

# Cultural festivals and their impact on the Development of Tourism Destinations

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## Abstract

Italy is known worldwide as a touristic destination, both for its beautiful landscapes and sea and for its unique cultural heritage. But even the well-known destinations have the chance to manage cultural events to attract different types of tourists and counteract seasonality. Our research focuses on the cultural festival La Notte della Taranta, which takes place in Apulia, in Southern Italy. Apulia is well known for its beautiful sea, its landscape and this peculiar music, which is called pizzica. This particular kind of music has been the basis for the creation of the festival La Notte della Taranta that was born in 1998 and is currently the largest European music event dedicated to the traditional music. This festival is currently able to attract over 230,000 viewers, thanks to an economic and regulatory management that has become a benchmark for other similar activities. Our attention has been focused on the economic and legislative choices that have made this success possible.

**Keywords:** Festivals; Tourism; Destination; Development; Governance.

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## 1. Introduction

In Italy, tourism is one of the most dynamic productive sectors. The country is characterized by the presence of archaeological, architectural, artistic and cultural sites and this is the reason why the Italian territory requires an adequate planning related to the provision of the touristic services (Sergio, 2019).

The qualification of the service network must be appropriate in order to promote the exploitation of the resources, the communication tools and the tourist accommodation. Therefore it is necessary to increase the number and the quality of the instruments aimed at guaranteeing the development of tourism both at a national and at a local and territorial level.

Italian territory is an expression of culture, a term that can take on a plurality of meanings. Indeed, culture concerns the development of knowledge, but also the involvement of the community in which the individuals live and therefore is linked to values and ideals. Culture and tourism is a winning combination for growth and development of a destination and also for sustainable growth. Tourism, indeed, is linked both to fundamental

rights and to all the economic activities and it is well known that, for an economic strategy on tourism to be really effective, we can not ignore the regulatory framework within which economic agents act.

From a legal point of view, tourism is a set of legal rules that manage this economic sector. The crucial importance of tourism has determined an extended intervention of the government in the discipline of tourism, in relation also to the different implications on public order, on the protection and enhancement of the territory, on the need to safeguard the artistic and cultural heritage. In this context, tourism could be supported in order to create the conditions for the development of Italy in a homogeneous territorial strategy, favoring employment and becoming the most important industrial sector on which the country can count for growth (R. Grossi, 2014).

Until the middle of the 20th century, culture was considered an elite phenomenon, approachable only to those who were able to appreciate the beauty. Therefore, it was reserved to the ones who held power. This has led to delays in introducing appropriate incentive mechanisms for visiting museums and cultural heritage in general, as well as for organizing and attending cultural festivals. Over the past 20 years, cultural festivals have spread around the world and have assumed a central role in the promotion of touristic destinations. At the same time, since local communities have increasingly started recognizing the value of these events, even the volume of the researches conducted on festivals and events has increased.

Our research focuses on the cultural festival La Notte della Taranta, which takes place in Apulia, a region located in the South of Italy. Apulia is well known worldwide for its beautiful sea, its landscape and this peculiar music, which is called pizzica and is celebrated during the festival. The economic and regulatory management of the cultural festival La Notte della Taranta has become a benchmark for other similar activities: indeed, data show that tourists increasingly choose the destinations where the festival takes place and attend the festival. Our attention has been focused on the economic and legislative choices that have made this success possible.

## **2. Literature Review**

Much of the literature on cultural festivals and tourism focuses on economic impact, touristic promotion of the destination and perception of tourism by the local communities (e.g. Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Daniels, Backman, & Backman, 2004). Many researches also investigate the tools for attracting a higher volume of tourists, starting from their psychological profiles and behavioral patterns (e.g. Bowen & Daniels, 2005; Getz, 2010).

The attention to the tourism sector is linked primarily to the territorial aspect, to the will to safeguard the territory and to protect and promote culture. Many researches stress the (negative) impact of cultural festivals on local communities due to crowding and damages to the natural and cultural heritage (McKercher, 1993).

Even if many studies approach tourism in a unified and extended way, it is always necessary to support the local disciplines, aimed at safeguarding the territory, protecting and promoting culture (M. Gola, 2012).

Indeed, the development of a territory is mostly based on the attention that the institutions (and first of all the local authorities) place in it.

The protection of the landscape and the cultural heritage is one of the issues that must be managed by local and central institutions, that also benefit from the development of the sector, thanks to the increase of the revenues (Rinaldi, 2011). To this aim, different subjects (both public and private) act to promote both the economic development of tourism and the preservation of the territory. Local government is the subject that is charged with the management of the externalities caused by the touristic exploitation of the natural resources (Rinaldi, 2012).

It is well known that festivals and events provide many opportunities for tourism, economic outcomes and increased investment inflows (Getz, 2007; Van de Wagen, 2005). Festival and events are a tool for stimulating the economic, social and juridical context of a geographical area and allow a territory to get out of the isolation to which it is often condemned by the process of globalization (Malo & Perini, 2012). They also contribute to balance the seasonality trends (Huang, Li & Cai, 2010; Boo and Busser, 2006; Mehmetoglu and Ellingsen, 2005). According to Cudny (2012), festivals are “varied, uncommon events, unconnected with work, they celebrate elements significant in the life of a given community, consolidating it, they are often related to the culture and religion of local communities, they often consist of many different social and cultural events, they are often regular events connected with art and culture”. Culture is one of the factors of success of festivals (Quinn, 2010), since cultural festivals exhibit local rituals and traditions, while economically and culturally empowering the local destination and promoting tourism (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003; Xie, 2004).

Cultural festivals, indeed are attractive not only for foreign tourists, but also for the members of the local community, who are attached to that culture (Delbosc, 2008). Community attachment is a concept that has been very used in the tourism-related literature in order to assess the attitudes of the local community towards tourism development (Um & Crompton, 1987). It has also been studied in relation to the festival visitors’ satisfaction (Kay, 2003); some researches pointed out that visitors’ attachment to their community is positively related to their perception of crowding at a festival (Wickham and Kersterter, 2000). Sheldon & Var (1984) assert that residents that have a stronger community attachment are also the ones who more frequently have negative attitudes towards tourism development. The levels of satisfaction and behavioral attitudes between residents and non-residents with respect to cultural festivals have also been compared (McDowall, 2010).

Of particular interest when analyzing cultural festivals are the factors that may explain the desire of visitors to revisit a festival (Gandi-Arora & Shaw, 2002; Shanka & Taylor, 2004). Satisfaction is one of the common features that have been used in order to estimate the will to revisit a festival (Cole & Illum, 2006; Lee & Beeler, 2009). For example, festival-related activities have a positive effect on the level of satisfaction of the visitors of cultural festivals (Kim, Sun and Mahoney, 2008). Even involvement impacts on satisfaction and, this way, on the likelihood of returning to a recurrent festival (Chang, Gibson & Sisson, 2013).

Another of the main factors in the success of cultural festivals is authenticity (Casteran & Roederer, 2013; Brida, Disegna, & Osti, 2013). In the tourism sector, authenticity may be defined as the tourists’ perception of experiences they feel as genuine (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Many researches also underlined the link between authenticity and touristic expenditure (Brida et al., 2013) or behavioral attitudes (Novello & Fernandez, 2016; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011).

Since cultural festivals consist of so many different aspects, the governance assumes a central role and this is particularly true for those cultural festivals that are organized by both public and private partners (Rinaldi, 2016). In these cases, indeed, the interactions established between private experts and public employees can promote the creation of effective networks and reduce the impact of the political disputes (Cabral & Krane, 2018). The collaboration between public and private actors (Bryson et al., 2006) is pivotal in order to large festivals to succeed, since they are based on a collaborative governance and depend on different resources that are held by both public and private stakeholders (Andersson and Getz, 2008).

### **3. Methodology**

The knowledge of a territory is essential to know its history and to understand its values that can remain etched in the mind of the traveler as an emotion of memory. A territory like Salento (in Apulia, Italy), which is the area where the Festival La Notte della Taranta takes place, is characterized by the presence of archaeological, architectural and cultural sites. For this reason, it requires a qualified public and private network to guarantee a correct use of the resources, the provision of efficient informations and an adequate tourist accommodation in order to efficiently exploit the cultural festival of La Notte della Taranta to allow Salento to be known abroad. To support the tourism development in the Salento area, it has been necessary to strengthen the tools of cooperation between public and private actors. To achieve the development of tourism in the area, one strategy has been the creation of particular forms of tourism, such as cultural tourism, tourism linked to traditions, religious tourism (S. Amorosino, 2000). It is widely known that the link between tourism and the territory is important from an economic, social and legal point of view. It is also important to satisfy two opposite needs: the development of tourism as a suitable resource for producing wealth and the safeguard of the territory and the cultural and natural heritage.

In order to implement the promotion of the territory it is necessary to carry out a collaboration between the administrations involved (S. Cantisani, 2016). Territory and tourism are therefore two essential elements for the cultural and economic growth of a territory. Thanks to the public-private governance of the festival La Notte della Taranta, this cultural event has become a referring point for the whole southern Italy. This happened also thanks to a new idea of land use. Within this framework, the administrations merged different factors: the protection and promotion of the territory, their valorization, the use of the territory in compliance with its nature as a public resource, the integration between urban planning and territorial planning. Touristic activities have been managed in full compliance with the provisions of the Tourism Code as well as with the provisions on territorial governance (both at state and regional level). This legislations are required to respect the rules on the protection of the environment, the landscape and cultural heritage and, at the same time, concern the legal regulation of the territory.

It is an expression of the collaboration between public and private bodies that act on the territory. The private-public partnership enabled the event to achieve the economic results, the media coverage and the tourist response it has today. The public administration and the private subjects work together for the realization of a coordinated activity aimed at achieving a single result, that is to enhance the touristic performance of the Salento area.

To assess the results achieved thanks to the collaboration between public and private subjects working together to guarantee the success of the festival La Notte della Taranta, we combined a legislative analysis with an economic analysis. The legislative analysis has been based on the study of the legislative framework that has made this success possible, by favoring the cooperation between different subjects, while the economic analysis has focused on the economic outcomes of the festival, in terms of funding sources, touristic arrivals and minimum economic impact.

#### **4. Results**

Our first objective was to analyze, in terms of the economic and legal governance of the territory, the impact of the Night of Taranta both for the population and for local producers of goods and services. In addition, we wanted to see whether, thanks to the festival, the Municipalities involved had been able to counteract seasonality. Finally, we wanted to understand how a cultural festival could impact on urban planning laws, land planning, and tourism development. In order to evaluate the development of the territorial area, we have used the available data series. These data allowed us to analyze the trends of the incoming tourist flows and their composition. Since one of the objectives of the research was to analyze the government of the territory in the management of such an event, we

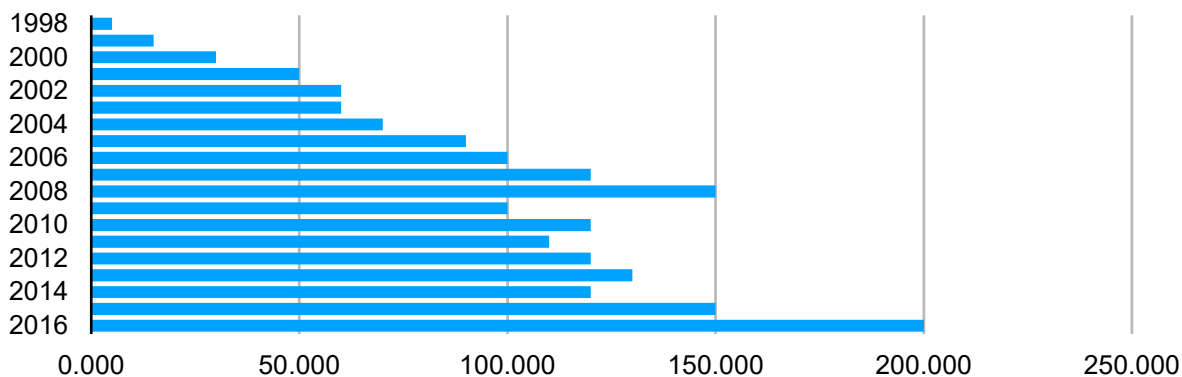
used the data released by the municipalities belonging to the Union of Grecia Salentina, which is the area in which the event is being held. The availability of historical series has enabled us to test the impact of the Night of Taranta on the development of the tourist destinations involved.

The data showed that, thanks to a popular cultural festival, the destinations involved have benefited from a growing flow of visitors. Consequently, through a multiplier effect, local tourist revenues have increased, and so did the wealth of the local population. In addition, the growing presence of tourists on the territory has provided a stimulus for the rise of new entrepreneurial initiatives. Also thanks to the international importance of the Night of Taranta, Salento (and in particular the municipalities of the Grecia Salentina) became an internationally famous destination. The Night of Taranta event has stimulated the collaboration between public, economic and cultural subjects with the aim of favoring the creation of new productive processes that have a decisive influence on the development of the territory.

In this field, our research has evidenced important correlations between culture, territorial development and economic growth of a touristic destination. And, like we stated before, one of the pivotal factors of success of La Notte della Taranta has been the strict collaboration between private and public subjects. This also happened with respect to the funding: in the last year, for example, the event has been financed by many public and private subjects. Thanks to this joined effort, the event currently consists of a series of concerts located in the municipalities of the area and a final concert which is held every year in the town of Melpignano. From 2007 to 2016, the local events hosted 607 musical performing groups and involved 4,228 musicians. During these years, more than 2,780,000 spectators attended the events. The final concert, in the same period, hosted 68 Italian singers performing, 42 singers from all over the world, 49 performers joining the local Orchestra and has been attended by over 1,485,000 spectators. As we may see in Figure 1, the number of participants at the final event is rapidly increasing in the last years. In fact, if in 2007 the participants at the final concert amounted to 5,000, in 2016 they reached 200,000.

Figure 1. Number of people attending the final concert of the Festival “La Notte della Taranta”.  
Source: Our elaboration on data released by the Foundation “La Notte della Taranta”.

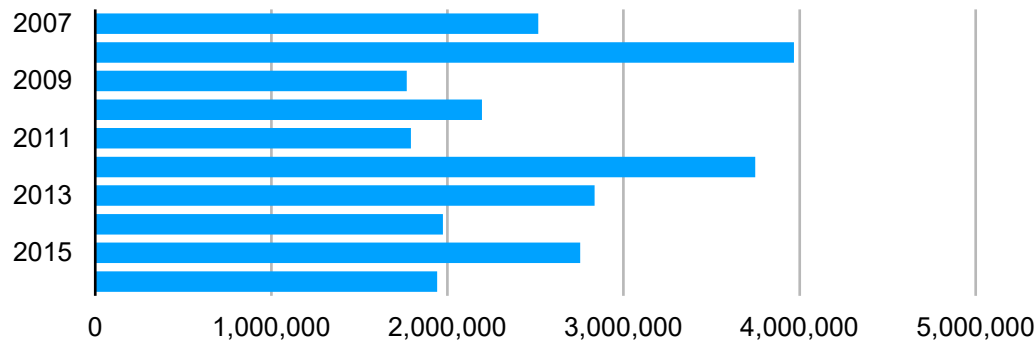
As it is well known, there are two variables that are commonly used to assess the impact of tourism (or tourism



events, like ours): tourist arrivals and tourist revenues. In order to estimate the impact that the festival has had on the territory, we analyzed the data of tourist arrivals in each of the municipalities in the area. Data highlighted that tourists choosing the area of the Grecia Salentina increased in the last decade, as we may see in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Tourist arrivals in the area of Grecia Salentina  
Source: Our elaboration on data released by the municipalities.

While in 2007 the tourists who chose this area for their holidays were about 492,000, in 2016 the volume of tourist

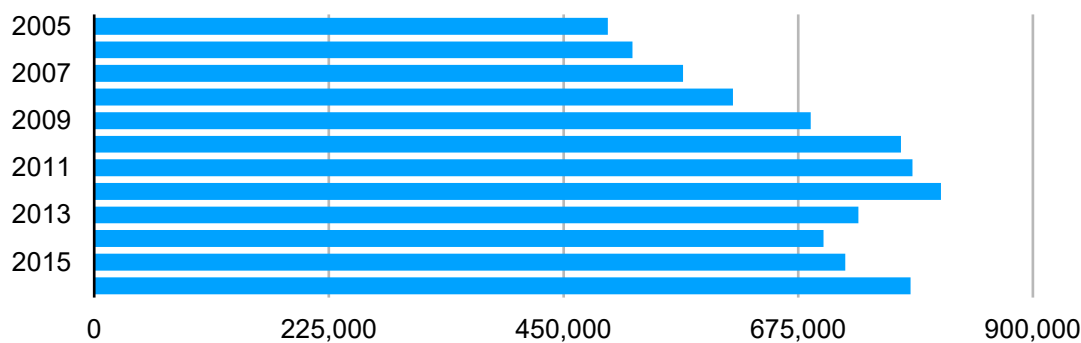


arrivals grew, reaching 783,000. For the towns involved, the festival represented a promotional tool that made them known both locally and internationally, even if they are very small towns.

In order to evaluate the economic impact of the Festival, we used data on the minimum economic impact and the potential economic impact. For the minimum economic impact, we considered the tourists who choose the Salento region only for attending the festival La Notte della Taranta. In the measurement of the potential economic impact, we also included the volume of the tourists who were in the Salento region also for the Festival (but not exclusively).

Figure 3. Festival “La Notte della Taranta” - Minimum Economic Impact in €  
Source: our elaboration on estimates provided by the La Notte della Taranta Foundation.

The trend of the minimum economic impact from 2006 to 2017 is very unstable (Figure 3). During the last 10

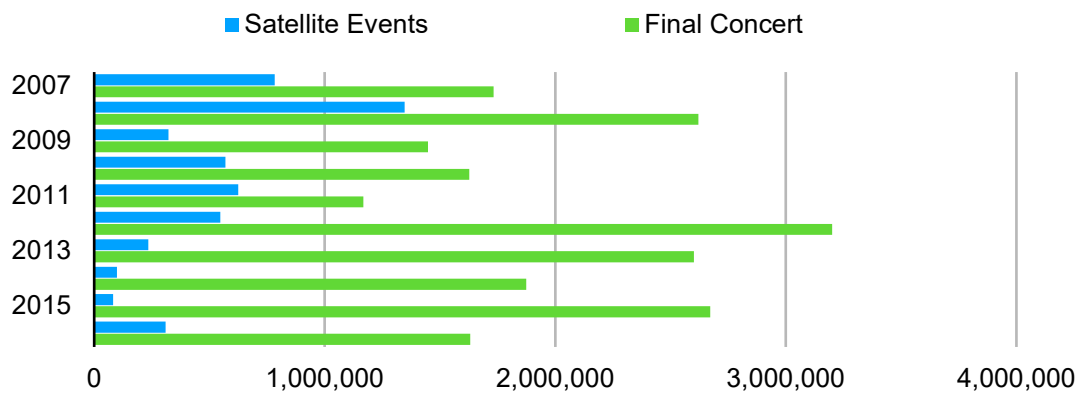


years, there have been three peaks: in 2008, 2012 and 2015. Despite that, the overall value of the economic impact is decreasing, from about 2.5 million € in 2007 to more than 1.9 million € in 2016 (while the highest value is in 2008, with almost 4 millions and the negative peak is in 2009, with about 1.8 millions). The revenues coming from the tourists that chose Salento exclusively to attend the Festival mostly derive from the expenses they made during the final event. We may presume that they prefer to attend the final concert rather than the smaller events located in the other towns (Figure 4).

Furthermore, the total impact of the final concert, which is not steady during these years, is similar in 2016 with respect to 2007 (respectively, 1.7 and 1.6 million €). Even if from 2007 and 2009 the two kinds of events show a similar trend, from 2009 on, the trend of the impact coming from the satellite events is quite stable, while the impact of the final concert is very irregular, showing a positive peak in 2012 (3.2 million €) and a negative peak in 2011 (almost 1.2 millions). Besides the minimum economic impact, we also used the data on the potential impact. The potential impact is measured on the basis of the tourists visiting Apulia and the Salento region for other purposes, but who still decided to attend the Festival.

Figure 4. Festival “La Notte della Taranta” - Minimum Economic Impact by event category in €  
Source: our elaboration on estimates provided by the La Notte della Taranta Foundation.

Surprisingly, these data (Figure 5) show an increasing trend during the last decade. While in 2007 it was 4.2 million €, in 2016 it reached almost 6.9 millions. The highest level has been reached in 2012 (more than 11



millions), while the negative peak occurred in 2008 (almost 4.9 million €). Also for the analysis of the potential economic impact (Figure 6), data have been disaggregated on the basis of the type of event (main event, satellite events).

Figure 5. Festival “La Notte della Taranta”—Potential Economic Impact in €.  
Source: Our elaboration on data released by the Foundation “La Notte della Taranta”

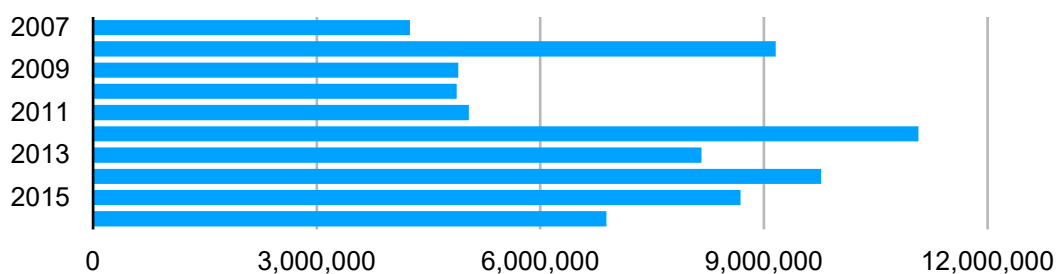
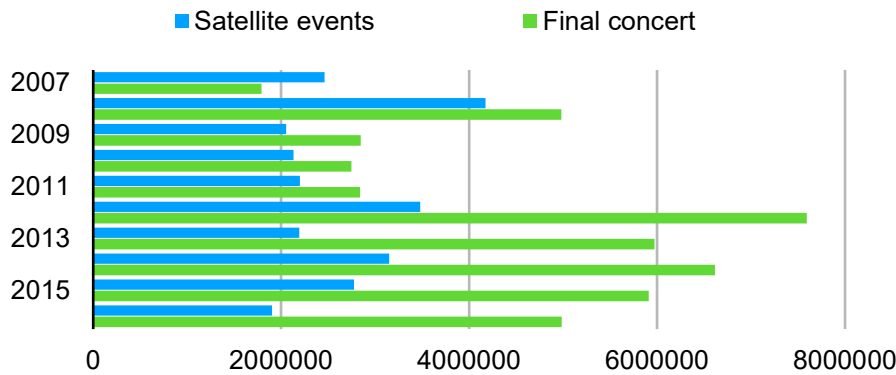


Figure 6. Festival “La Notte della Taranta”—Potential Economic Impact by event category in €. Source: Our elaboration on data released by the Foundation “La Notte della Taranta”.



The performance of the economic impact of the two categories of events is quite peculiar. Indeed, while the trend of the two variables is very similar until 2011, in the subsequent years the final concert shows a much higher impact. From 2012 on, the trend of the economic impact is decreasing both for the satellite events and the final concert.

## 5. Discussions

In the last twenty years, cultural events and festivals grew at an international level. Festivals, in particular, have become one of the fastest growing kinds of tourism attractions. This process caused for some touristic destinations the necessity to redefine their cultural, urban and economic identity. Analyzing the cultural festival La Notte della Taranta, we have been able to assess how tourism development can be achieved through local culture. Using cultural festivals as a tool to attract tourists to the territory, allows the destination to plan its economic growth. Our research focused on a territory that has very unique characteristics, which differentiate it from any other place in Italy. Indeed, the festival La Notte della Taranta is born in a geographical area in the south of Salento and in particular in the Municipalities of the so-called Grecìa Salentina, in the Apulia Region. As we stated before, the Apulia Region is located in Southern Italy and the Grecìa Salentina is in Salento, the south-eastern side of the Region.

The Grecìa Salentina is an inner area of the Province of Lecce, where a linguistic minority uses a language called griko, which is not very different from the modern Greek. This is the area where local municipalities created the inter-municipal association called Union of Municipalities of the Grecìa Salentina. This association includes the municipalities of Calimera, Carpignano Salentino, Castrignano dei Greci, Corigliano d'Otranto, Cutrofiano, Martano, Martignano, Melpignano, Sogliano Cavour, Soleto, Sternatia and Zollino. This result, namely the birth of the Union of Municipalities of Grecìa Salentina, has made been possible thanks to the commitment of the mayors who governed those municipalities in the 1990s. The Union of Municipalities of Grecìa Salentina has thus assumed the role of leader in the activity of valorization of the griko territory. And the valorization of that territory could actually be realized using just the cultural traditions. This gave rise to a process that resulted in the now well-known event La Notte della Taranta. The Union - thanks to its being a local body - has been able (and still continues today) to benefit from substantial economic funding both at regional and European Union level.



These funds have been used not only to finance La Notte della Taranta, but also to recover all those popular traditions that were slowly disappearing, not least the same griko language.

The festival - today known not only in Italy but also abroad (great attention to the event comes from China, for example) - was born in 1998 and is an expression of the enhancement of local music, local traditions and local territory. The Griko territory is indeed characterized by the oral tradition and the songs in Griko. These elements are very important for the enhancement of the Salento territory and heritage. Born in order to support local music, the Night of Taranta Festival has been able to involve, over the years, many different actors: artists, administrators, tourists, entrepreneurs, observers and scholars. Thanks to some particularly positive side factors (including good food and the landscape of exceptional beauty), the festival has become a unique tool for territorial marketing, not only on the national scene, but also on the international one. The dimensions of the Festival and its relevance led then in 2008 to the establishment of the La Notte della Taranta Foundation, which not only organizes the Festival, but also defines its management strategies. The Foundation even promotes initiatives for the enhancement and protection of the Salento area, from a cultural and touristic point of view. Thanks to its success, the festival became itinerant in 2000 and, since then, it started to take place in 15 municipalities.

### ***5.3 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations***

Since we mostly focused on the legal framework that allowed the festival to succeed and to the measurement of this success, we missed some informations about the consumers. In the future, it would be of great interest to better understand the profile of the tourists who choose to attend the festival La Notte della Taranta. Furthermore, we should give particular attention to the returning visitors. Indeed, it is well known that this kind of tourist, with a high level of probability with respect to first-time visitors, may recommend the festival to others (Shani et al., 2009). Finally, since local development is a process based on the exploitation of the resources of a given territory, in which the complementarity between public and private subjects is fundamental, an additional step could be made by elaborating forecasts for the future development of the tourist area.

## **6. Conclusions**

Cultural festival are increasing worldwide and are becoming an effective tool for the development of some touristic destinations. This peculiar tourism sector combines economic aspects with the regulatory framework and is linked to the governance of the territory. Festivals attract a growing number of tourists, since they answer to the need to connect with local cultures and to know traditions, music, food and places in their true essence. Even the local administrations increasingly use festivals as tools for promoting tourism and supporting the local economy. This is one of the reasons why we are observing a rising public assistance intervening in the organization of festivals.

Our study focused on the festival La Notte della Taranta. This festival, that was born in 1998 in Salento, takes place during the summer in the Apulia Region (Italy). First of all, we framed the structure that made the organization of the festival possible, underlining the effective connections between public and private subjects. Then, we analyzed the data on tourist arrivals and the economic impact of tourism in the area of Grecia Salentina, where the events are hosted.

The data show an increase in tourist arrivals, despite a decreasing economic impact. These controversial trends suggest the need for the implementation of new policies in order to use local festivals within a more complete tourism strategy. The new policies should be aimed at increasing both the volume of visitors and their consumptions. They should also find a new way for using popular culture and the traditions performed in the

festival La Notte della Taranta as a strategic tool for the promotion of the territory. Another aspect for further development could be related to find how to attract new tourist and develop new and different types of tourism. Despite the recent data on the economic impact, that is decreasing, the Festival attests that the relationship between culture, environment, cultural heritage is the factor that can guarantee the development of a territory. Indeed, what the Union of Municipalities was able to achieve was precisely the enhancement of its territory, that became a real tourist destination: Salento is chosen as tourism destination by a growing number of tourists who have been able to know the beauty of this area even thanks to the event of La Notte della Taranta.

Also from a governance perspective, the festival has attracted the attention of many institutions, committed to following the example of Salento: an effective collaboration between public administration and private subjects. In this context, the extraordinary success of the La Notte della Taranta event can be considered as an example for the whole of Southern Italy.

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