

TOURISM IN PESCARA (ITALY): COMPETITIVENESS AND ATTRACTIVITY

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Abstract: Pescara is a "young" city, that perhaps still participate, in part, to the underdevelopment of southern Italy, but since a few years this urban center represents the coupling to the Adriatic development model, creating a weld with the "third Italy". This is the position and the interpretative key of the reasons for the growth of Pescara, a rural and military village that, without renouncing to the contributions of the traditional sectors, opened itself with enthusiasm to the industry, the market and the first forms of tourism; the city broke down the ancient fortifications and was projected towards the river - which became the port - and the pine forest, to reach the beach and the woods for the new recreational needs; this new urban center began to integrate its production with Castellammare. Shortly, Pescara built, during the end of the last century, the foundations for the conquest of the urban hegemony, in terms of population and services, along the middle Adriatic sea, beyond the Abruzzo administrative boundaries. So we can see a situation that evolves all the time with problems and imbalances, with increasing force and with the ability to mobilize all available resources and opportunities, if we watch this from a more detached point of view in order to insert the city dynamics at the mouth of the Pescara river in the regional and national level and if we adopt an appropriate method of comparison. Pescara, certainly, has many aspects of evolution in this direction: from industrial and commercial city became an interregional and international metropolitan node - thanks to new relationships with the opposite side of the Adriatic -, increasing its value in the tourism market. Pescara is not currently a tourism attraction of "pleasure" for foreigners, but it is an important business center for them. However It maintains importance, for the hinterland inhabitants, as summer resort destination for a touring day. In fact it is the only center in the region which is equipped with the facilities of a modern business city, but combined, and "sweetened" by the pleasures of a holiday destination (weather, events, nightlife, waterfront restaurants, etc.). It's the place where all the tourist routes, to discover the region, start or end.

Key words: Pescara, tourism, urban growth, accessibility

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INTRODUCTION

Pescara was officially founded in 1927 by the merger of Castellammare Adriatico (in the province of Teramo with about 16,000 inhabitants) and Pescara (in the province of Chieti with about 10,000 inhabitants). Hardly hit in the years of the second World War,

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then the city suffers a massive and messy population and size growth that leads it to become the largest in the Abruzzo region.

Forming a conurbation between its territory (actually small), the coastline and the low valley of Pescara, it links, indeed, the centers of Francavilla al Mare and Montesilvano and industrial areas and settlements of Spoltore valley, San Giovanni Teatino, Chieti and beyond.

Its birth and its growth does not match the typical model of Italian and European cities: the city of ancient foundation, enclosed in the walls, which starts to go out along the main roads, to expand rapidly in all directions: the original core, fortified after the demolition of walls, is only belatedly recovered as a historic center while the city expands with a linear shape along the coastal rail, generating multiple “centers” (commercial, administrative), exploding in the area with sub-centers, suburbs and peripheries.

The dominant center of Pescara, born in 1927, was Castellammare Adriatico (the choice of the name Pescara can be considered for this a tribute to its most famous citizen, Gabriele d'Annunzio, “poet” of the regime, and perhaps a recognition to the more solid fascist faith of Pescara citizens) located in the northern part of the mouth of the river, whose original core – as, indeed, throughout the Middle Adriatic coast – was located in the hills.

The Bourbon drainage of the “*agro in piano*” (1815-1853) had begun to shift the interests on the coast, marked by the great mansions of the landowners; the arrival of the railroad brought the formation of a real urban settlement, starting from crossroads between the Adriatic road and the road that linked the new station to the sea¹.

Southerly and near the river, there was the D'Annunzio Pescara, a small and not very dynamic center that resisted to the destruction of the Bourbon fortress, strongly supported after the national unification. Demolitions were already initiated by the Austrian troops, to continue the construction of the railroad and to force the acquisition of free zones near the municipality, which instead had to pay the “*Reign*”; the only remaining military building is the “*Bourbon prison*”, now a museum (Avarello, 2000, pp. 752).

Almost not born yet, the new Pescara suffered heavy Allied bombing, and was mined by the retreating Germans, in both cases the rubbles impeded the movements of troops along the Adriatic. Abandoned by the people, who were displaced over the hills and in the countries of origin, at the end of the war the city was a ghostly rubble, especially in the more central areas².

THE URBAN GROWTH

However, the population and housing recovery was exceptionally rapid, so quick that the curve of population had no inflections and the people number rears up from 1951. A vigorous process of conurbation started, the first signs occurred since the first after-war of this century, and they were recognized at the administrative level with the formation, on both the banks of the river, of a single municipality. But they were different growth patterns of the two original cards: Castellammare Adriatico, in the north, was developing in an imploding manner on lines that were parallel to the rail and it favored the service sector for families; Pescara, in the south, expanded mainly for successive rings around the ruins of the old Bourbon fortress, and its economy was based on the tertiary for enterprises, mainly for the wholesale trade, and on the manufacturing industries whose production facilities were grouped near the railway station and the initial part of the Tiburtina highway.

¹ Today Corso Umberto. The station was located here “temporarily” - waiting for the railway bridge and the continuation of the line to the south - on areas “given” for the purpose by the Muzii family. It’s said that to take this opportunity to damage Pescara, was built in just 100 days. Over 15 years lasted the construction of the new “passing” station (further back than the old) completed in the mid-80s of the twentieth century.

² The report of the reconstruction plan says it was destroyed for 69%, even if, as always, in case of natural disasters or war, the damages were overstated in order to support the request for financial aids.



Figure 1. Castellammare station (1916)
(Collection: R. D'Amario)



Figure 2. Pescara station (1920)
(Collection: R. D'Amario)



Figure 3. Pescara bus station
(Collection: R. D'Amario)



Figure 4. "Marina di Pescara" tourist harbour
(Source: F. De Nicola)



Figure 5. Via delle Caserme. Former Bourbon prison, actually Museo delle Genti di Abruzzo
(Source: Freegiampi)



Figure 6. Aerial view of "Marina di Pescara" tourist harbor and the littoral
(Source: A. Di Loreto)

Pescara is essentially a sea city with the shape of a "strip", the coast is further densified in the central areas and along the Adriatic (without changing the viability), even if we can not overlook the connections with the valley and the hills, now densely built and inhabited. The Adriatic ring-road jumps largely the residential areas, and it is expected that it will expand even more in the hinterland, without distinguishing between the valley and the hills; this expansion was favored also by the recession of the station of about 500 m on the axis of the existing railway line that is the basis of the enlargement of the city center.

A strong population growth is recorded, in parallel, in the municipalities adjacent to Pescara (Montesilvano stands on all, now firmly in the fifth place in Abruzzo for population size) and some municipalities in the outer crown which, for their nature, can rightly be regarded as secondary population thickening centers within the Pescara conurbation (Landini and Massimi, 2000, pp. 738-739). We must note three things. The first is the increasing concentration of population in the urban area of Pescara censuses until 1971. The second aspect is the decrease in growth rhythms from the census of 1971, and then the decrease of the total population in the urban core, this can be interpreted as a result of several factors at the local level (residential decentralization for the high cost of the land and the progressive saturation) and at the regional level (strong industrial growth in Val di Sangro in the province of Chieti: formidable economic and population growth in the valleys and hills of Teramo). The third peculiarity is the fact that in addition to the core of the conurbation, centers of aggregation developed in the suburban areas, remaining subordinate to the main center, but growing on the functional plan.

The post-war reconstruction marks for Pescara a remarkable growth, promoted by the persistence of traditional industrial activities (food, bricks and mechanical) and the expansion of tourism and commercial services sector, especially wholesale. However, the strong urbanization shocked the port area, inadequate to meet the needs of joint fishing and commercial activities. The latter especially penalized by the inability to accommodate the boats in the channel port.

The mix between residential and manufacturing plants becomes at the beginning an attractive feature (short trips from home to work) and then repulsive (noise and air pollution) for the new tertiary middle class: it's emblematic the relocation, around the sixties, of the cement factory from the port to the present site that nowadays has become a central area too.

TOURIST RESOURCES AND ACCESSIBILITY

Pescara isn't very attractive for the external tourists, however it is an important affair center. It is a very important destination for the inhabitants of the hinterland who want to do a tour during the summer. In fact it is the only center in the region equipped with the facilities of a modern business city, but combined, and "sweetened" by the pleasures of a holiday destination (weather, events, nightlife, waterfront restaurants, etc). It's the place where all the tourist routes, to discover the region, start or end. It's a modern and cultural center (made famous by the figures of d'Annunzio, Flaiano, Cascella) which offers artistic and cultural events of great attraction, thanks to the presence of some museums (the birthplace of Gabriele D'Annunzio, the most visited, the Museum Basilio Cascella, the Museum of Modern Art Vittoria Colonna, the Museum of Genti d'Abruzzo, the Museum Villa Urania-Antiche Majoliche di Castelli) and of important theaters and musical institutions.

In spite of this, the city is considered a destination of a mid-level tourism with the limitations of an incomplete knowledge of the territory and of attractive landscapes for the great mass of Italian and foreign tourists: these ones, in particular, after they have remained in the city or in neighboring towns thanks to the case, they tend to come back, this for the acceptance of residents, the nice climate and, largely, thanks the "beauty" of the city too.

One of the important junctures of the Italian roads, Pescara is in fact the connection terminal between the south-central Adriatic way and the Tyrrhenian way. The motorway link is really good along the Adriatic side (Bari-Bologna) and along the Tyrrhenian one (Roma-Napoli). The rail links, however, are just discrete, and only in the north direction, with the presence of only four links to and from Milan: the Eurostar Frecciabianca. The easy accessibility from Rome increased a substantial local tourism and

the rise of “second homes”; the same conditions have facilitated and promoted tours and short theme stays (cultural, gastronomic, religious) with large basins of metropolitan demand (as well as Rome, Naples and Bari), supporting, at least, a partial insertion of Abruzzo in broader “*packages*” of national and international tourism.



Figure 7. D'Annunzio home museum
(Source: E. Taglieri)



Figure 8. D'Annunzio Theatre
and the beach
(Source: A. Di Loreto)



Figure 9. Pescara: bathing
establishments on the seashore
(Source: A. Di Loreto)

The accessibility by sea is also an important hub thanks to the tourist port Marina di Pescara, that is considered one of the best and most equipped in the Adriatic in terms of services and as source of attraction from the touristic and economic point of view, with a significant increase of workplaces in specific fields and industries. The regional tourist ports, in addition to absorbing the demand from the local coastal boating, play an important role in the whole system of yachtsmen in the lower middle Adriatic, whose potentials are obvious: easy access from the Roman demand basin, the proximity of the Croatian, Albanian and Greek coasts, that makes easy crossing the sea for a middle boat owner, the presence of islands (Tremiti) that can also be reached from a boat excursionist. The connections with Croatia and Tremiti accentuate the role of Pescara, thanks to other Abruzzo and Molise slipways (Ortona, Vasto, Termoli, despite seasonal and not positive annual discontinuity) as “*Adriatic outlet*” for the entire central Italian area.

Even the air accessibility is under strong improvement, even if are persisting, in this case, some difficulties and discontinuities: Abruzzo Airport, included in the urban area of Pescara, has greatly increased its activities, especially since the low cost

company Ryanair has enabled numerous scheduled and charter links, which brought a passenger traffic of around 400,000 units in 2008 (quintupled in a decade). The airport facilities, even if they have been enhanced, however, require a further strengthening, as necessary, prerequisite for an attack strategy of the region against the foreign tourism markets.

TOURIST ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY AND TOURIST FLOWS

The Pescara hotel accommodation capacity focuses heavily on the coastal section of the metropolitan area (Pescara, Montesilvano). The hotels, structures with a single management located in one or more buildings or parts of them, assure accommodation and/or any other services. In addition to hotels in the strict sense, there are still some guest houses in the urban area of limited size and quality, offering low-priced family-style hospitality. In the urban area of Pescara, hotels are open during all the year, even if the tourism remains mostly linked to the sea. However the cultural and, specially, business tourism substitutes the seasonal tourism. Definitely significant, especially in recent years, the frequency of conference events, sports events, exhibitions and cultural events of national and international level in the urban area and surrounding towns, which act as a sounding board not only for tourists in the strict sense, increasing the overall competitiveness and attractiveness of the territory.

Looking at the period 2003-2008, the number of hotels in the province of Pescara is almost constant, with a slight growth variation. These minor deviations did not contribute substantially to alter the distribution of beds, resulting in a number of just under 9,000 (table 1).

Table 1. Accommodation capacity in the province of Pescara - hotels
(Source: ISTAT)

Year	Operating	Rooms	Beds
2003	101	4,227	8,873
2004	103	4,246	8,951
2005	104	4,258	8,969
2006	105	4,253	8,966
2007	102	4,198	8,905
2008	102	4,180	8,846

Considering the size, we can see that in 2008 hotels of small size (less than 25 rooms), most of them belonging to the lower categories (1 and 2 stars), continue the negative trend of recent years: in total they are 51 with 797 rooms, for 1,570 beds; those of medium size (between 25 and 99 rooms), yet in sufficient number to meet the needs of the traditional tourism demand for the province (mostly beach holidays for families), are also declining (42 enterprises with 1,984 rooms for a total of 4,079 beds). We must highlight, then, the weak presence of large exercises (100 rooms and over), only 9 with 1,399 rooms for 3,197 beds: we can configure, with this, an offer poorly adapted to the changing needs of demand, which increasingly changes in favor of high quality hotels, with a higher comfort in facilities of adequate size.

In terms of management, the conduction of the majority of the hotels is individual, and in many cases of small-scale, counting the smaller size of the companies; much less present, as mentioned above, the presence of larger hotels with the resulting quality and quantity of services offered, because these structures are often part of national or multinational companies (in the case study, we report the presence of three sister hotels in Pescara belonging to Best Western chain).

From the qualitative point of view, the urban area includes hotels ranging from 5 stars to 1 star (table 2), explainable by the coexistence of the business and beach tourism, segments characterized by different types of tourists with significantly different needs.

Table 2. Number of hotels by category - Province of Pescara
(Source: ISTAT)

Category	2003			2005			2008		
	Operating	Rooms	Beds	Operating	Rooms	Beds	Operating	Rooms	Beds
☆☆☆☆☆	1	34	68	1	34	68	2	106	212
☆☆☆☆	14	1,187	2,405	15	1,258	2,532	19	1,296	2,603
☆☆☆	55	2,536	5,510	54	2,469	5,427	55	2,400	5,309
☆☆	17	290	543	18	296	558	14	229	426
☆	14	180	347	16	201	384	12	149	296

Table 3. Accommodation capacity by type of accommodation, tourist area and type of resort – Province of Pescara
(Source: ISTAT)

Tourist area		Pescara	Montesilvano	Caramanico Terme	other municipalities PE
Type of resort		Marine resorts	Marine resorts	Termal resorts	n. a. c. municipalities
2008					
Camping and holiday villages	Num.				1
	Beds				117
Housing for rent	Num.	2	4	13	14
	Beds	30	49	117	131
Accommodation in farms and country-house	Num.	1	-	5	82
	Beds	20	-	65	1,099
Youth hostels	Num.	-	-	1	5
	Beds	-	-	25	146
Bed & breakfast	Num.	13	23	2	49
	Beds	81	145	8	275
Total	Num.	16	27	21	153
	Beds	131	194	215	1,809
2005					
Camping and holiday villages	Num.				1
	Beds				117
Housing for rent	Num.	1	1	8	3
	Beds	19	20	98	30
Accommodation in farms and country-house	Num.			5	42
	Beds			66	542
Youth hostels	Num.				2
	Beds				50
Bed & Breakfast	Num.	4	16	1	16
	Beds	21	105	6	91
Total	Num.	5	17	14	64
	Beds	40	125	170	830
2003					
Camping and holiday villages	Num.				
	Beds				
Housing for rent	Num.	1	2	8	1
	Beds	19	70	91	7
Accommodation in farms and country-house	Num.			4	35
	Beds			56	433
Youth hostels	Num.				
	Beds				
Bed & Breakfast	Num.	2	4	1	11
	Beds	8	20	6	67
Total	Num.	3	6	13	47
	Beds	27	90	153	507

From 2003 to 2008, the 5-star accommodation has seen the opening of a second structure, which has effectively tripled the number of rooms and beds; there was also an increase for the 4-star category, increased from 14 hotels in 2003 to 19 hotels in 2008

(about 200 beds more); the number of 3-star hotels was virtually unchanged, but with a slight reduction of accommodation capacity (about 130 rooms and 200 beds less), explained by the large number of renovations carried out in recent years to improve the accommodation and the quality of family-run hotels. In line with recent trends in the demand/offer ratio, there is a decrease of the lower hotel categories (2 and 1 stars).

In the urban and metropolitan territory non-hotel or complementary accommodation units are variously distributed (hostels, campsites and resorts, rental accommodations, agri-tourism accommodations, country houses, bed and breakfast), whose type is however largely incomplete (table 3). In recent years there has still been a substantial increase in non-hotel structures, especially B & B in the coastal urban area and accommodations in farms in rural areas, mainly thanks to the provincial plan for their incentives (training courses and sensitization) and the realization of the trademark of quality, for the development of the sector. If we look to rental accommodations, it is notoriously undersized because the official figures, of about fifteen years, detect only the exercises of this kind entered in the register of companies at the Chambers of Commerce: for real, in urban area (where in addition to the tourist users we can find University Students) and in inland areas, the phenomenon is much more widespread and consistent.

The total number of complementary structures was 69 (with 777 beds) in 2003. In the next two years we see the significant growth of the category B&B, particularly in Montesilvano, while still weak is the growing of agro-tourism accommodations and of country-houses in the inland areas, where we can record, however, the entrance of the categories “*youth-hostels*” and “*camping and tourist villages*”. To notice how the second of these categories is absent in the coastal zone for the presence of hotels and tourism resorts and, then, for the congestion of urban areas. So, the number of complementary accommodation facilities in 2005 rose to 100 with 1,165 beds.

A further significant increase in accommodation facilities occurred in the following years, thanks, mainly, to the contribution of the farm in the inland areas and to B & B in the coastal urban area: so in 2008 we have a growth of the accommodation capacity with 217 non-hotel facilities for a total of 2,349 beds.

Considering now the tourist flows during the same period 2003-2008, there has been, at provincial level, a modest increase in the number of arrivals of Italian tourists (about 22,500 more, equal to 8.5 %) and even more modest – more than that discontinuous decline in 2005 – in the number of admissions (about 15,300 more), the latter due exclusively to the contribution of additional accommodations (+39,500), while the overnight stays in hotels are continuing to fall (table 4, 5, 6): the whole is globally in line with the general trends associated to the economic fluctuations and the length of tourist stays.

Table 4. Arrivals and overnight stays in hotel facilities
for customer residence and tourist destination
(Source: ISTAT)

Tourist area		Caramanico Terme	Montesilvano	Pescara	Other municipalities PE	TOTAL	
2003	Italians	Arrivals	12,772	103,095	91,025	59,276	266,168
		Presences	87,336	490,278	188,438	121,333	887,385
	Foreigners	Arrivals	811	9,333	23,336	6,809	40,289
		Presences	3,507	47,825	82,337	19,955	153,624
2005	Italians	Arrivals	14,078	115,897	100,389	48,230	278,594
		Presences	88,773	483,332	197,236	102,109	871,450
	Foreigners	Arrivals	1,020	9,032	23,579	6,323	39,954
		Presenze	4,191	43,215	70,527	15,322	133,255
2008	Italians	Arrivals	13,293	118,310	99,514	48,569	279,686
		Presences	81,099	493,747	177,726	110,570	863,142
	Foreigners	Arrivals	999	11,530	25,036	6,205	43,770
		Presences	3,255	46,843	82,886	18,949	151,933

Table 5. Arrivals and overnight stays in non-hotel facilities for customer residence and tourist destination
(Source: ISTAT)

Tourist area		Caramanico Terme	Montesilvano	Pescara	other municipalities PE	TOTAL	
2003	Italians	Arrivals	710	15	11	1,590	2,326
		Presences	4,575	19	26	5,702	10,322
	Foreigners	Arrivals	27	2	24	485	538
		Presences	104	2	58	2,153	2,317
2005	Italians	Arrivals	601	104	122	1,950	2,777
		Presences	4,640	524	284	7,137	12,585
	Foreigners	Arrivals	31	11	11	1,232	1,285
		Presenze	174	41	35	8,919	9,169
2008	Italians	Arrivals	961	510	1,971	7,942	11,384
		Presences	3,956	2,248	8,605	35,033	49,842
	Foreigners	Arrivals	114	112	394	2,177	2,797
		Presences	399	888	1,706	22,034	25,027

Table 6. Arrivals and overnight stays in hotel and non-hotel facilities for customer residence and tourist destination
(Source: ISTAT)

Tourist area		Caramanico Terme	Montesilvano	Pescara	other municipalities PE	TOTAL	
2003	Italians	Arrivals	13,482	103,110	91,036	60,866	268,494
		Presences	91,911	490,297	188,464	127,035	897,707
	Foreigners	Arrivals	838	9,335	23,360	7,294	40,827
		Presences	3,611	47,827	82,395	22,108	155,941
2005	Italians	Arrivals	14,679	116,001	100,511	50,180	281,371
		Presences	93,413	483,856	197,520	109,246	884,035
	Foreigners	Arrivals	1,051	9,043	23,590	7,555	41,239
		Presenze	4,365	43,256	70,562	24,241	142,424
2008	Italians	Arrivals	14,254	118,820	101,485	56,511	291,070
		Presences	85,055	495,995	186,331	145,603	912,984
	Foreigners	Arrivals	1,113	11,642	25,430	8,382	46,567
		Presences	3,654	47,731	84,592	40,983	176,960

Also on the front of the foreign tourists, arrivals and overnight stays record similar changes, with some more fluctuations and, however, very low absolute values, which denote the much lower incidence of the foreign component on the regional tourist movement against the national tourist movement.

The exception is only the city of Pescara, where the incidence stands at 20 % of arrivals and 30 % of overnight stays, compared with the respective values of 13.5 % and 15 % for the whole area of the province.

Equally obvious is the concentration of the flows in the urban area, where the average stay, higher in Montesilvano (average of 4.2 nights, against 2.1 in Pescara), denotes the duality of the type of offer and, consequently, of demand. The increased length of stays, which is closely linked to the spa, is recorded in Caramanico, with an index of average permanence of 5.9.

Comparing, therefore, the urban area of Pescara to Montesilvano, administratively separated but included in the metropolitan area, the fundamental differences lie in the tourism features: Pescara has a strong competitiveness for the urban and cultural tourism – we must mention the Jazz Festival, the summer theater season at the Teatro d'Annunzio, the international festival dedicated to Ennio Flaiano and the presence of numerous awards related to this and other leading figures in the history of art as the family of painters and sculptors Cascella – which also explains the great attraction for foreign visitors; Montesilvano is famous for the image of the seaside tourism, which, however,

operators gradually have been able to support with the congress tourism, with multi-seasonal feature, to raise the utilization rates of the major hotels.

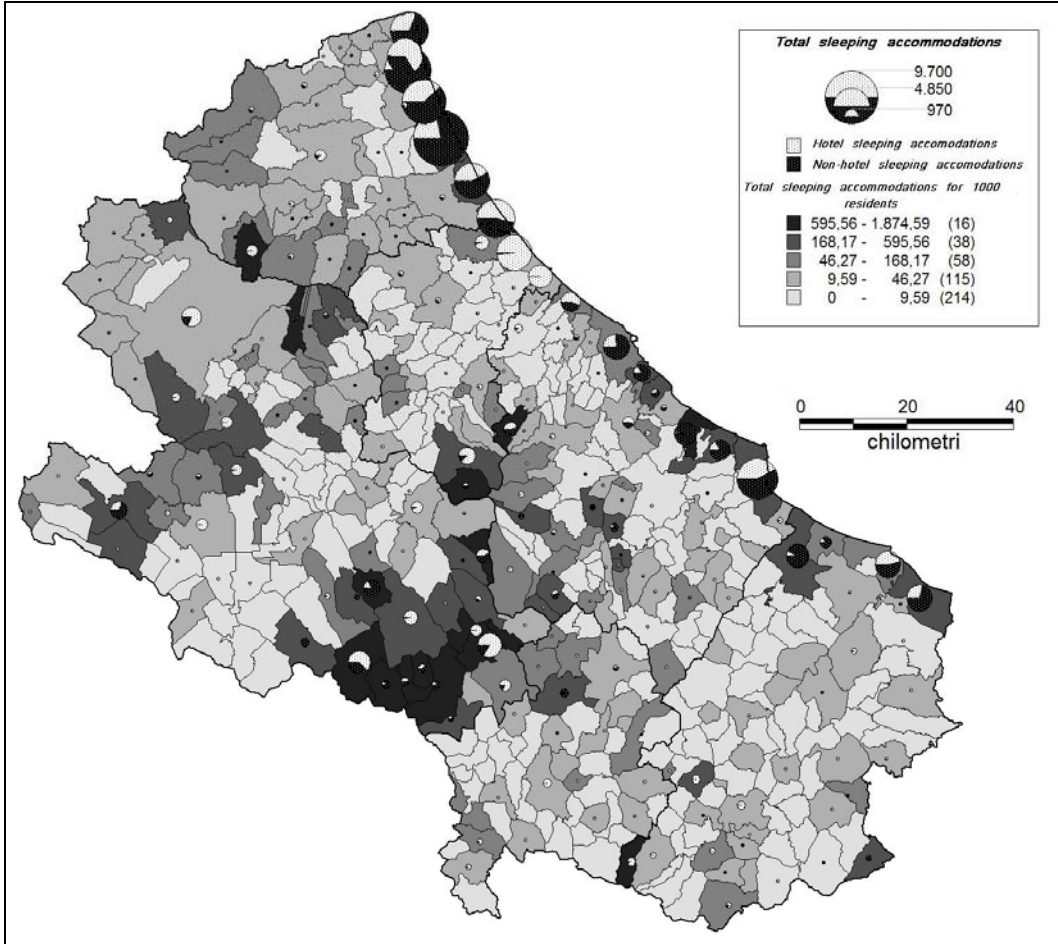


Figure 10. Abruzzo Region – total accommodation capacity by municipality
(Source: ISTAT)



Figure 11. The bridge and the channel port
(Source: E. Taglieri)



Figure 12. The bridge. On the back the “Marina di Pescara” tourist harbour
(Source: G. Cavuta)

Analyzing separately the performance of the non-hotel facilities (table 5), even if there are low absolute values, it is possible to speak of exponential growth for the increases from 2003 to 2008: the total arrivals in the province of Pescara record a significant +400 % in the period, going from 2,864 in 2003 to 14,181 in 2008 and presences of 500 %, from 12,639 in 2003 to 74,869 in 2008. Especially important was the dissemination of B&B structures in the territory, with peaks of high quality that collect the benefit of both foreign and domestic customers.

CONCLUSIONS

Pescara is a "young" city, perhaps even participant, in part, to the underdevelopment of southern Italy, but it represents the Adriatic development model, which creates a weld with the "Third Italy". A flexible and diffusive model, that needs a stronger centrality, well anchored in the area and provided with adequate services to perform metropolitan functions.

In the logic of the "glocal" economy (global/local), moreover, the cities don't represent anymore large construction sites and large factories, converters of peasants into workers, but network nodes, material and immaterial. To assume this role the cities must be capable to compete: the competition is necessarily on the quality of human capital, environmental capital and city capital, or the quality of settlements, that exert a great attraction on the tourism.

Pescara certainly has experienced an evolution in this direction: from industrial and commercial city, it's changing into a metropolitan node of inter-regional importance and – thanks to new relationships with the opposite side of the Adriatic – of international importance, increasing its value in the tourism market. The image that the city has obtained, thanks to important steps of urban renewal, tends to generate a more positive perception of both visitors and residents.

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