

# Community Resilience and Tourism Development \_

## The Case of Marginal Areas

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### ABSTRACT

**The chapter discusses the concept of community resilience in relation to tourism, with a main focus on marginal areas. The aim here is to present how tourism development in marginal areas can contribute to the development of resilience within the local communities, ensuring their survival in the future. Few studies have been done on the relationship between resilience and tourism, and most of them have been focused on tourism as a mechanism of post-crisis recovery or as a means to enable those involved in the tourism sector to confront future shocks and reduce disaster risks.**

**Here, a different approach is proposed, defining community resilience as an intentional action, aimed at responding to, and influencing, the course of social and economic change. According to this perspective, resilience is intended as a voluntary response to a slow change that is needed by marginal societies to shift from unstable economies to stable ones, preserving, in the context of this change, the local identity and thereby making it the central element of development.**

### KEYWORDS

community resilience, tourism, marginal areas, local development

## 1 Introduction

According to many studies, community resilience has always been related to disasters. Only in the past few years, new theories have started to discuss the capability of communities to act in response to any form of change, be it social or environmental. Therefore, notions of community resilience now also relate to the ability of the individual or the community to deal with difficult conditions or react successfully to change. This capacity of recovering from adverse situations can echo the instinctive aptitudes of a community, or it can be the outcome of a learning process (Amir, Ghapar, Jamal, & Ahmad, 2015). In fact, resilience cannot be meant as a characteristic that is owned, or not, by a person or a group, but instead as a process that may change according to different situations or times (Luthar, 2003), and that can be intentionally developed.

Within this field of study, only a little research has focused on the relationship between tourism and resilience. Sustainability is a key area in research on tourism, and sustainable development is a frequently mentioned example of actions that help a community to become more resilient, yet the concept of community resilience is scarcely discussed in the literature on tourism development (Amir et al., 2015). Placed in this lacuna, this manuscript aims to understand the concept of resilience through the lens of tourism, which is intended here as a means for building more resilient communities, with a specific reference to marginal areas.

This approach is seldom found in literature and no study specifically faces the topic of marginal areas, which needs to be addressed in order to consider in more depth the question of how communities can build resilience.

The manuscript starts from a review of the existing literature about community resilience and resilience and tourism, then the role of tourism in marginal areas is addressed to discuss how, within this context, it can be both a factor of local growth and a tool to develop resilience, ensuring the survival of the community in the future. Finally, the case study of Alqueva is presented to argue how a marginal area, which suffered a traumatic event, is recovering with policies that tend to promote forms of sustainable tourism.

## 2 On the Concept of Resilient Community. A Literature Review

The concept of resilience, from the Latin *resalire*, has been vastly used in many different disciplines in the last 50 years. The concept originates from both physics and mathematics, where it refers to the capacity of a material or a system to recover its shape after an interference, and from ecology, where it refers to the ability of an ecosystem to assimilate shocks while continuing to work.

A starting point in resilience theory is represented by Holling (1973), who, when discussing the behaviour of ecological systems, introduced a differentiation and an interplay between resilience and stability. Holling (1973, p. 17) stated that “resilience determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes”, while stability is “the ability of a system to return to an equilibrium state after a temporary disturbance”. According to this differentiation, a system can be very resilient but have low stability and vice-versa, i.e. the resiliency of a system is not determined by the stability of its components (population, economic activities, etc.) but by the abilities of these components to shift from one condition of (unstable) equilibrium to another.

The work of Holling has been particularly influential, giving rise to following definitions and application to a wide range of matters, such as communities and social system.

Among the different disciplines, resilience can be defined as:

- In physics, “the ability to store strain energy and deflect elastically under a load without breaking or being deformed” (Gordon, 1978, p.129) or the speed with which a “system returns to its equilibrium after displacement, irrespective of whether no, few, or many oscillations are involved” (Bodin & Wiman, 2004, pp. 34-35).
- In psychology, “an individual’s ability to successfully adapt to life tasks in the face of social disadvantage or highly adverse conditions” (Windle, 1999, p. 163).
- In ecology, the “ability to persist through future disturbances” (Abel & Langston, 2001, p.1).

However, there is no commonly accepted definition that can be used across all categories. In order to try and find a definition of community resilience, the Community & Regional Resilience Institute (2013) identified five different elements, or couples of elements, which can be found in different types of classification: Being vs Becoming, Adaptation vs Resistance, Trajectory, Predictability, Temporal Nature. The CRRRI (2013, p. 10) combined these elements, defining Community Resilience as the capability to “anticipate risk, limit impact, and bounce back rapidly through survival, adaptability, evolution, and growth in the face of turbulent change”. When analysing a community that is exposed to a risk, we often consider the negative consequences, and not the resources that the community can put in place to resolve the crisis in its favour. Overturning this perspective, Gist and Lubin (1989) emphasised the resilience of communities that have to face events such as natural disasters. Studying the reaction of a Puerto Rican community after a massive flood, Bravo, Rubio-Stipec, Canino, Woodbury, and Ribera (1990) formulated a community strengths hypothesis that was based on the fact that the psychopathological symptoms of the members of the affected community were not particularly different before and after the flood. Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, and Pfefferbaum (2008, p. 130) defined Community Resilience as “a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance”. This definition has the advantage of

underlining the process of change and adaption more than the result, being valid both for the community and the individual because it is “content free” (Norris, n.d.). As Norris (n.d.) noted, resilience is not a permanent quality of an individual or community, but rather “it is one particularly desirable trajectory of post-event functioning that is influenced both by the severity of the stressor and by resources that can be strengthened via pre- and post-event interventions”. Norris’s approach has something in common with MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson’s (2012, p. 264) definition of resourcefulness as a “material property and a relational term that seeks to problematize the often profound inequalities in the distribution of resources by the state that further disadvantages low-income communities”. In scientific literature, resilient communities tend to be defined by three main tendencies: tendency to resistance, referring to the capability to absorb shocks; tendency to recover, referring to the speed and ability to recover from the stressor; tendency to creativity, referring to the creativity potential of social systems while recovering after shocks. In order to establish a definition of community resilience that fits the purpose of this study, it is necessary to move the focus from shocks (tourism, inflow of visitors, in this case) to positive economic and social reactions.

Colussi et al. (2000, p. 11) defined community resilience as an “intentional action to enhance personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to, and influence the course of social and economic change”. The “intentionality” here is central: a community that is interested in a touristic inflow can react intentionally to take advantage of a social and economic change. It is not a simple defence mechanism put in place to preserve the integrity of the community itself, but a stimulus to adapt, improve, and thrive. In sum, for our purpose, the most effective definition of community resilience should take into account both the Norris approach, for the process-focused point of view, and the Colussi definition, especially with its emphasis on social and economic change.

### 3 Resilience and Tourism

Tourism has hardly ever been related to the concept of resilience. Only over the past few years, resilience thinking has attracted tourism academics’ attention, either as a mechanism of post crisis recovery or as a means to enable those involved in the tourism sector to confront future shocks and reduce disasters risks.

A schematic review of the theories concerning resilience and tourism is provided by Cochrane (2010), who lists various applications of the concept to tourism. Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004; 2005) initiated a discussion of resilience and complex adaptive tourism systems. The discussion was then used by Tyrrel and Johnston (2008) to generate a mathematical model, conceptualising the relationship within a ‘dynamic model of sustainable tourism’, on which Schianets and Kavanagh (2008) based their approach, which aimed at identifying

sustainability indicators in tourism. Moreover, the concept was applied in specific context, such as: by Perpar and Udovc (2007) with relation to rural tourism in Slovenia; by McDonald (2009), who used it to recognise relationships between stakeholders in a touristic location in Western Australia; by Calgaro and Cochrane (2009) in defining actions for building resilience in Sri Lanka and Thailand after the Asian tsunami; and by Amir et al. (2015) to discuss the development of sustainable tourism in rural communities of Malaysia.

Lew (2014, p. 15) highlights how, in recent literature about resilience, it has been recognised “that human settlements at all scale face a diverse range of predictable and unpredictable (or nonlinear) natural and social shocks, some of which are sudden and large, but others of which are gradual and moderate in their perceived”. Walker, Carpenter, Rockstrom, Crépin, and Peterson (2012, p. 30) refer to these as “fast variables” and “slow variables”. The latter include, among others, the response to long-term climate change, cultural shifts, and change and resilience in tourism. If the most common resilience perspective in tourism has been focused on tourism industries and tourist arrival numbers, following fast variable change (Lew, 2014; Faulkner, 2000), more recently slow variables have started to become a new matter of interest for tourism scholars. Lew (2014, p. 17-18) discusses how “communities perceive and manage slow change in the environment, culture and society in a different manner than they do under major shocks”, stating how a slow change, triggered by the development of the tourism sector, is apparently more sustainable and manageable, even if “at some point, the rate of change in the natural or social environment may pass a threshold (or breaking point) after which it is perceived like a shock event”. This means that, in the case of slow changes, a management plan for long-term viability and success must be defined. The required approach is that of resilience planning, which seems to be more appropriate than the sustainable paradigm. The difference between the two is focused, among others, by Lew (2014, p. 14) stating, “sustainability mitigates or prevents change by maintaining resources above a normative safe level, whereas resilience adapts to change” (see also Derissen, Quaas, & Baumgärtner, 2011).

Starting from this theoretical context, the chapter aims at discussing how the slow development of tourism can help to ensure a resilience community, with a focus on marginal area.

#### 4 **Marginal Areas. A Definition**

Marginal areas may be defined as areas characterised by unfavourable economic and social conditions, that cause a situation of development delay in comparison with the external context (Antolini & Billi, 2007). The marginality of an area can be the result of a slow historical process of isolation or the outcome of an economic, social, or environmental perturbation; it can involve both a small portion of a territory or a territory as a whole.

Schematically, according to Sommers, Mehretu, and Pigozzi (1999), marginality can occur at three different scales: macro-spatial, micro-spatial, and in-situ marginality.

The macro-spatial marginality involves the regional scale and concerns the disparities between the communities located in the central places of economic activities and the communities that, due to their remote position and the lack of natural resources, are vulnerable.

The micro-spatial marginality concerns depressed areas within quite small territories, such as urban areas and metropolitan regions. Factors such as history and age are quite important in this type of marginality, even if the more visible forms of vulnerability are based on ethnic-cultural distinctions, migration status, and economic bipolarities resulting from the cyclic dynamics of economy. In Europe and North America, the micro-spatial margins are usually located in the centres of the major metropolitan areas and are often determined by the interaction between different endogen factors.

The in-situ marginality refers to an unequal development within a very small geographical unit, such as an urban block, where very high disparities in living standards can be registered in the same neighbourhood. Even in this case, factors such as ethnic-cultural distinctions and migration status, represent the principal elements of vulnerability and differentiation.

To narrow the field of investigation, among these three different scales, the chapter discusses the case of macro-spatial marginality, i.e. marginal areas at regional level, which, within a given territory, can be recognised according to the following parameters (Buonincontri, 2011):

### **Geographical Aspects**

The distance from the main urban centres and the geo-morphological characteristics of the territory are the elements to which the idea of marginality has been mostly associated in time. A geographical position, distant from the central areas of development, and unfavourable natural and morphological conditions, are among the factors that usually have a central role in the process of marginalisation at the regional level.

### **Infrastructural Aspects**

Strictly connected to the geographical aspects are the infrastructural ones. Marginal areas are often catheterised by difficulty in access that, first of all, are given by the geo-morphological conditions of the site, but also by the lack of adequate road and railway networks. Moreover, the scarcity of new and technologically advanced communication and information infrastructures amplifies the condition of isolation, slowing down the overall progress of a territory.

### **Economic Aspects**

Marginal areas are normally characterised by a little diversified production structure, a poor integration between the various components of the local economy, and a difficulty in exporting local products

outside the territory itself. Agricultural activities are often predominant but are barely linked to agro-food processing, which, if reversed, could activate production and marketing of typical products. Another sector characterising the economy of marginal areas is that of handicraft. Both of these activities represent a strong element of identity that forms part of the immaterial heritage of such places. Yet, the lack of new workers and the competition created by new, undifferentiated and low-cost industrial products make craft subject to a slow process of extinction.

### **Demographical Aspects**

Although today even the most industrialised territories are affected by an aging population trend, a decreasing birth rate, an increasing unemployment rate, and widespread commuting, these trends are more evident and long-lasting in marginal areas.

These aspects, combined together, represent a point of reference to observe and quantify the condition of marginality of an area at regional level. In sum, a difficult geo-morphological position, the scarcity of infrastructures, and the lack of economic activities are usually the main threat for the survival of communities in marginal areas, which are already at risk of depopulation. This implies that the continuity of the community itself may depend on its ability to change and adapt to new conditions, i.e. developing resilience and finding new sources of economic and social income.

Shifting from quantitative parameters to a qualitative perspective, Buonincontri (2011) discusses how marginal areas, despite the critical situation that they have to face, often present cultural, natural, and artistic resources that, thanks to the condition of marginality, have been mostly preserved from the influence of the external context. These resources are an expression of authenticity and originality, becoming an important witness of the territorial identity. Assuming this point of view, marginality is not necessarily a crisis element, being also an opportunity. In this regard, Tišitel, Kušová and Bartoš (2003, p. 81) argue that “regions, considered marginal from one perspective can become focal points if put into another context”. In fact, the exclusion, at least partially, from the globalisation dynamics often allowed marginal areas to maintain their identity, which is a strong connection with local culture and tradition, and to preserve specific cultural landscapes. Identity is a significant resource that, if properly protected and enhanced, can become the starting point of a process of sustainable development in which tourism may play a main role, being a factor of economic diversification and a tool to enhance the strengths of marginal areas. Here, community resilience may be referred as “the ability of the community to enhance and sustain the business, exploring and disseminating what is valuable and essential for its survival” (Amir et al., 2015, p. 118). This means that the development of tourism can help the society to shift from an unstable economy to a stable one, preserving, within the change, the identity of the community itself.

## 5 **Tourism as a Tool to Develop Resilience Communities**

The good effects of tourism on local development have been widely demonstrated (Buonincontri, 2013), as well as the fact that the introduction of tourism causes major changes in the territory that a community has to face. On the one hand, the ability to react to those changes constitutes a first form of resilience, while on the other hand, in the case of peripheral and fragile territories, the development of tourism gives an opportunity for a change of the whole community, ensuring its existence into the future. As argued by Amir et al. (2015, p. 119), the resilience depends here “on the community’s flexibility, that is the ability to rebound and reorganise in the event of challenges while maintaining a sense of continuity”

The core issues are those of identity and community heritage, which, in the case of marginal areas, are the two main resources on which the development of tourism can be set up, being a strategy for the community to achieve better living conditions. It has been proved how local identity can be preserved only by opening it to an external market, thereby making it the central element of local development (Gualerzi, 2006). Giving value to local identity and promoting it as a touristic resource is a tool to develop community resilience. On the one hand, this allows the community to maintain, in the present, cultural repertoires that have been passed through generations. On the other hand, this implies that the community deliberately makes an effort to keep a historic sense of place but which still affects the present. (Beel et al., 2015). This attitude can be assimilated to that of resilience planning, where “resilience may not recover to a previously undisturbed state but to something that is entirely new” (Beel et al., 2015, p. 3). Magis (2010, p. 402) defines this attitude as an intentional action that members of resilient communities “engage in to respond to and influence change, to sustain and renew the community, and to develop new trajectories for the communities’ future”.

In the case of peripheral areas, the change, which is needed for their survival, aims to invert the depopulation trend, to improve infrastructures, and to obtain a better socioeconomic condition of life. A possible strategy to introduce a slow and manageable change that ensures the resilience is that of a community-based tourism, which promotes the relationship between local community and visitors and involves the whole community in the shift of economy. In this way, achieving a high-quality visitor experience, preserving the natural resources, the material and immaterial heritage and improving the wellbeing of the area (Manyara & Jones, 2007). This implies incorporating “hotel management, tourism management, food and beverage and complementary services all together”, without forgetting “other subsystems such as infrastructure, health, education and environment” (Amir et al., 2015, p.117), as well as developing a method of analysis of marginal areas that is aimed at recognising all the natural, historical, architectural, and artistic resources, as well as the immaterial heritage. In fact, both material and immaterial



heritage (traditions, food products, etc.) are expressions of the local identity that have to be promoted in order to give rise to a slow and sustainable change.

Within this context, we must consider that many forms of tourism exist and that not all of them are compatible with fragile territories like marginal areas. Here, in fact, the form of tourism that seems to be more suitable is that of sustainable tourism, defined by UN World Tourism Organization and UN Environment Programme (2005) as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". This idea was the basis of the Charter for Sustainable Tourism (UNWTO, 1995). The Charter (p.1) discusses the ambivalence of tourism, recognising that "it has the potential to contribute to socio-economic and cultural achievement and it can at the same time contribute to the depletion of the environment and the loss of local identity" and defines a series of operational guidelines. All the indications listed in the Charter are inspired by the principle of the respect of the cultural and natural heritage, as well as the involvement of local communities in the touristic development. Both the respect of local heritage and the involvement of communities implies a social, ethical commitment that is required when thinking of a process of recovery of marginal areas mainly based on the enhancing of their identity.

## **6 The Case of Alqueva, Developing Resilience**

Alqueva is the central-western part of the Portuguese region of Alentejo. Located on the boundary between Portugal and Spain, it has always been a remote place, far from the main economic centres of both countries. An economy mainly based on agricultural activities, the dryness of the soil, a depopulation trend, a high rate of unemployment, the scarcity of infrastructures, and a very low per capita income are, among others, some of the factors that characterise Alqueva as a marginal area. In order to face this critical situation, in the 1950s, the Portuguese government started to plan the construction of a dam, to be placed close to the village of Alqueva and aimed at the construction of a widespread irrigation system. The building of the dam started in 1976 and, after some interruptions, was completed in 2002, when the water started to flood the territory, giving rise to one of the largest artificial lakes in Europe. The water submerged about 250 square kilometres of land, covering ancient rural architectures, archaeological ruins, and even a whole village (Pacheco, Mendes, & Rocha, 2014).

If, on the one hand, the creation of the lake has empowered agriculture, on the other hand, it has represented a traumatic event for the territory and the local community, that has now to develop resilience, finding a way, within the change, to preserve its memory and identity.

A piece of research on Alqueva, entitled Architecture, Tourism and Marginality. Design and Touristic Enhancement of Marginal Areas, was conducted at the University luav of Venice, Department of Architecture and Arts, with the cooperation of the University of Évora, Faculty of Architecture. The investigation aimed to evaluate to what extent the development of tourism in marginal areas could be a tool to help fragile territories to overcome a situation of disadvantage, ensuring the survival of the local communities in the future. The Alqueva case study has helped to develop a method to recognise the weaknesses and points of strength of a marginal area, trying also to understand the ongoing process through which Alqueva is now building resilience by activating the tourism sector.

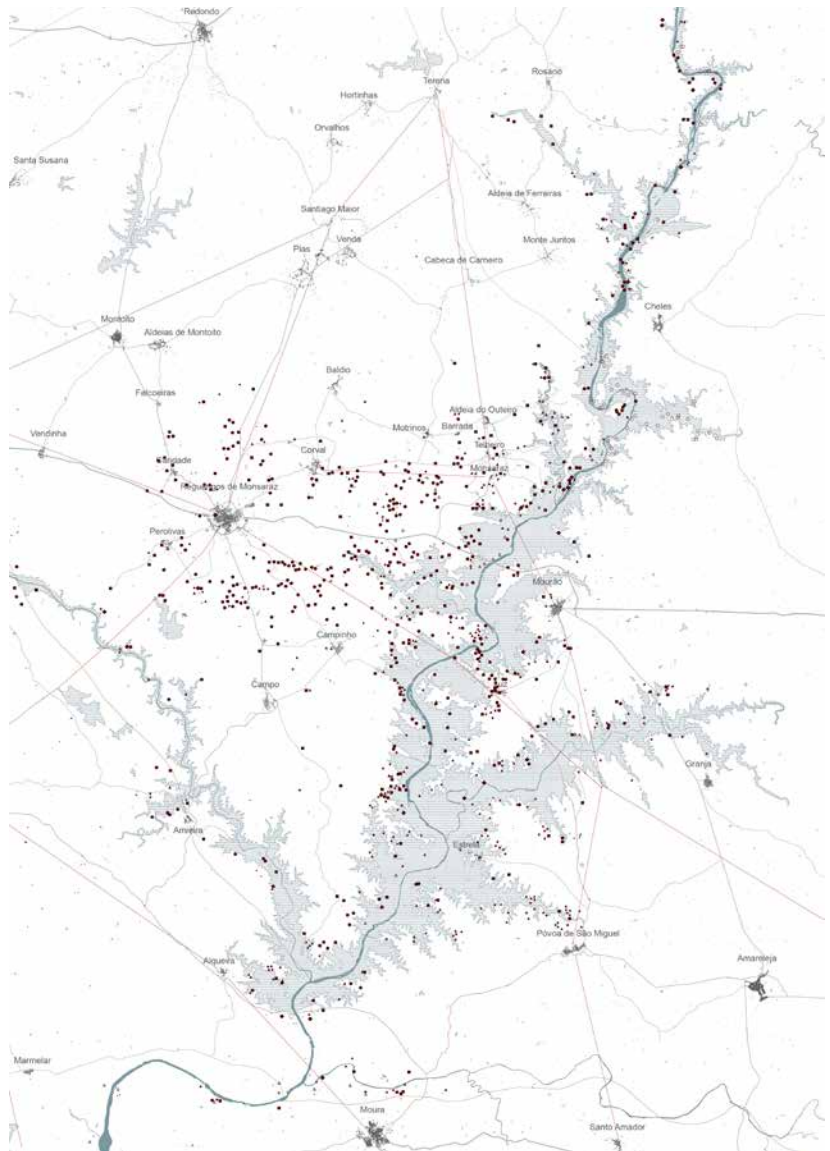


FIG. 6.1 Alqueva, map of the archaeological sites (Image by Viola Bertini, 2016)

The developed method of analysis consists both of the study of statistical data and the recognising and mapping of the material and immaterial resources of the territory. The mapping of the resources focused on

natural, historic-cultural, and architectural heritage to define the elements that may be a starting point for the development of tourism in the area. These elements are an expression of local identity and, exactly for this reason, they represent a strong point of interest for those forms of sustainable tourism in search of a contact with the authenticity of the place. The maps can be conceived both as a form of knowledge of the places and an operational tool to define the actions that can help a correct management of the territory, i.e. its protection and promotion.

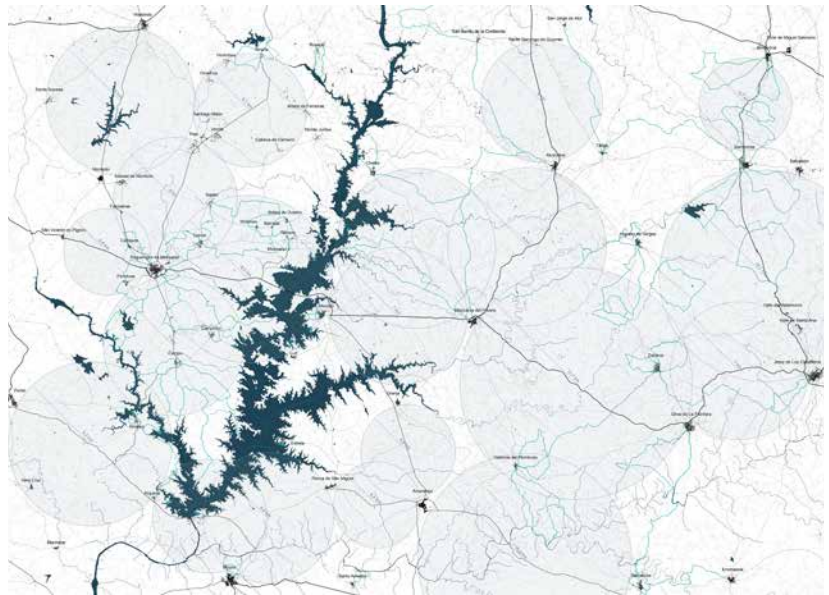


FIG. 6.2 Alqueva, map of the infrastructures and the slow mobility (Image by Viola Bertini, 2016)

The study of statistical data has taken into account both social and economic aspects, such as demographic trend, average monthly income, and data on tourism. The study highlighted a strong condition of social and economic marginality and a consistent growth of the tourist sector, due to the recent policies undertaken by local authorities. These policies represent an interesting example based mainly on the idea of developing forms of sustainable tourism in Alqueva that can benefit and ensure the economic and social survival of the area. The actions undertaken can be summarised as follows:

- a cross border association (Associação Transfronteiriça do Lago Alqueva) has been established, with the purpose of managing the territory as a whole;
- people and authorities started to see the creation of the lake not only as a traumatic event, but also as an opportunity for economic development both in agriculture and tourism. Consequently, new economic activities have been started in relation to the touristic use of the lake, such as touristic ports, camping areas, and boat rental facilities;
- the promotion of the area as a touristic destination has been launched through actions of territorial marketing, and increasing the number of touristic arrivals;
- the production of local agricultural products have been empowered thanks to the creation of the new irrigation system. In particular, the

production of wine has largely increased, giving rise to a form of neo-gastronomic tourism and incentivising its trade;

- the re-use of abandoned rural buildings, mainly for touristic purposes, has been incentivised, giving rise to new economic activities for accommodation;
- new areas of ecological protection have been established;
- new museums and interpretative centres have been created, as well as new touristic routes that, crossing the territory, represent a way of enhancing the local cultural and naturalistic heritage.

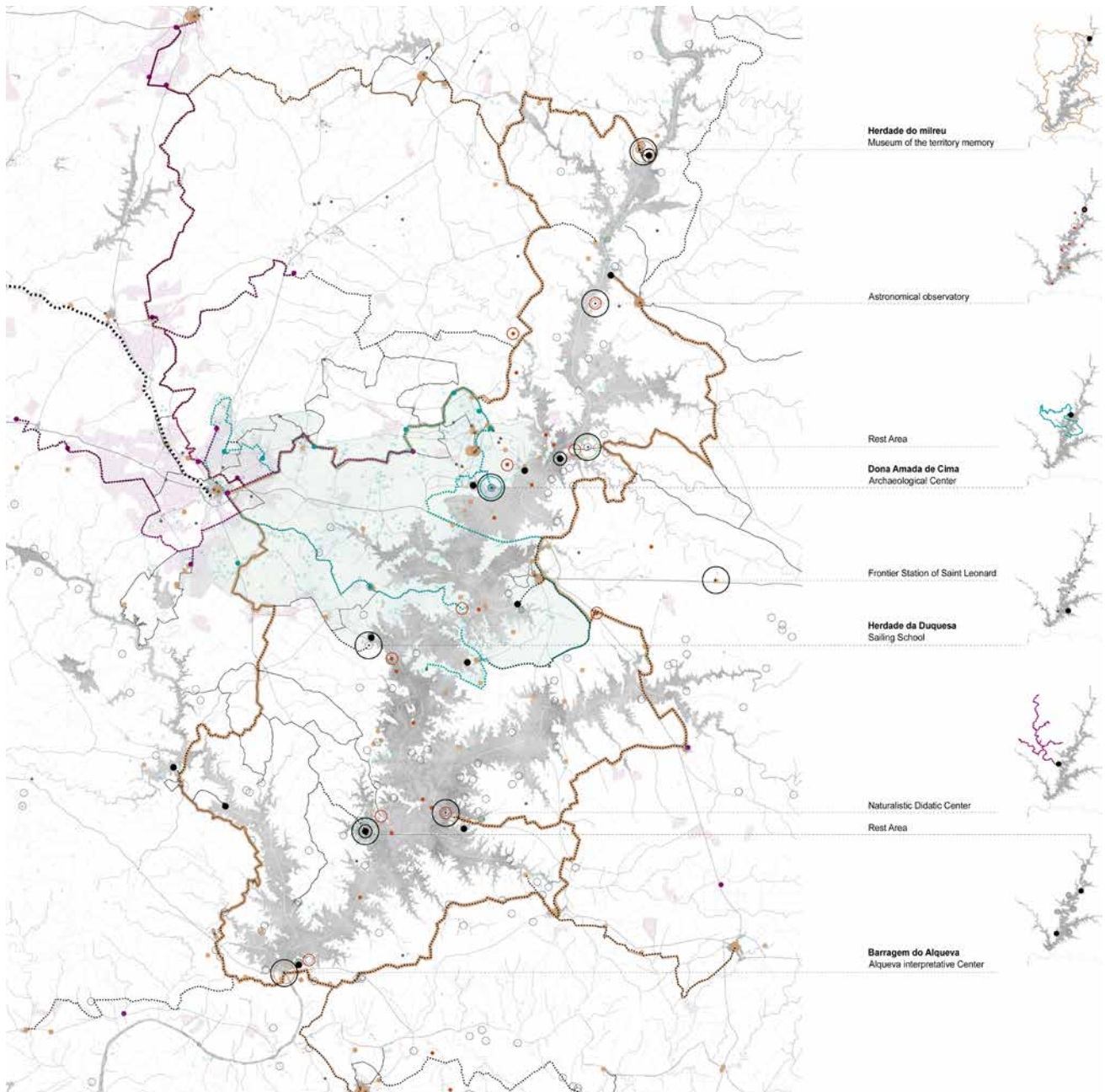


FIG. 6.3 Masterplan proposal for the Alqueva area (Image by Viola Bertini, 2016)

The results of these actions will be tested in the future, as they represent an interesting example. The proposed model is, in fact, one of local development mainly based on improving sustainable tourism as a way of developing resilience. Here, tourism is intended as a means through which the local community can adapt to the new situation, taking advantage of the change that took place in the territory. Moreover, tourism may be a tool to help a marginal area to overcome its implicit disadvantage, hence improving, thanks to new economic activities, the quality of life of the community. Finally, the idea of promoting sustainable tourism is a way to enhance and give value to the local material and immaterial heritage, as well as helping the conservation of the local identity.

Within this context, resilience is a voluntary act resulting from a territorial management that proposes a new development model, which is able to relate the promotion of low-intensity forms of tourism, the redirecting of agriculture towards typical productions, and phenomena of suburbanisation. This model requires "a careful reading of the historic landscape and an interpretation of the local community's needs, between a rediscovery of the genetic codes of a series of ground and buildings arrangements and the exploration of their potential transformability" (Lanzani, 2002, p. 273, translation by the author).

## 7 **Conclusions**

In marginal areas, the development of sustainable tourism can be a tool aimed at diversifying local economy, improving wellbeing, and developing community resilience. Resilience is not intended here as a response to a fast and unpredictable change, but as a voluntary choice to respond to and influence the course of social and economic change, which is needed to ensure the survival of the community itself.

In this context, a tool through which resilience can be developed is the enhancing of local identity, which is the main strength and the main touristic resource of marginal areas and, at the same time, the way by which the community can maintain a historical sense of place. This means managing and driving a change, while keeping a sense of continuity and a link with the past. The good effects of this mechanism can be measured by parameters such as demographic trend, improvement of physical and technological infrastructures, employment rate, number of new local business, etc., as well as by parameters like interventions in the field of environmental protection, actions of safeguarding and promoting of material heritage, integration of local community and visitors, etc. This process requires the bottom-up creation of an integrated system of touristic offerings and originates from correct territorial management that proposes a model of sustainable development, based on the elaboration of new cultural models of tourism, and implying a high, even if controlled, transformation of the territory rather than just its pure conservation.

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