

a cura di  
Gabriele Manella

# Oltre il turismo?

Viaggi e viaggiatori  
nella società del (post)Covid

SOCIOLOGIA DEL TERRITORIO



TURISMO E LOISIR

# Sociologia del territorio

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SOCIOLOGIA DEL TERRITORIO





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TURISMO E LOISIR

**FrancoAngeli**

Gabriele Manella, *Oltre il turismo? Viaggi e viaggiatori nella società del (post)Covid*  
Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2025  
Isbn ebook: 9788835185079  
Isbn cartaceo: 9788835175919

La versione digitale del volume è pubblicata in Open Access sul sito [www.francoangeli.it](http://www.francoangeli.it).

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## 8. *MaaS as a Solution for Sustainable Mobility of Italian Remote Tourist Areas: Opportunities and Challenges*

by *Matteo Colleoni, Luca Daconto, Simone Caiello*

### **Introduction**

Tourism is a key sector, particularly in Italy and for naturalistic and rural areas, that have seen an increase in their attractiveness and the presence of tourist flows since the Covid-19 pandemic. While trends in tourism confirm the importance of rural and naturalistic destinations, access to them is highly dependent on unsustainable forms of mobility, based on the use of cars or private motorised vehicles. This is due to the unsustainability of investments in public transport for the low density of demand and the morphological and orographic characteristics of the territory. In this framework, MaaS (Mobility as a Service) is considered an effective solution to favour accessibility and sustainable mobility of remote tourist areas due to their flexibility and capillarity. With the aim of providing useful elements for the development of innovative MaaS policies and services, which can play a key role in the promotion of accessibility and sustainable mobility and which are responsive to the different characteristics of rural tourist areas, the chapter presents the first results of a study carried out within the MOST - Sustainable Mobility Centre (European Union Next-GenerationEU - National Rest and Resilience Plan (PNRR) - Mission 4, Component 2, Investment 1.4 - D.D. 1033 17/06/2022, CN000023). First of all, the basic concepts adopted for the development of the study will be introduced, starting from the description of the official definition of “touristness” for Italian municipalities and the classification of SNAI (*Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne*). A brief definition of MaaS solutions, and of their potential role in tourism systems, will then follow, as well as a proposal for the measurement of the readiness of territories in developing them. After having detailed the methods adopted, a classification of Italian tourist remote municipalities in terms of preparedness, inspired by the international

literature, will be presented. In the conclusions, the results are discussed as a basis for tailor-made guidelines for the development of innovative MaaS services for remote tourist areas.

## **1. Tourism and Inner Areas: Between Good Attractiveness and Accessibility Issues**

### *1.1. Classifying Tourist Contexts in Italy*

Tourism represents a key sector in the Italian economy (UNWTO, 2024), with an increasing impact (5,7% of the GDP in 2019, +0,6% if compared to 2010). It is not by chance then that the government needed to better monitor it throughout the country, and, consequently, promoted the development of a national classification. According to the Law n. 77/2020, in occasion of the Covid-19 emergency, the Italian institute of statistics (ISTAT) carried out a classification of the national municipalities in order to allow access to targeted support measures in favour of companies in the trade sectors, catering and accommodation facilities affected by the prolonged reduction in tourist flows. The classification has been carried out according to two dimensions:

- i.* the “main tourist category”, i.e. the potential tourist vocation of each municipality identified mainly on the base of geographical and anthropic criteria;
- ii.* the “tourist density”, expressed by a set of statistical indicators to measure the endowment of accommodation infrastructures, the presence of tourist flows and the local incidence of productive activities and employment levels in tourism-oriented economy. With respect to the tourist category, ISTAT has classified six main categories (lake, sea, mountain, cultural, thermal, large city) and two residual ones (without specific vocation, non-tourist). As a result, there are 1,575 municipalities (19.9%) that belong to a single tourist category, while 633 (8.0%) belong to two or more categories. More than half municipalities (50.6%), however, have tourist structures and flows, in some cases even significant ones, but do not belong to a specific category. Finally, there are 1,704 (21.5%) non-tourist municipalities, i.e. where there are no accommodation facilities and/or where tourist flows are absent.

## 1.2. Accessibility as a Further Dimension

Beside vocational and consistency dimensions, Italian tourist municipalities vary consistently also in terms of accessibility, namely in the possibility and degree of easiness in physically reaching them through different means of transport. This is a crucial element for the quality of life of local population and, in a more touristic perspective, for the enjoyability of the destinations. Accessibility is in fact a pivotal issue taken into consideration by destination management policies as well as a key aspect in national strategies. As an example, the *Piano Straordinario per la Mobilità Turistica*<sup>1</sup>, developed by the Italian MIT (Ministry of Transport and Infrastructures) for the 2017-2022 period, reserved a whole section to accessibility, measuring the inequalities among Italian territories in terms of easiness to reach and move among the UNESCO sites, and all the main cultural and natural attractions. If a general divide exists between the northern and southern Italy in terms of overall accessibility (due to infrastructural gaps, economic imbalances, geographical patterns, etc.), it is also true that also at a micro level huge differences are reported also in regions that are on average better connected. Mountain areas, isolated contexts, are often characterised by a low degree of accessibility, and for this reason can be classified as “inner areas”<sup>2</sup>.

In order to pave the way for better planning in development interventions, in 2013 the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion established the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI). The aim was promoting policies to counter demographic decline, ageing and territorial marginalisation of these areas, that have often also a relevant naturalistic vocation, an element enabling their attractiveness in a touristic perspective. For that reason, the overlapping of these aspects allows to highlight the presence of municipalities with a touristic vocation and a low accessibility.

By jointly analysing the two classifications (Tab. 1), a first relation emerges between tourist density and remote areas. In fact, 60% (n=750) of the Italian Municipalities with a very high tourist density and 42%

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<sup>1</sup> Extraordinary Plan for the Tourist Mobility.

<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of SNAI, a classification of municipalities was created and updated in 2020 based on the degree of centrality/periphery, operationalized through an indicator of the level of accessibility (in time distance) to a series of essential services for the quality of life of the population (secondary education; hospitals with I DEA level; railway stations with at least a silver level). As a result, municipalities have been divided into six classes (A – Pole; B – Inter-municipal pole; C – Belt, t less than 20 minutes; D – Intermediate, t between 20 and 40 minutes; E – Peripheral, t between 40 and 75 minutes; F – Ultraperipheral, t more than 75 minutes). In particular, the Municipalities classified as Intermediate, Peripheral and Ultraperipheral represent the Inner Areas (NUVAP, 2022).

(n=518) of municipalities with a high tourist density fall within the inner-intermediate, peripheral or ultra-peripheral areas. If a high tourist density also characterises the central areas, the data confirm the presence of highly attractive municipalities also in areas with low accessibility to services.

*Tab. 1 - Italian municipalities according to tourist density and peripherality (absolute values and % by tourist density index degree class)*

<i>Tourist density index</i>	<i>Central Areas</i>			<i>Inner Areas</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Pole</i>	<i>Intermunicipal Pole</i>	<i>Belt</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Peripheral</i>	<i>Ultra peripheral</i>	
<i>Not Tourist</i>	0 0.0%	2 0.1%	819 47.9%	459 26.9%	349 20.4%	75 4.4%	1709 100%
<i>Very Low</i>	1 0.1%	3 0.2%	613 49.7%	329 26.7%	234 19.0%	53 4.3%	1233 100%
<i>Low</i>	5 0.4%	3 0.2%	680 54.9%	296 23.9%	212 17.1%	43 3.5%	1239 100%
<i>Medium</i>	18 1.5%	12 1.0%	697 56.2%	285 23.0%	193 15.6%	36 2.9%	1241 100%
<i>High</i>	88 7.1%	23 1.9%	611 49.3%	296 23.9%	185 14.9%	37 3.0%	1240 100%
<i>Very High</i>	70 5.6%	16 1.3%	403 32.5%	262 21.1%	350 28.2%	138 11.1%	1239 100%
<i>Total</i>	182 2.3%	59 0.7%	3823 48.4%	1927 24.4%	1523 19.3%	382 4.8%	7896 100%

*Source: authors' elaboration on SNAI and Istat (2020)*

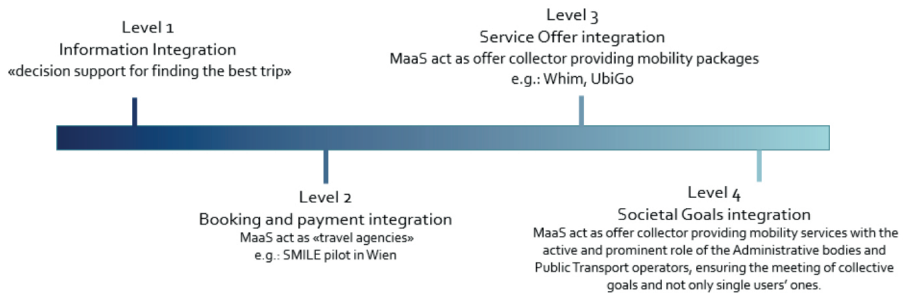
This is crucial to define priority areas of interventions in order to guarantee their integration within the national mobility system, to enhance their liveability and opportunities, and to preserve their typical natural environment, thanks also to sustainable mobility planning initiatives and solutions.

## **2. Mobility as a Service**

MaaS solutions encompass a wide range of initiatives and applications, focused on the need to integrate various services and transport modalities, in a continuous degree of complexity. Several “shades” of MaaS are now-

days possible: as also Sochor *et al.* (2018) show at least four ideal-typical versions of MaaS arrangements are possible (Fig. 1), with an increasing relevance of services integration. It ranges from the simple information integration (Level 1), when users can obtain details about the potential integration of travel solutions, to applications allowing the booking of services or purchasing of tickets (level 2), or even to purchase bunches of services through packages. In Italy most of MaaS experimentations have been able to reach the level 2, often in the framework of the MaaS4Italy programme activities. The ultimate stage is one in which not only individual mobility is concerned but more broadly the common system of needs, where mobility represents one of the enablers of a more sustainable and liveable society.

Fig. 1 - Continuity of MaaS solutions integration character



Source: authors' elaboration on the base of Sochor *et al.* (2018)

In any case it seems hard to clearly define the meaning of MaaS, due to the relevant variability of its unfolding patterns and perspectives. Following the well-known contributions on the topic it could be affirmed that (Kamargianni, Matyas, 2017, p. 14): «Mobility-as-a-Service (Maas) is a user-centric, intelligent mobility management and distribution system, in which an integrator brings together offerings of multiple mobility service providers, and provides end-users access to them through a digital interface, allowing them to seamlessly plan and pay for mobility».

Other kinds of definitions can be found, following different conceptual approaches and focusing on various aspects (Vitrano, Colleoni, 2020). Jit-trapirom and colleagues, for example, define MaaS as:

- a concept or a new idea of conceiving mobility;
- a phenomenon (occurring with the emergence of new behaviours and technologies);

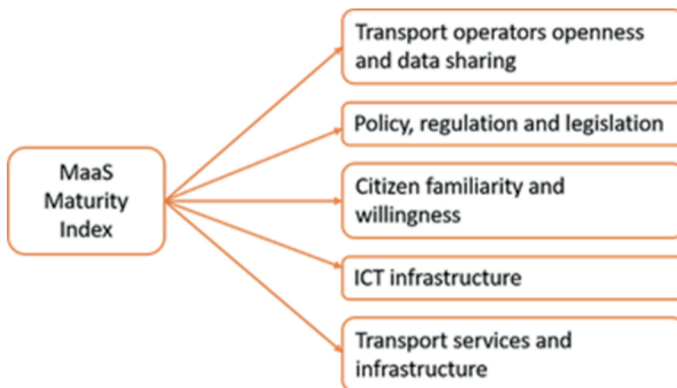
- a new transport solution (which merges the different available transport modes and mobility services) (Jittrapirom *et al.*, 2017, p. 14).

However, in order to better analyse MaaS diffusion and development perspectives and to assess the readiness of metropolitan areas for the implementation of this system, the MaaS Lab of the University College London created a measurement tool: the MaaS Maturity Index (MMI). The dimensions and sub-dimensions were identified through a comprehensive literature review and elicitation with MaaS experts and practitioners (Kamargianni, Goulding, 2018). The index is made up of five broad dimensions, both qualitative and quantitative (Fig. 2):

- Transport operators’ openness and data sharing: the extent to which transport operators share data;
- Citizen familiarity and willingness: the extent to which citizens lifestyles and behaviour aligns with a MaaS model of transport provision;
- Policy, regulation and legislation: the extent to which key policies, regulations and laws which support MaaS are in place;
- Transport services and infrastructure: the readiness of the current transport system for MaaS. This includes the variety of available modes, the density of services, the frequency of services and the integration of services;
- Ict infrastructure: the penetration of MaaS enabling technologies. This includes internet access and smart ticketing infrastructure.

As we will see in the next paragraphs, not all the dimensions could be measured in our study, due to the lack of suitable data. An adaptation was needed, reducing the overall coverage of the composite index.

Fig. 2 - The dimensions in the MaaS Maturity Index proposed by MaaS Lab-UCL



Source: [www.maaslab.org/maasindex](http://www.maaslab.org/maasindex)

### 3. MaaS and Tourism: Potentialities for Accessibility Improvement

If it is true that MaaS solutions, due to the pivotal role of travel integration and multimodality that characterise them, could act as a leverage for the promotion of more sustainable mobility systems, up to now the most part of them has been developed mainly in urban contexts or medium-large cities (Mitropoulos *et al.*, 2023).

Less dense areas (like peri-urban and rural ones, metropolitan fringes and remote areas) are often barely touched by the availability of MaaS-like services. This is due, at least partially, to the higher difficulty in serving a fragmented territory, that brings to higher costs (both in time and monetary terms). As known, public transport is considered the backbone of MaaS and a crucial element for their development (Vitrano, Colleoni, 2020). As a consequence, when density does not allow a provision of public transport, or a very weak one like in peri-urban and rural contexts, the opportunities for MaaS appear to be challenging and still unaccomplished (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2020). However, in these contexts MaaS can provide a further added value: if the integration between mobility solutions in urban contexts is mainly focused on the need to reduce pollution and environmental-related issues, in rural areas the development of innovative services is often linked to the need to provide a higher accessibility and to contrast mobility-related social exclusion (Gogola, Sitányiová, 2020).

The integration between public transport and other “on-demand” services can be considered a useful tool to enhance accessibility and promote sustainable mobility in low-density contexts, for residents first but also for tourists.

Recently, also thanks to the strong Eu investments in research in MaaS solutions (MaaS4EU project – 2017/2020; Pro-MaaS Project, 2020; and several others in the following years), many pilot services have been tested in rural, low-density areas, in order to also meet tourists’ needs. This is the case of the Desti-Smart Interreg Europe project, in the framework of which nine innovative mobility-related solutions for tourists have been developed<sup>3</sup>. Even if none of them can be considered a proper MaaS-shaped solution, several of them showed their potentiality in case of integration between them in a MaaS ecosystem. From the tourist destination connection solutions (shuttle bus services, park & ride approach, running in the Balearic islands; combined train ticket plus tourist attraction in Corfe Castle, Dorset, UK) to the more complex strategies developed by some administrative bodies like in the case of Thessaloniki 2030 Resilience

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<sup>3</sup> <https://projects2014-2020.interregeurope.eu/desti-smart/> (last visit: 20/01/2025).

Strategy, the creation of a proactive interaction between local actors and stakeholders appeared as crucial for the development of new solutions. In particular, an interesting point of the Thessaloniki Strategy is the focus on Transit-Oriented Development (Tod) directed towards the creation of multimodal hubs in order to link adjacent neighbourhoods to existing mainstream cultural and tourism corridors, considering also connections to the seaside contexts.

Similarly, the project Last Mile (Interreg Europe, 2016-2020) focused on the development of potential innovative, flexible and sustainable solutions for both tourist and residents' mobilities (Last Mile, 2025). The project's aim was to find new ways to offer visitors the possibility to travel their "last mile" sustainably and, at the same time, provide alternatives to car use for residents on their daily trips. In this framework the study provided a feasibility analysis of some innovative transportation services, all focused on developing demand-responsive transport system solutions (sharing/pooling/public). In particular the pilot territories developed Call/Dial Services (on demand small buses), bus-shuttle/taxi-shuttle hailed solutions; sharing services (mainly bikes and cars), to be integrated with the main public transport services (where available).

#### 4. Methods

In order to measure the "readiness" of the Italian tourist areas towards the development of MaaS services, four indexes have been combined: (1) the Synthetic Index of Tourist Density computed by Istat and already mentioned; (2) the Index of Centrality/Periphery, on the base of the Snai classification; (3) a Transport Infrastructures Availability Index, to provide a measure of local public transport availability; (4) an Ict Infrastructures Availability Index.

1. *Synthetic Index of Tourist Density*. It represents the synthesis of the normalized average values of the composite indices relating to the presence of accommodation infrastructures, tourist flows and productive activities and employment in tourism-oriented sectors. In particular, the index classifies Italian municipalities into five categories (from very low to very high) using the quintiles method.
2. *Index of Centrality/Periphery*. The index, classifies Italian municipalities into six classes on the base of their temporal distance from some essential services. Our analysis was limited to the Inner Areas (Intermediate, Peripheral and Ultra-peripheral municipalities).

3. *Transport Infrastructures Availability Index*. The index represents the density of public transport stops calculated using the Kernel Density Estimation method (KDE) on data from the Points of Interests (POI) - Italy database of Geolytica, collecting georeferenced data about the distribution of services and territorial opportunities in the whole country's surface in 2021. The index covers the indicator 4 proposed by Kamargianni and Goulding (2018) for their MaaS Maturity Index.
4. *ICT Infrastructures Availability Index*. The value of this index represents the average of maximum download speed as recorded in the broadband map dataset of the Italian Communications Authority - Agcom (2020). The index covers the indicator 5, proposed by Kamargianni and Goulding (2018) for their MaaS Maturity Index.

A cluster analysis was then carried out on the data using a “two-step” methodology, in order to highlight municipal gatherings on the basis of the composite distribution of the values. This algorithm was developed in the Spss environment and has two main advantages: on the one hand the possibility of implementing both categorical and quantitative variables, on the other hand the system self-selects the number of clusters on the base of the data structure (Everitt *et al.*, 2011). The fitness of the model (silhouette coefficient of cohesion and separation) was good (0.8), meaning that the thirteen clusters that were identified are pretty well diverse.

## 5. Results

The results (Tab. 2) highlight the presence of municipalities, mainly located in intermediate inner areas, with a strong tourist vocation, where the conditions for the development of MaaS are relatively good, given the availability of public transport and Ict infrastructures above average (Clusters 1, 5, 2, 14, 12). A second macro-group (Clusters 13, 11) is represented by the peripheral inner areas, with medium-low tourist density, with a relatively good ICT infrastructure but a below-average availability of public transport. The third macro-group is made up of municipalities located mainly in peripheral or ultra-peripheral inner areas, with a strong tourist vocation but a public transport and ICT infrastructure which are below-average of Italian inner areas (Clusters 8, 7, 6). The fourth macro-group is represented by clusters 9 and 10, in which the peripheral or ultra-peripheral inner areas prevail and the level of MaaS readiness is the lowest. Finally, there is a very small cluster (46 municipalities), where the level of readiness in terms of public transport and Ict infrastructures is good, but with a heterogeneity of profiles regarding tourist density and inner area category (Cluster 3).

The mapping of the clusters allows to obtain further information. As we can see in Fig. 3, the municipalities with the lowest level of MaaS readiness (4<sup>th</sup> macro-group) are mainly located in southern mountain areas (particularly in Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Abruzzo and Molise), in the islands, in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines and in some Alpine areas of Lombardy (provinces of Bergamo and Brescia). The third macro-group is instead concentrated in the Alpine areas of Piedmont, Trentino Alto-Adige or in Tuscany, Umbria and Abruzzo.

*Tab. 2 - Clusters' description*

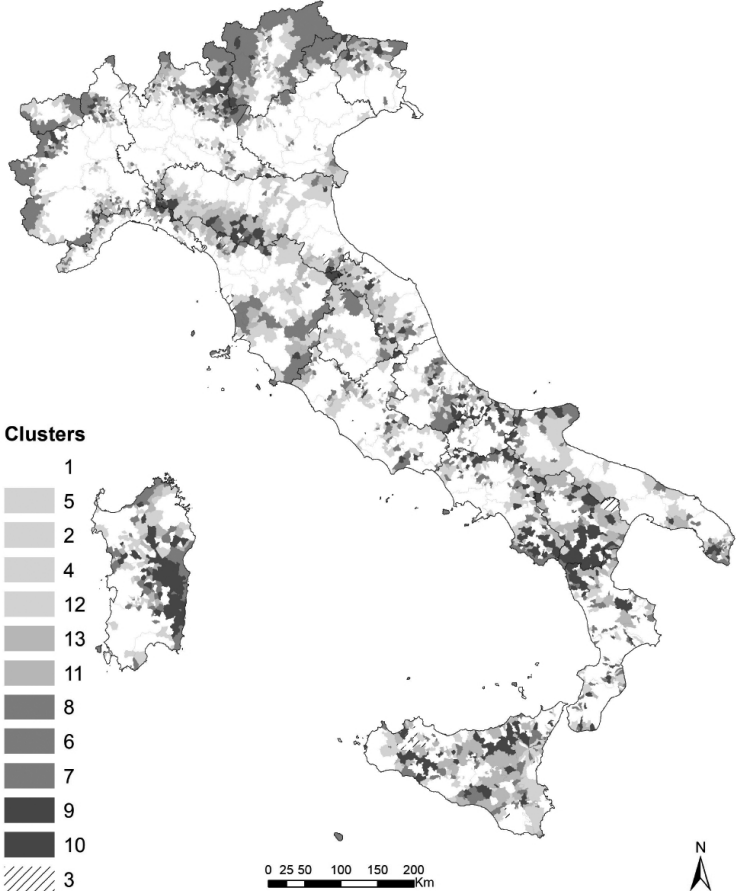
<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Nr</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Tourism Density</i>	<i>Inner Area</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>ICT</i>
1	291	9.9	High	Intermediate	Above average	Above average
5	254	8.6	Very High	Intermediate	Above average	Below average
2	279	9.5	Medium	Intermediate	Average	Above average
4	293	9.9	Low	Intermediate	Average	Above average
12	184	6.2	High	Peripheral	Average	Average
13	192	6.5	Medium	Peripheral	Below average	Above average
11	212	7.2	Low	Peripheral	Below average	Above average
8	337	11.4	Very High	Peripheral	Below average	Below average
6	324	11	Very Low	Intermediate	Below average	Below average
7	131	4.4	Very High	Ultra peripheral	Below average	Below average
9	233	7.9	Very Low	Peripheral	Below Average	Below average
10	171	5.8	Various	Ultra peripheral	Below Average	Below average
3	46	1.6	Various	Various	Above average	Above average

*Source: authors' elaboration from Istat (2019, 2020), Agcom (2018) and Geolytica (2020)*

A higher level of MaaS readiness (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> macro-groups) instead characterises the coastal, foothill or lowland municipalities, as well as the inner areas of Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Marche, Umbria, Lazio and Puglia.

Finally, we can see a spatial proximity between areas with high and low levels of MaaS readiness, except for the concentrations of municipalities with the lowest values in Pollino (between Basilicata and Calabria), in the eastern Sardinia, in some Bergamo valleys and between Abruzzo and Molise. In fact, this highlights the opportunities for the development of innovative MaaS services on a regional scale.

Fig. 3 - Mapping Italian Tourist Inner Municipalities in terms of MaaS preparedness



Source: authors' elaboration from Istat (2019, 2020), Agcom (2018) and Geolytica (2020)

## Conclusions

The paper presented a proposal for the identification of Italian inner tourist areas aimed to profile them in terms of mobility and accessibility. The knowledge of the local characteristics is a fundamental element to provide tailored guidelines for the development, implementation and management of innovative MaaS and innovative mobility services. Through the integration of the existing transportation supply and the development of further complementary solutions, all connected by a common management and operating digital framework, MaaS systems aim at enhance mobility opportunities and accessibility inside and between territories.

The results of the data analysis highlighted the presence of thirteen clusters characterized by specific configurations of the four indicators used (Tourism Density, Centrality/Peripherality, Public Transport Infrastructure Availability, ICT Infrastructure Availability). Starting from this detailed framework, five macro-groups of inner tourist municipalities were identified which on the base of their level of MaaS readiness. Finally, the spatial mapping of the clusters allowed us to detect regional specificities and inequalities.

The classification therefore provides useful elements for the policies and planning of services to support mobility for tourism inner areas and, moreover, represents a basis for further analysis into more circumscribed areas, which can first of all concern the dimensions of the MaaS maturity (Kamargianni, Goulding, 2018) which has not been possible to integrate into the analysis due to the unavailability of data, such as the transport operators openness and data sharing, the citizen familiarity and willingness and the policy, regulation and legislation.

MaaS is not just a technological challenge, but also, and maybe in some cases mainly, a social and governance one. It is just through a difficult balance between infrastructural interventions and upgrading, private and public actors' roles combination and calibration, good knowledge and representation of local needs that it is possible to plan services tailored for each specific context. As a consequence, the collection of localised (also qualitative) data is fundamental to guarantee the coverage of all the dimensions composing the territorial readiness to MaaS.

Another relevant issue is linked to the sustainability of these kinds of services out of the peak tourist seasons, when the demand decreases, but the (local) residents' needs do persist. Some experimentations have been already tested in some Italian inner and tourist areas, like the Eastern Biella Mountain Union (see the Interreg Alpine Space project ASTUS), design-

ing more economic and socially sustainable local mobility services, balancing seasonal peaks earnings with low season's ones. But more research is needed, as well as a stronger commitment of local and supra-local actors in making accessibility, liveability and economic development assets of these contexts.

## Acknowledgement

This study was carried out within the MOST – Sustainable Mobility Center and received funding from the European Union Next-GenerationEU (PIANO NAZIONALE DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA (PNRR) – MISSIONE 4 COMPONENTE 2, INVESTIMENTO 1.4 – D.D. 1033 17/06/2022, CN00000023). This manuscript reflects only the authors' views and opinions, neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be considered responsible for them.

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Il turismo è spesso definito la “più grande industria del mondo”, vista la sua crescente rilevanza per l’economia e il mercato del lavoro in quasi ogni angolo del pianeta. Mostra inoltre una straordinaria capacità di riprendersi da qualsiasi crisi economica, bellica o sanitaria. Questo è accaduto anche con il Covid-19: dopo il crollo del 2020-2021, già nel 2024 siamo tornati ai flussi turistici pre-pandemici.

Le criticità e le contraddizioni, però, sembrano aumentare di pari passo: l’impatto su servizi ed ecosistemi locali, il sovraffollamento delle destinazioni, le dinamiche immobiliari che mandano fuori controllo i prezzi degli alloggi, i conflitti tra viaggiatori e popolazione locale... tutti questi effetti collaterali del turismo sembrano purtroppo tornati a crescere dopo la “pausa pandemica”.

Questo rafforza l’esigenza di una analisi sociologica ma anche quella di un confronto tra realtà territoriali, diverse ma vicine e spesso toccate da problemi molto simili.

La regione mediterranea, malgrado una forte instabilità socio-politica e una concorrenza globale sempre più agguerrita, rimane quella che attira la quota maggiore di turismo internazionale, grazie a un’insuperata ricchezza di patrimoni materiali e immateriali. È proprio intorno a questo che si concentra la quasi quarantennale attività di ASTMEd - Associazione Mediterranea di Sociologia del Turismo.

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