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**Traditional agri-food products as a leverage to motivate tourists.
A meta-analysis of tourism-information websites**

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Traditional agri-food products as a leverage to motivate tourists.

A meta-analysis of tourism-information websites

Abstract

Purpose – This paper provides evidence on the extent to which traditional agri-food products constitute a leverage to promote tourism in the province of Reggio Calabria, Italy and discusses ways in which community led local development governance institutions might enhance it.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on a review of existing information on Calabrian traditional agri-food products (TFPs), to classify them by area of production and identify those that are specific of relatively small areas, in addition to a qualitative analysis of the content of the texts of a sample of websites promoting tourism in the region.

Findings – Though food is one of the leverages used to promote tourism in Calabria, TFPs are not yet sufficiently exploited to attract tourists to the province of Reggio Calabria, despite their potential as a vital expression of local culture and traditions.

Research limitations/implications – The selection of the websites used in the study may not be exhaustive of the full spectrum of web-based promotion of tourism in Calabria.

Practical implications – The results provide useful insights to public and private institutions responsible for rural development and tourism promotion in Calabria. The database on the TFPs of the province of Reggio Calabria permits an easy reading of the geographical distribution of the different categories of products, useful as a resource for further studies and as a local development policy support tool.

Social implications – Promoting a form of culturally-sensitive, food-based tourism in the interior areas of Calabria may constitute an important factor to revert the trend towards impoverishment, migration of young people and depopulation of the interior areas of Calabria. This is a particularly sensitive issue in Italy today, in view of the difficulties that other strategies pursued in the area are facing.

Originality/value – Existing literature on typical food products in Italy focuses on those labelled by denomination of origin and geographic protection. This is one of the first articles focusing on TFPs labelled as *Prodotti Agroalimentari Tradizionali* (PAT) in the Italian legislation. By exploring the role of local food and traditions in promoting tourism, the article expands the scope of existing studies of rural tourism and on rural development in Calabria, and beyond.

Keywords – Traditional food products, Sustainable tourism, Rural development.

Paper type – Case study.

Introduction

Since the “quality” turn in the discourse on food policy in Europe (Brunori, 2018) there has been a growing attention towards recognizing characteristics that make food products special. The EU has a consolidated legislation on labelling and certification of agricultural and food products that revolves around the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG), three labels that are explicitly meant to better inform the consumer about specific products’ characteristics and thus shield the original products from unfair competition (EU, 2012). “Tradition” is one of these characteristics, as explicitly reflected in the TSG label and as recognized in the Italian legislation at least since 1998 (Mipaf, 1999). This makes sense, as it recognizes that food can be considered representative of the people who make it and their culture and heritage. To the extent that these are considered elements to be preserved, traditional foods (sometimes referred to also as “regional”, “typical” or “local”) may play a role in

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5 sustaining a rural development paradigm that puts agriculture, and the people revolving around it,
6 at centre stage (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000).

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8 This article focuses on Traditional (agri)-Food Products (TFPs), defined in the Italian legislation
9 since 1998 as *Prodotti agroalimentari tipici* (PAT), as those that best embed local traditions. Among
10 the many ways in which local development can be fostered through reference to local food, it
11 focuses attention on tourism, recognizing that “tourism and food production are seen as potentially
12 significant sources of economic development in rural areas” (Hall, *et al.*, 2003, p.26). In Italy, the
13 strong synergies that exist between tourism, food and agriculture are one of the reasons why
14 tourism has been recently brought under the competence of the ministry of food, agriculture,
15 forestry and fishery. Moreover, wine and gastronomy tourism has been identified as one of the most
16 promising areas for strengthening tourism in Calabria (Aloi and Borgese, 2014). All of this leads to
17 our hypothesis that TFPs could play a role in local development by becoming a tourism attraction.
18 However, we argue, not all TFPs can be equally effective in promoting development that might
19 benefit local communities through tourism. To be effective in this sense they must be *specific* of the
20 areas where these communities strive. We therefore narrow our attention to the subset of the
21 Calabrian TFPs that are highly specific within the province of Reggio Calabria, meaning that their
22 production area is limited to few municipalities in the province.

23 To be attracted to a specific location by its offer of traditional foods, we argue, tourists should
24 be aware of the particular foods and culinary traditions they are likely to find there. As the internet
25 has rapidly become the main choice for prospective tourists when looking for information on
26 destinations, in this paper we explore websites that provide tourism information for Calabria to
27 verify whether they make reference to food as one of the key leverages to attract tourists and if they
28 convey information on TFPs, particularly on those that we identified as specific of relatively small
29 areas of the province of Reggio Calabria. This article thus provides insights into the extent to which
30 TFPs may constitute a leverage to promote tourism and sustainable local development in the
31 interior of the province of Reggio Calabria. We also discuss ways in which community led local
32 development governance institutions might enhance it. Focusing on the highly specific TFPs,
33 policies and other supporting actions may steer the leverage of food to promote local development
34 in a direction that is more likely to benefit local people, who often end up being somehow neglected
35 by food-based strategies that emphasize the food, rather than the place and the people who live
36 there. This might be particularly relevant for places where, for different reasons, the social fabric is
37 not conducive to the spontaneous creation of networks (for example, in the form of producers’
38 cooperatives) which might sustainably support local food-based development strategies. This is
39 clearly the case for many areas of the province of Reggio Calabria, where traditional foods are often
40 produced by numerous small-sized producers, who rarely engage or cooperate with others, for
41 example in pursuing joint marketing activities. But it may be typical of other marginal areas in
42 Europe, where the lack of “marketing” opportunities whose benefits can be appropriated by a wider
43 group of also non-local actors, has led thus far to neglecting the importance of food as a leverage for
44 development. Even just limiting attention to Southern Italy - the area the authors are most familiar
45 with - it is surprising how largely undeveloped the “local foods” economy still is, when compared,
46 for example, to other regions in Italy such as Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, Piedmont, Lombardy or
47 Veneto. This is despite the objective richness of the agriculture and culinary patrimony of Regions
48 such as Calabria.

49 The article proceeds as follows: first, it discusses how traditional foods and their role in
50 promoting tourism and local development have been treated in recent literature on rural
51 development. Next, the paper presents the characteristics and geographical distribution of TFPs in
52 the province of Reggio Calabria - the context of the article. Then, it reports on the results of a meta-
53 analysis of the content of a sample of Internet websites providing touristic information on Calabria
54 intended to assess the extent to which food is used as a leverage for tourism promotion in the
55 region, and whether TFPs, in particular, are already part of the picture. Finally, the findings are
56 discussed in terms of practical implications, including for rural development policy making in
57 Calabria.
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Traditional food, tourism and local development

The debate on the role of traditional food products in promoting local development

"Local" agri-food productions have long been included in the discourse on rural development policy in the European Union and elsewhere. As far back as 1996, the opinion was prevalent that local products can strengthen rural areas, particularly disadvantaged ones, in several ways; an idea embedded in the European legislation:

"Firstly, identification [of relevant local productions] enables a link to be forged between the product and a region's landscape and culture; also, where appropriate, between the product and certain practices or services in the environmental or animal protection spheres. Secondly, protecting them sometimes means that a culinary heritage, contributing to regional identity, can be preserved. Lastly, encouraging a partnership approach to local products can, through synergies, have a highly positive impact on their promotion." (EU, 1996, pp.2-3).

There is now voluminous literature on the way in which local agricultural and food products can contribute to rural development (Mardsen and Murdoch, 2006; Marsden, 2017) and it is beyond the scope of this paper to review it (see Section 4.1. in the excellent review by Rinaldi, 2017 and the literature cited therein). Our focus here is more specifically on the role that "traditional" or "typical" (rather than simply "local"), foods may play, and we must start by noting how different terminologies and definitions of have sometime been presented, reflecting the perspective from which they have been studied (see, for example, Tregear et al., 2007; Weichselbaum, Benelam and Soares Costa, 2009; Kristbergsson and Oliveira, 2016; Galli, 2018) and how by lumping together different concepts, use of different terms may create confusion (Tregear, 2011)[1].

While "tradition" is often explicitly mentioned and recognized as a dimension of food quality, as for example in the definition of TSG, the simple reliance on quality labelling is still perceived, by many, as insufficient, failing to provide "adequate protection [both] to the producers [and] to the food" (Trichopoulou et al., 2006 p. 503). One of the reasons is perhaps the way in which the TSG labelling has been implemented in the European legislation does not give full visibility to the enormous variety of traditional foods, often typical of very specific geographic areas, of limited economic relevance due to the narrow extent of their production, and in many cases at risk of extinction. Despite its richness in traditional foods, for example, Italy can count only two products in the list of registered TSG, ("Mozzarella di Bufala Campana" and "Pizza Napoletana") none of which is truly at risk.

This limitation has been recognized in the Italian legislation. In 1999, the Ministry of Agriculture defined TFPs as products "whose methods of processing, preservation and maturing are consolidated over time, homogeneous for the whole territory concerned, *according to traditional rules*, for a period of no less than 25 years" (Mipaf, 1999, p. 30, our translation, emphasis added) and begun maintaining a list, published for the first time in 2000 (Mipaf, 2000). To avoid the risk of excess proliferation of labels and denominations, whoever wishes to propose that a product be recognized as a TFP must provide sufficient evidence that indeed the listed criteria apply. The ultimate responsibility to validate the proposals for inclusion stands with regional governments. The current list counts more than five thousand entries, as a testimony of the truly exceptional variety of foods that makes Italian gastronomy quite unique in the global context (Mipaaf, 2019). Calabria, with 268 entries in 2018, is one of the richest regions in this respect, thus making it a useful context for this paper.

Local foods and tourism

In recent years, much interest has revolved around tourism experiences and attractions related to food and gastronomy (Hjalager and Richards, 2002, Hall *et al.*, 2003; Sidali *et al.* 2011, Timothy, 2016, De Jong *et al.* 2018; Medina *et al.*, 2018; Rachão *et al.*, 2019).

Many studies highlight how local foods are an important element of attraction for tourist destinations, stressing how the symbiotic relationship between gastronomy and tourism might play a decisive role in building a competitive advantage for some touristic destinations (see for example,

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Kivela and Crotts, 2005, 2006; Sengel *et al.*, 2015 and the references therein). Culinary traditions can contribute to delineate the touristic-culinary identity of a place, which may thus become an attraction for 'foodies', that is, people who look for unique gastronomic experiences. (Getz *et al.*, 2014) Local foods, as an expression of place identity, can thus be important cultural identity markers that provide tourists with an opportunity to get in touch with an important part of the intangible heritage of the places they visit (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014).

According to Cucculelli and Goffi (2015), gastronomy is one of the elements that convey a sense of authenticity to tourist destinations, something tourists may value to counteract the standardization that inevitably invests one's routine lifestyle and eating habits. This is a concept of authenticity fully consistent with the 'sense of place' understood as the "respect for local climate" and that, to be authentic, 'must be true to place' (Symons, 1999, p 336, cited in Scarpato and Daniele, 2003, p. 299).

In addition to transmitting a sense of authenticity, another leverage exerted by food on some prospective tourists is linked to their desire to recover contacts with traditions and ways of living of their past. This is particularly relevant for areas such as the interior of Southern Italy that have witnessed intense migration in the past and where a very relevant share of the touristic flow is fuelled by new generations who return to the places their families came from, in search of their ancestors' heritage (Palladino, forthcoming).

A corollary of all this is that gastronomy, intended as the complex of foods, wines and culinary traditions, is a resource that the tourism industry should consider when trying to establish the competitive advantage of a given destination. It is an important element of specificity for a territory that cannot be easily transferred or replicated elsewhere (Hernández-Mogollón *et al.*, 2015). In this sense, it can effectively be one of the forces that exert unique appeal for tourists and drive them to the place. The specificity of the territories as well as the search for authenticity become central elements of the demand/tourist experience. Not surprisingly, given its riches in the region, the importance of gastronomy has been recognized as a key resource for tourism in Calabria (Aloi and Borgese, 2014).

An area where there appears to have been less attention in the literature, is on *how* to adequately promote food-based tourism in rural areas, considering the impact that different options may have on the ultimate goal to promote local development. A few studies have focused on the web as key channel to convey information on local foods to potential tourists (Boyne and Hall, 2004; Huang, 2009; Kim *et al.* 2009, Horng and Tsai, 2010, Ashish and Shelly, 2015). The only one that focuses on rural areas (Boyne and Hall, 2004) finds that web-based resources are underutilized to promote food-related tourism in the UK, offering a few insights on how to possibly improve them.

Gastronomy and sustainable local development.

But, can tourism, and gastronomy tourism in particular, effectively lead to local development? And what type of development? While the call is still out on whether promoting tourism in rural areas unequivocally leads to foster local development (see for example Sharpley, 2002 and Cerić, 2016 for some cautionary calls), there is mounting evidence that, indeed, gastronomy tourism can lead to a type of local development that is sustainable (Rinaldi, 2017). Examples of tourism strongly based on food and local heritage that highlight the potential benefits and some vulnerabilities of tourism-based revitalization initiatives in Southern Italy are presented in Kilburn (2018).

Fundamentally, through gastronomy, the tourist meets and communicates with the locals and their culture. To experience the local gastronomy is not simply to taste or consume typical or traditional products; it is also a way to get in contact with the historic heritages of a territory and its community. The triad of food, place and community is further enhanced by the spread of food festivals and special events (Scarpato and Daniele, 2003; Frost and Laing, 2013; Silkes *et al.*, 2013; Jung *et al.*, 2015), which play a significant role in stimulating local economies as the activities and experiences that attract tourists usually provide work for the local communities.

For local foods and gastronomy to become an effective tourists' attraction, communication is of the essence. Gastronomy is, in fact, a complex resource, which involves history, geography, physical-chemical characteristics of food, traditions, perceptions and conviviality, all facets that contribute to create the 'sense' of the place. The way in which it is presented must "faithfully communicate an intimate link between food, place and the local community" (Hillel *et al.*, 2013, p. 202) if it is to be used as a resource that conveys strong cultural values and, therefore, effectively attracts tourists.

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Only thus, the uniqueness of the gastronomic resources of a place acts as an expression of authenticity, from the tourist perspective, and can lead to returns. The importance of proper narration of what is behind a certain traditional food or recipe to reflect its full value is highlighted elsewhere (see for example Palladino, forthcoming, and Slow Food, 2019). Here, we tackle a more fundamental question of whether or not, even just reference to unique traditional foods is made when promoting tourism in these areas.

Methods

For the reasons mentioned in the previous section, in exploring the potential of traditional food products as a pillar on which tourism-based local development policies could be built, the research strategy adopted in preparing this article is two-pronged.

On the one hand, we provide what, to the best of our knowledge, is the first, systematic, reasoned account of the broad range of traditional agri-food products (TFPs) of the province of Reggio Calabria, chosen among those included in the list of officially registered in Calabria (Mipaft, 2019). In doing so, we also make a distinction between generic and “specific” TFPs, based on the extension of the production areas. On the other hand, we search the Internet for websites that promote tourism in Calabria and explore the extent to which “food” (in its broadest sense) is already recognized there as a key driver to attract tourists to the region.

The two streams of research are then brought together by exploring whether the websites that are more likely to be consulted by potential tourists that are considering Calabria as a destination, do mention any of the specific TFPs we identified, and take that as an indication of the attention given by the tourism industry and other stakeholders to these highly specific, niche products, which, we believe, might be very relevant to the promotion of a sustainable form of tourism in the interior areas of the province of Reggio Calabria, and beyond.

Products' analysis

To be linked to a specific location is not one of the conditions required for a product to receive the official TFPs recognition. The area of reference for a registered TFP can in fact extend up to an entire region and thus it is unclear whether either a generic reference to traditional foods or to foods that can be found everywhere in the region, may actually be beneficial to determinate small communities in the interior of the province. We therefore focused on the information on the production area of each TFP and selected those (that we call “specific”) for which such area covers only one or few municipalities, assuming that these are the ones that are rooted in very specific local traditions, so that they can be considered an essential element of the identity of the small, rural areas of the interior of the province of Reggio Calabria whose development we are ultimately interested in.

Our starting point is the current list of officially registered TFPs, which includes 268 products in Calabria, grouped in 6 categories as defined by Mipaf (1999): meats and offals; fish; breads pastries and sweets; fruits and vegetables; cheeses; and prepared dishes. Each product has a production area that ranges from one or a few municipalities, to the entire regional territory. Careful review of information available from various sources[2] allowed us to reconstruct the list of municipalities (“comuni”) where each of the products is traditionally obtained, leading to a classification of the Calabrian TFPs by area of production and the creation of an original database, which has already been used, for example, to create one of the layers in an online atlas of Reggio Calabria’s food products (Gastrocert, 2019) and that is available upon request from the authors.

As we are interested only in the province of Reggio Calabria, from the list of 268 we exclude TFPs whose production areas involves only other provinces, bringing it to a total of 195 products. Of these, 89 are hosted only in the province of Reggio Calabria, covering either the entire province or only one or a few of its 97 municipalities, distributed across the five macro areas that compose the province of Reggio Calabria: Piana di Gioia Tauro, Costa Viola, Area dello Stretto, Grecanica and Locride (figure 1).

We finally excluded the ones that are produced in the entire province, obtaining a final list of 66 highly specific products, organized in a product-by-municipality matrix, which, in turn, allowed to construct the graph of a network of products and municipalities, useful to provide – at a glance – several insights. To facilitate the reading of the graphs, different symbols are used to identify the 66

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5 products (spheres) from the 97 municipalities (squares) and different colours are used to identify
6 the 6 product categories. The size of the products' nodes is based on the *degree* index, that is the
7 number of ties it has. In this case, the larger the node size, the more municipalities are involved in
8 the production of that particular product (figure 1).
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11 [Figure 1 here]
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13 *Websites' analysis*

14 The second step in the analysis is an exploration of the sources of information that potential tourists
15 interested in visiting Calabria might consult, to detect whether they contain any reference to food
16 and gastronomy and, in particular, to specific TFPs.

17 A recent EUROSTAT report on ICT use in tourism reports that "with 4 out of 10 Europeans
18 looking online for travel related information, the internet is a major communication channel for the
19 tourism sector" (Eurostat, 2016). For this reason, we focus on web-based tourist information
20 resources, on the assumption that the Internet is indeed the main source for prospective tourists to
21 explore potential destinations. To identify relevant websites, we conducted a Google search using
22 "touris*" or "turis*" and "Calabria*" as search terms[3]. The objective was to try and identify the
23 websites that would be more likely reached by tourists who are considering visiting Calabria.

24 The search was performed during the week of November 19-23, 2018, using the two terms
25 separately in Italian and in English, to mimic the situation that potential tourists might encounter
26 when searching from Italy and from abroad. A Google search yielded millions of results (about 40
27 million when searching with the Italian words, and about 13.9 million when searching with the
28 English ones). Recognizing that people conducting internet searches rarely scroll beyond the
29 second page of results (McKenna et al., 2018), but to be sure we would not miss relevant sources,
30 we limited our attention to the first 150 entries in each of the lists (e.g., those listed on the first 15
31 pages, when using the default setting of the Google search in Google Chrome, which displays 10
32 results per page). While, in theory, this may still result in neglecting potentially interesting sites, the
33 fact that such sites would appear so low down the list of results is indirect evidence that their
34 designers probably did not include the keywords "tourism" and/or "Calabria" in the portal's
35 metadata. We discuss later some of the implications of not having found some of the sites we
36 expected to find among the first hits. A further screening was manually done by scrolling the list
37 and trying to identify those that more likely conveyed touristic information (we excluded, for
38 example, results pointing to news articles that happened to mention our search words, but that
39 were not meant to provide tourism information).
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41 [Figure 2 here]
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43 Our final list includes 21 websites in Italian and 15 in English (see Figure 2) and we note from the
44 outset that our sample is not meant to be exhaustive of all websites that contain tourism
45 information on Calabria. It is rather a convenience sample, intended to provide a snapshot of the
46 "impression" on tourism opportunities in Calabria that the average user may form by browsing the
47 web, at the time when we conducted our search.

48 We then performed a qualitative meta-analysis of the sites' content, aimed at determining the
49 extent to which the sites make references to food (in its broader sense). We evaluated how relevant
50 any reference to "food" is, when compared to references to the two other main dimensions:
51 "culture" and "territory", that would be most typically used as a potential leverage to attract tourists.
52 The analysis was performed by three of the authors by manually navigating through the websites,
53 looking for references to each of three categories, e.g., "food", "culture" and the "territory", and
54 expressing a qualitative judgment of how relevant each of them was, as a result of the overall
55 experience of browsing through the site. The analysis was conducted independently by each of the
56 involved authors, who assigned a score in responding to the questions "how relevant is the
57 reference to "gastronomy" / "territory" / "culture" in this website?" When, in a site, reference was
58 found to more than one of the three items, answers were given to questions that make pairwise
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comparison (“How much more relevant is the reference to X compared to Y?”). The final outcomes were scores of “HIGH”, “MEDIUM”, “LOW”, or “NONE” assigned to the relevance of each leverage, and a ranking of the three.

The last step in the analysis was the search for references to any of the 66 specific TFPs within each of the websites selected in the first phase. The search was performed semi-automatically, using the “site-search” option available on the Google Chrome browser[4]. It allowed us to search for the name of each of the 66 products within each of the 36 websites, avoiding the need to have to manually navigate through all the websites’ pages. Only when the search produced a hit, meaning that the name of the product was found in the textual content of the website, we manually browsed the site to validate the search and verify that, indeed, a meaningful reference was made to that product.

Three possible limitations of the method we followed must be noted. First, by limiting the search to Italian and English we may have missed websites providing information in other languages. However, the probability that there may be websites intended to inform international tourists who do not have an English version is very low, which makes us confident that this is not a serious limitation. Second, limiting the search for TFPs’ names to the textual part of the websites may have failed to identify references made to these products only through images or only inside separate files downloadable from the site (such as PDF’s). While this is a possible concern, we deem it not so big to question the validity of our main results. Finally, we need to recognize that the Internet is a continuously evolving resource, implying that a search with exactly the same terms we used, conducted at a more recent data, may yield different results, especially when the subject of the search is a rapidly evolving sector.

Results

Creation of an original database organized in a products’ map

The result of the analysis of mapping the 66 specific TFPs of the province are summarized in Figure 3 and Table 1. The picture that emerges is that of a region with a very rich patrimony of traditional foods, the variety of which is the result of encounters between various millenary traditions and cultures from the Mediterranean basin, northern Europe and the near East. Peoples who inhabited Calabria over the millennia have left their cultural heritage also in the culinary tradition.

A relevant aspect is the high degree of “typicality” that characterizes the food heritage of the province. Despite our strict criteria for selection of specific products, only 9 of the 97 municipalities in the province have not been identified as home of one of these specific products. The map of specific products by municipality is a very dense one, with only nine isolated nodes (Figure 2). The “isolated” nodes belong to the Strait Area and the Piana di Gioia Tauro, arguably the less rural of the five areas and whose economic fabric is dominated by the city of Reggio Calabria and by the industrial operations surrounding the Port of Gioia Tauro, respectively.

[Table 1 here]

The category of “bread, pastries and sweets”, with 35 entries, is the most represented one, with products in each of the five areas, though particularly concentrated in the Strait area and in the Locride, as it can be easily appreciated by noting the sizes of the nodes on the map. Among the different sub-categories, there is a larger variety of pastries and sweets, many of which are typical of specific seasons or period of the year, such as around religious festivities (Easter or Christmas).

The second category by number of specific TFPs is the group of fish-based products, with 10 entries. These products are found especially in the Costa Viola area, something hardly surprising considering the fishing tradition of the area. The notable exception is the Stocco di Mammola, a fish-based product that has found home in an interior area of Calabria not of because of the fish (dried cod imported from Norway) but because of the quality of the spring waters used in its special rehydrating technique.

Cheeses (5 entries) are highly typical of the southern slopes of Locride and Grecanica, being present in almost all municipalities there. Particularly worthy of mention is the Caciocavallo di

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5 Ciminà, produced in only two municipalities of the Locride and which has become one of the very
6 few SlowFood presidia of the province[5].

7 That the “meats and offals” category only contains 4 entries in our list should not be interpreted
8 to mean that meat-based products are rare in Calabria: quite the contrary, pork should be rightfully
9 considered the real “king” of the Calabrian cuisine. The reason is that pork-meat based products are
10 so ubiquitous that they can hardly be considered specific. Virtually every rural family in Calabria
11 will butcher a pig once a year and home produce salami, prosciutti, and other delicacies. Calabria is
12 well known all over the world for its typical dry sausages: *soppressata*, *salsiccia*, *pancetta* and
13 *capocollo di Calabria* have gained the European PDO certification and are now produced
14 everywhere in the region. The few specific meat and offal TFPs we included in this category are
15 quite unique productions, such as the *satizza* (a sausage aromatized with wild fennel), and the
16 *soppressata affumicata* (smoked sausage) typical of the Strait Area, produced and consumed
17 particularly in the city of Reggio Calabria and the surrounding areas. *Culatta*, on the other hand, is
18 typical of the Locride, and is obtained from the leg of the pork, flavoured by pepper and fennel seeds,
19 and dried.

20 The “drinks” category contains only the bergamot liqueur, obtained from the skins of the fruit of
21 the typical citrus, which are macerated in alcohol for up to three months, followed by addition of
22 water and sugar and filtration. Bergamot production is limited to a small number of municipalities
23 in the Grecanica area, and its production is deeply rooted in the Calabrian culture.

24 *Meta-analysis of websites information*

25 Table 2 lists the 36 websites selected for the analysis, distinguished by whether the search was
26 conducted in Italian or in English, and whether the site is an institutional one or not. The latter
27 group was further divided into those that are linked to commercial entities in the tourism industry
28 and those managed by Internet community groups (such as, for example, Wikipedia) with no
29 evident for-profit motivation. For each website, the table reports our evaluation of the relevance of
30 “food” within the website content, and its ranking as a leverage.

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33 [Table 2 here]

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36 References to food are rather common, with only two of the 21 Italian websites and three of the
37 15 English ones, making no reference to it. However, there are notable differences in the relevance
38 they are given in the economy of the websites, depending on the type. We found it “HIGH” for most
39 of the identified commercial websites linked to Calabrian travel agents, and “LOW” or “VERY LOW”
40 in all those that can be linked to companies based in other regions of Italy. With only one exception,
41 however, food is never the main reference to promote tourism in Calabria. This is not surprising, as
42 Calabria has been very traditionally considered in Italy a touristic destination mainly for its beaches
43 and mountains and, more recently, for the growing attractiveness of historical sites and museums.
44 These results conform with the statistics published in the periodic reports on tourism in Calabria
45 produced by the *Assessorato al Turismo* of the *Regione Calabria* (SIT, 2014, 2015, 2018)

46 What is somewhat surprising though, is that we still found a number of sites that seem not to
47 mention food at all, when describing the regions’ touristic attractiveness. Similarly it is interesting
48 to note the paucity of references to agro-tourisms, perhaps one of the main vehicles through which
49 tourists may get in direct contact with the rural communities and way of living (Mangialardi, 2011;
50 Di Caprio, Wiltshier and Della Corte, 2019) and that have been especially successful to promote
51 rural development in other areas in Italy, such as the Tuscany or Latium *Maremma*, or the interior
52 of Campania, which share some of the features of the interior of Calabria, both from the naturalistic
53 and rural heritage points of view.

54 *Results for specific TFPs on websites*

55 The last column in Table 2 reports the number of specific TFPs of the province of Reggio Calabria
56 whose name is mentioned in each of the websites. Seventeen of the 36 websites we scraped contain
57 reference to none of the 66 specific TFPs we focused on. In most other cases, reference is found to
58 just five products or less. Only a few of the locally owned commercial sites provide users with a
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reasonable wide overview of TFPs in the province. One of them (www.tropea.biz) turned out to be very rich in information on these “specific” products, but it appears to be a rather unappealing website, very cumbersome to navigate, and thus potentially being much less effective of what it may have been in disseminating this type of information.

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One special mention must be made to the content of a website recently published by the Grecanica Local Action Group (GAL Area Grecanica, 2015a) which did not make the initial list, but which contains very thorough references to the food in the area, including on many of the specific TFPs we identified.

In terms of products, the one mentioned more often is *Pecorino della Locride*, which is present in 11 of the 36 websites we scraped. Bergamot liquor, Funghi di Giffone and Caciocavallo di Cimina’ come second and third, with 10 and 8 hits, respectively (if we exclude the “Pesca”)[6].

Discussion

The promotion of local development by enhancing sustainable tourism, in a strategy centered on traditional local agro-food products should be a promising alternative to other possible strategies for interior areas of the province of Reggio Calabria, which are facing some unfortunate resistance today.[7]

Traditional food products may represent an important resource in this respect. (Bessière and Tibere, 2013; Aloï e Borgese, 2014; Parasecoli, 2017). The specific Calabrian TFPs we have identified, however, are clearly “niche” products. While they may well constitute the main source of income for the small producers involved, their market can hardly be expanded beyond the current scale.[8] The biggest advantage of a strategy based on their valorisation should probably be found not in their mere economic value, but rather in the importance that their intimate relation with the territory has, both from a social and an environmental point of view (Aloï e Borgese, 2014). Each of these products is special, in its own way, and their promotion can only be successful if highly customized to the peculiar characteristics of each product.

Our review of the content of the web-based resources more likely to be accessed by prospective tourists interested in visiting Calabria has shown that they are not an effective vehicle to learn about these products. Reference to TFPs is too sporadic for them to be effective in attracting tourists to the specific locations. The finding reinforces the conclusion from previous literature that the web may still be underutilized as a resource to promote food tourism in rural areas (Boyne and Hall, 2004), but also highlights the importance to take into due consideration the specificities of the local context.

Individual producers of these specialties in Calabria are too small to be able to create or maintain an active marketing promotion by themselves. We expected that local institutions such as the Local Action Groups might have taken this responsibility on, and devoted attention to actions aimed at increasing the visibility of TFPs through all channels that may reach the potential demand. The fact that the websites of the three Local Action Groups (LAG) (GAL Area Grecanica, 2015b; GALBATIR, n.d.; GAL Terre Locridee, n.d.) and of the two Fishery Local Action Group (FLAG) (FLAG Jonio2, n.d., FLAG Stretto, n.d.) active in the province of Reggio Calabria did not make our initial list, is worth noticing, as these institutions are created specifically to promote development of the territories of their competence. Support to local agri-food enterprises should be central, at least when reading through their development plans (see for example, Marciandò & Romeo, 2019).

One possible reason why the LAGs websites did not appear in our searches is that, most likely, “tourism” was not included as a keyword in the websites’ metadata at the time the websites were designed. Whether this was a deliberate decision or simply the result of carelessness by the web designers, the fact remains that, if such a situation persists, these websites might fail to achieve one of their intended outcomes, namely, the promotion of their areas as potential tourism destinations. There is only one exception that might be used as an example by the others. The LAG Grecanica, through the *calabriagreca.it* website, clearly gives tourism and traditional foods a key role as one of the distinctive combinations to be used in promoting a sustainable development of the area. The current network of the LAG includes 20 operators active in the tourism industry (agro-touristic farms, Bed&Breakfast, “virtual hotels”, typical restaurants). Since 2003, it also led to the creation of an agency for the development of rural tourism that now involves most of the tourism stakeholders in the area. Among its initiatives, the agency has promoted the Paleariza Festival, which has been

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5 found to generate relevant spillovers on the local economy including through the sale of TFPs such
6 as wine, meats and cheeses.

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8 The situation is less encouraging for other LAGs and FLAGs in the province. Apart from the lack
9 of visibility in the google search, the content of websites they maintain clearly does not emphasize
10 rural tourism and traditional food products as a potential, highly synergetic combination. There are
11 signs that some of them are now finally recognizing the importance of TFPs, but these have not yet
12 been translated into concrete actions. Marketing enhancing activities, but not tourism, are included
13 in several local development plans in the area as ways to promote typical productions. The web is
14 not exploited so much as potentially feasible as a means to attract food and gastronomy tourists,
15 but rather simply as one marketing channel. The 2014-2020 action plan of the "Terre Locridee" LAG
16 foresees the creation of a territorial marketing laboratory, whose objective is to increase the
17 visibility of local food and artisan productions. The laboratory is conceived as a tool to promote
18 cooperation among local firms to push both local marketing and tourism.

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20 Part of the explanation for the different situation found in the Grecanica and the Locride can be
21 found in the different strength of the local development institutional fabric in the two areas. The
22 LAG Terre Locridee is a brand new one in the area, since the one that existed before was dismissed
23 by the Regional Authority for administrative problems. In fact, the farmers in the area barely knew
24 that a LAG existed in the area previously. On the contrary, Local Action Groups in the western side
25 of the province and in the Grecanica have been continuously operating, including in relationship
26 with the local Mediterranean University, since the end of the 1990s. Several agro-food and touristic
27 enterprises have been funded in the different cycles of the EU Leader program, the level of trust the
28 rural community maintained towards the LAGs was higher, and their activities sufficiently well-
29 known, including those related to typical food (promotion and investments of food enterprises,
30 publication of booklets of traditional recipes, national and international initiatives for the
31 promotion of local foods, etc.).

31 Conclusion

32 In closing their extensive review of the potential that wine and gastronomy tourism held for
33 Calabria, Aloi and Borgese concluded by noting the importance of designing thematic touristic
34 routes linking "the places that effectively express the spirit of the chosen themes", and "to identify,
35 along the itinerary, the most important 'stations' of wine and gastronomy tradition". They also
36 pointed that "wine and gastronomy products can play the role of flagship products for the territory,
37 that is, symbols of uniqueness and territorial identity, basic elements for creating and promoting
38 touristic brands for some of the Region's area" (Aloi and Borgese, 2014, p.177).

39 Even though something has happened since, this article has revealed that a truly local foods-
40 based gastronomy is not yet effectively used as a leverage to promote tourism in Calabria. There is
41 still a lot that could be done to fully exploit the potential embedded in the wealth of highly specific
42 traditional agri-food niche products in the province of Reggio Calabria.

43 The reflections presented here suggest that current and future local development initiatives
44 should devote more attention to traditional food products and to the intimate link between people,
45 products and places they are emblematic of. Web based strategies to communicate and to promote
46 sustainable rural tourism centred on traditional foods, are only recently starting to appear. On the
47 positive side, there is evidence that typical food products are gradually been recognized as potential
48 elements of a development strategy for the whole area, although still much is needed to build
49 effective local food value chains and to create synergies between public and private sectors.

50 This article contains useful insights for private/public partnerships interested in the
51 development of the interior areas of the province of Reggio Calabria, and some of the materials
52 developed specifically for this research are being used in other applications.

53 Despite their undoubted potential as an expression of local culture and traditions, however,
54 specific TFPs remain a relatively well-kept secret, difficult to dig-out from the still underdeveloped
55 web-based supply of gastronomy tourism information in Calabria. We hope the research presented
56 in this article may contribute, somehow, to unearth such a treasure.

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Notes

1. See Verbeke et al. (2016) for a discussion on various possible definitions of traditional food products.
2. When the proposal for inclusion of a product in the list of PATs is made, the proponent must describe its characteristics, including the area in which it is traditionally produced. Summary cards for each of the products included in the list, used to be published on a website of the Assessorato all'agricoltura of the *Regione Calabria* (www.assagri.calabria.it/qualita) and on the portal of the foodinitaly project (www.foodinitaly.com) managed by the *Fondazione Qualivita* both of which are no longer accessible, and have recently made available again through a dedicated webpage at http://portale.regione.calabria.it/website/organizzazione/dipartimento8/subsite/qualita_promozione/pat/.
3. The asterisk is used as a "jolly" character, so that the search would yield all words starting with "touris", including "tourism", "tourist", "touristic", etc. "Turis*" is used for the search of the Italian words "turismo", "turista", etc.
4. The search was conducted using a customized routine programmed by one of the authors in R. To validate the results obtained from the automatic routine, the same search was replicated manually on some of the websites.
5. Further details on the Stocco di Mammola and on the Caciocavallo di Ciminà can be found in Palladino (forthcoming).
6. In addition to being the name of a typical cake from Reggio Calabria, "pesca" also means "peach" and "fishing". This means that some of the hits our semi-automated scraping routine may have found, are actually not related to the TFP.
7. The reference is to strategies based on local integration of migrants and refugees, very effectively spearheaded by mayor Domenico "Mimmo" Lucano of Riace, one of the municipalities in our study area (see for example http://mashariazgitonga.blogspot.com/2013/10/the-tiny-italian-village-that-opened_13.html). Despite having been very effective in promoting a form of socially desirable, sustainable tourism that had successfully reversed the process of depopulation that was plaguing Riace, putting the small Calabrian town on a clear path of economic and social development, his activities have been challenged by unsupported accusations of administrative misdoing by some of his political opponents.
8. See Palladino (forthcoming) for a discussion on the marketing prospects of the Caciocavallo di Ciminà.

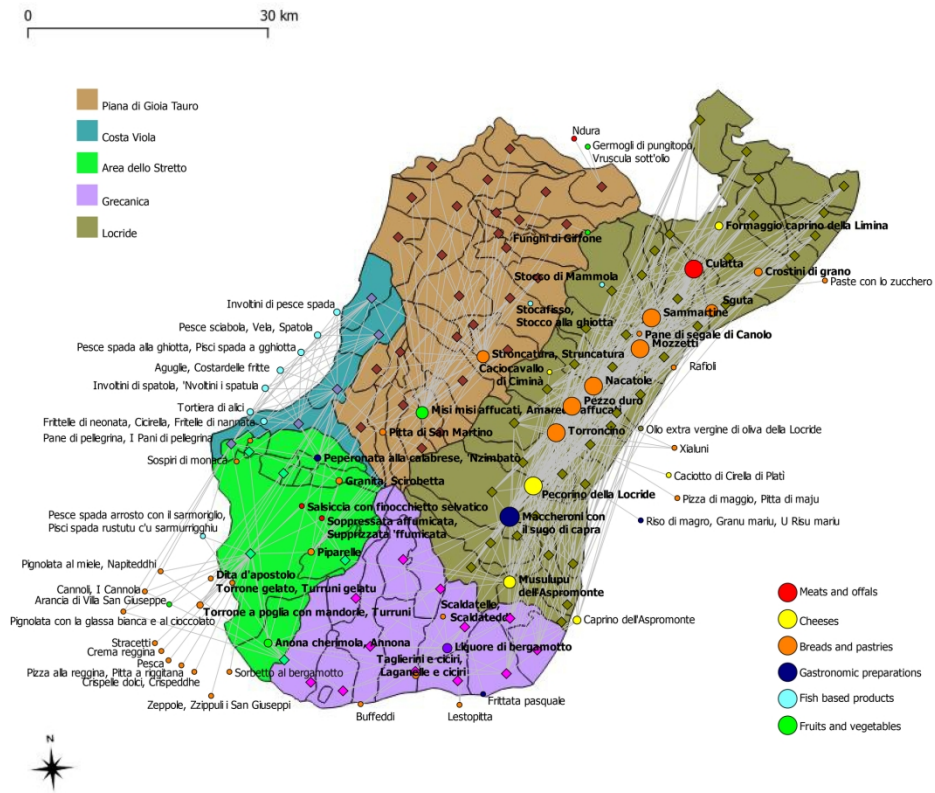
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Combined map of the study area and network of Traditional Food Products

385x307mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Figure 2: Flow-chart of website selection

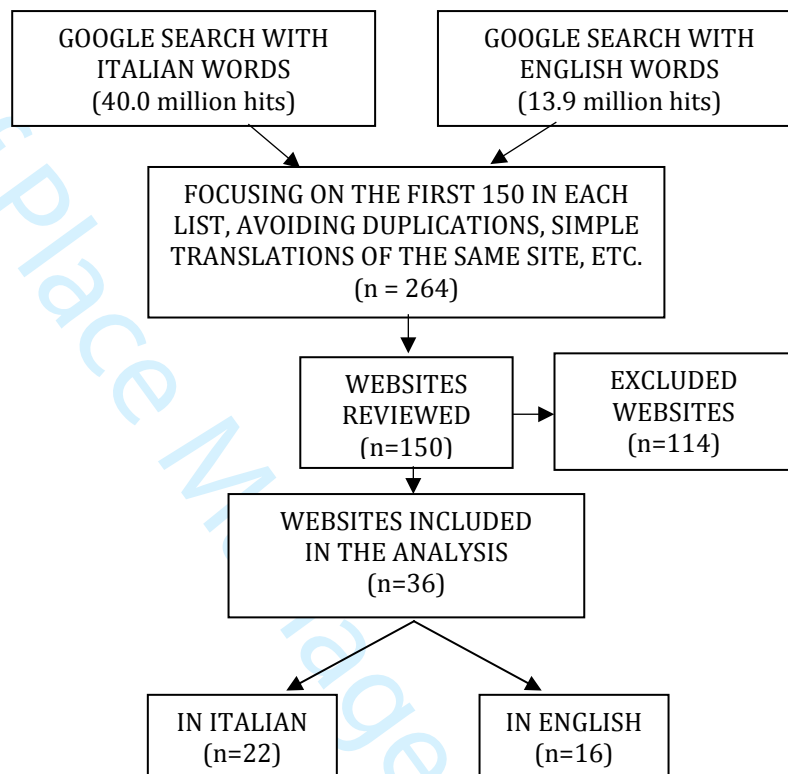


Table 1: "Specific" Traditional Food Products of the Province of Reggio Calabria, Italy

N	Name	Number of Municipalities	Area (*)	Category (**)	Number of websites that mention it
1	Liquore di bergamotto	Many	GR	D	10
2	Culatta	Many	LO	M	1
3	'Ndura	1 (San Pietro di Caridà)	GT	M	0
4	Satizza (sausage with wild fennel)	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	M	2
5	Soppressata affumicata (smoked soppressata)	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	M	3
6	Caciocavallo di Ciminà	2	LO	C	8
7	Caciotto di Cirella di Plati	1 (Plati)	LO	C	0
8	Caprino dell'Aspromonte	Many	GR, LO	C	3
9	Caprino della Limina	10	LO	C	2
10	Musulupu dell'Aspromonte	Many	GR, LO	C	2
11	Pecorino della Locride	Many	LO	C	11
12	Olio EVO della Locride	4	LO	O	5
13	Annona (<i>Anona cherimola</i>)	Many	AS, GR, LO	V	3
14	Arancia di Villa San Giuseppe	3	AS	V	5
15	Funghi di Giffone	1 (Giffone)	GT	V	8*
16	Vruscula (germogli di pungitopo) sott'olio	1 (San Pietro di Caridà)	GT	V	0
17	Misi misì or amareddi affucati	Many	GT	V	0
18	Buffeddi	3	GR	B	1
19	Cannoli	Many	AS	B	3
20	Crema reggina	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	3
21	Crispelle	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	4
22	Crostini di grano	10	LO	B	2
23	Dita d'apostolo	2	AS, CV	B	2
24	Granita or Scirobetta	5	AS, CV, GT	B	7
25	Lestopitta	1 (Bova)	GR	B	1
26	Mozzetti	Many	LO	B	0
27	Nacatole	Many	LO	B	3
28	Pane di Pellegrina	1 (Bagnara Calabra)	CV	B	2
29	Pane di segala di Canolo	1 (Canolo)	LO	B	2
30	Paste con lo zucchero	1 (Gioiosa Ionica)	LO	B	7
31	Pesca	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	10*
32	Pezzo duro	Many	LO	B	3
33	Pignolata or Napiteddhi	Many	AS	B	5
34	Pignolata bianca o al cioccolato	Many	AS	B	1
35	Piparelle	Many (Aspromonte)	AS, CV, GR, CV	B	1
36	Pitta di San Martino	9	AS, CV	B	1
37	Pitta alla reggina	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	2
38	Pitta di maju	1 (Ardore)	LO	B	5
39	Rafioli	1 (Gerace)	LO	B	1
40	Sammartine	Many	LO	B	1
41	Scaldateddi	1 (Bova)	GR	B	1
42	Sguta	Many	GR, LO	B	4
43	Sorbetto al bergamotto	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	3
44	Sospiri di monaca	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	1
45	Stracetti	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	1
46	Stroncatura	Many	GT	B	4
47	Taglierini or Laganelle and Ciciri	Many	GR	B	0
48	Torroncino	Many	LO	B	1
49	Torrone a poglia with almonds	5	AS, CV, GT	B	0
50	Torrone gelato	2	A, CV	B	1
51	Xialuni	4	LO	B	0
52	Zeppole di San Giuseppe	1 (Reggio Calabria)	AS	B	5
53	Frittata pasquale	1	GR	P	1
54	Maccheroni with goat sauce	Many	AS, GR, LO	P	5
55	Peperonata or 'Nzimatò	Many	CV, GT	P	0
56	Riso di magro	1 (Bovalino)	GR	P	2
57	Aguglie or costardelle, fried	5	CV	F	2
58	Frittelle di neonata	5	CV	F	0
59	Involtini di pesce spada	5	CV	F	4
60	Involtini di sciabola	5	Cv	F	1
61	Pesce sciabola	5	CV	F	1
62	Pescespada alla ghiotta	5	CV	F	3
63	Pescespada arrosto with salmoriglio	Many	AS	F	4
64	Stocco alla ghiotta	2	GT, LO	F	0
65	Stocco di Mammola	1	LO	F	5
66	Tortiera di alici	5	CV	F	1

(*) AS = Area dello Stretto; GR = Grecanica; LO = Locride; CV = Costa Viola; GT = Piana di Gioia Tauro

(**) D = Drinks; M = Meats and offals; V = Vegetables; O = Oils and fats; B = Breads, pastries and sweets; P = prepared dishes; F = Fishes (including seafoods and fish-based preparations)

Table 2. List of the websites analyzed for this research.

Website	Relevance given to food	Ranking of food as a leverage	Number of hits when searching for TFPs
A) Italian			
<i>Institutional</i>			
turismo.provincia.rc.it/	HIGH	2	4
www.turiscalabria.it/	MED	2	10
www.parcosapromonte.gov.it/	MED	2	0
turismo.reggiocal.it/	LOW	3	14
www.italia.it/it/scopri-litalia/calabria.html	LOW-MED	2	0
www.comuni-italiani.it/18/turismo.html	NONE		0
<i>Private - linked to commercial entities</i>			
www.tropea.biz	HIGH	?	13
www.kalabrien.biz/turismo.html	HIGH	1	1
www.visitcalabria.it	HIGH	2	31
www.reggiocalabriaturismo.it/	HIGH	2	5
www.turismo.it/italia/scheda/calabria/	HIGH	?	3
www.vacanzecalabresi.it	MED-HIGH	3	0
www.vacanzeincalabria.it/	LOW	?	29
calabria.italiaguida.it/	LOW	3	4
www.calabriatours.org	LOW	3	4
www.turismoincalabria.it/	VERY LOW	3	13
calabria.jblasa.com/turismo/	VERY LOW	2	8
www.paesionline.it/italia/guida-calabria	VERY LOW	3	0
www.ilturista.info/destinazioni/calabria/italia/	NONE		0
<i>Private - community based</i>			
www.scoprilacalabria.com/	MED	3	2
it.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Calabria	LOW-MED	2	1
it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calabria	NONE		2
B) English			
<i>Institutional</i>			
www.italiantourism.com/calabria.html	NONE		0
<i>Private - commercial</i>			
traveltips.usatoday.com/tourism-calabria-italy-56337.html	LOW-MED	2	0
www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/calabria	VERY LOW	3	0
travelguide.michelin.com/europe/italy/calabria/	NONE		0
<i>Private - community based</i>			
roadsandkingdoms.com/2018/know-before-you-go-to-calabria/	MED	NA	0
www.cntraveler.com/stories/2015-03-29/rise-of-calabria-rediscovering-the-south-of-italy	MED	2	0
en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Calabria	MED	1	0
wikitravel.org/en/Calabria	LOW-MED	2	0
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calabria	LOW-MED	3	4
www.italyheaven.co.uk/calabria/index.html	LOW	3	0
www.wanderingitaly.com/maps/calabria.html	LOW	3	1
ecobnb.com/blog/2016/06/calabria-jacurso-responsible-tourism/	VERY LOW	3	0
www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/travellers-guide-calabria-8027438.html	VERY LOW	NA	0
www.viajandoparaacalabria.com/	NONE	3	3