

An assessment of agritourism in Salento (Apulia) in the era of the internet

Abstract

Apulia is the region with the highest overall growth rate of agritourism units in Italy in the period 2008-2012. This article aims at analysing and assessing the prospective demand, dynamics, evolution and number of these specific rural facilities in Salento – a sub-region of Apulia formed by the provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto – in the so-called “era of the internet”. By using quantitative and qualitative techniques it has been able to determine that Lecce is the leading province in Salento and in Apulia in terms of number and diffusion of agritourism facilities. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that the possibilities offered by the internet and the new media are not sufficiently used by agritourism operators in Salento and in other areas – like in Tuscany and Trentino-Alto Adige, where agritourism activities boast a long tradition – to promote their services and products they offer.

Keywords: Agritourism, Salento, Internet.

Introduction

Throughout history tourism has been strongly influenced and sometimes determined by changes which have marked paths and evolution of various societies. Several socioeconomic, cultural and technological factors have led to the gradual transition from the so-called “proto-tourism” – an expression including leisure and travel activities carried out from the classical antiquity till the end of 1700s – to the forms of tourism, created during the Industrial Revolution and precursors of other several tourism experiences, which are named “modern” as a whole. Later, the success of social tourism (beginning of 1900s), mass tourism (1950s) and global tourism (1990s and 2000s) have represented the most significant stages of the recent history of tourism.

In modern tourism all these stages have had in common a consistent differentiation of the supply. Indeed, since the mid-1800s new and varied forms of tourism consumption – such as mountain, lake and, although only later, seaside tourism – have been added to more traditional and already successful forms of tourism (i.e. thermal, cultural and religious).

Therefore, on the basis of these assumptions we should use the plural when we refer to tourism, since many other further subcategories (i.e. cycling holidays, wine and food tasting tourism, rural tourism, green tourism) have been added to the aforementioned “tourisms”¹.

All of these subcategories – equally included in the concept of global tourism – have been created with the aim of satisfying an increasingly demanding clientele. However, these “tourisms” can take credit for having led to rediscover values such as environmental safeguard and sustainability.

The purpose of these “tourisms” is to be responsible and alternative to other forms of tourism which are characterized by a strong human impact: agritourism is included among these ones.

Agritourism can be defined as the ensemble of those «*tourism hospitality activities carried out by farmers [...] by using their rural facilities and combining tourism with farming, forestry and livestock activities*»².

The first agritourism facilities in Italy date back to mid-1960s, but only recently – and specifically in the last decade – their growth has been substantial (ISTAT, 2013).

Starting from these considerations and taking into consideration the crucial role which the internet plays in supply and enjoyment of tourism services (i.e. communication and marketing strategies, use and characteristics of media, target market of tourists, information and booking systems), this article aims at analysing and assessing the prospective demand, dynamics, evolution and number of rural facilities in Salento – a sub-region of Apulia formed by the provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto – in the so-called “era of the internet”.

This study has been carried out by using quantitative and qualitative techniques and secondary data or sources (official national statistics, national and regional regulations, previous literature on the topic, Google tools such as “Trend” and “Adwords”, analysis of social media).

The article is organised as follows: section 2 defines the geographical, historical and cultural framework of Salento; section 3 determines the diffusion and the evolution of agritourism accommodations in Italy, Apulia and Salento; section 4 (divided in several subparagraphs) detects the number of agritourism facilities in Salento on the internet and analyse the potential demand of this services in a comparative perspective by means of several techniques and methodologies which will be explained exhaustively later; finally, section 5 summarizes the contents of the previous sections and presents the conclusions.

Geographical, historical and cultural characteristics of Salento

Historically and culturally speaking, Salento is an interprovincial sub-region in Apulia including the province of Lecce and part of the provinces of Brindisi and Taranto. However, for an easier comparative analysis, in this work Salento has been identified with the whole provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto.

The two coastlines of Salento (Adriatic Sea and Ionian Sea) are extremely fascinating and characterized by both wide beaches and cliffs full of splendid grottoes. Furthermore, as the sea is considered one of the most beautiful in Italy, seaside tourism has been extremely successful.

However, there are several natural reserves and areas of great interest, where many habitats and species (especially flora) of “Community Importance” coexist. Furthermore, Salento is full of cultural, historical and architecture attractions.

The province of Taranto is characterized by some important towns and popular tourist resources along the Ionic coast (i.e. the provincial capital and Pulsano), stone age sites (especially in the Murge), examples of ancient Grecian and Messapian cultures, extensive olive groves and vineyards, very interesting archaeological parks and natural reserves.

The province of Brindisi is characterized by the tracks of Norman-Swabian and Angevin cultures on the inland (i.e. the castles of Mesagne, Oria and Ceglie Messapica); Roman archaeological areas (Egnazia); several remains of the Messapian

civilization; luxuriant vegetation, olive groves, vineyards, typical manor farms (called “masserie”, often converted in agritourism) and “trulli” in the Itria Valley; important natural reserves along the Adriatic coast.

Finally, the province of Lecce is characterized by the sandy and rocky shores of the Adriatic and Ionian coastal areas; the fascinating and peculiar Baroque style especially in cities like Lecce and Nardò; the area named Grecìa Salentina where the Greek culture and a language called “griko” (already spoken in Magna Graecia) survive; and several musical and cultural events such as “La Notte della Taranta”, an itinerant musical festival ending with a final concert in Melpignano (Grecìa Salentina) (Viaggiare in Puglia, 2014). “La Notte della Taranta” is a very popular event held since 1998 which gathers hundreds of thousands of people each year coming from Italy and abroad.

The flows of tourism in Salento continue to be mostly concentrated in the summer period, although the regional and local authorities have tried to increase these flows in the low season by diversifying tourist activities and attractions both on the coasts and the inland.

The evolution of agritourism supply at national and regional level

The first agritourism facilities in Italy date back to the 1960s and were created by a group of farmers who created also a still important and renowned association named “Agritourist”. This association took its first steps in a period when most Italians were abandoning the rural areas because modern urban lifestyle was considered more convenient and rewarding.

Henceforth, agritourism in Italy has experienced at least four different development phases (Rocca, 2013):

- the “cultural awareness” period (1965-1975) when the promoters of the first agritourism facilities tried to make the public opinion aware of the perspectives of agritourism supply;
- the “experimentation” period (1975-1985), when other important associations and guidebooks specifically concerning agritourism were created. In this period, the growth of agritourism was significant: indeed, there were 80 facilities with about 500 beds in 1975 and 1,500 facilities with more than 14,500 beds in 1985;
- in the third phase, defined as the “adjustment” period (1985-1992), agritourism doubled amounting to 3,000 units. The phenomenon



was by now widespread in Italy and involved also Apulia and the coastal areas of Salento.

- in the latest phase (1992-2008) a new substantial growth of agritourism was ascertained: in 2008 there were 14,480 units even if their geographical distribution was extremely diversified at national level compared with the previous period. Indeed, almost 58% of Italian agritourism were located in only 5 regions (Tuscany, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Lombardy and Umbria) (ISTAT, 2009).

Finally, in the period 2008-2012 there was a further growth of agritourism facilities in Italy, which today are more than 20,000 (ISTAT, 2013).

Quantitative Analysis: agritourism in Italian regions

Deepening the previous analysis relative to 2008-2012 and taking into consideration the regional level, it emerges how the 5 aforementioned regions (Tuscany, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Lombardy and Umbria) held again the first positions as for the overall number of agritourism units per region. However, other two regions (Piedmont and Emilia Romagna) exceeded 1,000 agritourism units.

The thematic map in Fig. 1 shows the quantitative changes occurred between 2008 and 2012 concerning the number of agritourism units at regional level.

From the official data shared by the ISTAT (2009, 2013) and pictured in Fig. 1 it emerges that the number of agritourism units increased in 18 regions out of 20, even if the variation is sometimes very different.

Probably the low growth in some regions (especially Tuscany and Trentino-Alto Adige, respecti-

vely +2% and +4%) can be ascribed to the fact that in these areas the phenomenon of agritourism has started and developed far in advance and it is by now well-established (Rocca, 2013). Consequently, these regions have strengthened their leading position over the decades and for this reason their growth is slow today.

On the contrary, in other regions the growth rate is far higher because in these areas the phenomenon of agritourism is still in an expansive phase.

In particular, Apulia – the region where Salento is located – is the region with the highest overall growth rate in Italy in the period 2008-2012: agritourism units here increased from 270 to 366 (+36%).

Agritourism in Apulia and Salento

Until December 2013 the agritourism activity in Apulia was regulated by a specific Regional Law approved in 1985 (L.R. 22 maggio 1985, n. 34) by which the Regional Authorities aimed at promoting and incentivizing «*agritourism activities with the purpose of fostering territorial development and equilibration, support the permanence of farmers in rural areas by means of the integration of incomes support and the improvement of their life conditions, optimizing the existing buildings and natural rural heritage (also for tourist interests), promoting typical products and local traditions, creating a harmonious relationship between urban and rural areas, orienting tourist flows*».

According to this Regional Law, agritourism meant «*hospitality and promotion activity carried out by the agricultural operators [...] by means of company and inter-company activities, whose main productive role is agriculture*».

The new Regional Law approved in December

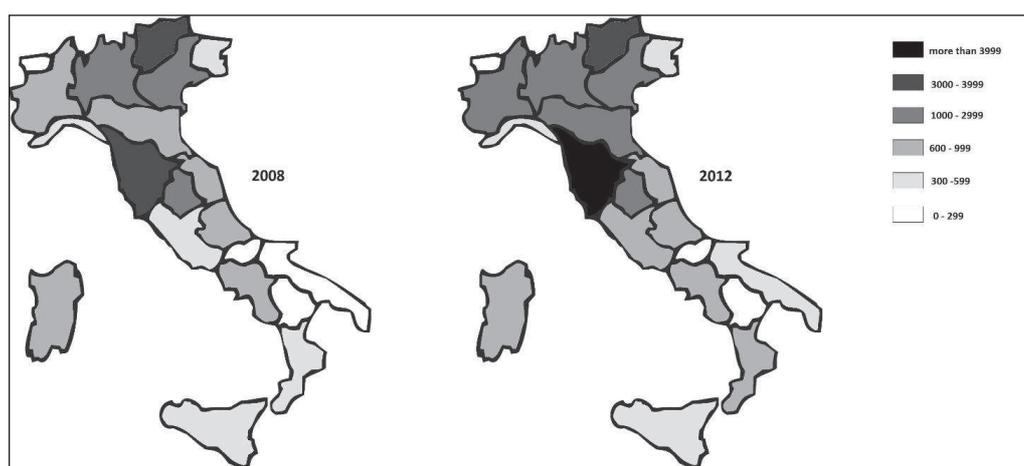


Fig. 1. Agritourism units in the Italian regions, 2008 and 2012 (Source: ISTAT, 2009, 2013).

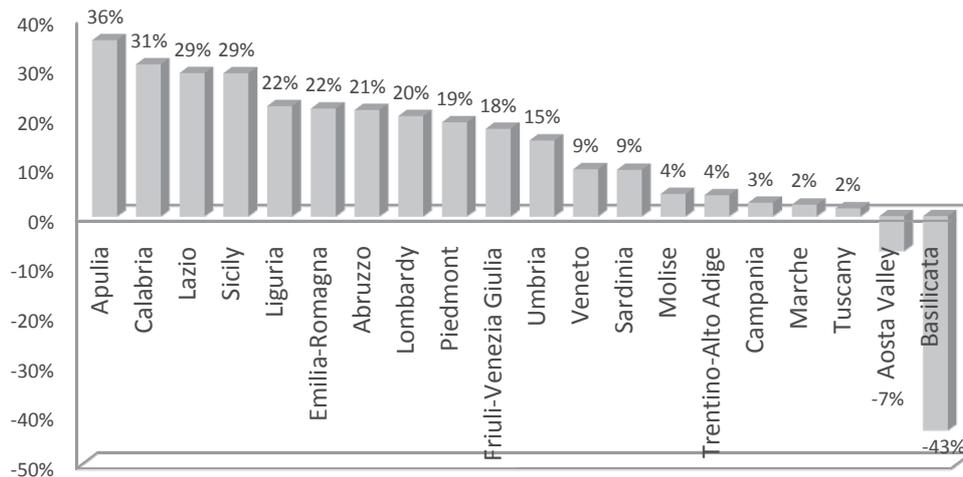


Fig. 2. Variation of agritourism units in Italian regions, 2008-2012 (Source: ISTAT, 2009, 2013).

2013 (Legge Regionale 13 dicembre 2013 n. 43) introduced several changes regarding especially the definition and purposes of agritourism.

In addition to the previous objectives, the new Regional Law includes the following aims: recovery and promotion of rural, natural and architectural heritage; support to environment preservation and protection; promotion of traditional regional products of high quality; tutelage and promotion of local traditions; support to cultural initiatives linked to the rural world; support to nutritional education; boost of relationships between urban and rural areas.

Several changes concerned also a thorough definition of “agritourism activities”. According to the new Regional Law, the definition of agritourism includes «*accommodating campers in specifically equipped open spaces; serving mainly farm raised food and beverages or produced in other farms within the same province, including alcoholic beverages and spirits by promoting traditional regional agriculture and food, Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and “Prodotti di Puglia” products³; organising leisure time, cultural, agricultural and food, educational and sport activities as well as excursions and horse riding tourism, within and outside the farmers’ property, also by means of agreements with local authorities aiming at promoting the territory and the rural heritage*».

Therefore, the new Law approved in 2013 drew on, expanded and updated several concepts contained in the previous one taking advantage of the renewed interest in the environment protection and peculiarities of each territory (i.e. history, culture, landscape, nature, food and wine, local tradition and so on) which has emerged in

almost 30 years since the previous Regional Law.

However, going beyond the merely legislative aspect and the purposes of the Regional Law, it must be stressed how the phenomenon of agritourism in Apulia is peculiar at a regional level and apt to combine at least two different typologies of agritourism. The resources of several agritourism units in Apulia are linked to the sea, like other Southern regions (Calabria, Sardinia and Sicily). However, agritourism in Apulia is also characterized by many rural areas (Rocca, 2013).

As highlighted above, Apulia is the region which scored the highest increase of agritourism units in the period 2008-2012. However, significant differences have been observed in the concentration of agritourism facilities within each province in the region.

The three provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto have a considerable importance from the numerical point of view at regional level. On the basis of the “Regional List of the Agritourism Operators” (Elenco Regionale degli Operatori Agrituristici, Regione Puglia, forthcoming) it emerges how there are 1,685 subjects authorized to carry out agritourism activities in Apulia⁴. Most of these are located in the province of Lecce (704 authorizations), whereas the two other provinces scored a very similar result (154 authorizations in Brindisi and 147 in Taranto). These figures relative to the provinces of Brindisi and Taranto are lower than the ones of Foggia and Bari (the regional capital of Apulia), but higher than Barletta-Andria-Trani. In the provinces of Salento (Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto) is located 60% of the subjects authorized to carry out agritourism activities in Apulia.

Going into details, it must be noted as the first



three towns with the highest number of authorizations in Salento are located in the province of Lecce: respectively Otranto (Adriatic coast, 85 authorizations); Nardò (Ionic coast, 57) and Melendugno (Adriatic coast, 45).

The localities with the highest number of agritourism units in the other two provinces are respectively Fasano (Brindisi, 41 authorizations) and Martina Franca (Taranto, 40): these two municipalities are ranked 4th and 5th at regional level behind the three aforementioned centres located in the province of Lecce (see Fig 4).

After this preliminary analysis, the standard deviation has been applied in order to understand how the data were scattered around the index of central tendency⁵. This measure of dispersion has

been calculated on the whole population of subjects authorized to carry out agritourism activities in Apulia: the results of Lecce and Brindisi are similar (respectively 12.8 and 11.4) whereas the dispersion in the province of Taranto is lower (8.6).

The provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto are characterized by three different gradations (from white to dark-grey). The dimension of the spheres represents the number of authorizations in each municipality.

The highest concentration of authorizations in the province of Lecce emerges clearly. However, it must be noted also how the number of authorizations is well-balanced between coastal and inland areas in Lecce (even if the first three towns with the highest number of agritourism units are

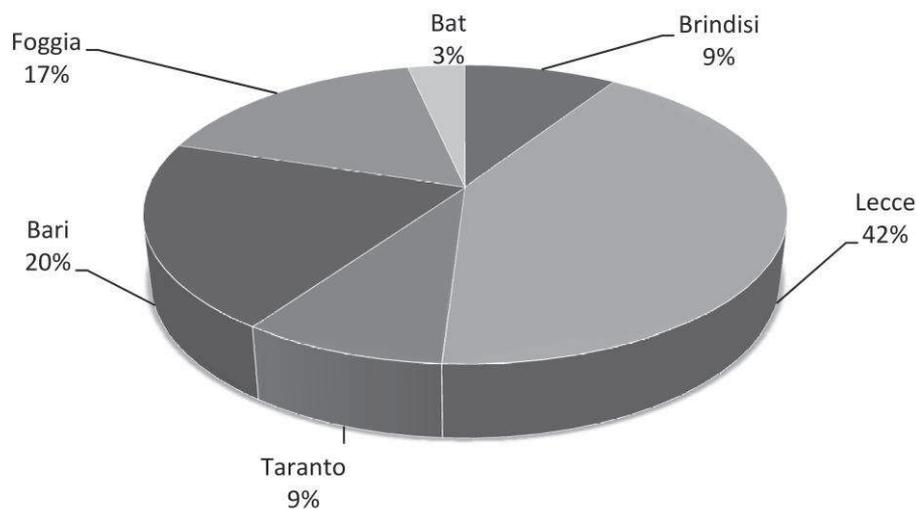


Fig. 3. Authorizations to carry out agritourism activities in Apulia (Source: Regione Puglia, forthcoming).

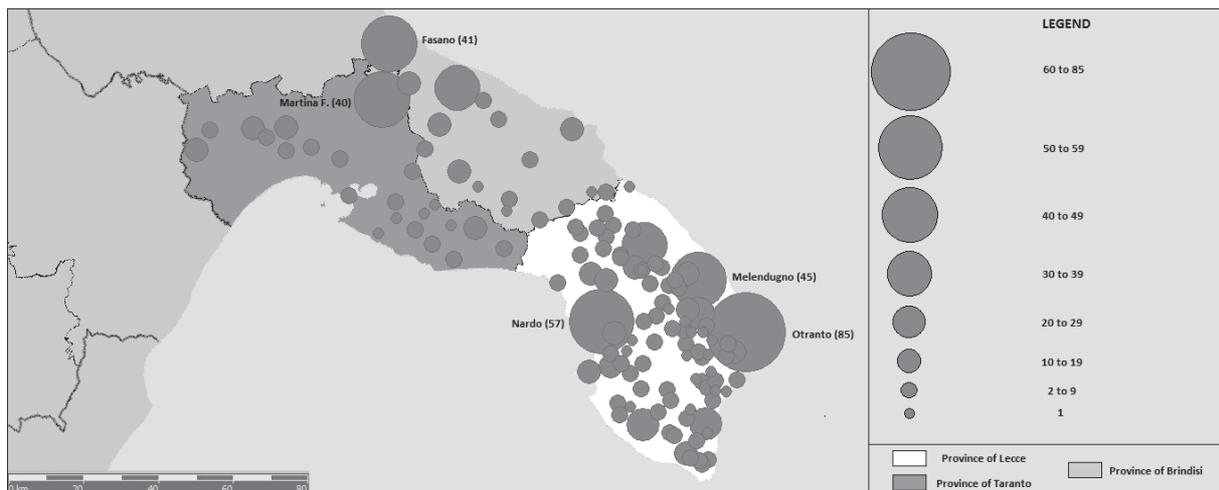


Fig. 4. Authorizations to carry out agritourism activities in the provinces of Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto, 2013 (Source: Regione Puglia, forthcoming).

located along the coasts) and how these authorizations are mainly located in inland areas in the provinces of Brindisi and Taranto.

Finally, taking into consideration only the provincial capitals, Lecce has a significant number of authorizations (35), whereas the presence of prospective agritourism operators is extremely limited in Brindisi (10) and Taranto (5).

Tourism and the internet: the case of agritourism in Salento

According to the appraisal of the Polytechnic University of Milan, the trade of Italian websites grew of 17% in 2013, with a sales volume of about 11.2 billion euros. Tourism is included among the sectors where the growth was higher (13%); such a sector is ranked 4th behind clothing (27%), information technology (24%) and grocery (18%) (Netcomm, ContactLab, 2013).

Furthermore, according to the E-Commerce Consumer Behavior, in 2010 the purchase of vacations on-line was the main driver of the e-commerce sector in Italy, with a high percentage of tourists (equal to 88%) who have purchased their vacation entirely on-line. Furthermore, the same report highlighted how the consumers who purchase their own vacations on the internet is usually more “advanced” and less influenced by the “price barriers” (Netcomm, ContactLab, 2010). This figure relative to the price of vacation is very interesting and it is stringently related to the behaviour of the “cultural tourist” (in a broad sense): in 2004 the average expenditure of a “cultural tourist” was 101 euros per day, whereas the expenditure of a “general tourist” was 67 euros (Grossi, 2004). Although this figure is not particularly new, it seems to be significant because of the high difference observed between these two typologies of tourists.

The spending power of tourists is a crucial point inasmuch it leads to higher profits for tourists businesses, to a lower environmental impact (the criterion of sustainability) and to a decrease in the costs deriving from the human impact caused by mass tourism.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that according to a recent survey those tourists who choose and book their vacation on the internet have different motivations as opposed to mere saving (which is ranked at the bottom of the list with only 23% of the answers). These motivations include “looking for a beautiful place where to spend the vacation” (54%), “paying attention to logistics information”

(52%), “looking for places able to satisfy personal (41%) or family and travel companions (30%) aesthetic taste”, “find incentives and ideas about the place to visit” (35%).

A crucial factor must be added to these motivations: more and more frequently the “on-line” tourist chooses to “deseasonalize” its vacation (i.e. low season booking). Indeed, this issue has motivated 12% of those who decided to take a vacation in the low season in 2010, whereas they were only 2% in 2009 (Netcomm, ContactLab, 2010).

Agritourism facilities in Salento on the internet

In the first phase of the analysis of the number of agritourism units in Salento on the internet, a research was carried out on the Google search engine by using the keywords “agriturismo lecce”, “agriturismo brindisi” and “agriturismo Taranto”⁶. Later on, such a research has been repeated for all the Italian provinces with the aim of creating a ranking of keywords (and territories) in a comparative perspective. The tab. 1 shows the first 10 positions of the ranking concerning the webpages for each aforementioned couple of keywords (namely “agriturismo + name of the province”).

Before analysing in detail tab. 1, it must be taken into consideration that the overall number of webpages is influenced by several factors. One of these is the absolute popularity of Milan, Venice and Rome – but also Naples and Palermo – which are big cities and internationally renowned tourist destinations. A second factor is linked to the homonymy of certain terms: this is the case of “Prato”, a town next to Florence, whose name in Italian is written in the same way as “meadow”. Furthermore, also the level of activity on the internet of each area may influence the overall number of webpages. Finally, it must be highlighted how the aforementioned ranking changes radically by inserting different keywords or carrying out an advanced search⁷.

Apart from the necessary explanation about the limits of the data-set pictured in tab. 1, it is evident that the first 10 positions of this ranking do not represent faithfully the quantitative analysis carried out above concerning the overall number of agritourism units in the various Italian region (compare to 3.1 and Fig. 1).

The second position held by Piacenza (Emilia Romagna), just behind Milan, is surprising. In terms of webpages, the province of this small city has exceeded those of bigger cities and re-



Tab. 1. Number of webpages; Keywords: "agriturismo+name of the province".

Position	Province	Region	Internet pages
1	Milano	Lombardy	50.800.000
2	Piacenza	Emilia-Romagna	44.500.000
3	Venezia	Veneto	39.200.000
4	Roma	Lazio	34.200.000
5	Napoli	Campania	27.100.000
6	Perugia	Umbria	23.700.000
7	Palermo	Sicily	21.200.000
8	Trieste	Friuli Venezia Giulia	14.100.000
9	Prato	Tuscany	14.100.000
10	Brescia	Lombardy	12.700.000
22	Lecce	Apulia	4.490.000
58	Brindisi	Apulia	1.580.000
85	Taranto	Apulia	625.000

Source: Google (2014).

nowned tourist destinations (i.e. Venice, Rome and Naples, which are ranked respectively 3th, 4th and 5th) as well as centres traditionally linked to rural tourism and agritourism such as Perugia in Umbria.

Another interesting figure is the presence in this ranking of regions like Lazio (driven by Rome) and Friuli Venezia Giulia, two areas which are not particular renowned for the high number of agritourism units.

The province of Florence, one of the most famous and appreciated destination abroad, stays out from the first 10 positions and holds only the 11th position (unexpectedly also behind the province of Brescia) with a number of webpages which is not so high (12.2 million pages) if compared with the fame and importance of the Tuscan city.

Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto stay out from the first 10 positions: the province of Lecce has scored the best result (about 4.5 million pages, 22nd position at national level, 1st position at regional level). Brindisi (1.85 million pages, 58th position at national level) and Taranto (650 hundred pages, 85th position at national level) occupies respectively the intermediate and the low side of the overall ranking.

Search trends and overall number of visualization of webpages regarding agritourism

The previous analysis on the number of webpages regarding agritourism in each province must be deepened by adopting a different perspective (i.e. from the point of view of the potential demand) by means of the use of two free Google tools.

The first one is Google Trend, a tool which compares the results of various keywords (up to a maximum of 5) and georeferences in an aggregate form the search coming from foreign countries.

The second one is Adwords, a Google free tool which is used by professionals to address their advertising to a targeted audience. Among the various options, Adwords shows the monthly overall number of visualizations for one or more keywords.

Search trend on the web regarding agritourism in Salento

The first analysis on the search trend has been carried out taking into consideration only the term "agriturismo", without any other geographic reference.

The figure 5 shows how the interest for the topic "agritourism" has progressively decreased after the peak in April 2006. The overall amount of searches in April 2014 was almost 50% lesser than 8 years earlier. Furthermore, such decrease in the interest about the topic agritourism involve all the Italian regions.

In the framework of a general decrease of interest in agritourism on the internet, it is Lecce again the province with the highest number of searches on the internet in the period 2004-2014. The peak of interest was in March 2004 (result equal to 100), whereas the lowest result was in February 2010 (result equal to 20). Furthermore, in Fig. 6 it can be observed how the interest of Google users towards the two provinces of Brindisi and Taranto is almost equivalent and how in winter the gap



among the three provinces is lower whereas it is higher in the spring and in the summer.

After having determined which is the province in Salento with the best trend on the internet in the period 2004-2014, the performances of the province of Lecce have been compared with those of some provinces in Tuscany (Siena and Arezzo) and in Trentino-Alto Adige (Trento and Bolzano)⁸.

In this case, the province of Siena has scored the best trend in the period 2004-2014 regarding the keyword “agriturismo”, followed by the prov-

inces of Arezzo, Lecce, Bolzano and Trento.

The result of Lecce is very interesting inasmuch it is better than the provinces of Trentino-Alto Adige and is not very different from the result of Arezzo (which is considered one of the most renowned areas because of its long tradition).

Average of the monthly search of the webpages regarding agriturismo in Salento

The monthly average search analysis regarding agriturismo in Salento has been carried out by us-

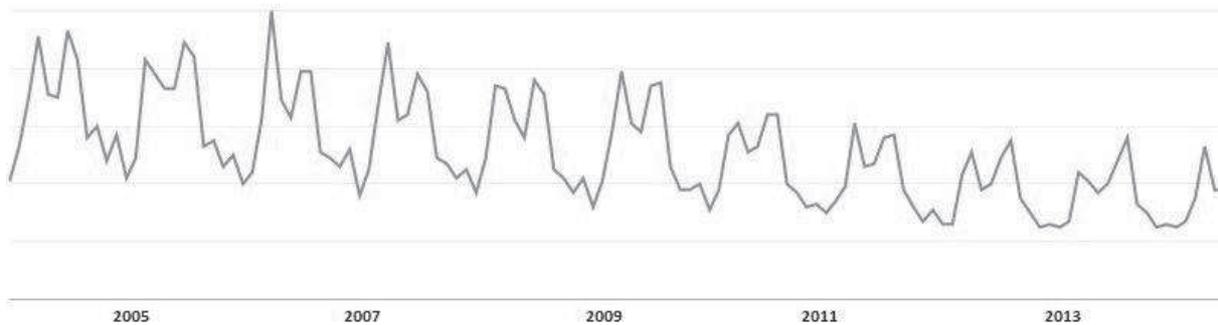


Fig. 5. Trend of the keyword “agriturismo”, 2004-2014 (Source: Google Trend, 2014).

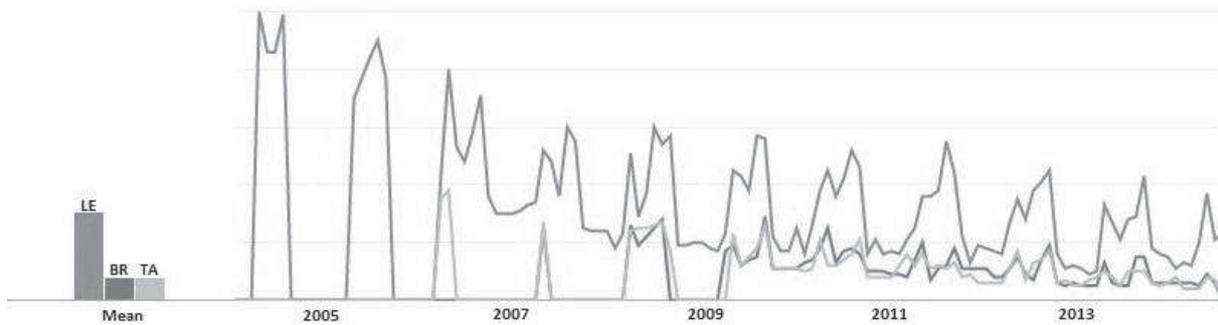


Fig. 6. Trend of the keyword “agriturismo + province”, Lecce, Brindisi, Taranto; 2004-2014 (Source: Google Trend, 2014).

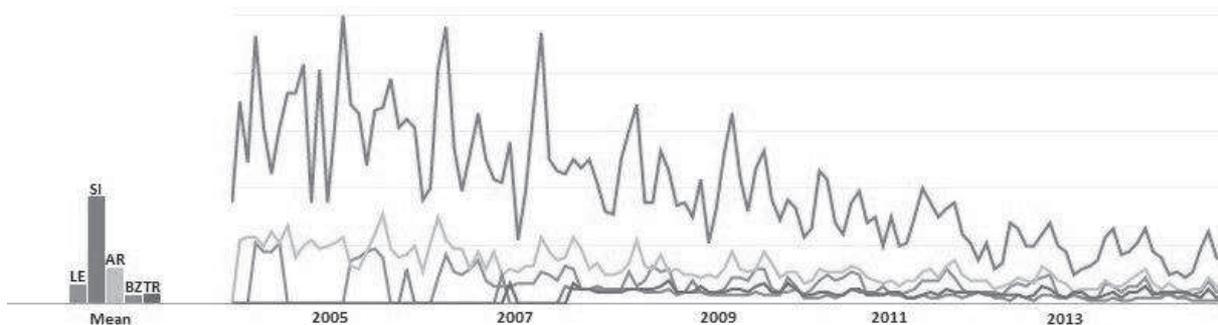


Fig. 7. Trend of the keyword “agriturismo + province” Siena, Arezzo, Lecce, Trento, Bolzano; 2004-2014. (Source: Google Trend, 2014).

ing Google Adwords, an internet tool which compares such averages in a two-year period (in this case, June 2012-May 2014).

In the first phase of this empirical research the figures have been obtained by inserting the keyword “agriturismo + province of Salento”.

Fig. 8 shows clearly as the average monthly

searches of agriturismo in the province of Lecce are far higher than those of the provinces of Brindisi and Taranto. The overall average for the province of Lecce is 898,75 searches, whereas the average for the province of Brindisi is 258,75 and for the province of Taranto is 235,42.

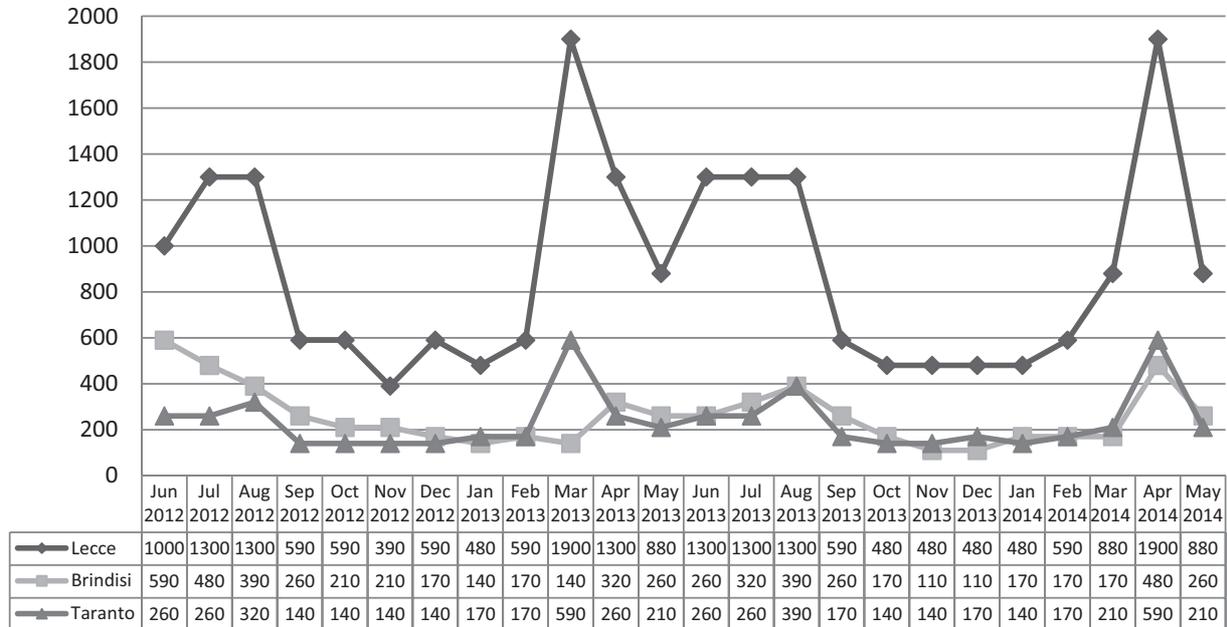


Fig. 8. Monthly average searches for the keyword “agriturismo + province”, Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto, 2012-2014 (Source: Google Adwords, 2014).

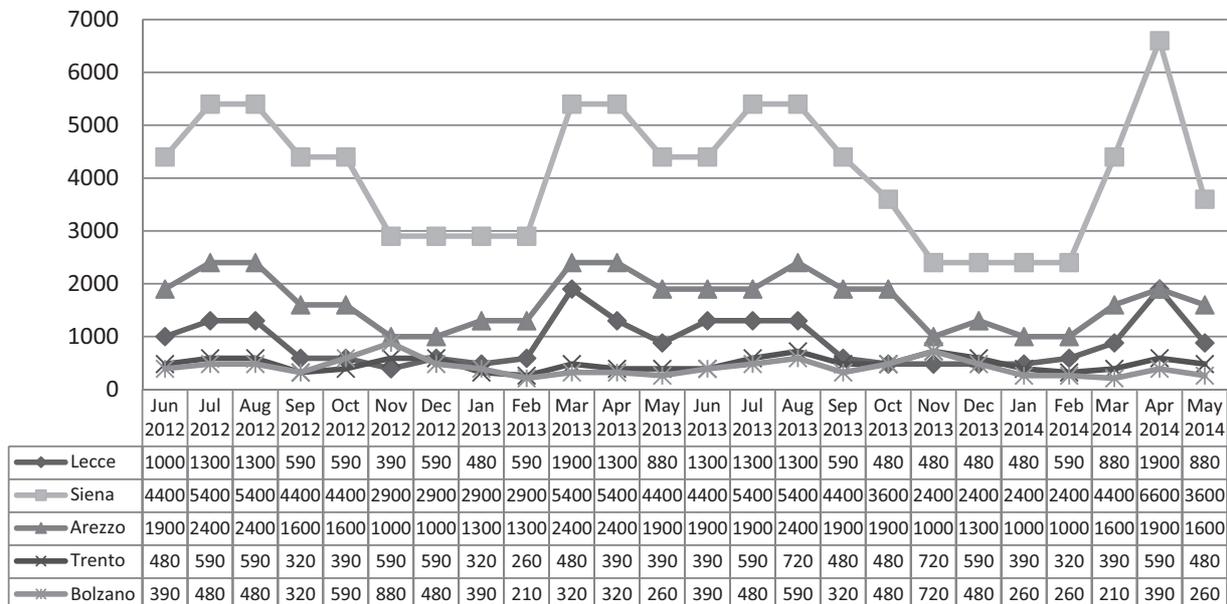


Fig. 9. Monthly average searches for the keyword “agriturismo + province”, Siena, Arezzo, Lecce, Trento and Bolzano, 2012-2014 (Source: Google Adwords, 2014).



The peak in the province of Lecce was in March 2013 and April 2014 (1900 searches); in the province of Brindisi it was in June 2013 (590); in the province of Taranto in March 2013 and April 2014 (the same as Lecce) and it was 590.

In a second stage, the monthly average searches regarding agritourism in the province of Lecce (the one with the highest score) has been compared with those of Siena, Arezzo, Trento and Bolzano. Also in this case the comparison has been carried out by using the keyword “agriturismo + province”.

First of all, this new comparison has confirmed the results of the search trend (see 4.2.2); furthermore, it has assessed precisely that the monthly average searches are far higher for agritourism in the province of Siena (4092), followed by Arezzo (about 1692), Lecce (almost 899), Trento (about 481) and Bolzano (415).

Going beyond the merely numeric figures, the major differences in this comparison regard the seasonal peaks in each province. Such a peak took place in April 2014 in Siena; in July and August 2012, in March, April and August 2013 in Arezzo (2013); in August and November 2013 in Trento (720); in November 2012 in Bolzano (880). As it was explained previously, the peaks in Lecce were in March 2013 and April 2014 (in these months the searches of agritourism facilities were the same as in Arezzo, i.e. 1900).

Qualitative analysis of the diffusion of agritourism units on the internet

After checking the number of webpages regarding agritourism facilities in each Italian province, the search trend and the overall number of keywords (in a comparative perspective), an analysis of the each agritourism website in the province of Lecce was carried out.

The reason why only Lecce was taken into consideration to carry out this analysis is that its province numbers most agritourism units and is the most requested by web users.

A comparative approach has been used also to carry out the qualitative analysis of the agritourism websites. The websites in the province of Lecce were compared with the one in the provinces of Arezzo and Trento.

Such a comparison has been carried out on the basis of the layout and the contents of the sites and the presence on the main social media (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube).

All the agritourism websites in the provinces of Lecce, Arezzo and Trento found on the site of Agriturist were analysed as well as the first agritourism on the portal TripAdvisor (up to a maximum of 5) and the first 5 websites found using the keyword “agriturismo + province”.

Only the first three pages available on the search engine have been analysed⁹.



Fig. 10. Some pictures on the homepage of websites of agritourism units in province of Lecce (Source: various internet websites, 2014).



The layouts of websites on agritourism of province of Lecce is not particularly innovative. The homepage of most sites (16 out of 19) shows big pictures or photogalleries usually placed in the middle or in the upper part of the page. Beside the usual pictures aiming to show the outside, the interior, the rooms and the green areas, these photogalleries include mainly some characteristic shots of the countryside, especially olive groves. Nevertheless, in the webpages of agritourism facilities located near the coast, photos of the marine landscapes (not significantly local) can be found, together with stretches of coast photographs from the sky.

Olive trees and olives are the most frequent items, whereas only few agritourism websites show in the homepage subjects such as oranges and lemons, vines, cactus and wisteria. Occasionally the homepage shows typical products on sale (mostly olive oil, sometimes wine) and food cooked and served in the facility. Sometimes episodes of rural life and farming are shown.

Most agritourism websites are translated in many languages: some are written in Italian and in English, others in German as well. Few are translated into French, Spanish, Russian, Dutch, Swedish and Chinese.

Most agritourism units appear only on Facebook, where 15 units out of 19 can be found. Most of them do not have their page but only a personal profile. The five agritourism units owning a page on Facebook have respectively 0, 3, 56, 209, 359, 592 and 707 fans. It must be added that only the Facebook page of the last agritourism unit is really active on the social network. Actually, no posts appear in the first two pages (0 and 3 fans), whereas in the page with 56 fans the latest post dates back to 5th July 2013; page with 209 fans has not been updated since 29th April 2014; the one with 359 fans has not been updated since 8th April 2014 and the one with 592 fans was updated the 7th April 2014 (the previous post dates back to the 9th November 2013).

The performance of the agritourism units owning a personal profile on Facebook is more intense as these profiles are updated quite regularly, even if the interaction (with the friends) is minimal.

The presence on the other social media is next to nothing¹¹.

3 agritourism units have a profile on Twitter, but only 2 are active. They have also their page on Facebook and can rely on the highest number of "I Like". Furthermore, the two Twitter profiles

which are regularly updated correspond to the ones of the agritourism units most active on Facebook.

As for Twitter, the first unit has 202 tweets and 530 followers, whereas the second one has 388 tweets and 81 followers.

3 agritourism units have a Youtube channel. The uploaded videos are few (3, 4 and 5 for each agritourism units) and the views are only a few hundreds.

Comparisons with the agritourism units in the provinces of Arezzo and Bolzano

The websites in the province of Arezzo do not have a layout more original than the one of the websites in the province of Lecce. Their homepages show an obsolete layout both because of a surplus of photos of the facilities (aerial views, interiors and outside of the facilities) and the green areas around them.

Only 2 units out of 24 have texts written only in Italian: the other 22 are written also in English, Italian and German and few also in French, Spanish, Dutch and Russian.

The same qualitative analysis has been carried out on the websites of 11 units in the province of Trento. Also their layouts are quite obsolete, except two sites whose layouts are quite original and whose photogalleries show beautiful interiors and outsides and green areas and the mountains surrounding the facilities. Most agritourism units show the most renowned local products (apples) and the logo of important fruit companies or associations. Pictures of snowy landscapes can be found next to shots of sunny spring days.

6 sites are written in Italian, English and German, 1 in Italian and English, 1 in Italian, English, German and Dutch, and 3 only in Italian.

As far as the social media are concerned, the situation of agritourism units in Arezzo and Trento is similar and sometimes worse than the ones in the province of Lecce.

In the province of Arezzo too the most used social media is Facebook, whereas Facebook is the only social media used in the province of Trento.

Most specifically, 17 agritourism units, out of the 24, which were analyzed in the province of Arezzo have an account on Facebook. Most have a whole Facebook page (14 units); 2 units have a personal profile and only 1 has a group page. The diffusion and the interaction of these units are poor. Many pages have a limited number of fans (a few dozens or little more than 100 users) and most are rarely updated or are not active at all, except few units having between 200 and 800

fans. Only 1 unit has more than 1,000 fans, it is updated regularly and can rely on a quite frequent interaction with the users.

As for Trento, 10 units out of 11 are on Facebook, but the interaction with the users is minimal. The highest number of "I Like" is 297.

The diffusion of agritourism units in Arezzo on Twitter is higher than Lecce: there are 6 units but only 3 can rely on a good number of tweets (respectively 1346, 312 and 115) and followers (672, 519 and 83). No agritourism units in the province of Trento is on Twitter.

As for Youtube, Arezzo and Lecce are similar: few facilities have their own channel (only 3). The videos are scarce (maximum 4), the views are a few hundred (except one video posted by a unit in the province of Arezzo with 11,500 views, but it is a 1 minute video showing typical Tuscan ballets with no link to the core activity).

No facilities in the province of Trento appear on Youtube.

Discussion about the results and conclusions

This study has shown that Apulia has scored the most relevant increase as for agritourism facilities in the period 2008-2012 (+36%, ISTAT, 2009, 2013). In spite of that, Apulia is still in a backward position as for the total number of agritourism units (366 in 2012, 17th position at national level). Furthermore, the geographic distribution of agritourism in Apulia has been assessed together with a deeper analysis of the situation in Salento.

It has been ascertained that the geographical distribution of the agritourism activities units in Salento is not homogenous as most can be found in the province of Lecce, where the authorization are 704 (i.e. 70% of Salento and 42% of Apulia).

The discussion about the diffusion and the behavior of the operators from Salento on the internet leads to compare with the situation in Tuscany and Trentino-Alto Adige, where agritourism boast a long tradition. The number of webpages of the agritourism units in Salento is just acceptable in Lecce (22nd position at national level) and inadequate for Brindisi and Taranto (respectively 58th and 85th position).

In any case, it is evident that the province of Lecce is the most searched on the web. Both the analysis of the search trend and the overall number of monthly searches plays Lecce in an intermediate position between the provinces of Siena and Arezzo in Tuscany and Trento and Bolzano in Trentino-Alto Adige.

It is worthwhile noticing the poor attention agritourism units in the province of Lecce pay to the internet and social media, an attitude that Lecce has in common with provinces of Arezzo and Trento. The layouts of the websites is poorly looked after and not very original. They are scarcely present on the social media (mainly on Facebook) and their interaction with the users is extremely limited. Such are the characteristics of the agritourism websites in the province of Lecce on the web.

Internet and the new media have become fundamental to promote tourism also for the characteristics of the people choosing and booking the vacation on the web. Generally speaking, they are better clients, not afraid of high prices and who prefer to "deseasonalise" their vacation (Netcomm, ContactLab, 2010).

All these considerations suggest that the possibilities offered by the internet and the new media are not sufficiently used by agritourism operators in Italy to promote their services and products they offer.

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Notes

¹ For a broad historical and geographical survey of agritourism and the different types of tourism, see, among the others, Belencini Meneghel (1991) and Rocca (2013).

² Legge 20 febbraio 2006, n. 96 - Disciplina dell'agriturismo.

³ "Prodotti di Puglia", "Products of Apulia", is a collective label for identifying regional products.

⁴ The number is quite different from the one shown previously (ISTAT, 2013) because the ISTAT data refer to active agritourism facilities, whereas in this case we take into consideration the number of subjects authorized to work as agritourism operators without considering if they actually perform (Regione Puglia, forthcoming). The comparison among the provinces in Apulia and in Salento has been made on the basis of the Regional List of the Agritourism Operators because it permits to disaggregate the operators at provincial level, whereas the ISTAT data are available on a regional scale.

⁵ The standard deviation is a statistical index to measure the dispersion of single observations around the arithmetical average.

⁶ All the searches on the internet have been carried out using Italian words as the use of the same words in English has not given any significant result.

⁷ The research about the number of webpages has been

repeated with other similar keywords and has sometimes produced very different results. For instance, if the keywords ["agriturismo" and "name of the province"] are used the result shown in tab. 1 is challenged and Lecce holds 8th at national level (about 7 million searches). Nevertheless, the keyword "agriturismo + name of the province" has been used to compare the different provinces because it is likely to be the most used.

⁸ We have taken into consideration the two regions with the longest tradition in agritourism (Tuscany and Trentino-Alto Adige) and the provinces within Tuscany with the number of webpages more similar to the one of Lecce.

⁹ The methodology we have explained shows why in this case the agritourism units in the province of Siena and Bolzano have not been used in this comparison. In both cases, the differences with the province of Lecce were too strong to make a good comparison: in the province of Siena the number of agritourism units was far higher, whereas in the province of Bolzano it was far lower than Lecce.

¹⁰ The comparison of the qualitative diffusion of the agritourism units in the provinces of Lecce, Arezzo and Trento on the social media was made from 26th May to 2nd June 2014.

11. It was not possible to count the actual number of friendships as the profiles are blocked and do not show any information.

