ (...) image”* of the rural as a tourism destination.

All the above mentioned aspects are strongly connected with a general (and increasingly *global*) image of rural areas as pure, natural, genuine, authentic and traditional spaces and with the positive feelings towards rurality. As Butler, Hall and Jenkins (1998:12) refer *“the overall image of rural areas is a very positive one in most of the developed world. Rurality may be a myth in the terms that many people regard it, a peculiar blend of nostalgia, wholesomeness, heritage, nature and culture, combining the romantic combination of man and nature working in harmony, captured on calendars and Christmas cards throughout the developed world, but it is a powerful myth that has created a demand for access to, and in some cases, acquisition of parts of the rural landscape”*. Following this apparently growing demand, rural tourism units tend to present their rural contexts accordingly with the more global symbols and narratives we described above.

The rural that is being promoted through tourism promotional materials tends to represent an image based on the idyllic features, on the traditional and genuine character, using some rather meaningful words and symbols, easily recognized by the general public opinion, as well as by rural tourists, as the *countryside*. In fact, as Figueiredo (2004: 8) demonstrates *“the symbolic constructions of rurality (...) usually refer to a set of paradigms about rural life which had its origins long time before the modernization of agricultural activity. They refer to a pre-industrial and to a pre-modern rural”* and in this sense they perfectly seem to respond to the actual demand for *lost paradises* that are apparently easier to be found in *remote* rural spaces.

These somewhat hegemonic social representations of rural areas are being well translated in the promotional materials used for marketing purposes that, in many cases, ignore the *real* character of the places being promoted and contribute to new (re)configurations. In this sense, tourism *“ends up by promoting the preservation of the fictional recreations of ethnicity as*

ethnicity becomes a commodity to be bought and sold. Village life becomes something to see in the recreational repertoire of the tourist rather than a complex of real social activity" (Norkunas, 1993: 2). As MacCannell (1973, 1976) refers in his seminal works on authenticity in tourism, a new *real reality* might be constructed to be more appealing and desirable by tourists, authenticity thereby becoming not *authentic* and *real* but *staged*. Despite the diverse meanings and definitions of authenticity (MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Cohen, 2004; Hillman, 2007; Lau, 2010 and Wang, 1999), in this paper the concept assumes its most basic sense, which means, following Theobald (1998: 141) that authenticity is understood here as something "... *genuine, unadulterated... the real thing*". A relevant feature here is the degree to which any touristic attraction or participation can be defined as real and authentic once it is promoted, created and offered as a commodity (e.g. Hillman, 2007).

The previous remarks are in clear opposition with the optimistic perspective of Mormont, from 1980, a period in which rural tourism started to be regarded, both in political and in academic terms, as a powerful local development instrument. In his work, Mormont stated that "*tourism in rural areas has the peculiarity that a part of the tourist product is rurality itself: its culture, its way of life, its landscapes, all the commodities that without being produced for tourism are consumed by the tourists*" (Mormont, 1980: 283), almost presenting the *authentic* and *real* rurality as the tourism product itself. Nowadays, on the contrary, it is the tourism industry that apparently *produces* a large part of the rural *product*, more in accordance with the urban needs, desires and expectations over rural areas than in accordance to the existent characteristics of the local contexts.

Although rural tourism entrepreneurs (and the promotional materials they use) are not the single agents determining the tourists' destination choices and not the only that can be accountable for rural areas reconfiguration processes, in recent years they act as the main interface between local territories and tourism demand and consumption. In this sense, they certainly have a paramount role in addressing tourists' requests towards *authentic* local character and qualities. Yet the tendency to fulfil tourists' representations, desires and demands by supporting their images and visions of rural areas and rurality, demonstrated by rural tourism entrepreneurs may act against their potential role as local development agents. In this sense, one may agree with the suggestion of Butler and Hall (1998) that the way in which rural areas are being promoted is of fundamental relevance to the manner in which they are being consumed and developed. As the authors' state "*the way people view rural areas is of fundamental importance for the way they use rural areas. There are an increasingly diverse set of viewpoints or perceptions of rural areas: what they are, what they could be, what they should be, and how they could be brought there. Inevitably such a variety of viewpoints can result in disagreement over goals and objectives, and policies and methods of achieving such goals*" (Butler and Hall, 1998: 115).

The primary tools for conveying certain images and representations of the rural are promotion and advertising aiming at selling rurality elements and the contexts in which they are allegedly placed. As illustrated by Perkins (2006), quoting the interpretation of promotional materials of the Highlands undertaken by Hughes (1992), tourism entrepreneurs can create *mythical places*, disregarding their real historical dynamics. However, *local character* and *authenticity* are frequently mobilised as major advertisement tools, even as part of the *global* rurality. The risk here is that, quoting Baudrillard (1981: 6), "*signs of a real can substitute the real itself*". And, as the signs refer to a construct, "*nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity... a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared*". The *real* rural dynamics, activities and even rural inhabitants may, therefore, be *overwhelmed* by the *signs* of the *new real rural* as desired by tourists and promoted by tourism entrepreneurs.

It is to be expected that these processes and the apparent discrepancy between the *real* rural and the rural that is object of *touristification* occur and impact differently in diverse locations and contexts, taking also into account the diversity of tourism enterprises and levels of tourism development.

3. Research Questions, Methodology and Study Areas

3.1 Aims and research questions

The paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the ways in which rural areas and rurality are being promoted and presented to tourists and of the correspondence between their promotion and the *reality* of local contexts as it emerges from the official statistical data. Therefore the paper presents the results of an exploratory content analysis of promotional materials issued by 50 rural tourism establishments in five municipalities of Campania and Tuscany, in Italy.

The content analysis was guided by the following research questions:

- Which specific rural elements (e.g. landscapes, natural aspects, cultural traditions and typical productions) are used to promote tourism establishments?
- Which types of activities and services are offered to tourists and what is their relation with local character?
- What is relationship between promotional images and symbols and local socioeconomic contexts?

In addition, the research intended to contribute to debate the impacts of the use of particular images and symbols of rurality on local contexts.

3.2 Methodology

To answer the previous questions, data was collected, during the first semester of 2008, from a number of different sources. First of all and in order to characterize the rural social and economic contexts, statistical and documental data was collected⁵. Subsequently, all the promotional materials in Italian language (preferred even when other languages were available) – websites, leaflets, postcards and business cards – issued by the 50 tourism establishments, were collected and registered. However different in nature and potential in attracting tourists' attention (e.g. Choy et al, 2007; Molina and Esteban, 2006; Pan et al, 2011), the materials were analysed as equivalent through an exploratory content analysis.

As explained by Zhou and DeSantis (2005) content analysis is a research technique focusing on the actual content and internal characteristics of *text*, being *text* defined as any written or spoken word, pictures, videos, documentaries and films. As Berelson (1952) demonstrated content analysis aim to objectively and systematically describe the content of almost any form of communication, therefore requiring a clear and unambiguous definition of attributes or variables to be measured and the correspondent values or categories (Pan et al., 2011) that should be part of the coding frames.

In this study the analysis was focused on the written content of the promotional materials and on words and concepts used. Content analysis was both qualitative and quantitative, supposing the determination of the presence of certain words and concepts as well as their contextualization and articulation with other words and concepts within the text or sets of text (figure 1).

Two coding schemes were built: a first one dealing with the attributes regarding the characterization and presentation of each rural establishment and a second one including the attributes related to the presentation of the local rural areas and rurality (table 1). As it is generally the case, this procedure was followed by a summative content analysis, which involved counting and comparisons of values, and by the interpretation of underlying contexts. As this systematization procedures can result in losses regarding the richness of the texts analyzed, a more qualitative and non-structured approach and a direct use of transcriptions were also used.

⁵ Collected from ISTAT – Italian National Statistical Institute – and from the Municipalities.

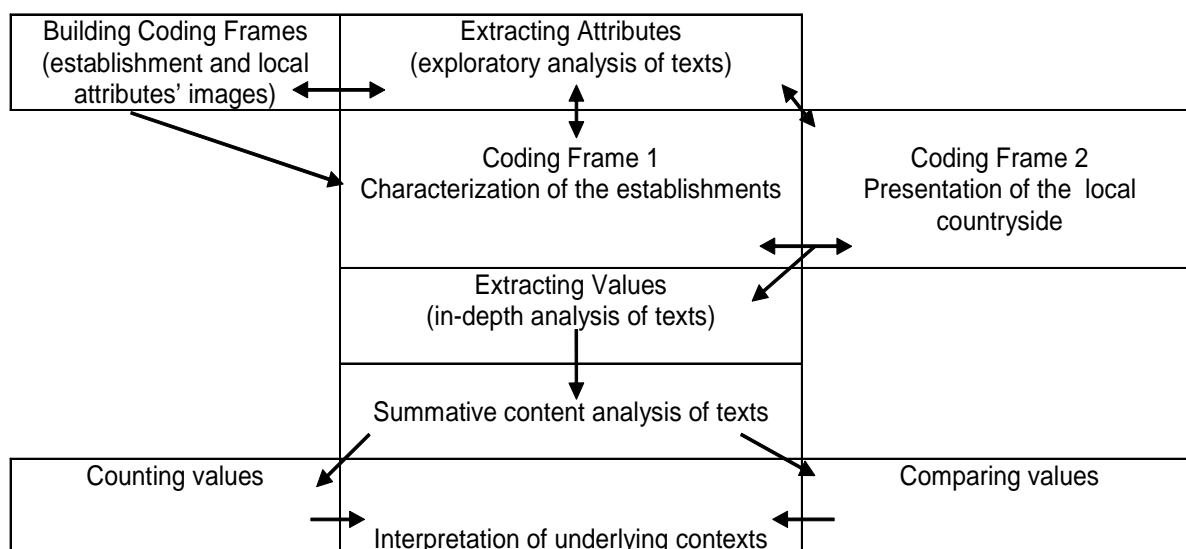


Fig 1. Promotional materials' content analysis procedures.

CF 1 Characterization of the establishment		CF 2 Presentation of the local countryside	
Attributes	Values	Attributes	Values
<i>Bedrooms</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Landscape</i>	<i>Words used to describe (e.g. forests, green, fields)</i>
<i>Beds</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Nature</i>	<i>Natural elements and description (e.g. animals, trees, genuine, authentic)</i>
<i>Services Offered</i>	<i>List of Services (e.g. parking, playground, swimming pool)</i>	<i>Food Products</i>	<i>Products and description (e.g. olive oils, wine, homemade, typical, genuine, traditional)</i>
<i>Activities Proposed</i>	<i>List of Activities (e.g. swimming, relaxing, trekking, horse riding)</i>	<i>Local People</i>	<i>Local people mentioned (e.g. historical figures, farmers)</i>
<i>Products Offered/Sold</i>	<i>List of Products (e.g. cheese, bread, olive oil, wine)</i>	<i>Local Communities</i>	<i>Words used to describe activities and ways of life (e.g. traditional, sustainable)</i>
<i>Links</i>	<i>List of Links to monuments, cities, etc.</i>	<i>Architecture</i>	<i>Words used to describe architecture and architectural elements (e.g. stone, ancient, traditional)</i>
		<i>Local Activities</i>	<i>Activities mentioned and words used to describe it (e.g. agriculture, handicrafts)</i>
		<i>Art and History</i>	<i>Monuments and historical events mentioned (e.g. churches, museums, battles, castels)</i>

Tab 1. Coding frames (CF) for the Promotional Materials.

The analysis performed at this stage mainly focus on the frequency analysis of the principal symbols and words used by the rural tourism units to describe the landscape, the typical productions and the architectonic features.

3.3 Study Areas and Cases

The selection of the study areas and cases (table 2 and figure 2) was based on previous research and knowledge and mainly on their different characteristics in terms of tourism development, economic activities (particularly the relevance of agriculture to the local economies) and social and demographic contexts. Although not entirely representative of the regions and of the Italian large diversity of rural environments, the five areas represent different types of rural features, *rurality*, landscape and natural elements.

Region	Province	Municipality	Agro-Tourism	Room rental and B&B	Hotels	Holiday houses	Total
Tuscany	Siena	Rapolano Terme	15	1	4	2	22
	Arezzo	Chitignano	1	1	1	1	4
		Ortignano/Raggiolo	1	1	0	1	3
Total			16	3	5	4	29
Campania	Benevento	San Marco dei Cavoti	5	10	0	1	16
		San Giorgio la Molara	4	1	0	0	5
Total			9	11	0	1	21
		Total	26	14	5	5	50

Tab 2. Number of tourism units analysed in the study areas, by category.

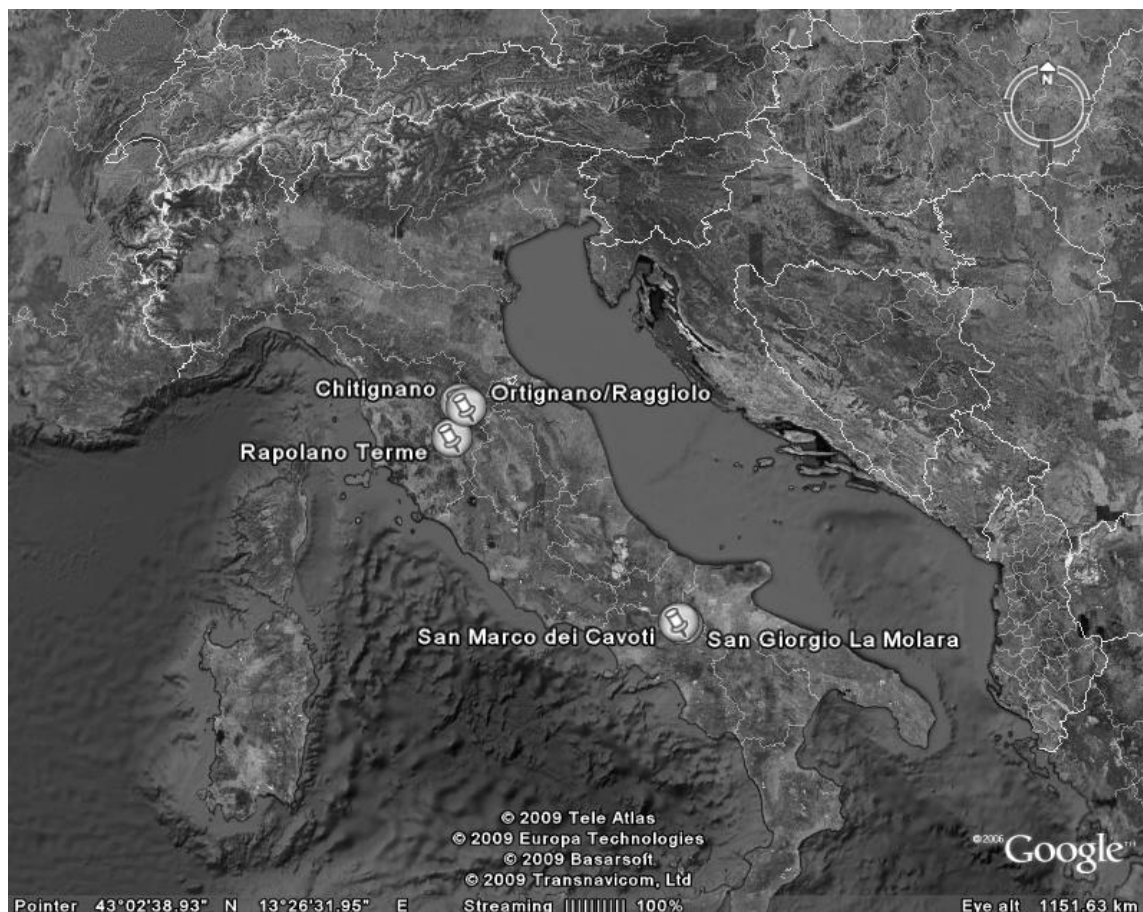


Fig 2. Location of the study areas. Source: Google Maps, (accessed December, 2010).

At the socioeconomic and demographic levels, significant population losses took place in the last five decades in all the study areas, apart for Rapolano Terme, due to the proximity to Siena, to better transport accessibilities and to the presence of some industries. In fact, Rapolano Terme has the largest number of inhabitants, followed by San Marco dei Cavoti and San Giorgio La Molara. Much smaller are Chitignano and Ortignano/Raggiolo. Table 3 depicts some demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the five municipalities, from which the generally low levels of literacy revealed by local population and the accentuated ageing processes must be emphasised.

Municipality	Number of Inhabitants	Population density	Population </ =14 years (%)	Population =/> 65 years old (%)	Population Secondary School degree or less	% of employed population working in agriculture
Region of Tuscany	3638211	158,2	12,3	23,3	57,5	4,0
Province of Siena	262990	68,8	12,0	25,1	54,5	7,8
Rapolano Terme	4686	56,4	12,9	28,6	59,7	6,1
Province of Arezzo	337236	104,2	12,5	22,8	56,6	4,6
Chitignano	979	66,5	17,6	36,9	60,8	4,1
Ortignano/Raggiolo	848	23,2	11,3	31,7	61,5	6,7
Region of Campania	5790187	426,0	17,3	15,5	54,0	7,1
Province of Benevento	228572	110,4	14,7	20,8	50,5	16,5
San Marco dei Cavoti	3686	75,5	18,9	34,5	51,3	23,3
San Giorgio la Molara	3135	48,0	12,9	22,4	58,1	47,2

Tab 3. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, by region, province and municipality. (Source: ISTAT, 2007.)

San Marco dei Cavoti and San Giorgio la Molara lay in a remote part of Campania, forgotten by tourism. Agriculture and related activities, centred on the production of cereals, meat and cheese, employ a large part of the population, together with the tertiary sector. Intensively cropped farmland occupies almost all the territory, marking the landscape together with some oak groves. The two small municipalities – Ortignano/Raggiolo and Chitignano – located in a mountain area rich in abandoned chestnut and beech forests, have relatively few productive activities and agriculture plays a much residual role. In spite of the proximity of art cities such as Arezzo and Cortona, tourism possesses a negligible economic role. Conversely, in Rapolano Terme, tourism has some importance due to the proximity of Siena, and to a well-established tradition of visitors to the geothermal springs. This municipality is characterized by what is commonly identified as the *typical Tuscan* landscape, dominated by farmhouses and castles, scattered among cereal fields, olive plantations and oak groves. Additionally, light industry and quarries have a major role, while agriculture (centred on productions as olive oil, wine and cereals) is declining.

Resulting from the diversity of environmental, cultural and socioeconomic contexts, as well as from different social and institutional notions of rurality and its relevance to regional identities, the aims, level of detail and updating of rural tourism legislation are quite different in Campania and Tuscany. In Campania agro-tourism has been regulated for many years by a scarcely updated law from 1984, and only at the end of 2008 a new law was issued, while in Tuscany the legislation in force was issued in 2003. The previous law, from 1994, had been updated several times, witnessing an unmatched attention to this economic sector. In fact, while in Tuscany the legislation is rather detailed in its aiming to define the specificity of agro-tourism and its relationship with agricultural productions, in Campania the law was much more oriented towards the definition of economic interventions to support agro-tourism, therefore neglecting its comprehensive definition. On the other hand, Tuscan legislation aims to improve farmers' income and to support local high quality productions and traditions, thus fostering local development. This clearly indicates a deep recognition both of rural tourism role in local development and of the importance of local character in rural tourism promotion. In Campania, the legislation was more oriented to support folklore, handicrafts, traditional festivities, etc, as

well as archaeological heritage, that are supposed to play an important role in the attraction of tourists. These major differences seem to reflect the different centrality of rurality and specific rural features in the social construction and representation of regional identity. In Tuscany, a well governed rural environment has always been a regional asset for socioeconomic stability and for its aesthetical value. In Campania, urban culture, expressed mainly by the city of Naples, always had a more relevant role over the countryside, which was marginal from both the social and the cultural points of view.

The institutional attention of Tuscany to the development of rural tourism is reflected in the number of tourism units that can be found even in little municipalities (see table 2). Although Rapolano Terme and Chitignano attracted tourists in past times, due to their mineral waters, rural tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon (developed mainly in the last three decades) fostered by the large (and worldwide recognized) appeal of Tuscan landscape and *way of life*, and by the proximity of art cities. In the southern areas rural tourism is even a more recent activity, being the creation of tourism establishments largely subsidized by the regional administration and European Union funds.

4. «An immense countryside wrapped up in green» or how Tuscan and Campania rural tourism establishments reinvent and sell the countryside – an exploratory analysis

The socioeconomic diversity, together with the different role and importance of tourism, presented in the previous section, draw some light on the ways in which rural areas are being promoted and sold to tourists, as well as on the forms in which the countryside is being reinvented.

In general, agro-tourism establishments represent 52% of the cases, suggesting a survival of small family farms and households, whose resistance in face of crises has been evidenced in other contexts (Bennett and Phillipson, 2004), showing their role in local economy. In the case of Italy, their role in landscape maintenance should also not be ruled out. Major differences are found regarding the characteristics of the establishments. Bed & Breakfast are the most common type of accommodation in Campania municipalities, despite the higher relevance of agriculture in the region. In Tuscany, despite the minor role of agricultural activities, agro-tourism establishments are dominant. The rural tourism establishments analysed are generally small, 52% possessing less than 6 bedrooms and 38% less than 6 beds. The smaller units are concentrated in Campania, evidencing both the recent character of rural tourism and the minor demand for the countryside.

The longer tradition in rural tourism and the larger competition among units in Tuscany seems to explain the differences in terms of promotional activities, materials and means used. In fact, more than 85% of the Tuscan units have email contact, maps, website and use other promotional materials (business cards, leaflets, advertising in rural tourism websites, etc.) to advertise their activities. On the contrary, only 57% of the establishments in Campania possess a website, while only 42.8% have email contact and maps. Nevertheless this difference is mainly due to the establishments located in Rapolano Terme, since the ones in Chitignano and in Ortignano/Raggiolo follow approximately the same path of the southern units.

The same can be stated about the languages spoken in the studied units: while in the ones located in the Tuscan region, English, French, German, Spanish and other languages are spoken besides Italian; in the Campania units only 4.7% speaks English.

Besides accommodation, rural tourism units frequently offer a number of other services to guests, varying from swimming pools and sports structures to the organization of excursions and guided tours. Once more, there are important differences between the two regions, when globally considered. A first difference is related to the number of proposed services; a second to their type and a third one to their relation with local territories. In the Tuscan units (figure 3) a larger number and variety of services are offered to guests, being more strictly connected with regional and local features. These include courses on traditional skills (such as cooking and ceramic courses), wine and food tasting, SPA and thermal facilities (or discounts to the facilities

nearby), among others. Once again the units located in Rapolano Terme, due to a longer tourism tradition and also to the presence of some natural characteristics (mineral waters) offer a larger number as well as a wider variety of services. In Campania, the studied units offered a few services which, in parallel, do not seem much related with local and regional specificities.

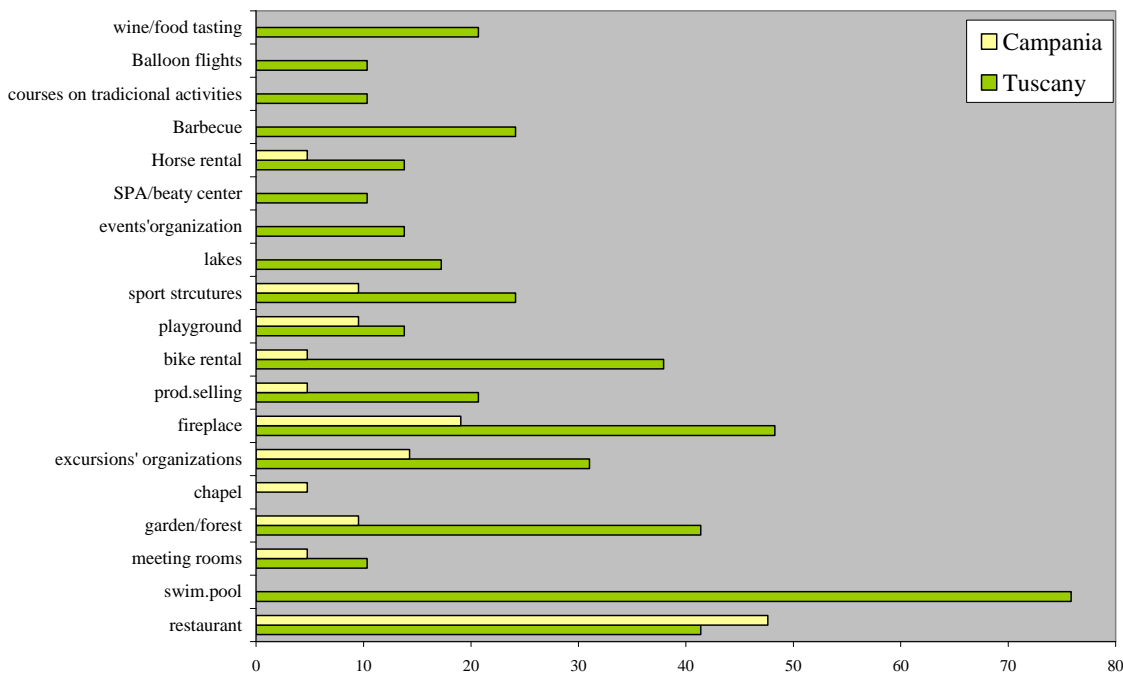


Fig 3. Type of Services offered by Rural Tourism Units, by region (%).

In terms of activities proposed to guests, the differences between the two regions are less evident. Actually, although Tuscan units suggest a larger number of activities, their type and variety are similar. The activities more often suggested are *relax*, *bicycle ridings*, *sports* and *trekking or walking*. Again, in Tuscany a more local territory oriented approach is visible through the proposal of activities such as *mushroom picking*, *wine and food tasting* and *courses on traditional aspects*. In Campania, agro-tourism establishments more frequently suggest to guests *work on the farm* as an activity, in accordance with the relatively major role retained by agriculture in the area, the higher number of full time farmers, and the subsidiary role of tourism (in accordance with Evans et al. (2002) regarding other contexts).

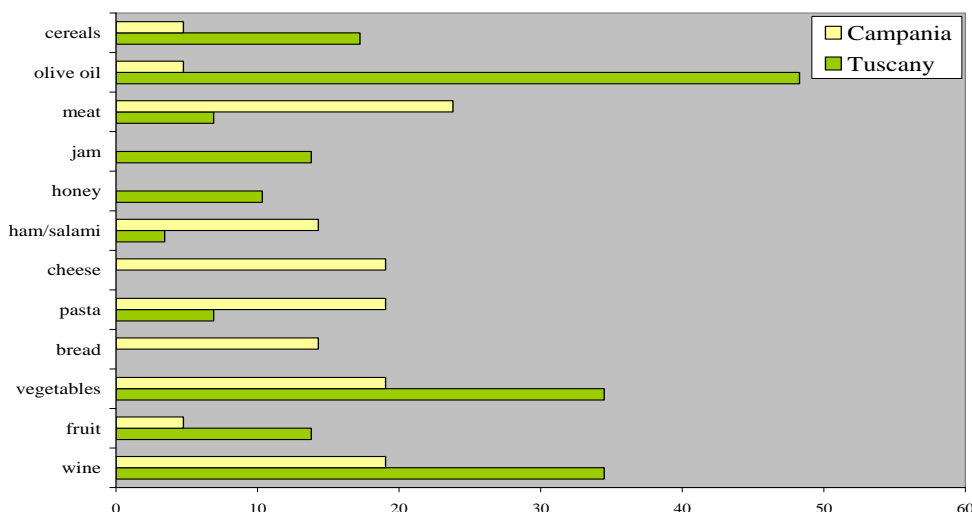


Fig 4. Type of Products offered, by region (%).

Regional legislation in Tuscany and Campania considers local productions as an important part of the rural tourism offer, particularly and not surprisingly in agro-tourism establishments (which represent 52% of the establishments analyzed). Figure 4 shows the type and variety of products served or sold to guests, by municipality, evidencing a relatively strong connection with local agricultural productions: olive oil, wine and vegetables in Tuscany; meat, cheese, vegetables and wine in Campania. Rapolano Terme again stands out proposing more and more diverse, traditional products to guests.

The discourses and symbols used by rural tourism establishments to describe rural areas and rurality, in terms of landscape, architecture and typical productions, contribute, as mentioned in section 2, to the production of a *certain* image of local territories as well as of rurality and rural areas in a more global sense. The symbols and narratives used could contribute to modify the *physiognomy* of places and even alter the rural *reality* itself, through a process of reimagining and reinvention which in turn could lead to the reconfiguration of rural contexts and identities. Bearing in mind these aspects, as well as the growing social and economic relevance of tourism in rural areas along with the identification between the countryside and both the natural resources and the traditional cultural aspects, the exploratory analysis focused precisely on the symbols used to describe the landscape, the traditional productions and the architectonic features. Although the words used to describe the landscape and natural elements are quite similar in both regions - green, *nature/natural*, *hills*, *forests*, *valleys* and *mountains* being the most frequent - Tuscan rural tourism units describe the landscape using a larger number and range of natural features (figure 5).

Rapolano Terme is, again, the municipality where more environmental and natural elements are used, including also *typical* Tuscan features such as *sunset*, *sunflowers* and *cereal fields*. *Vineyards* also represent an important part of the narrative about Tuscan landscape in this municipality. In Chitignano, *valleys* are the most frequent word in the promotional materials, while in Ortignano/Raggiolo *nature* and *green* are the most frequently used words. *Mountains* are, in turn, the more relevant feature for the rural tourism units located in southern municipalities, particularly in San Marco dei Cavoti, although in reality the landscape in this area is mostly characterized by the presence of hills. In parallel, although cereals have a major role in Campania, also marking the landscape, they are not mentioned in the promotional materials.

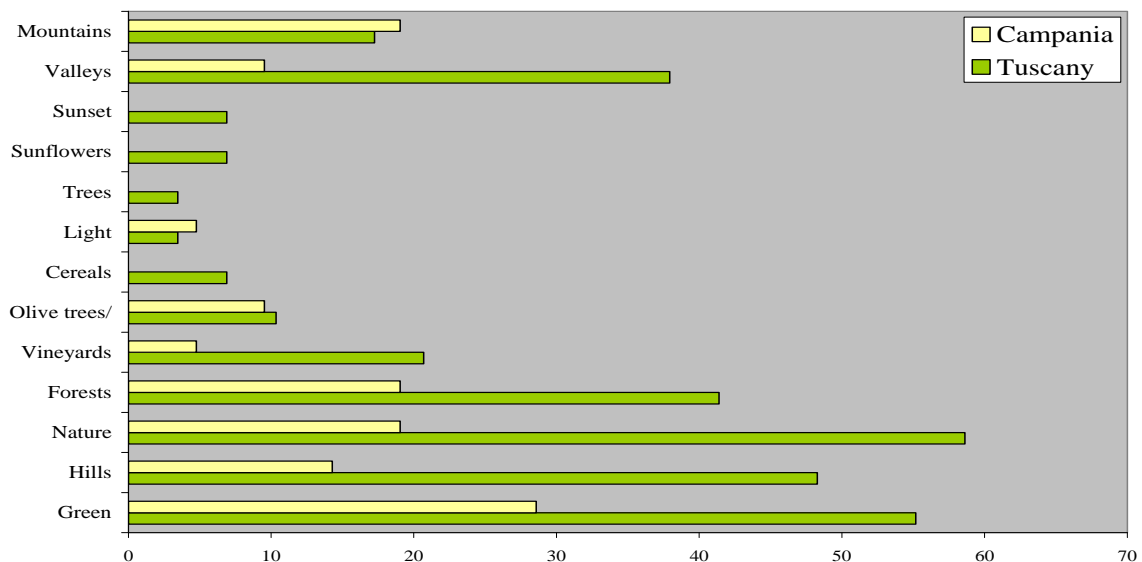


Fig 5. Words used to describe the Landscape, by region (%).

The fact that *natural* and *green* are the most frequent categories, seems to meet the common identification (among tourists and urban dwellers in general) between the countryside, nature and the environment (Jollivet, 1997), drawing at the same time our attention to a specific form of reinventing rural areas, i.e., as natural and environmental reserves (e.g. Figueiredo, 2008b). It is worthwhile to point out that even in the Rapolano Terme establishments, located in the *Crete Senesi* area (which is characterized by the absence of vegetation), the surrounding environment

and landscape are described as *green*. The same may be said about cereal fields, characterized by yellow colour in summer and by brown in autumn, being green in fact only during a few months in spring. This evidence is in accordance with Newby's (1979) reflections on the *green and pleasant [rural] land* and to a specific way of commodifying the rural as an *always-green* and *close to nature* space (e.g. Bell, 2006; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). The circumstance that tourism operators stress those specific characteristics is not negligible, since from a scenario dominated by natural elements and green landscapes, local actors and activities seem to be (to a certain extent) excluded (e.g. Figueiredo, 2003). Numerous excerpts from the promotional materials analysed allow us to confirm these findings:

- | |
|---|
| 1. «The farm is located in an immense countryside wrapped up in green and forests, on a hill from where one can appreciate a beautiful panoramic view» (San Giorgio la Molara/SGM) |
| 2. «Immersed in the green, protected from the wind and exposed to the sun all the day, between privacy and relax, in an ancient atmosphere and an unique silence, where peace and serenity can be found» (Ortignano/Raggiolo – O/R) |
| 3. «Wide and open spaces, in the green» (Rapolano Terme - RT) |
| 4. «Surrounded by green, in a real enviable position, among the sweet senesi hills» (RT) |
| 5. «Fascinating landscape, where Man's hand has not broken the enchant of a pure and unspoiled nature» (RT) |
| 6. «In complete harmony, immersed in nature» (San Marco dei Cavoti – SMC) |
| 7. «In a remote location and immersed in a charming natural landscape» (RT) ⁶ |

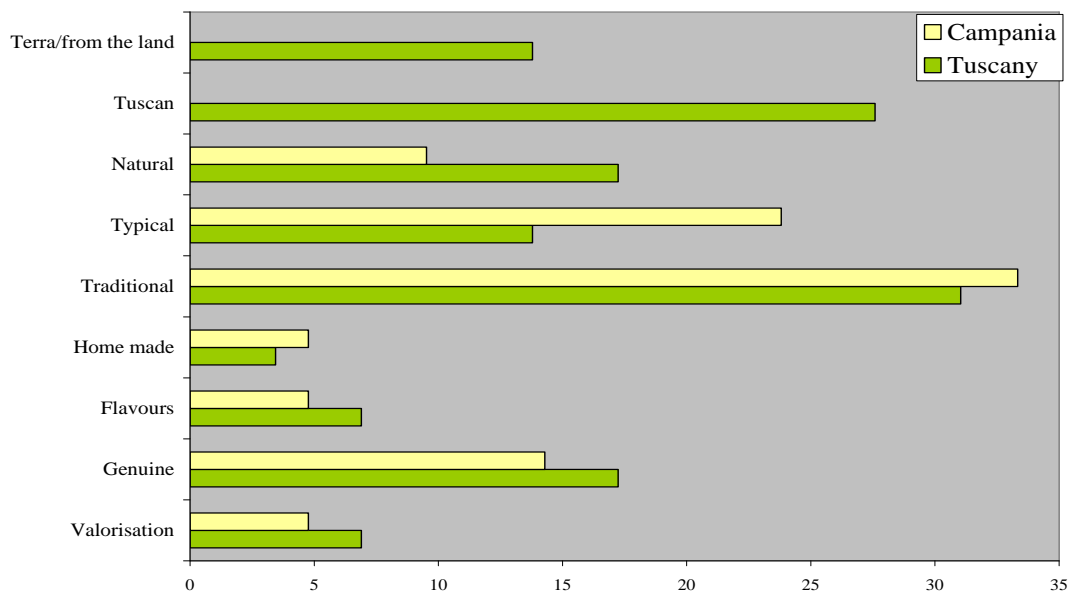


Fig 6. Adjectives used to describe the Landscape, by region (%).

From the previous narratives it is quite evident that *immersed* is one of the most powerful adjectives used in the promotional materials, particularly in Tuscany (75.6%). In Campania, the most common symbol is *panoramic*, immediately followed by *immersed*. The house, the swimming pool, the farm, the stables, all are *immersed* in the *green*, in the *nature*, in the *countryside*, in the *typically Tuscan landscape*, in the *mountains of Campania*, in the *colours of the fields*, etc. (figure 6). It might be worthwhile to note that in Tuscan units *Tuscany* is a symbol used by circa 35%, along with *splendid* and *landscape*. In Campania, the attributes of the region are not mobilised to describe the general environment in which the establishments

⁶ All the excerpts presented in the chapter were translated, by the authors, from Italian.

are located. Also the *purity*, the *charm*, the *heart*, the *silence* and the *enchanted* character of the landscape are symbols apparently only valued by the Tuscan rural establishments.

As mentioned before, since agro-tourism units represent the larger percentage (52%) of the units analysed and since traditional food productions can be considered as an important part of the territories' cultural heritage, the narratives and symbols used to describe them seemed an important variable, given the aims of our research. As figure 7 shows, *Tuscan* character and *della terra (from the land)* aspects are symbols only used by Tuscany units. *Typical* character category seems to be used in the southern municipalities, in the exact same sense. *Traditional* and *genuine* are symbols used in both regions with the same percentages. *Natural* or *biological* aspects are also emphasised by various units in both regions (particularly in Tuscany).

There are some differences among the municipalities: in Rapolano Terme the most commonly used words in describing typical productions are *traditional*, *Tuscan*, *from the land* and *natural*; in San Marco dei Cavoti *traditional* is the more often used symbol, followed by *genuine* (which is as well the word most used in Ortignano/Raggiolo) and in San Giorgio la Molara the preferred expressions are respectively *typical* and *natural*.

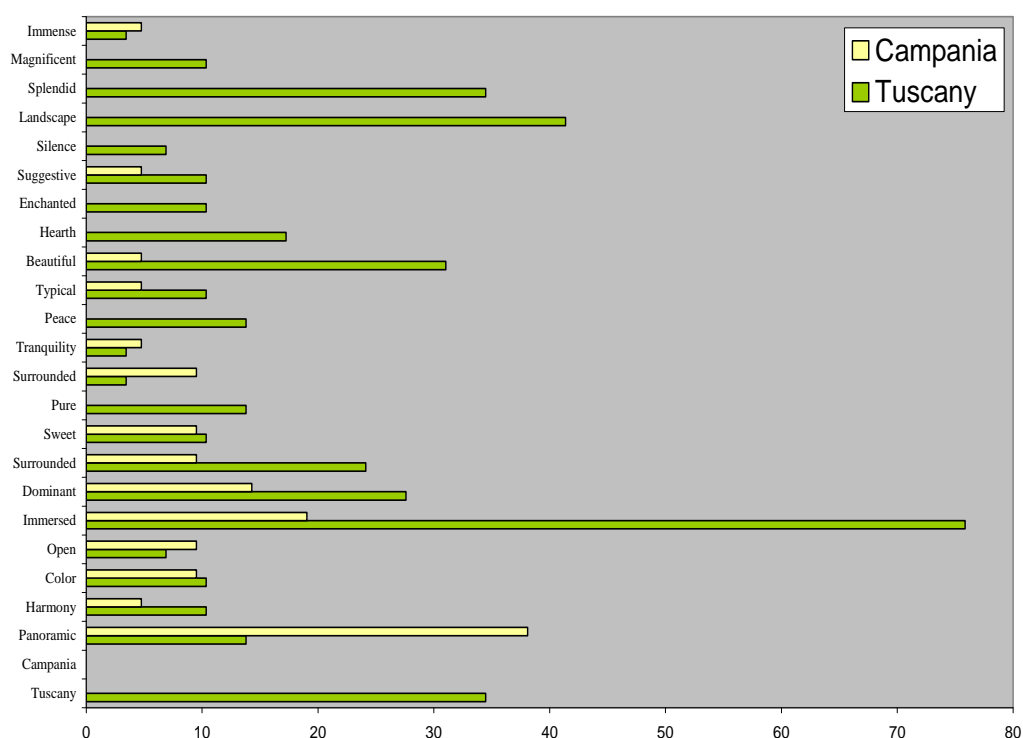


Fig 7. Adjectives used to describe typical food productions, by region (%).

Again, some excerpts from the promotional materials analysed can be used to illustrate the previous findings:

1. « <i>Discovering and valuing the typical dishes of the area's traditional cuisine</i> » (SGM)
2. « <i>Cooking as in the ancient tradition (...) a wide variety of Tuscan typical dishes</i> » (Chitignano – C)
3. « <i>Taste the traditional dishes and our excellent wines</i> » (RT)
4. « <i>With the genuine flavours</i> » (RT)
5. « <i>Tasty dishes of Tuscan cuisine, home made</i> » (RT)
6. « <i>From the 400 olive trees, we make an extra virgin natural oil, of considerable quality</i> » (SGM)
7. « <i>Tasty and genuine cuisine as natural as the territory it represents</i> » (RT)

The symbols and narratives used to describe the architectonic features are, as abovementioned, important aspects when dealing with local cultural heritage issues. The words more frequently used in both regions to describe those features are symptomatic of that importance. In fact, both in Tuscany and in Campania they are: *ancient*, *stone*, *restored* and *characteristic*. Only in the Tuscan units *rustic/rural*, *typical* and *Tuscan* are used to describe the architectonic qualities of the houses (figure 8). Again, it is worth noticing the relevant symbolic value of the word *stone*, largely used to describe the houses even in Rapolano Terme, where bricks are the most common and more traditional building materials.

Once again some differences are visible among the municipalities, being architecture features described as *Tuscan* and *original* only in Rapolano Terme, *ancient* in the former and also in San Giorgio la Molara and being *stone* the most frequent symbol in Ortignano/Raggiolo. The following excerpts are, again, elucidative of the previous findings:

1. «Ancient Tuscan farmhouse recently restored without modifying the original architectonic characteristics » (RT)
2. «Farmhouse made in stone, typical of the Tuscan agriculture, object of an accurate and careful restoration respecting the ancient characteristics» (RT)
3. «The agro-tourism unit is located in an old farmhouse made in limestone from the end of 800, perfectly restored» (SGM)
4. «Old construction in stone, recently restored» (C)
5. «Entirely constructed in stone» (RT)
6. «One solid stone building of typically Tuscan architecture» (O/R)

It seems quite evident, from the previous analysis, that Tuscan rural units use the local characteristics in a more active way in their promotion, while in Campania much less attention seems to be given to local features. This might be connected to the fact that *Tuscany* is a worldwide known sort of *label* and *trademark* (and in this sense, also a *global* symbol and *marker*) and to the circumstance that tourism activities and related marketing strategies are more developed in this region. In Campania, as pointed out before, despite of recent institutional efforts, rural tourism still represents a residual economic activity which seems to be translated into poorer promotional materials and activities. These differences are apparently related to the fact (pointed out in section 2) that diverse rural contexts and rural tourism development stages may produce *different* types of rurality, although based in rather common and global symbols. Further analysis of the promotional materials and local contexts is, however, needed to confirm this relationship.

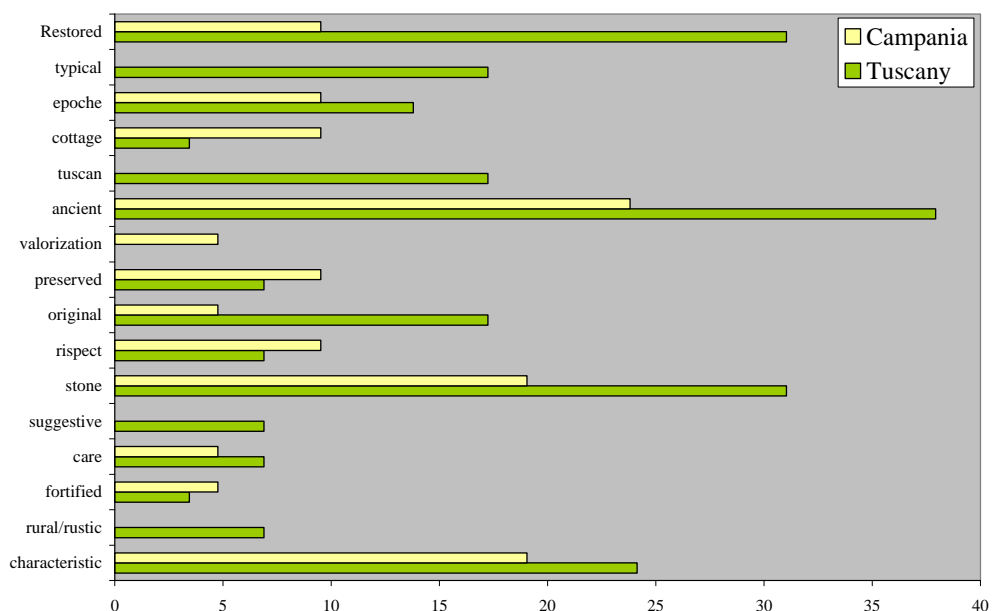


Fig 8. Adjectives used to describe architectural features, by region (%).

5. Conclusions

Rural areas and agriculture are seen nowadays (both socially and institutionally) as multifunctional. Among the various functions rural areas can perform, leisure and tourism activities linked with natural and cultural aspects, seem to have a central role. Rural areas, as we mentioned in the second section, are increasingly perceived and valued for their environmental and traditional qualities which are frequently and globally translated, in social narratives and representations, by the expression *rural idyll*. In the construction of such narratives and images, tourism may play a major contribution. Additionally, tourism might have positive impacts on rural areas development, through the valorisation and mobilization of local character and features in the overall product offered to tourists. Although this might be true in theoretical terms, tourism proved so far to have minor impacts, or at least minor than optimistic expectations would have suggested, both on the socioeconomic conditions of local territories and on the promotion of their characteristics. In fact, the limited role of rural tourism *per se* as a tool for development has been evidenced by several authors (e.g. Balabanian, 1999; Kastenholz and Figueiredo, 2007; Ribeiro and Marques, 2002; Tooman, 1997), also in consequence of the limited income that can be generated by small tourism units (Fleischer and Pizam, 1997; Ribeiro and Marques, 2002).

It has been noted that the understanding of the conceptual framework in which rural world evolves can benefit from an analysis of the social construction of agro-environments and the representation of agriculture and rurality in texts and images (Evans et al., 2002) and from the reflexion on the role of language and representation in the constitution of reality (Barnett, 1998). Although tourists choices are determined by a large variety of factors, symbols used in the promotional materials of rural tourism establishments help to form a *certain* representation of the rural as a specific and, simultaneously, a global, destination. As Garrod et al (2006: 124) noted "*the choice of a destination is greatly influenced by a perceived sense of empathy with the area and this itself is a function of the destination identity that is being projected*". Rural tourism units, using specific words and symbols to promote themselves and the rural environment, can contribute not only to the choice of a destination by tourists, but also to alter local identities, through a process of reinvention and redefinition of the rural reality. This is again supported by the use of global symbols and *products* of rurality to fulfil the dominant visions, desires and needs of tourists. Frequently these symbols and products are not *local* in character nor related to the features and peculiarities of a given community, but rather *global(ized)* in nature. Harmonizing the need to appeal to a target market (in this case the urban dwellers) and to reflect the reality of a destination (here, the rural contexts) is not an easy task (Butler and Hall, 1998).

To a certain extent, it can be said that tourism activities contribute to foster the discrepancy between the *real* rural and the *idealised* one, or between the *authentic* rural and the *staged* one, apparently being the last one much more marked by the urban visions and needs than by the views and expectations of local populations. It is, to some extent, an *urban constructed* rural that tourism entrepreneurs are promoting, selling and diffusing, based on global symbols such as the *green rural*, the *natural rural*, the *typical rural*, the *traditional rural*, the *genuine and authentic rural*. These new forms of promoting and selling the rural may have important impacts on rural realities, contributing to the evolution of a territory in the sense expected by tourists, and to losses in terms of local traditions, skills, agricultural productions and biodiversity, thus devaluating local territories and compromising their development processes.

The evidence from promotional materials demonstrates a global non coincidence between the local realities, as they emerge from statistical data, and the way in which rural contexts are being presented and sold to tourists. Apart from food productions, where a relatively strong connection seems to exist between what is being sold and what is locally produced, the remaining aspects seem largely not to be related with the local features. On the other hand, although in Tuscany a larger number and variety of regional characteristics are mobilized to promote the rural tourism establishments, the worldwide recognised character of the *Tuscan label* seems more to appeal to a globalized image rather than to a dynamic use of local symbols and features. In Campania, given the much weaker regional image, the regional character is not used by any of the cases analysed. It can be noted again that tourism, in the Tuscan

countryside, has a much long lasting tradition, referred both to internal regional tourism and to international tourism, which contributed to build an image and a *trademark* of the territory, and a worldwide recognised *label*. As mentioned, the same cannot be said about Campania, where only the city of Naples and some of its surroundings were able, so far, to build a relatively strong touristic image.

Even though in the Tuscan establishments a larger number and diversity of products, services and activities, as well as describing signs and words are used in the promotional materials, one should stress the similarity in the symbols used in both regions to describe and present the landscape, the local productions and the architectonic features. As analysed in section 4, rural landscape is described as *green, natural, hilly, mountainous*, covered with *forests* and marked by *valleys*, clearly emphasising the common urban identification between the countryside, nature and unspoilt environment (e.g. Jollivet, 1997). This identification is an important aspect in the current rural reconfiguration processes and, as it is argued above, it may contribute to the institution of rural spaces as natural and environmental reserves (e.g. Figueiredo, 2008b). Another important related conclusion is that every aspect promoted by the tourism units analysed seems to be *immersed* (particularly in Tuscany) in *green*, in *nature*, in the *countryside*, in the *typical* and *traditional* landscape. In Campania the tourism establishments appear to offer a more *panoramic* view, although again over the *green*, the *nature*, the *countryside*, the *typical* and *traditional* landscape.

Almost the same paths can be found when analysing the ways in which local productions and local architecture are described and presented. Again, similar symbols are used in both regions. Although local productions are mobilised as important promotional aspects, their local character is scarcely pointed out. Despite some minor differences, both in Campania and in Tuscany, traditional food productions are presented as *genuine, traditional* and *natural*, again drawing our attention more to a *globalised* image than to the *local* and *real* character of the agricultural productions offered. Almost the same can be stated about the architectonic elements used, presented through global (at least in the European countryside) symbols of rurality such as *stone made, ancient*, however carefully *restored* and preserving the *original characteristics*.

Given the abovementioned empirical findings and the theoretical debate about the consequences of the lack of correspondence between the *real* rural and the *sold to tourists* rural, it is evident that further analysis and comparison of the data should be carried out to define the relationships existing between local contexts, tourists expectations, promotional activities and the need to create competitive destination images (Garrod et al., 2006). At the same time it is clear that additional research should be produced in order to address the relationship between tourism activities and local contexts, and how their interaction can influence the paths of future rural development processes.

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