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THE EVOLUTION OF SEASIDE TOURISM ON THE ADRIATIC
COAST OF ABRUZZO: FROM THE MID-19TH CENTURY TO THE
MID-20TH CENTURY*

Received: 30 September 2020 / Accepted: 21 October 2021

Abstract

Seaside tourism originated in the wealthiest and most advanced regions of northern Europe in the 17th century, spreading to Mediterranean countries approximately a century later. Both medical research on the benefits of the sea and the progressive economic and infrastructural expansion allowed the adoption of this type of tourism that has progressively passed from an elite habit to a mass practice. In this framework, we examine the case of the Abruzzo region in Italy on the central coast of the Adriatic Sea. We illustrate, in particular, the evolution of four coastal municipalities whose economic development encouraged the first public and private initiatives for tourism purposes. In the historical reconstruction, important roles are played by the events of the Unification of Italy (1861) and by the social and consumption changes of Italians.

JEL CLASSIFICATION: N00; Z3

KEYWORDS: SEASIDE TOURISM; ABRUZZO REGION; HISTORY OF 19TH CENTURY; HISTORY OF 20TH CENTURY

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* A previous version of this article is published in *Storia del Turismo - Annale 11* (2018).

1. Introduction

In this article, we propose the historical reconstruction of approximately one hundred years of development of seaside tourism in the Abruzzo region in Italy. Abruzzo is a region barely considered in historical and economic studies, yet nonetheless has played a decisive role in connecting the “two Italy’s”, North and South.

On the one hand, Abruzzo is geographically located in central Italy, on the Adriatic coast, historically belonging to the Kingdom of the Two Sicily’s and since then culturally and socially linked to the southern area. On the other hand, Abruzzo’s economic development has shown consistently different performances from the weak resilient south, differentiating in economic structure and society (Leonardi 1995; Andriani 2013), and even sharing some characteristics and socioeconomic paths with regions of the centre-north conventionally considered wealthy (e.g., Lagravinese 2015; Asso 2021).

In this article, we deepen one of the paths of economic development, namely, the creation and spread of seaside tourism, proposing the detailed historical reconstruction of four of the main coastal municipalities. Through consulting numerous unpublished archival documents, we reconstruct the history of tourism practices and the respective economic implications starting from the first wave of elite tourism, coinciding with the period of the unification of the country (1861), up to the rapid postwar economic development (1950s) and through to the expansion of mass consumption.

The original contribution of our research is the historical reconstruction of a relevant economic sector in what was once a backwards and isolated region, part of a vast “periphery” nearly isolated from the “central areas”, such as the capital – Rome – and the wealthy north. Seaside tourism currently represents one of the most important forms of tourism in the area, and such an economic activity contributes to creating 3.99%¹ of the total regional added value (the Italian average is 3.95%, in 2018, on ISTAT data).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, we present a brief historical reconstruction of the beginning and early stages of the development of seaside tourism. Section 3 contains the introduction of the

¹ Considering total tourism activities: accommodation and catering services.

case of Abruzzo and the extensive explanation of four case studies among the most important coastal municipalities. Section 4 concludes.

2. The evolution of seaside tourism: a brief historical reconstruction

The origin of seaside tourism dates back to the countries of northern Europe, particularly in the England of the eighteenth century, where thriving elite tourism had developed in some spas. These first experiences of services could not yet be considered tourism in all respects, and the first step towards the creation of seaside resorts took place when the beneficial properties of thermal water were added to those of bathing in the cold water of the sea. The development of this practice on the English coasts made it possible that one of the first and largest seaside resorts of the eighteenth century was created near a British spa town – Scarborough – a summer tourist destination for the aristocracy and nobility (Urry 2002, 36).

The nascent tourism sector has undergone changes and rapid evolution. Seaside tourism surpassed spa tourism at the end of the 18th century, when the benefits of sea air, rich in iodine, were added to those known from diving in salt water. Indeed, a new addiction was emerging in England, which focused on the charm of the cold seas (Battilani 2001, 104).

Medical science recognised brackish air as an important curative property against respiratory diseases that spread in those years due to the unhealthy environment created by the disorderly development of the new cities in the process of industrialisation. The tourist holiday in coastal towns was also recommended for the treatment of childhood diseases and, above all, to combat tuberculosis, which at the time was considered the disease of the century.

With the spread of consumption trends connected to these practices, at least for a privileged part of the population, the spread of seaside resorts was observed in maritime towns on the coasts of northern Europe. The practice of seaside tourism was initially regarded as an elite practice that used the coast for strolling, carefully avoiding exposure to the sun, wind and contact with the sand. In water, strict rules for diving were observed, away from the sight of other swimmers and tourists (Pierucci 2009a, 274-275). The same architecture of the beach resorts underscored their inaccessibility for the middle class: imposing and impressive stations, finely elegant, equipped to accommodate wealthy customers, with covered walkways for access to the bathing rooms, which could be done in special tubs or through the so-called “bathing

machines”, i.e., small horse-drawn cabins with an opening on the back from which it was possible to dive without being seen (Berrino 2011, 119).

The advent of new means of steam transport facilitated the spread of the same model of tourism on the Mediterranean coasts as early as the end of the eighteenth century. It continued to be elitist winter tourism practised for the treatment of respiratory diseases, and the facilities built on the Côte d'Azur and in Italy first imitated the lush buildings typical of the Atlantic coasts.

The first seaside resort on the Adriatic Sea was built in Trieste – at the time part of Austrian territory – at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the first floating beach resort, a model adopted almost immediately in the Venice lagoon and then on the Doric coast in the city of Ancona. Given the particular morphology of the coast, which is mostly flat and sandy, floating beach resorts were used and subsequently replaced with other types of more efficient structures. The latter were in particular known as the “Adriatic model”: seasonal structures connected to the beach by walkways, consisting of platforms resting on stilts with cabins from which it was possible, via stairs, to descend into the water without being seen. They were modern and functional buildings, which did not need the protection of natural creeks (Pierucci 2009a, 281-282).

The change in the style of tourism from the winter to the summer season occurred slowly and only at the end of the nineteenth century, when the dictates of medical science began to enhance the therapeutic properties of the sun. The spread of sandblasting and thalassotherapy changed the tourist's relationship with the beach, which, in response to demand, began to be more frequented and better equipped. The habit of tourism on the warm coasts was facilitated by the development of the railways that allowed people to reach the bathing places in a short time. These transport changes favoured the frequenting of places previously considered remote and isolated, and regions such as Abruzzo in Italy observed an initial soft development of coastal resorts (Berrino 2011, 141).

The beach increasingly became the protagonist not only as a place of health but also for socialisation and entertainment. The normal attendance for tourism expanded to include most of the social classes. Magazines and newspapers of the time took an interest in the new phenomenon, disseminating information on seaside tourism and contributing to the development of coastal resorts (Taddei 1993, 257). In this framework, alongside the specialised treatment structures, the kursaals (intended as tourist facilities that offer a

variety of services and entertainment) were born, i.e., facilities dedicated to leisure.

With the new century, the relationship with the sea changed definitively; from quick dives away from the gaze of others, tourists switched to bathing in the sea. The hygienic culture and the habit of tanning made the relationship with the sea more uninhibited; bathing was no longer a moment of care but became above all a moment of leisure. The consequences for seaside tourism were huge, from the significant expansion of tourists to the modification of the model of beach resorts. The latter were no longer built on the sea from which bathers could immerse themselves without being seen but were built in concrete on the beach, equipped with cabins, toilets and often places for refreshments.

3. Development of seaside tourism in the municipalities of Abruzzo

In the postunification of Italy (1861), the development of tourism in the southern regions was faced with enormous difficulties due to the high heterogeneity of the territories that made up the new state. In addition, a high degree of hostility towards the new unification policy was present, especially from poor and less educated subjects, who were more widespread in the south (Di Nucci 2019).

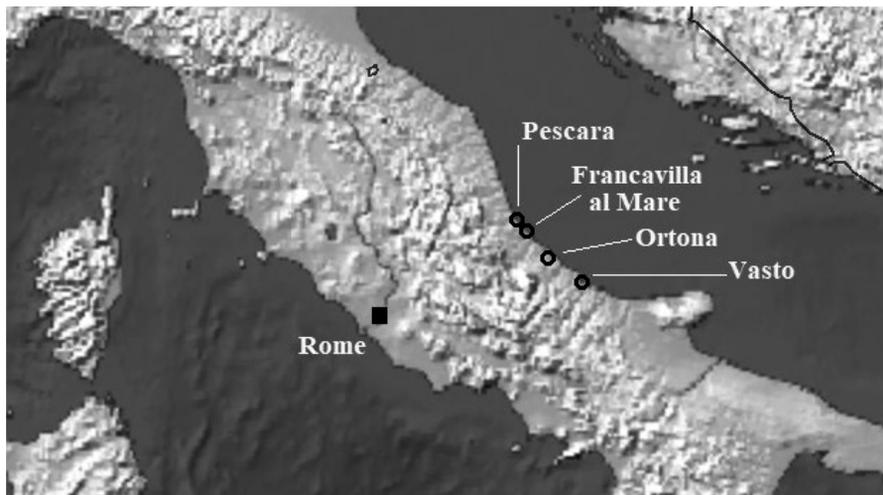
In some southern regions, a major role in tourism expansion was played by the *Italian Touring Club*, which revealed the attraction scenarios of that area (Berrino 2011). In particular, some possible southern tourist destinations – at least in regions such as Abruzzo – often concerned with natural landscapes in a general context of insufficient transport infrastructures.

In this framework, seaside tourism in Italy developed substantially only in the mid-nineteenth century. As regards the Adriatic coast, it developed especially in the north where facilities dedicated to elite tourists were created even before unification. The central and southern beaches were mostly aimed at local day tourists, with no reception facilities. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century were appropriate improvements planned – such as the extensive reclaiming of the marshy areas and the construction of roads and railways – which allowed easier access to the coast from a tourist point of view. During these first signs of coastal transformation, large urbanisation

projects developed in many coastal municipalities, including the construction of parks for tourists, luxury hotels and holiday homes (Di Nucci 2019).

The new relationship between tourists and the sea discussed in Section 2 outlined a new geography of seaside tourism: the elite resorts, frequented by an international clientele, were mainly concentrated on the Ligurian coast, in Venice and Trieste; the high bourgeoisie and the Italian nobility preferred Versilia; and the Adriatic coast of Abruzzo was frequented by the middle class (Benegiamo and Nardone 2018). In Abruzzo, the natural landscape and the Mediterranean climate (Pierucci 2009b) have encouraged the dissimilar and particular development of the municipalities discussed in the following sections: Pescara, Francavilla al Mare, Vasto and Ortona.

Figure 1. Caption of the figure.



Source: Authors' elaboration on Eurostat map.

3.1. Seaside tourism in the municipality of Pescara

The bathing activity of the municipality of Castellammare Adriatico-Pescara (the two urban agglomerations that formed the municipality of Pescara) began at the end of the 1870s, when the local administration facilitated the construction, by private entrepreneurs, of the *Padiglione Marino* (*Marine Pavilion*), a beach resort used as ballroom, and some bathing huts. *Padiglione Marino*, inaugurated in August 1887, and *Caffè-Concerto*

represented the fulcrum of the tourism development project of the town (Alici 1993, 14, 20; Bianchetti 1997, 62)². In the complex of activities implemented by the seaside town, in the same month, the “Censimento dei Bagnanti” (“Census of Bathers”) was instituted, where 1,642 people with 195 companions were registered. It was mostly local tourism: the majority of the bathers came from the nearby towns of the Val Pescara (Valley of the Pescara River), with only 6% residing outside the region (from cities such as Bologna, Milan, Rome, Foggia, Naples). The presence of the nobility was negligible, accounting for less than 1% of tourists, compared with 50% of the upper-middle-class tourists and another half belonging to the less well-off classes.

The data of the census of the summer of 1887 highlighted seaside tourism still in an undeveloped phase, which was certainly not affected by the opening of the Adriatic railway line and the Rome-Pescara line, which took place in 1863 and 1883, respectively (Alici 1993, 12). Additionally, the short-sighted orientations of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie played a negative role in tourism development. They aimed at stimulating industrial and commercial growth, leaving out the tourist-seaside sector. A sign of change occurred in May 1892, when the mayor Teofilo D’Annunzio – together with a group of local entrepreneurs – favoured the birth of the *Società per il Progresso Economico di Pescara* (*Society for the Economic Progress of Pescara*). The institution aimed to create a modern tourist district in the eastern part of the city. However, the achievement of the objective was subject to the implementation of reclaiming and urbanisation works, the cost of which was prohibitive for the municipal coffers, so the project was abandoned³. In the meantime, a residential building program along the beach was started, which involved the demolition of unhealthy urban neighbourhoods, thus giving the town a pleasant appearance from an architectural point of view. In 1893, the municipality obtained the availability of the beaches located north of the *Padiglione Marino* by the State Property (Demanio), and the entire area was divided into building lots to be sold by private negotiation.

Other transformations that took place together with the birth of the *Club Estivo* (*Summer Club*), set up on the model of the *Commissione Balneare di Rimini* (*Rimini Seaside Commission*) (Silvestrini 1965, p. 58)⁴ made it

² Archivio di Stato di Chieti (ASCh), Contenzioso (CON), Processi verbali, 1875-1885, *ad vocem*; Archivio Storico Comunale di Pescara (ASCPe), b. 124, f. 10, Luigi Olivieri to the municipality of Castellammare Adriatico, 12 October 1878, b. 2009, f. 23, private writing, 12 November 1883.

³ ASCh, Tribunale Civile e Commerciale (TCC), Processi verbali, 1879, *ad vocem*.

⁴ ASCPe, b. 9/CA, f. 88, b. 13339, f. 1, 6.

possible to register over 4,000 visitors in the summer of 1905. The latter figure was considered significant for the time and made it necessary to urgently proceed with the necessary structural interventions to adequately support the increase in tourist flow⁵.

A second ambitious project was thus launched, entrusted to engineer Antonino Liberi, who directed the building interventions in the area bordering the municipality of Francavilla al Mare (a coastal municipality on the southern border of Pescara, see Section 3.2). This project took place through a master plan aimed at the subdivision of the beaches of the *Pineta* area (a pine forest located in the southern part of the city). However, even this development program was rejected due to the lack of buyers, so the engineer from Pescara opted for an alternative solution: the construction of a garden city following an urban model that was widespread in Europe at the time (Bianchetti 1997, 69)⁶. A kursaal and a series of homogeneous villas were then built, a project in which local entrepreneurs actively participated, supported by the incentives and tax breaks granted by the municipal government. The project was successful, and the new neighbourhood created obtained the nickname the “garden city” by journalists and writers (Alici 1993, 20-21)⁷.

The original project of Liberi was resumed in the following years and included in the program of the *Kursaal Pineta* joint stock company, founded on 22 September 1911, with the aim of building a marine district at the *Pineta* of Pescara (De Antonis and Minore 1977, 34; Colapietra 1980)⁸. For this purpose, in 1912, the municipality of Pescara approved “The rehabilitation plan of the Contrada Pineta” (“Il Piano di risanamento della Contrada Pineta”) and the “Building plan to transform the rehabilitated area into a seaside climate district” (“Piano edilizio per trasformare la plaga risanata in quartiere climatico balneare”) for a cost of 600 thousand lire⁹. In 1913, work began on the construction of the Kursaal building: the structure immediately became one of the most active aggregation centres of the city’s cultural and recreational life, later hosting an important beach resort (Bianchetti 1997, 64).

The significant development of tourism in the city forced the municipality to finance increasingly noteworthy public works during the period 1913–1916¹⁰. In February 1919, work was carried out again on the *Padiglione*

⁵ Ivi, b. 2430, f. 7, Zecca Cauli to the mayor of Castellamare Adriatico, 11 october 1910.

⁶ ASCh, Prefettura (Pref.), I serie, VII versamento (vers.), categoria 22^, prefect of Chieti to mayor of Pescara, 12 september 1911.

⁷ Ivi, b. 2009, resolution of the Municipality of Castellamare Adriatico, 23 march 1910.

⁸ ASCh, TCC, Fallimenti (FALL), b. 52, registri di Società, n. 4, *ad vocem*.

⁹ Ivi, Pref., II serie, IV vers., b. 141, f. 125.

¹⁰ ASCPe, b. 24, f. 11, City Council resolution, 14 april 1913

Marino, with an upgrading project aimed at improving its functionality in the summer period for a cost of over 60 thousand lire¹¹. The building housed the numerous leisure activities organised by the *Pro-Castellamare* association, mainly engaged in popular festivals. The premises of the *Padiglione* were also used as a stage for the creation of shows staged by theatrical entrepreneurs¹².

In the first postwar period, seaside tourism in the Mediterranean area recorded a significant development, and the bathing model that previously characterised the popular classes gradually spread to all the social classes (Battilani 2001, 120). The fleeting and intimate immersion in water was replaced by entertaining and social activities. In particular, during the Fascist period, holidays became a strong social activity, and in light of the myth of the “vigour of the breed”, a decisive impulse was given to popular beaches (Pierucci 2009a, 290).

As a result of this transformation, the neighbouring towns of Castellamare and Pescara intensified the reclaiming of the coast and the construction of new houses along the shore and governed the entire urban development. The goal was to create a national-level seaside tourism along the coast between Montesilvano and Francavilla al Mare (municipalities north and south of Pescara, respectively) able to compete with the Romagna Riviera (a wealthy and highly developed coastal area of the north). The costs of the project were considerable: the municipalities involved – while waiting for the local entrepreneurs to finance the largest share of the works – started the most significant interventions; in particular, they strengthened public transport, entering into agreements with companies in the sector¹³. Despite the commitment of Castellamare and Pescara, in the summer of 1925, the gap with Rimini (the reference point for tourism in the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy) was still large, as evidenced by the data published by the *National Agency for the Increment of Tourism (Ente Nazionale per l'Incremento del Turismo)*. The latter agency calculated approximately 70 thousand beds available in 26 hotels and 13 pensions for the city of Rimini, while Castellamare and Pescara could only count on 300 beds divided into 13 hotels (Enit 1925).

An important turning point in the seaside tourism sector was recorded in 1927, when the new province of Pescara was born from the union of the municipalities of Castellammare Adriatico and Pescara, and in October of the

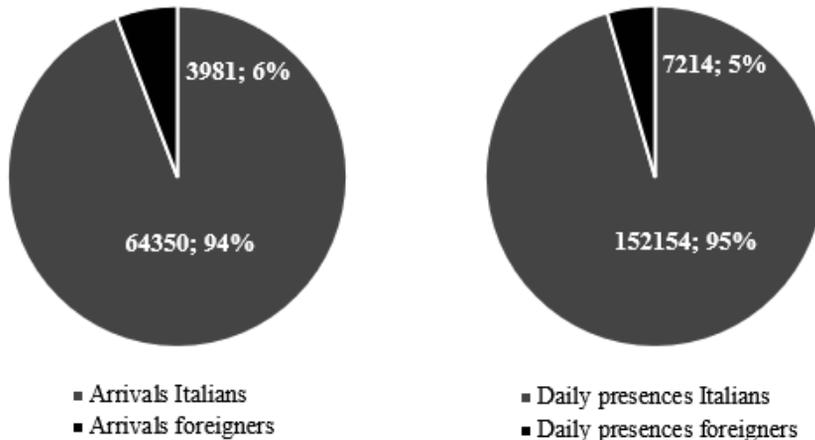
¹¹ Ivi, b. 1926, f. 2, report of the refurbishment works of the Padiglione Marino, 28 October 1919.

¹² ASCPe, b. 33, f. 9, President of the Club to the mayor, 20 June and 3 July 1908.

¹³ ASCPe, b. 674, f. 2.

same year, the *Autonomous Tourist Board (Azienda Autonoma di Soggiorno e Turismo)* was officially recognised (Iacone 1993, 45; Di Biase 1998, 218). These two events brought rapid consequences: the flow of “foreign vacationers” had a significant increase in the summers of 1928 and 1929 – over 57,000 visitors – with obvious benefits for the coffers of the Province of Pescara (Consiglio Provinciale dell’Economia 1929, p. 117). At the end of the 1920s, the *Tourist Board (Azienda di Soggiorno)* took the place of the municipality of Pescara in the administrative and financial management of bathing activities. The program of interventions launched in the following decade, with the involvement of private entrepreneurs, produced positive effects: in 1931, 206,000 visitors were present, which rose to over 334,000 in 1934, of whom 3,000 were foreigners. However, these results were not yet sufficient to transform Pescara into a seaside resort of national importance because there was no significant increase in the second half of the 1930s. The weak receptivity of the hotel sector and the poor level of services offered to vacationers had a negative effect on the image of the city¹⁴.

Figure 2. Shares of arrivals and daily presence of tourists in Pescara in 1938.



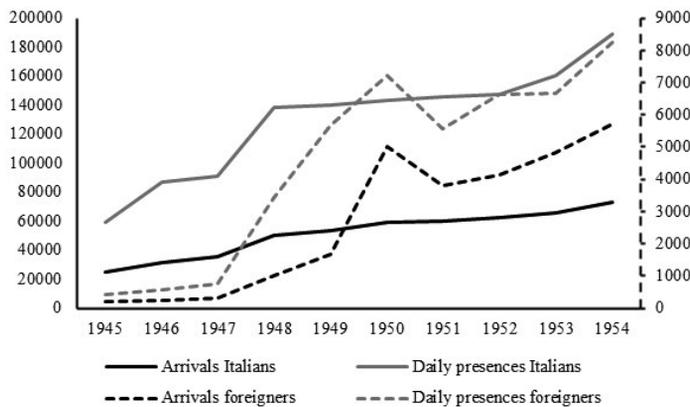
Source: Authors' elaborations on data from Di Nucci (2019).

The Second World War and the massive bombings by the Allies caused extensive damage to the hotels in Pescara. The reconstruction program

¹⁴ *I problemi turistici della provincia di Pescara*, in «L'Adriatico», 2 march 1935.

launched in October 1945, on the initiative of the *Provincial Tourism Board* (*Ente Provinciale per il Turismo – EPT*) and other public and private entities,¹⁵ allowed 11 hotels to be in operation in July 1946, with 207 rooms and 316 beds. In 1948, 10 hotels were in operation, with a sufficient supply of single and double rooms and services¹⁶. Nevertheless, Pescara's accommodation capacity was still modest; public bodies were unable to strengthen the bathing industry, a goal that could only be achieved by drawing on the ERP (European Recovery Program) funds that were requested¹⁷, or by contacting – as happened in 1950 – the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (Casmez – *Southern Italy Development Fund*), which had planned to allocate approximately 30 billion lire to the development of the tourism industry in southern Italy¹⁸. The amount requested was 1,740 million lire to be invested in accommodation equipment, spas and sports facilities as well as in the road infrastructure sector. The sum granted was only 400 million lire, of which 295 million were tied to the seaside sector¹⁹.

Figure 3. Arrivals and presence of tourists in Pescara from 1945-1954



Source: Authors' elaborations on data from Di Nucci (2019).

¹⁵ ASPe, Ept, I serie, b. 19, f. 96, Enit to Ept of Pescara, 13 October 1945.

¹⁶ Ivi, b. 11, f. 1, Ept to the Direzione Generale del Turismo, 13 July 1946; Ivi, b. 5, f. 14, denunciation of the hotel structure of the Ept of Pescara, 19 July 1948.

¹⁷ ASCPe, b. 1250, 18 March 1949.

¹⁸ 30 miliardi della Cassa per il turismo nel Sud, in «Il Tempo», 13 March 1951.

¹⁹ Le esigenze turistiche regionali in «Il Messaggero», 10 September 1951; ASPe, Ept, serie I, b. 24, f. 156, Ept of Abruzzo to the Casmez, 9 October 1951.

During the 1950s, Italy experienced significant industrial development; Abruzzo participated in the country's economic growth in several sectors, including tourism. The seaside industry in Pescara, thanks also to the presence of foreign tourists, was on the way to becoming a mass phenomenon. Positive effects were triggered by the law of 25 March 1950 (n. 228), which facilitated expropriations for public use projects carried out for the construction and modernisation of hotel complexes, followed by law no. 161, which provided subsidised loans for the construction of hotels and financed one billion lire a year.

Although public funding was not yet sufficient, it proved very useful, especially for the modernisation of some hotels in the Adriatic city²⁰. At the end of the 1950s, seaside tourism in Pescara had grown considerably compared with the postwar period. However, the leading weakness, namely, the insufficiency of hotels and equipment, continued to negatively affect the definitive take-off of the tourism sector²¹.

3.2. Seaside tourism in the municipality of Francavilla al Mare

The seaside development of Francavilla al Mare began at the end of the nineteenth century, when the natural expansion of the sandy strip at the foot of the hill where the city stands began to attract the first tourists for summer holidays, even from outside the region (Iacone 1993, 15-17). In this context, foreign tourism was attracted by the initiatives of public and private bodies that created bathing facilities and organised suggestive events in the late 1870s.

The first seaside resort was built in 1873 by private initiative, and a few years later, the municipality began the construction of the road destined to become the structural core of the future *Marina* district, i.e., the current *Viale Nettuno* (*Neptune Avenue*). In 1886, the construction of the *Palazzo della Sirena* (*Palace of the Mermaid*) began, with the aim of creating a building dedicated to the organisation of highly appealing summer events. A few years later, in 1888, the completion of the infrastructural network that led to the construction of the Rome-Pescara railway caused a strong increase in tourists from Rome.

After the First World War, the town's activity in the seaside sector resumed with moderate intensity. *Palazzo Sirena* became the hub of all summer

²⁰ Ivi, f. 156, report 11 may 1959.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

activities, giving rise to huge profits but also to disputes between local and foreign entrepreneurs, to whom the management was assigned with five-year contracts²². With the aim of obviating the tensions among entrepreneurs that were likely to affect the performance of the tourist season, the municipality authorised the establishment of the *Circolo della Sirena (Mermaid Club)*, i.e., an association formed by local entrepreneurs and members of families who usually spent their holidays in the town of Francavilla. The solution did not work, however, so the municipality decided to dissolve the club in December 1920, having become a near total monopoly of a small group of entrepreneurs from Francavilla²³.

In the 1920s, important hotels were built, as well as meeting places and seaside resorts, which led to an increase in clientele from other regions. The tourism sector became the main economic and productive alternative to the crisis of agricultural and fishing activities. In January 1927, the municipality joined the *National Consortium of Seasons of Vacations spots (Consorzio Nazionale delle Stagioni di Soggiorno)*, with the aim of including Francavilla in the national seaside circuit, and in March of the same year, the town obtained the coveted recognition of the establishment of the local Travel and Tourism board, one of the first in Italy (Benegiamo 2006, 46).

The same year, the municipality planned to build a kursaal on the model of the one in Pescara (see Section 3.1), with approximately 100 cabins and a wooden platform of 600 square metres with a canvas roof over the sea. The work was not completed, although the designer, Federico Cuneo of Rapallo, had undertaken to advance the sum necessary for the work (estimated at approximately 100,000 lire) upon a commitment by the municipality to return the funds within five years²⁴. Various interventions were implemented by the Tourist Board to encourage the “foreign tourist industry”, a choice deemed necessary to ensure a leading role in the tourism industry of the Adriatic belt (Rosito 1995, 92-94). The 1929 crisis was a factor that weighed negatively on this objective. A sharp decline in the number of bathers occurred, putting one of the most beautiful and important structures at risk of closure: the large *Hotel dei Bagni (Hotel of the Baths)*, with a capacity of 70 rooms and intended to accommodate an elite clientele. Measures to rescue the hotel were urged by the EPT, which called the city administration to pay greater attention to all

²² ASCh, Pref, II serie, V vers., b. 190, City Council resolution, 12 december 1910.

²³ Ivi, City Council resolution, 12 november 1925.

²⁴ Ivi, b. 192, resolution of the podestà, 2 june 1927 and agreement Municipality-Cuneo, same date.

accommodation facilities in crisis²⁵. For this reason, the municipality designed a series of urban interventions aimed at strengthening the driving role of the coast during the 1930s, investing considerable sums that were partly financed by the Ministry of Public Works²⁶ and began the arrangement of the beach crossed by the Alento River with the aim of transforming it into one of the area's greatest tourist attractions. The project was also supported by two major companies from Rome, owners of extensive local land to be redeveloped²⁷. In the same years, the city administration organised the beach located to the northeast of the urban belt in the direction of the pinewood of Pescara (*Pineta* area). The project involved the construction of an avenue parallel to the sea, *Viale Alcione* (*Alcyone Avenue*) at a total cost of over one million lire, which was completed in 1937²⁸. In 1938, the project for the construction of the kursaal was resumed, and the total cost of 500 thousand lire would be paid by the Tourist Board with subsidised bank loans and with State contributions²⁹. In 1939, the tourist tax was introduced, which affected both the rented apartments and the guests of the 7 public hotels, of which only one (*Albergo dei Bagni*) was in the higher category. It thus became possible to obtain funds for the municipal coffers and plan other works to improve the Francavilla accommodation infrastructure³⁰.

Despite the commitment and initiatives of the Tourist Board and the Municipality, the seaside industry was still struggling to take off sufficiently in the years 1940–1945. Several times, the two entities were forced to request the government to intervene and provide credit to institutions to deal with the financial crisis caused by a gradual decrease in the flow of tourists, which in turn was attributable to the general situation of the country engaged in the war effort³¹. The situation did not improve much at the end of the war, and in the early 1950s, when daytime tourism increasingly joined the long tourist stays due to the destruction suffered during the war. Francavilla al Mare, formerly known as the “Pearl of the Adriatic”, was converted into a beach for mass tourism.

Only in the second half of the 1950s did a turnaround and a lively increase in attendance begin to take place, thanks to the continuous efforts made by the Municipality and the Tourist Board in rebuilding *Palazzo Sirena* and many of

²⁵ Ivi, b. 187, Municipality of Francavilla to the Prefect, 19 June 1935; deliberation Ept, 3 April 1937.

²⁶ Ivi, b. 190 e 195, f. non num.

²⁷ Ivi, b. 195, f. non num.

²⁸ Ivi, b. 195, f. non num.

²⁹ Ivi, b. 190, f. non num., resolution of the Azienda di Soggiorno, 12 March 1938.

³⁰ Ivi, bb. 190-192, f. non num.

³¹ Ivi, b. 190, f. non num., report of the Azienda di Soggiorno, 22 November 1951.

the lost hotel and bathing facilities. At the beginning of the summer of 1960, Francavilla had 4 hotels and 2 inns, with an accommodation capacity of 90 rooms and 150 beds, and the town could also count on approximately 300 apartments to rent.

Francavilla still had a modest reception and recreational structure (of both public and private origin), nevertheless characterised by a series of latent driving forces that quickly unfolded in the following years, transforming the town of Abruzzo into one of the most important seaside municipalities of the Adriatic Sea³².

3.3. Seaside tourism in the municipality of Vasto

The Vasto seaside tourism sector developed a few years later than the other Abruzzo towns. The coast was devoid of urbanisation, except for a few houses of farmers and sailors, while the urban centre stood on a distant promontory and was poorly connected with the beach. Added to this particular territorial feature was the poor entrepreneurial mentality in the tourism sector; at the end of the nineteenth century, the concessions required for the use of the beach concerned only factories and warehouses.

The first seaside resort, *La Sirena (The Mermaid)*, opened in 1890 and was developed from a shed for the shelter of fishing gear. This structure was built on a series of stilts in the sea; it housed 20 cabins from which it was possible to descend into the water away from prying eyes and was connected to the mainland by a jetty (Tagliente 1994, 26-28). For the time, it was an important structure that fully satisfied the still scarce local tourism and that increased with the activation of the Adriatic railway. The anthropisation of the beach took place only in the early decades of the twentieth century, when the beach and the sea of Vasto began to feed feelings of entertainment and worldliness, as evidenced by the construction of the first villas along the coast by private entrepreneurs³³.

During the Fascist period, the coast experienced real tourist development. In particular, the first hotel restaurant was inaugurated in 1929, *Nuova Italia (New Italy)*. This accommodation facility was strongly requested by the municipal authority, which guaranteed the manager an exemption from paying

³² Ivi, Pref., I serie, V vers., categoria 7[^], material pending order, Mayor of Francavilla to the prefect, 22 november 1951.

³³ Archivio Comunale di Vasto (ACV), Biblioteca Raffaele Mattioli (BRM), b. 77, f. 102, 103.

local taxes, free use of the drinking water service, and a monthly contribution of 250 lire for the first 5 years of activity³⁴.

The 1930s were characterised by the opening of several seaside resorts and the construction of the *Colonia Marina (Marine Colony)*, consisting of a series of wooden shelters built on the beach with the contribution of private citizens and the “Pro Colonia Marina” city committee, of which the podestà was president³⁵. The increase in the tourist flow that followed is evidenced by the number of beach concessions for bathing purposes, in addition to the safety, hygiene and beach rescue service set up by the municipality during the summer³⁶.

In the second half of the 1930s, the most important initiative to accelerate the tourist take-off of Vasto took place. In 1937, the engineer Attilio Giammaria planned the construction of a large bathhouse to also be used during the winter. The project concerned an area of 2,659 square metres, for an expected expenditure of over 800 thousand lire, which would be financed by the *Ministry of Popular Culture (Ministero della Cultura popolare)* and the *Autonomous Section of the Hotel Credit (Sezione Autonoma del Credito Alberghiero)*. The three-story building, built on the beach and with immediate access to the seafront, hosted numerous entertainment and catering activities³⁷. In fact, although Vasto had not yet been officially declared as a Health, Holiday and Tourism Resort, it had already eradicated all malarial areas in 1931. This substantially increased the number of vacationers, which forced the administration to organise adequate services. To finance these services, the managers of the seaside huts contributed a fee of 20 lire per structure for the whole summer season³⁸.

Among the last prewar initiatives, the entrepreneur Michele Molino opened the *Hotel Nettuno (Neptune Hotel)*. Built with the contribution of EPT funds (2,500 lire), it became the flagship of Vasto seaside tourism for many years³⁹. In addition, the municipality decided to buy 330 square metres of beach from the State Property in 1940 to be used for bathing activities. However, the sudden fall of the city council led to the termination of the agreement with the State Property.

The end of the war in Abruzzo in June 1944 triggered a vigorous resumption of activities in the seaside sector. In May 1945, the municipal

³⁴ ASCh, Pref, II serie, V vers., b. 492.

³⁵ ACV, BRM, b. 77, f. 107.

³⁶ Ivi, f. 111.

³⁷ Ivi, f. 109, Giammaria project, 10 october 1937.

³⁸ ASCh, Pref, II serie, V vers., b. 439.

³⁹ Ivi, b. 142.

administration determined the shares of the beach to be paid by the owners of the bathing huts, in addition to the public price of the cabins for the entire summer season, classifying them by row⁴⁰. Prices were initially rather modest; they were revised upwards in 1947 due to inflation and budgetary needs.

In 1948, when Vasto obtained recognition for a five-year term as a Health, Holiday and Tourism Station, three hotels were in operation (*Nuova Italia*, *Nettuno*, and *Ricci*) in addition to several inns for a total of approximately 800 beds⁴¹. However, these hotels and inns were old and inadequate for enhancing the infrastructure related to seaside tourism and for the town of Vasto to be included among the most renowned tourist destinations on the regional coast⁴². At a later time, the Tourist Board supported the construction of two hotels with approximately 40 rooms to be built on the coast and in the city centre⁴³.

In 1953, the activities organised by the city granted Vasto the definitive recognition as a Health, Holiday and Tourism Station, an event that made it possible to build additional structures that attracted 54,134 vacationers in 1958, of whom 5,897 were foreigners⁴⁴. Vasto achieved a prestigious milestone with the construction of the *Autostello Hotel*, prevailing over neighbouring larger municipalities such as Pescara, Francavilla, Chieti and Lanciano, which were strongly interested in the project. *Autostello Hotel* was a hotel type linked to the road route and, in some cases, connected to the *Automobile Club of Italy* (ACI). The complex, which covers approximately 3,800 square metres, provided for an expense of 4 million lire, an important sum advanced entirely by the ACI to the municipality, that committed to repaying it in eight annual instalments starting in 1955⁴⁵. Additionally, in 1955, the municipal administration convinced the Ciatsa Company of Valdagno di Vicenza to build the *Jolly Hotel* on one of the most attractive points of the coast, equipped to meet the needs of an elite clientele at any time of the year⁴⁶. In the same year, the *Italian Tourist Hotel Society* (*Società Italiana Alberghi Turistici*) planned the construction of a hotel complex on an area of approximately 1,500 square metres. A few years later, the *Youth Hostel*

⁴⁰ Ivi, b. 493.

⁴¹ Ivi, b. 142.

⁴² Ivi, b. 148.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Ivi, b. 488, report of the Azienda di Soggiorno, 2 december 1958.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Ivi, resolution of the Municipality of Vasto, 4 june 1955.

(*Ostello della Gioventù*), the first camping sites and guesthouses opened in Vasto⁴⁷.

At the end of the 1950s, the tourist activity of Vasto was ready to successfully face the development of mass tourism of the seaside industry that would take place in the 1960s, thanks to the opening of the A14 motorway and the new route of the old Adriatic state road. The contribution of the Tourist Board was particularly important in supporting the initiatives of the municipal administration and private citizens to improve services and facilities. It created notable hype, using national and foreign newspapers and magazines to establish direct contacts with official tourism bodies and travel agencies in Germany, France and Holland. Numerous publications were published, for example, of historical-artistic guides of Vasto and of the price lists of hotels with indications of holiday periods⁴⁸.

3.4. Seaside tourism in the municipality of Ortona

The town of Ortona has had a different development path compared with the seaside municipalities illustrated thus far. Although Ortona has a considerable coastline, it did not develop a real seaside tourism policy before the Second World War. Until then, the interests of the local government were entirely centred on the development of the cargo port rather than on bathing⁴⁹. Nevertheless, the electric funicular, which connected the beach with the railway station (state railways and Sangritana railway) and the upper part of the city,⁵⁰ was active since 1926, suggesting that in the 1920s there was already some tourist activity on the beach. In particular, a tourist guide of the time mentions the *Dea Venere (Goddess Venus)* seaside resort, equipped with two rows of dressing rooms and a square for summer entertainment activities (Rapino 1928, 50-51).

At the beginning of the 1930s, a soft development of the seaside tourism sector was observed, particularly in the *Lido Riccio* and *Lido Saraceni* areas, frequented by swimmers for the healthy climate and for the moderate prices, above all in the *Bagni Marini* seaside resort⁵¹.

In 1937, only three modest inns existed with just 16 rooms, a totally unsuitable infrastructure for tourism development. For this reason, the

⁴⁷ Ivi, Etp to the Prefecture, 5 July 1958.

⁴⁸ Ivi, activity program of the Azienda Autonoma for the four-year period 1958-1962.

⁴⁹ Ivi, I serie, IV vers., b. 167, report of the local port commission, 20 October 1900.

⁵⁰ ASCh, TCC, Registro Società, n. 3, *ad vocem*.

⁵¹ Ivi, Pref, I serie, VI vers., categoria 22^, material pending order, Prefectural Report, 12 September 1930.

administration began a series of beautification works in the city the same year, taking advantage of the financial plan launched by the national government to support and upgrade tourist facilities. The city administration entrusted the engineer Giovanni Nervegna with the drafting of the project for the construction of a large hotel with 41 rooms; the estimated cost of 570 thousand lire would have been partially covered with a loan contracted by the city with the *Hotel Credit Section of the Italian National Labour Bank (Sezione del Credito Alberghiero della Banca Nazionale del Lavoro)* and with the government. In 1939, the Ministry of Popular Culture accepted the request from Ortona; nevertheless, the delay in granting funding and the outbreak of the war resulted in the project's failure⁵².

Fifteen days after Italy entered the war – on 25 June 1940 – the government issued the new lists of climatic and seaside municipalities of tourist interest, including Ortona. However, the war events saw the city among the most devastated on a national level, precluding any possibility of tourist development⁵³. The devastating impact of the war affected the city for a long time, and forced it to give up the project to improve tourist facilities by exploiting the 35 million awarded in 1949 by the State, thanks to ERP funds. The Stem company, that had been awarded the contract, went bankrupt at the very beginning of the project⁵⁴.

In 1956, one year after the first request to the government for recognition of the status of Holiday and Tourism Station, the city had only four certified bathing resorts for marine heliotherapy and thalassotherapy treatments, two third- and fourth-category hotel complexes, and some guesthouses and inns for a total of approximately 100 beds⁵⁵. For the take-off of the seaside tourism sector, the establishment of the Autonomous Board with its important financial advantages was of the utmost importance. For this reason, in 1957, the local administration reiterated the request, obtaining recognition linked to the quality of the tourist area in 1959. It was, therefore, possible for Ortona to access government conditions for the construction of tourist infrastructure and adjust the amounts of the tourist tax, passing from an average income of 28,000 lire in previous years to approximately 150,000 lire in 1960. The delay experienced by the city was considerable compared to the other Abruzzo

⁵² Ivi, II serie, V vers., b. 314, resolutions of the podestà, 1 august 1938 and 23 december 1939.

⁵³ Ivi, III vers., Ufficio di Gabinetto, b. 45, fasc. 12.

⁵⁴ Ivi, II serie, V vers., b. 352, resolution of the Municipality of Ortona, 9 july 1954.

⁵⁵ Ivi, b. 300, report of the Ufficiale Sanitario, 16 october 1956.

towns, and in the 1960s, Ortona remained in the lowest position among the seaside resorts of the region.

4. Conclusions

At the time of the unification of Italy, the coastal strip of Abruzzo was isolated from the internal territory, a situation determined by the application of centuries-old policies aimed at the defence of the territory, which favoured an uninhabited coast without connections with the hinterland. A wild and desolate coast suitable both for fighting but, above all, to discourage the landing of the enemy coming from the sea. For this reason, until the unification of Italy, the Abruzzo seaside was a deserted land where only a few shipments needed for maritime trade were present (Nardone 2008).

The unification process changed the fate of the region, which was affected by government actions aimed at creating the new state. The construction of road infrastructures – in particular the opening of the railway line, which runs along the coast – was a determining factor in revolutionizing the geography and economy of the maritime side. Many inhabited centres from the hill moved along the coast, and new urban centres were born.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the necessary conditions had been created for alternative use of the coastal strip from the usual fishing and recreational activities. The new heliotherapeutic medicine encouraged long walks along the coast that became a meeting and leisure place, while the first seaside resorts built on stilts were used for fleeting immersions.

It was only in the Fascist period that extensive malaria remediation programs were put in place and that residential neighbourhoods and seaside infrastructures began to be built to take advantage of a unique opportunity for the coast of Abruzzo. The opportunity to attract maritime tourism was born from the new fashion of bathing suits and tanning, which had been the discovery by medical science of the healing qualities of the sun.

Remediation programs and the development of tourism infrastructure allowed several coastal localities of Abruzzo to qualify as Health and Tourism Resorts and, consequently, to be able to create local Tourist Offices capable of attracting and driving state funding in the tourist seaside sector.

In 1927, Pescara and Francavilla al Mare were among the first centres in Italy to obtain this qualification together with other important towns such as Rapallo, Senigallia, Santa Margherita Ligure and Viareggio (all known tourist locations in the wealthy and more developed centre-north). The important occasion for Vasto took place in 1948 and in 1959 of Ortona, a time gap that led to the heterogeneous economic development of the coastal strip that has

not recovered in the following years and that sees the city of Pescara excel over the others for seaside tourist activities.

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