


Chapter 9

Matera – From Abandonment to Rebirth: Impacts and Opportunities of the 2019 European Capital of Culture

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ABSTRACT

Matera, a city in the Basilicata region, represents one of the most emblematic cases of cultural and tourism-driven revitalization in Italy. The primary objective of this chapter is to identify and analyze the tourism marketing strategies that enabled Matera to transform from a forgotten city into a premier tourist destination. Specifically, this study aims: to examine the role of UNESCO recognition in the enhancement process; to analyze destination branding campaigns and tourism promotion initiatives; to assess the impact of the European Capital of Culture 2019 title; to reflect

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on future challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. Furthermore, this chapter aims to provide insights and replicable models for other Italian tourist destinations seeking to enhance their cultural and natural heritage. The examination of Matera's revival holds both academic and practical significance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand communication is crucial to the success of companies and tourist destinations (Remondes & Borges, 2016). Countries, regions, cities, towns, and tourist destinations often use territorial branding communication to distinguish themselves and differentiate themselves from other tourist spots and achieve greater competitive differentiation at the territorial level (Sousa & Rocha, 2019; Tarnanidis et al., 2024). Brands are a manifestation of identity (physical and psychological) and allow greater trust among their users (Sousa et al., 2021). Matera, a city in the Basilicata region, represents one of Italy's most emblematic cases of cultural and tourism-driven revitalization. Once a symbol of backwardness and poverty—immortalized in Carlo Levi's famous book *Christ Stopped at Eboli*—Matera is now a vastly different place. It has become one of the most fascinating and internationally recognized tourist destinations (Aquilino, Armenski & Wise, 2019; D'Andrea, 2023). This chapter analyzes Matera's transformation journey, focusing on the tourism marketing strategies contributing to its revival (Pepe & Percoco, 2019). The study will explore the dynamics that enhanced the Sassi and Matera's cultural recognition. It will use a multidisciplinary analysis to examine these factors, including the UNESCO World Heritage recognition and the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) designation in 2019.

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Furthermore, this chapter aims to provide insights and replicable models for other Italian tourist destinations seeking to enhance their cultural and natural heritage. The examination of Matera's revival holds both academic and practical significance. In an era where cultural and sustainable tourism is a key driver of economic development for many regions, Matera's experience is a valuable benchmark for other destinations. The ability to integrate the promotion of historical and cultural heritage with innovative and inclusive marketing strategies makes this a compelling case study for researchers, policymakers, and tourism industry professionals.

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