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**PROXIMITY TOURISM IN THE PROVINCE OF LATINA: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL  
ANALYSIS**

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### Abstract

The crisis triggered by COVID-19 has resulted in an appreciation of proximity tourism as a key factor for people's well-being and for the economic resilience of Italy's peripheral areas. In general, the success of proximity tourism might depend on: the relationships that tourists establish with a plurality of stakeholders; the degree of development and accessibility of the areas, especially when considering the tourism attractiveness of rural and natural areas; the contribution of culturally sustainable proximity tourism to narrow territorial and economic disparities on a local, provincial or regional scale.

Against this background, the research explores the potential of the Province of Latina for culturally sustainable proximity tourism that considers the metropolitan city of Rome as its place of origin. In particular, the research answers the following questions: what are the most attractive destinations for proximity tourism from the Metropolitan City of Rome to the Province of Latina? What territorial factors can positively or negatively influence local tourism attractiveness? What benefits do local communities obtain from the development of proximity tourism from the Metropolitan City of Rome? To elaborate an answer, a multidimensional analysis is developed focusing on the construction and measurement of a composite index integrating four domains: tourist attractiveness, tourist development, economic development and territorial development. Using the data published by ISTAT at the municipal scale, integrated with other data collected through desk research, a score for the composite indicator is calculated for each municipality from the measurement of a set of elementary indicators. Based on the results obtained, policy recommendations are formulated that may contribute to identifying the role of proximity tourism in the Province of Latina as part of a culturally sustainable local development process.

**Keywords:** culturally sustainable proximity tourism, tourism attractiveness, territorial and economic development, Province of Latina

**JEL codes:** L8, Z32, O18

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 syndemic (Singer et al., 2017; Mendenhall, 2020; Singer and Rylko-Bauer, 2021) has led to an unprecedented global tourism crisis (Salustri, 2020). In the current post-pandemic scenario, marked by acute tensions of a geopolitical nature, it is necessary to cope with the new dynamics of the sector and identify the latent resources and territorial potential that can contribute to its overall re-examination. In this perspective, at the national level, it is worth noting how the COVID-19 crisis has increased the recognition of proximity tourism as a key factor for people's wellbeing and for the economic and social resilience of Italy's peripheral areas.

Building on these premises, this research further elaborates the logical framework outlined in previous research on the tourist attractiveness of the Latium territories and on the contribution of tourism to the economic development and to the reduction of the disparities between centers and peripheries (Salustri, Cocco, Mawroh, 2023, Salustri, Cocco, 2022; Salustri, 2022). In particular, the research explores the potential of the Province of Latina as a destination for culturally sustainable proximity tourism (Throsby, 1995) that considers the Metropolitan city of Rome as its place of origin. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the most attractive Municipalities for proximity tourism targeting Rome's residents?
- What economic-territorial factors can positively or negatively influence local tourist attractiveness?
- What benefits do local communities obtain from offering proximity tourism services targeting Rome's residents?

To answer these questions, using data from ISTAT's Statistical Atlas of Municipalities, integrated through desk research, starting from the measurement of a set of elementary indexes and their aggregation into a composite index, a score is calculated for each Municipality along four domains: tourist attractiveness, tourism development, economic development, and territorial relevance. Then empirical evidence is used to test the hypothesis that tourist attractiveness can promote local tourist development, and that the latter contributes to economic development, which in turn underpins the social and demographic vitality of places (Sacchetti, 2023).

## 2. Literature overview

In 2018, the tourism sector was experiencing a phase of considerable expansion

(Unwto, 2023), then the Covid-19 pandemic led to a drastic fall in the economic activity. In many regions, domestic travel has returned more rapidly to pre-crisis levels than international tourism, partly due to fewer restrictions on local mobility. This has led to the conception of domestic tourism as a potential substitute, at least in the immediate future, for international tourism (Allan et alii, 2022).

The hypothesis that policies aimed at attracting domestic tourists can effectively mitigate – especially at the local level – the international tourism crisis is not supported by robust empirical evidence. It is certain, however, that, globally, the domestic tourism market is more than six times larger than that of international tourism. Furthermore, compared to international travel, domestic travel has returned more rapidly to pre-crisis levels (Unwto, 2023).

Geographically, it is worth noting how Europe is the largest tourism destination in the world, and how it recorded the best performance worldwide in 2022. Supported by robust intra-regional demand, Europe has already recovered the pre COVID-19 contribution of travel and tourism to the European economy, and until 2032, the sector is expected to grow at an average annual rate exceeding the growth estimated for the regional economy (Jus et alii, 2022).

As regards Italy, tourism is perceived as a trigger of sustainable territorial development that may involve local communities in a process of cultural regeneration (Antolini, Giusti, Cesarini, 2022; Bizzarri, Colombo, 2022). In the NRRP (Italia Domani, 2022). Mission 1 Component 3 pursues the growth of Italy's tourist and cultural attractiveness through: a modernization of the tangible and intangible infrastructures of the historical and cultural heritage that promotes its accessibility, fruition and sustainability; support for the dual transition and requalification of enterprises, structures and skills in the tourist and cultural sectors; the regeneration of historical villages, parks and gardens (Bellandi, Giannini, Iacobucci, 2022). In this perspective, tourism (especially cultural tourism) is seen as an enabler of Italy's sustainable economic growth.

At the regional and local level, the metropolitan city of Rome has long been a national excellence in the field of tourism development, ranking first in Italy for the number of arrivals and second for the number of presences in accommodation facilities, third for foreign presences out of the total number of tourist presences and fourth for the average length of stay of guests (Carrozzi, Mancini, 2019). However, the extreme polarization of the territory leads to an underutilization and under-exploitation of almost the entire Roman hinterland and of the other Latium Provinces (ibid.).

About the latter, it is worth noting how since the beginning of the Covid-19 syndemic, proximity tourism, mostly in the form of local excursions, short stays, and second-homes tourism, has acquired a new vitality, but, on the supply side, it

often lacks dedicated infrastructures and marketing plans. In fact, notwithstanding a (re)discovery of mountain and rural areas and of the familiarity with their (tangible and intangible) cultural heritage, tourism and accommodation services are still underdeveloped, scarcely integrated, and mostly concentrated in the provincial tourism poles. Consequently, proximity tourism, instead of contributing to narrowing the territorial imbalances, might exacerbate the existing divides, and at the same time it may increase overtourism. Instead, if proximity tourism were experienced in peripheral destinations without crowding out the interest of the local stakeholders, it might provide a significant contribution to the local economy, valorizing local resources and triggering culturally sustainable forms of local development (Throsby, 1995).

Beside mountain and rural areas, also the coastal areas are attractive destinations for proximity tourism in the Latium region. In these areas, even if tourism enterprises are still largely represented by *lidos* for second-home users, bars and restaurants (Castellano, Montanari, 2020), further improvements in proximity tourism may contribute to triggering other tourism segments, as tourism facilities for international tourists and new residents. Also, in places where hotels operate exclusively in the summer season and where farms and fishery-related activities lack coordination and product integration, proximity tourism might contribute to the achievement of a business scale that may trigger the implementation of more encompassing marketing plans, involving other tourism segments and tourism-related economic activities (rural development, fisheries, cultural amenities, local transport services...) (ibidem). Finally, insularity, here intended both as a peculiar mix of cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic elements and as a form of peripherality, is a relevant issue for proximity tourism in the Latium Region (and in the Province of Latina), as it includes the Pontine archipelago, and in particular the islands of Ponza and Ventotene, two of the 27 Italian small islands. The latter are hot-water islands for which tourism is the main sector of economic activity, as well as the main source of anthropic impacts on natural and social equilibria (Gallia, 2012, 2022; Salustri, Appolloni, 2021).

These aspects of the regional and local territory cannot be ignored when designing an offer plan for proximity tourism at the regional/provincial scale. But, on the other hand, it is also necessary to consider the distinctive features that characterize proximity tourism on the demand side. Being a tourist in one's own region - which tends to be a close and familiar place - means adopting a point of view based on curiosity, that at the same time is simple and complex<sup>1</sup> (Diaz-Soria,

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<sup>1</sup> The proximity tourist's approach is complex because, as in the case of the local inhabitant, it is constructed from information from multiple sources: personal experiences, family, work, society, environment, media, etc. On the other hand, this information is often combined with

2017). As stated by Salmela et al. (2021), proximity tourism is based on the idea of reconsidering from a new perspective a close and everyday environment (Rantala et al., 2020). Furthermore, tourism can promote a conceptualization of the localities based on an appreciation of the aesthetic value of everyday environments, rebalancing their typically prevailing functional meanings (Richards, 2016; Besson 2017). Increased aesthetic sensitivity within the ordinary can also have a relevant impact on tourism practices, mobility and the ways in which individuals engage with their everyday environments (Salmela et al., 2021).

On a societal level, Hollenhorst et al. (2014) suggest how proximity tourism – in the form of locavism or bioregional tourism – can enable travellers to invest in and connect with local communities. Moreover, proximity tourism allows people that cannot travel to distant destinations for economic reasons to still experience tourism (Salmela et al., 2021). From a territorial perspective, a greater understanding of the potential of proximity tourism suggests exploring the relationships between tourist centers and peripheries, emphasizing the diversity of the available experiences and contributing to the development of peripheral and ultraperipheral areas (Bertacchini et al., 2021). Finally, at an economic level, proximity tourism contributes to the destagionalization of tourist practices (Diaz-Soria & Llurdés-Co it, 2013) and the rediscovery and creation of new meanings for those elements of local heritage that have been neglected or have lost their original significance (Jeuring, 2016).

Based on these premises, this research considers a hybrid proximity tourism offer, i.e. based on the integration of cultural and recreational, food and wine, and environmental tourism services, as a trigger of culturally sustainable local development in highly diversified contexts. Planning complex excursions and journeys, however, is a difficult task, since the value of such initiatives is co-designed and co-produced by a plurality of stakeholders. The latter operate in a context of information asymmetries that may give rise to opportunistic and/or extractive behaviours, both on the supply side and on the demand side - or on the territorial side - undermining the positive outcome of the experience.

Against this background, a potential research gap is observed concerning the development of a proximity tourism offer in the Province of Latina and the assessment of the contribution it can make to reducing territorial imbalances between the poles of services and the provincial and regional peripheries. The issue is of particular interest since Latium is a monocentric region in which Rome, located in the heart of the region, is by far the largest municipality. On the other hand, the Province of Latina, while being “close” to the Province of Rome, holds a mix of local cultural, rural, and natural resources that could be exploited in the

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that available to traditional tourists (travel preparation, media, etc.), who adopt a simplified approach because their relationship with the destination is relatively new.

design of sustainable local tourism offers, given also the existence of a substantial number of residents in the metropolitan area of Rome who might be interested in consuming local products and services as part of proximity tourism activities (excursions, short stays, second-home tourism, etc.).

This research suggests that the design and implementation of a proximity tourism offer in the Province of Latina must involve at least four areas of value. Firstly, beyond its intrinsic value, rural development reveals its instrumental value as a resource that can be exploited within local welfare and economic development policies. Indeed, villages and rural and natural landscapes are ideal amenities for proximity tourism, but they are also factors that, if perceived as assets by residents, can contribute to countering the depopulation processes that are affecting the inner areas. Furthermore, civic, rural and pastoral traditions have always had an environmental dimension linked to the sustainable exploitation of common natural resources and a social dimension linked to a mutualistic and ancestral way of managing the risks inherent to rural activities (Scassellati, 2021).

Secondly, the result of a culturally sustainable development process (Throsby, 1995) is a bunch of niche products (Verrascina et al., 2020), which is often part of a broader and culturally determined offer involving the fruition of natural and cultural resources. Consequently, the commercialization of culturally sustainable tourism services requires the identification of clusters of products and services composing a local offer that might achieve a profitable scale. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing that the development of culturally sustainable proximity tourism offer does not only encompass purely tourism activities, but also the sustainable use of territorial resources, the promotion of the cultural value of small towns, the development of sustainable forms of hospitality and the involvement of local cultural institutions, such as local administrations, museums, libraries, etc. This implies the development of a dynamic and diffused public and private entrepreneurship that might innovate economic and social relations to generate tourist attractiveness.

Thirdly, being, as already mentioned, a relevant economic activity, proximity tourism can trigger a demand-driven local development, i.e. bringing to locations lacking other forms of development skills and capital to invest in the design of a local tourism offer plan. In this regard, cultural sustainability becomes a target rather than a prerequisite, which must be achieved by preventing tourism development from causing gentrification effects for residents, displacement of local community interests and relevant economic activities, diversion of public funds otherwise dedicated to satisfying residents' needs, or extractivism linked to the depletion of local environmental resources. It is important, therefore, that "touristic territories" activate policies to modernize the sector in a way that is consistent with recent developments in the area of sustainability (cultural, social,



economic, and environmental).

Lastly, the tourist attractiveness of a destination depends both on its identitarian characteristics (cultural and natural heritage, crafts, food and wine, and popular traditions), on the availability of leisure facilities (cinemas, theatres, museums, sports facilities, etc.) and on the organization of events (concerts, festivals, historical re-enactments, etc.). The two latter aspects allow to increase the attractiveness of urban peripheral areas, highly industrialized territories or those lacking in morphological and/or cultural peculiarities, etc. At the same time, these elements contribute to counter depopulation trends by enhancing residents' quality of life.

Based on these premises, this research develops a quantitative analysis that may be used as a reference framework to design proximity tourism activities in the Province of Latina targeting residents of the Metropolitan City of Rome.

### **3. A brief description of the Province of Latina**

The Province of Latina, established in 1943, occupies the south-western part of the Latium Region and has an area of approximately 2,256 square kilometres. Morphologically, it is characterised by prevailing altitudes below 300 meters above sea level (75%), while the remaining part is occupied for about 17% by the hills between 301 and 700 meters above sea level, and 8% by mountains. Numerous watercourses flow through the provincial territory (the Astura, Amaseno, Ufente, Portatore, Sisto, and Garigliano rivers), as well as a dense network of canals (such as the Acque Medie di Latina Canal, Rio Martino Canal and the Linea Pio Canal). The Pontine coastline is characterised by sandy beaches, coastal dunes, salt lakes and ponds (lakes of Sabaudia, Fogliano, Caprolace, and Monaci). Small lakes can be found also close to the hills (such as the Giulianello, Ninfa, and the six sulphureous Bishop's lakes) and in the plain of Fondi and Monte San Biagio (Lake Lungo and the lakes of Fondi and San Puoto). Finally, off the coast is the Pontine Islands archipelago, consisting of six islands divided into the north-west group (Ponza, Palmarola, Zannone and Gavi) and the south-east group (Ventotene and Santo Stefano) (n.a., 2012).

The history of the Province of Latina and its population is closely linked to the reclamation of the swamp, which occupied a vast area between Cisterna and Terracina. The first attempt at reclamation was that of Rio Martino. Other partial works were carried out by the Romans, such as the one in 312. B.C. concomitant to the opening of the Appian Way. After the Roman decadence, the lack of maintenance of the Appia resulted in the exclusion of the Pontine territory from trade and stable settlements. In the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci developed a reclamation project which led to the excavation of the Portatore canal, while the

monks built the new channel which gave the name to the Abbey of Fossanova. The Caetanis and Pope Sixtus V also managed reclamation projects, then Pope Pius VI Braschi restored the Appia, built the “migliare” – a system of roads and canals orthogonal to the Appia – and ordered the excavation of the Pio Line, repopulating the area. However, the fishponds on the canals soon obstructed the regular flow of water, returning to the swamp the areas between Cisterna and Terracina until the beginning of the 1920s (Pace, Serra, n.d.).

In 1918 the integral reclamation of the Agro Pontino and the submerged part of the Agro Romano created the conditions and essential infrastructures for new settlements. The plain was divided into land units of about 20 hectares for each family, which was also provided with a farmhouse. In the period between October and November 1932, 60 thousand peasants from Veneto, Friuli, and Emilia were entrusted with the farm units, and, for every hundred farms, new agricultural poles were created, that, nowadays, are densely populated villages, many of which still maintaining their agricultural vocation. On 1932 Littoria was founded and its urban center, the Quadrato, was built around the original nucleus erected by the settlers and the hydraulic technicians of the reclamation. Littoria became the provincial capital in 1934, then changed its name in 1945 from Littoria to Latina (ibidem).

After the reconstruction of the Second World War, the Province of Latina anticipated the Italian “boom”, becoming an ideal settlement for private manufacturing industries due to consistent public investments. The industrialization process continued until the 1970s, generating economic well-being, and fostering the modernization of the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the increased local demand for goods and services promoted trade and the increase of tourist flows toward the coastal areas of the province. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the tertiary sector, especially the large-scale distribution, wholesale trade and tourism, experimented a phase of consolidation and development. However, in the early 90s the province entered a phase of crisis, also due to the gradual exclusion from public subsidies (Fiumara, 2006).

To date, the provincial productive system is still experiencing structural difficulties that have hindered, and in some cases compromised, its economic development. The crisis triggered by COVID-19 and the measures implemented to cope with it have exacerbated the weaknesses, and made manifest the disparities between and within production sectors, and the vulnerability of the supply chains. Notwithstanding the economic turmoil, the Province is still experiencing demographic growth, and territorial imbalances have slightly reduced between 2014 and 2020. At territorial level, the Province of Latina is as an aggregate of 33 municipalities, with most Municipalities (almost 80%) included in the belt (group C) and intermediate (group D) categories in the classification of the inner areas

and two poles of services (Latina and Formia).

**Tab. 1. Overview of the Municipalities of Latina**

	Municipalities				Area				Residents			
	2014		2020		2014		2020		2014		2020	
	n.	%	n.	%	sqm	%	sqm	%	n.	%	n.	%
Latina	33	100,0	33	100,0	1.997,61	100,0	2.256,14	100,0	544.732	100,0	566.224	100,0
A – Pole	2	6,1	2	6,1	351,79	17,6	351,78	15,6	154.223	28,3	164.901	29,1
C – Belt	9	27,3	11	33,3	688,66	34,5	929,64	41,2	207.161	38,0	231.682	40,9
D – Intermediate	16	48,5	15	45,5	838,40	42,0	717,17	31,8	125.670	23,1	109.601	19,4
E - Peripheral	4	12,1	3	9,1	85,10	4,3	245,65	10,9	53.297	9,8	56.003	9,9
F - Ultraperipheral	2	6,1	2	6,1	33,66	1,7	11,90	0,5	4.381	0,8	4.037	0,7
		100,0		100,0		100,0		100,0		100,0		100,0

N.B. In calculating the total area of the province of Latina by aggregating the areas of the municipal territories, a change of about 260 square kilometres is observed between 2014 and 2020. However, the change seems to be the result of a statistical discrepancy rather than an effective allocation of new territories.

At environmental level, the Province of Latina hosts 57 protected areas, mostly belonging to the Parks established on the provincial territory (the Circeo National Park, Riviera di Ulisse – Gianola and Monte di Scauri Regional Park, the Monti Aurunci Regional Natural Park, the Monti Ausoni and Lake Fondi Regional Natural Park)<sup>2</sup>. Also, many hiking and nature trails can be identified, not only in the mountain areas of the Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci, but also, for example, on the coastal promontories, such as Monte Orlando (Gaeta) and the Circeo promontory (San Felice Circeo and Sabaudia).

At cultural level, numerous abandoned villages, archaeological sites and castles in the area can also be considered as tourism resources, such as, for example, the ancient city of Ninfa (Cisterna di Latina), Norba (Norma), the Caetani Castle (Sermoneta), the Temple of Jupiter Anxur (Terracina), the Tomb of Cicero (Formia), the Fountain of Lucullus and the acropolis of Circeo (San Felice Circeo), but also the numerous religious sites (e.g., the Abbey of Fossanova, the Abbey of Valvisciolo, the Monastery of San Magno and the Hermitage of San Michele Arcangelo).

There are three small centers (Gaeta Medievale, San Felice Circeo, Sperlonga) surveyed among the most beautiful small towns (so called “borghi”) in Italy, but others can also be attractive destinations for a day trip (Bassiano, Campodimele, Cori, Fondi, Norma, Priverno, Roccasecca dei Volsci, Terracina, Sabaudia, just to name a few). Finally, there are many food festivals (artichoke festival in Sezze, festival of falia and broccoletti in Priverno, polenta festival in Sermoneta, chestnut festival in Rocca Massima, chestnut festival and zeppole spignesi in Spigno Saturnia, truffle festival in Santi Cosma e Damiano, food festival in Priverno, festival of prosciutto cooked in wine in Cori), historical re-enactments (historic

<sup>2</sup> It consists of one Protected Marine Area, 12 Natural Monuments, three Nature Parks, one National Park, one Urban Regional Park, one State Nature Reserve, four Special Protection Zones, 31 Special Areas of Conservation, three Special Protection Zones/Special Conservation Zones (SPAs/SACs).

Carousel of the Rioni in Cori, Fossanova's medieval festival, Priverno's Palio del Tributo), and cultural events surveyed in the territory (each municipality organized at least once in 2024).

#### 4. Methodology

The research integrates the spatial-temporal analysis of the Province of Latina with a statistical analysis at the Municipal scale based on a composite index divided into four domains: tourist attractiveness, tourist development, economic development, territorial development. The focus on the Municipal scale is justified by the multitude of amenities (natural, food and wine, urban, cultural, etc.) that can be exploited within the framework of a local offer plan, but also by the desire to enhance the local scale as a dimension of excellence for a culturally sustainable proximity tourism. The scores obtained for each Municipality in the four domains are then used to construct empirical evidence that might contribute to identifying the causal relationships among the four domains.

Overall, 30 variables were collected from the Statistical Atlas of Italian Municipalities (ASC) published by ISTAT (mainly, socio-economic-territorial data), from Google Maps (distances in kilometers and minutes from the center of Rome), and from other websites (analysis of the cultural and natural heritage of the Province of Latina). The data were then merged in a single dataset and analyzed using Excel and RStudio.

As shown in Table 2, out of 26 elementary indices, 14 are the result of transformations and/or aggregations of basic variables, while 12 are identical to the basic variables they refer. The raw data were cleaned of outliers by truncating the distribution to the first and ninth deciles, and then used to produce the scores of the elementary indices for each Municipality. The scores obtained were normalized, according to the polarity of the index, using the min-max criterion. Finally, the elementary indices were weighted and aggregated into sub-domains and domains. Overall, therefore, the scores at municipal level for each domain are obtained as follows:

$$\hat{D}_{i,m} = \sum_j w_j \hat{I}_{j,m}, \quad \hat{I}_{j,m} = \sum_n s_n x_{n,m},$$

where  $m = 1, \dots, 33$  denotes the number of Municipalities,  $i = 1, \dots, 4$  denotes the number of domains  $D$ ,  $j = 1, \dots, 12$  denotes the number of first-level indexes  $I$ ,  $n = 1, \dots, 26$  denotes the number of elementary indexes  $x$ ,  $w$  denotes the weights for each first-level index,  $s$  denotes the weights for each elementary index.

Specifically, the aggregate scores are obtained as:

$$\begin{aligned}
\widehat{SVTE}_m &= \widehat{D}_{1,m} = 0,3I_1 + 0,2I_2 + 0,5I_3 = \\
&= 0,3(0,4SUP + 0,4POP + 0,2PPD) + 0,2(0,5CDM + 0,5DMP - 0,1COL) + \\
&+ 0,5(0,3DKM + 0,3DTL + 0,4TTL) \\
\widehat{SVEC}_m &= \widehat{D}_{2,m} = 0,4I_4 + 0,2I_5 + 0,4I_6 = \\
&= 0,4(0,5ULP + 0,5ADP) + 0,2(0,5ULV + 0,5ADV) + 0,4(BAN) \\
\widehat{SVTR}_m &= \widehat{D}_{3,m} = I_7 = 0,8TUR + 0,2TUV \\
\widehat{ATTR}_m &= \widehat{D}_{4,m} = 0,1I_8 + 0,1I_9 + 0,1I_{10} + 0,1I_{11} + 0,6I_{12} = \\
&= 0,1(0,7AAA + 0,3AAV) + 0,1(0,5PRD + 0,5TRS) + 0,16(0,5MUS + 0,5VIS) + \\
&+ 0,04(0,5MUV + 0,5VIV) + 0,6(0,6AMB + 0,4CLT)
\end{aligned}$$

The weights were assigned discretionally according to two criteria: firstly, the variables and indices were equally weighted, hence more weight was given to the most relevant variables and indices within the reference group. Variables for which no significant variability was found were excluded from the selection of 26 elementary indexes. For example, events were not considered among the elements of cultural attractiveness, as each municipality organizes at least one event per year and estimating their attractiveness goes beyond the scope of this research. Similarly, as regards the analysis of economic development, indices measuring the share of SMEs in the total number of enterprises and the share of employees in the SMEs over the total number of employees were excluded due to their lack of variability.

## 5. Results

The scores obtained in the four domains by each municipality are briefly summarized in the Appendix. An initial selection of municipalities that scored 0.5 or higher in at least one domain is presented in Table 2. Considering this threshold acceptable for organizing a day trip or short stay in the destination, the table shows that 17 municipalities can be considered relatively attractive. Of these, nine have a well-developed level of tourist accommodation, six also have a good level of economic development and four score relatively high in all four domains (Latina, Sabaudia, Fondi and Terracina).

In brief, results suggests that the ideal destinations for proximity tourism, not necessarily focused on excursions or short stays, are the larger coastal municipalities, located at an average distance from Rome, but relatively accessible. Then, there are two small municipalities, Sperlonga and San Felice Circeo, which, although not particularly accessible, are attractive destinations for proximity

tourism, which in fact constitutes the driving force of a tourism-related local development (with all the benefits and distortions that this may imply). Three municipalities (Gaeta, Formia, and Ponza) exhibit an interesting mix of attractiveness and tourist development, which however suffer from poor accessibility and low economic development (Ponza in particular). To these coastal or island municipalities can be added the municipality of Ventotene, which is ultra-peripheral and economically underdeveloped, but highly attractive for tourism.

Lastly, Table 2 allows to identify a number of small “inner” municipalities (Cori, Itri, Priverno, Roccagorga, Sermoneta, Sezze, Sonnino), economically and touristically underdeveloped, but touristically attractive due to their hiking routes in mountainous areas and/or their cultural heritage. These municipalities would be ideal destinations for excursions from Rome (the classic “out-of-town trip”), but also as day trip destinations to alternate with seaside tourism during longer stays in the province. Similarly, although they are difficult to reach from Rome, the Pontine islands are sufficiently accessible from the municipalities of San Felice Circeo, Terracina, Sperlonga, Gaeta, and Formia, and could therefore be attractive destinations for day trips as part of a longer tourist stay.

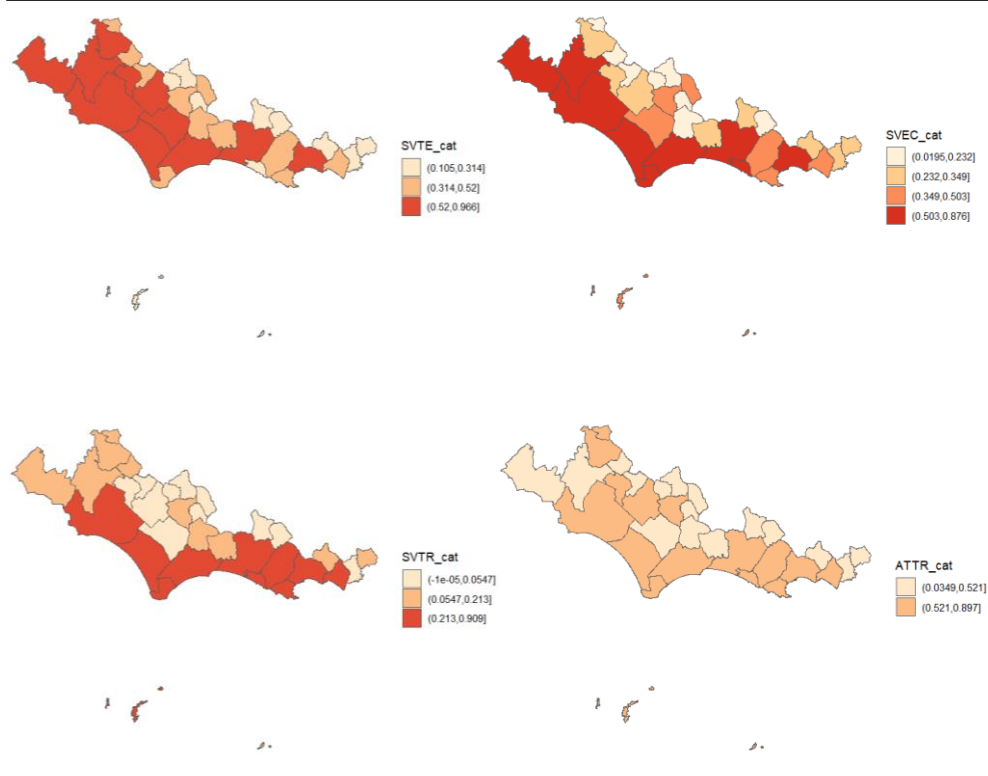
**Tab. 2. Brief summary of the multidimensional analysis**

	D1	D2	D3	D4
Aprilia	Y	Y	N	N
Cisterna di Latina	Y	Y	N	N
Cori	Y	N	N	Y
Fondi	Y	Y	Y	Y
Formia	N	N	Y	Y
Gaeta	N	N	Y	Y
Itri	N	N	N	Y
Latina	Y	Y	Y	Y
Minturno	N	N	Y	N
Pontinia	Y	N	N	N
Ponza	N	N	Y	Y
Priverno	Y	N	N	Y
Roccagorga	N	N	N	Y
Sabaudia	Y	Y	Y	Y
San Felice Circeo	N	Y	Y	Y
Sermoneta	Y	N	N	Y
Sezze	Y	N	N	Y
Sonnino	N	N	N	Y
Sperlonga	N	Y	Y	Y
Terracina	Y	Y	Y	Y
Ventotene	N	N	N	Y

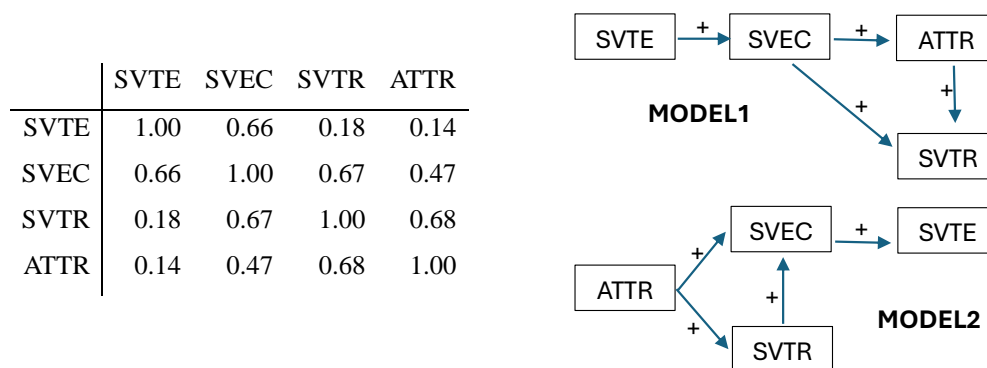
Graph 1 illustrates the spatial distribution of the scores calculated for the four domains of the composite index. The diverse numerosity of the classes considered facilitates the interpretation of the results. As regards territorial development, the main determinant seems to be proximity to the metropolitan city of Rome.

Economic development, on the other hand, seems to be concentrated in the proximity of Rome and along the coastline, while tourism development mainly regards the coastal areas. Finally, the elements of tourist attractiveness are concentrated along the coastline and in some hilly and mountainous areas of the Province (the municipalities of Monti Lepini and Monti Aurunci).

**Graph 1. Spatial representation of the scores computed for each Municipality in the four domains**



The spatial distribution of the results suggests that there are significant interdependencies between the four domains included in the analysis, and the correlation matrix presented below confirms this intuition. The hypothesis formulated here concerning the causality relations is that, as indicated by the spatial-temporal analysis of the Province of Latina, territorial development has triggered a robust economic development of the territory, making its most attractive parts (the coastline, the islands, and some inner areas) accessible to tourists (Model 1). Nowadays, a backward trend can be hypothesized, whereby the attractiveness of places enables tourism-related economic development, which, in turn, promote a higher quality of life for the residents, mitigating a predominantly functionalist conception of ordinary landscapes.

**Graph 2. Correlation analysis and two hypotheses on the causal relationships**

The available data, however, do not allow for a precise measurement of the direct and indirect effects of tourism on territorial development. Consequently, the analysis has focused on the scatterplot of pairs of domains, where Municipalities have been grouped by applying the k-means clustering algorithm (see Graph 3).

Regarding the relationship between tourist attractiveness and tourism development, three groups of Municipalities are observed: the first is characterized by low levels of tourist attractiveness and low tourism development, the second by high levels of tourist attractiveness but low levels of tourism development, and the third by high values on both dimensions. This representation invites to reflect on how to develop those municipalities that are touristically attractive but poorly developed.

By looking at the relationship between economic development and attractiveness, two groups of Municipalities are observed: those characterized by low economic development and low attractiveness and those characterized by high economic development and attractiveness. There are, however, several Municipalities where economic development is not associated with tourism attractiveness. In these Municipalities, the construction of leisure facilities might increase both the attractiveness of the area and the quality of life of their residents.

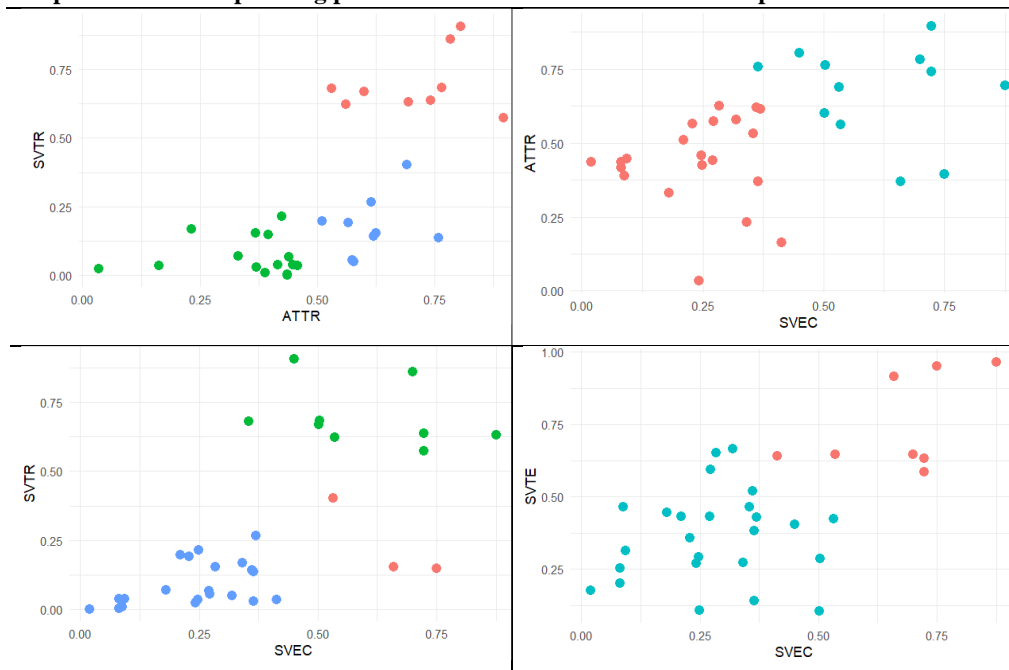
Analysing the relationship between economic tourism development, three groups of Municipalities are observed: a first group characterized by low levels of both economic and tourism development, then there are three municipalities characterized by high economic and low tourism development, and finally, a group characterized by both high economic and tourism development. Thus, the validity of the first model seems to be confirmed, namely that tourism is the final stage of a local economic development rather than as an economic activity that might autonomously trigger a broader development.

Finally, two groups of municipalities can be distinguished in the last graph: those characterised by a low level and those characterised by a high level of



economic and territorial development. Overall, the analysis seems to corroborate the hypothesis of a tourist development driven by territorial and economic development rather than by the attractiveness of places. The latter seems to be an element that can only boost tourist and economic activities at a later stage, and not in opposition, to effective local territorial development.

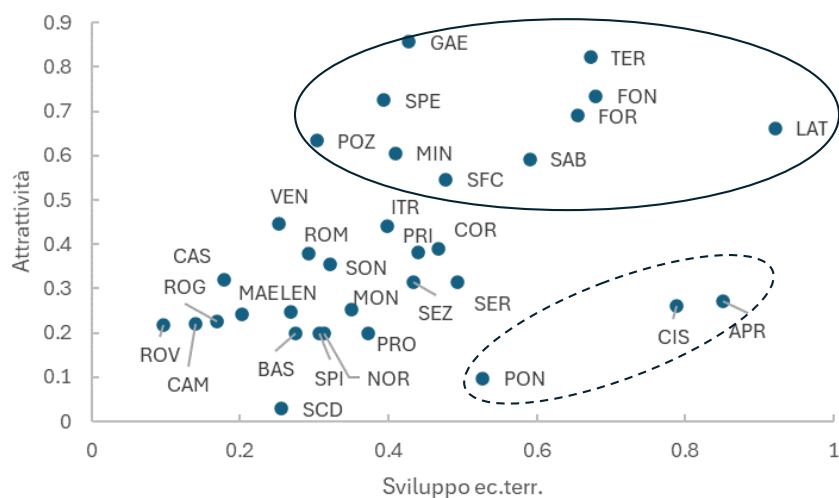
**Graph 3. Relationship among pairs of domains and clusters of Municipalities**



## 6. Discussion

The results of the analysis suggest how the Province of Latina has attractive features that can be exploited within projects of proximity tourism targeting Rome residents. The focus is not only on excursions and short stays, but also on second-home tourism, or longer stays. These are tourist experiences that can enhance both the familiarity of the local culture and the exoticism of the natural contexts and cultural heritage (e.g., the enchantment of the Montagna Spaccata in Gaeta, the Circeo Promontory, the Grotta di Tiberio in Sperlonga or the Pontine islands), as well as a hinterland that is still scarcely exploited, but “monumental” both from a historical and natural point of view (consider, for example, the Abbeys of Fossanova and Valvisciolo, the Gardens of Ninfa, the panoramic landscapes of Rocca Massima, and the hiking itineraries of the Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci Mountains) and rich in traditions (e.g., the historic Carousel of the Rioni in Cori). Even in the less attractive municipalities, however, there are cultural and natural resources, traditions and important events that could be exploited as part of supra-municipal tourist itineraries (e.g., the Landriana Gardens in Aprilia, the thermal resources of Castelforte, the Castle of Itri, and the numerous festivals).

**Graph 1. Economic and territorial development (average of score of SVTE and SVEC) vs tourism attractiveness (average score of SVTR and ATTR).**



N.B. The solid line identifies municipalities that are attractive from a tourist point of view, while the dotted line identifies the most industrialized municipalities.

The ideal destinations for proximity tourism seem to be the main coastal municipalities (Fondi, Gaeta, Terracina, Sperlonga, Formia, San Felice Circeo, Sabaudia, Minturno, and the coast of the Municipality of Latina). Considering only seaside tourism, however, would be a limitation, since the Province of Latina includes numerous municipalities in mountainous and hilly areas endowed with attractive naturalistic and cultural resources, which could be perfect destinations for excursions, short stays, and supra-municipal tourist routes. Among them, the most attractive municipalities seem to be Cori, Priverno, Itri, Sermoneta, Sezze, Roccamare, and Sonnino, but elements of attractiveness are to be found in almost every municipality (e.g. the Gardens of Ninfa in Cisterna di Latina, the Norba archeological site in Norma, or the Landriana Gardens in Aprilia, the thermal resources in Castelforte).

At the same time, accessibility to the municipal territories is not always immediate, even if the province is crossed longitudinally by the railway line and the via Pontina (later Flacca). Transversal connections from the coast to the mountainous areas, whose road network is often poor and lacks maintenance, are particularly scarce and still based on the medieval "migliare". Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of frequent and capillary local public transport, especially in tourist seasons, that may foster intermodal transportation, reducing congestion and facilitating the connections to the Pontine Islands. The latter would be attractive destinations for excursions and short stays, but connections with the main provincial and regional ports are still scarce and rather uncomfortable.

An element that should be considered in planning proximity tourism activities from Rome is the heterogeneous level of tourism development of the territories.

Alongside tourist poles (Terracina, Sperlonga, Gaeta, San Felice Circeo, Ponza, etc..) in which proximity tourism integrates a composite demand of local, national, and international tourism, there are territories where tourism demand mostly depends on the regional component – at most integrated from tourism from neighboring regions – (Sabaudia, the coastline of the Municipality of Latina, Fondi, Minturno, and Formia), and territories where tourism, apart from family tourism of second homes, is limited to excursions and short stays from regional centers or provincial tourist poles (the hilly and mountainous areas of the Province).

The role that proximity tourism can play in provincial dynamics is therefore multifaceted: in tourist poles, it can integrate national and international tourism to further increase the already significant tourist demand. However, it would be important to plan proximity tourism activities without aggravating overtourism phenomena by countering the stagionalization of tourist flows, currently concentrated in the summer season. In other areas, proximity tourism is the main form of tourism, both in the form of excursions and short stays, and as part of longer stays, often linked to second-home tourism (there are many second-homes built along the coastline). In these areas, proximity tourism can contribute to the socio-economic and real estate development of the municipal territories, generating an induced demand for locally produced goods and services, but attention should be paid to avoid land consumption and gentrification. In mountain and hill areas, proximity tourism linked to excursions and short stays (as well as second-home tourism) might contribute to the local development of territories, enhancing high-quality local productions and generating employment in the wider tourism-related sector. Finally, in the agricultural and industrial areas of the Province, proximity agro-tourism and excursions from Rome or from the local tourist poles might foster the development of leisure infrastructures and of a sustainable urban development, increasing residents' quality of life.

The relationship between economic development and tourism development deserves some reflection on the benefits generated by the two types of territorial development. As already mentioned, there are territories with a high tourist vocation (consider, for example, Fondi, Terracina, Formia, San Felice Circeo, and Sabaudia), in which tourism - even at the cost of a certain degree of overtourism - has triggered a flourishing economic activity, or at least coexists with it, promoting a culturally sustainable local development. In other cases (see in Graph 1, Pontinia, Aprilia, and Cisterna di Latina), industrial development seems incompatible with tourist activities, or at least a limiting factor, as it generates environmental and landscape degradation. On the other hand, there are municipal territories where exclusively or predominantly tourist development (e.g. Sperlonga and Ponza) might have generated alongside overtourism and gentrification. Finally, in the mountain and rural areas of the Province, the lack of public services (e.g., poor accessibility and weak or absent internet connection) and private services (e.g.,

lack of ATMs, underdeveloped retail trade, absence of large-scale distribution, etc.) might hinder excursions and short stays that could instead contribute to local development, generating employment and contrasting depopulation.

To conclude, it is worth noting how the most attractive destinations for proximity tourism are at a non-negligible distance from the metropolitan city of Rome (almost 100 kilometers far, more than an hour by car and, sometimes, by train). According to Wynen (2013), distance is also considered a determinant factor in explaining the choice of tourist destination and the factors explaining the distance of the destination can be seen as indirect determinants of expenditure on day trips and excursions. It seems, therefore, that when compared with other destinations in Latium (see, Salustri, 2022; Salustri, Cocco, 2022; Salustri, Cocco, Mawroh, 2022), the destinations in the Province of Latina that best meet the requirements for proximity tourism focused on excursions and short stays imply a somewhat high level of expenditure. This could cause a certain degree of self-selection in the tourists and excursionists to be served, leading to marketing strategies oriented towards more sophisticated and higher value-added activities.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

The most attractive destinations of the Province of Latina for proximity tourism from the city of Rome are Fondi, Gaeta, Terracina, Sperlonga, Formia, San Felice Circeo, Sabaudio, Minturno and the coast of the Municipality of Latina. These are the coastal municipalities of the Province, which are located at a medium-high distance from Rome, but have a relatively fair accessibility as a result of the development of the railway and the presence of decent road infrastructures.

At provincial level, proximity tourism from Rome seems to be positively influenced by the presence of natural (the coastline and the numerous protected areas) and cultural (historical villages, abbeys, castles, museums...) elements, and by the development of a fair level of tourist hospitality – also related to second-home tourism –, which offers opportunities for proximity tourism going far beyond the perspective of hiking and short stays. However, the key structural and enabling element of proximity tourism from Rome seems to be the economic and territorial development of the Province (understood as a mix of accessibility, demographic consistency and vitality, entrepreneurship and widespread employment), given the relatively high distance of tourist destinations (often aggravated by traffic congestion), the need for efficient local public services in tourist poles to counteract overtourism, and the importance of economic development to avoid gentrification.

Nevertheless, tourism confirms its role as an important driver of development for the part of the Province of Latina that is furthest from Rome and less

industrialized and, at an aggregate level, may play a role in rebalancing territorial gaps. It is, however, an economic activity that is mainly related to the coastal areas, and which does not always trigger wider economic development, leading in many cases to the gentrification of places (as in the case of Sperlonga and San Felice Circeo and, more generally, in all cases where local development is driven solely by tourism). Moreover, the focus on coastal tourism marginalizes the inner territories of Agro Pontino and Monti Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci, notwithstanding their naturalistic and cultural peculiarities, as well as interesting food and wine traditions, which instead would be valuable resources for local tourism. Greater attention to these areas as destinations for proximity tourism might foster the local development of the mountain and hill territories, also contributing to countering the stagionalization of tourism and to reducing the congestion of coastal areas. Moreover, especially as regards the Agro Pontino, the development of proximity tourism linked to infrastructures and services (availability of parks, sports and leisure facilities, quality food and wine traditions, agrotourism development, etc.), beyond rising the tourist attractiveness of the localities, would also improve residents' quality of life, especially in those areas where agricultural and industrial development has generated negative environmental and social externalities (see Graph 1).

Other important issues related to the development of proximity tourism in the Province of Latina concern the development by “coalescence” of supra-municipal tourist itineraries involving the hilly and mountainous areas of the Province, either directly, as a destination for proximity tourism, or indirectly, as experiences to be alternated with long stays for seaside tourism. In this regard, the history of the Pontine reclamation remains an almost unknown theme to tourists visiting the coastline. Instead, it would be very interesting, as an element of a culturally sustainable proximity tourism, to enhance the Province's historical burghs by designing a tourist itinerary centered on the historical memory of the reclamation. Lastly, and especially in the months surrounding the summer season (to avoid creating overtourism phenomena in July and August), upgrading the connection lines with the islands of Ponza and Ventotene could ease a tourism focused on excursions and short stays in the archipelago.

Research results also suggest that tourism in the Province of Latina is highly dependent on the achieved level of territorial and economic development. The “production of wealth” by means of tourism must, therefore, constitute the culmination of a more encompassing development path, that does not overlooks the centrality of land reclamation works, the improvement of road and rail infrastructures, and the creation of a capillary network – still lacking – of cultural itineraries and routes that might promote the inner areas, even beyond the summer season. Being aware of the public value that underpins the competitiveness of private activities in the province (first and foremost tourism),

it would be very important to retain the added value produced by the private sector at a local level to fund public investments in territorial development, thus fueling a virtuous circle between the public and the market economy.

Despite the importance of the economic and territorial aspects, this research raises two considerations of a statistical nature. Firstly, the lack of available data (albeit partly retrievable) on hiking, short stays and second homes does not permit a full appreciation of the – probably considerable – contribution of proximity tourism to the economic and territorial development of the Province. Greater attention to the production and dissemination of information on what appears to be a significant phenomenon could contribute to the organization and management of tourist flows, especially in the poles, as well as to a general rebalancing of the same flows towards the less touristically developed but nevertheless attractive areas, in both cases mitigating the phenomena of congestion, gentrification and overtourism affecting the coastal areas. Secondly, the municipal data made available by ISTAT and collected online through desk research are for most indexes insufficient to shift from sectional to longitudinal analyses of the domains considered in this research. Should the available data allow it, however, a longitudinal analysis of the relationships among the attractiveness of places, tourism development, economic and territorial development would make it possible to produce more robust empirical evidence of the causal relationship among the four domains.

In brief, a greater recognition at a political and economic level of proximity tourism from Rome to the Province of Latina – a phenomenon that is already widespread and greatly appreciated at a microeconomic level – would make it possible, on the one hand, to design an offer plan that better meets the needs of Roman tourists, and, on the other hand, to obtain greater economic resources to be reinvested, at least partially, in the economic and territorial development of the Province, in ways that might contribute to rebalancing the observed economic and territorial disparities.

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