

**IS IT WORTH BEING INSCRIBED IN THE  
WORLD HERITAGE LIST?  
A CASE STUDY OF  
“THE BAROQUE CITIES IN VAL DI NOTO” (SICILY)**

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## **1. Introduction**

The World Heritage List (WHL) was established by the UNESCO Convention with regard to the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage, was signed in 1972, and entered into force in 1977. From this year on, an increasing number of monuments and natural and cultural sites were inscribed in the WHL. Quite a strong competition among the States Parties has risen to include a piece of their own heritage in the List. Some studies show that the “outstanding universal value” required to be included in the WHL has been preferably recognized to be Western heritage, mainly European sites, and some empirical evidence tries to explain the most significant determinants of the World Heritage Listing (Frey and Pamini, 2009; Bertacchini and Saccone, 2010). The UNESCO Commission is aware of the unequal distribution of the global heritage covered by protection and in the updated Guidelines for the inscription in the WHL (2011), it introduces some priorities that favor a more balanced global distribution of the heritage covered by its protection.

UNESCO recognizes the universal value of the heritage that preserves as well as promotes its sustainable valorization. The promotion of cultural heritage can be a driver of economic development. As the World Heritage Committee says in the Budapest Declaration on World Heritage (2002), “*we will seek to ensure an appropriate and equitable balance between conservation, sustainability and development, so that World Heritage properties can be protected through appropriate activities contributing to the social and economic development and the quality of life of our communities.*”

In the case of serial sites, which embrace different destinations sharing a common culture testified by their tangible and intangible heritage, UNESCO seems to go further by suggesting the local development model that the sites in the WHL should follow. In the case of Val di Noto, UNESCO approves the institution of a cultural district (Santagata, 2002; Scott, 2004).

There is at the same time national and international competition that is inscribed in the WHL: a national economic interest for the inclusion of a large part of the

national heritage in the WHL, and a local economic interest for what national sites have to be selected for the nomination at the UNESCO World Commission. Local policy makers compete with each other, because they suppose that the highest and the most immediate economic impact of the inscription of a site in the WHL is at the local level where the site is located. The inclusion of a site in the WHL becomes a quality certification of its cultural relevance, and the right to adopt the UNESCO trademark becomes a way to differentiate the local area in the market of tourism destinations and to attract specific segments of tourism demand that are more interested in cultural heritage. Different economic reasons can move the local policy makers to start a quite long procedure and a two-level competition to inscribe a site in the WHL: a genuine interest in new strategies for local development based on tangible and intangible expressions of the local culture and the research of political consensus.

In this article, we discuss the effectiveness of the UNESCO listings in the preservation of the WHL and in the promotion of a local development model based on tourism attractiveness. We follow a recent line of research (Jimura, 2010) that is focused on a case study concerning the World Heritage Sites (WHS). We study the case of a serial site, “The Baroque cities in Val di Noto,” in Sicily. It represents a new kind of protected site; it is not a single monument or an archaeological site; rather, it is an architectural style that characterizes the historical private and public buildings, and, notably, the churches of the historical centers located in eight Sicilian municipalities in Val di Noto (VdN), an ancient geographical denomination of the South Est of Sicily. The valorization of this kind of a site involves a large number of local actors who should act in coordination and establish a “cultural district.”

The rest of this article is as follows. In the First Section, we describe the pros and cons involved while including a site in the WHL, considering the present characteristics of the WHL, the UNESCO priorities reported in the Guidelines, and the limited enforcement power of UNESCO. In the Second Section, we introduce the different concepts of a cultural district that are adopted in the literature and the strength of this model in a positive and normative economic approach. In the Third Section, we provide some data concerning the economic situation of VdN, which is our case study.

The Fourth and Fifth Sections deal with the economic impact of the inclusion in the WHL on the creative industries and tourism activity, respectively. We focus on the seasonality of tourism flows, because we assume that cultural tourism, which should be more attracted by a World Heritage Site (WHS), is less seasonal compared with the other niches of tourism. The Sixth Section offers some comments on governance and policy issues that concern not only the specific case study but also the role which an international organization, such as UNESCO,

plays in the local development process. The main conclusions are gathered in the Final Section.

## 2. Pros and cons of inscription in the WHL

In 1977, when the UNESCO Convention with regard to the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage entered into force, it was signed by twenty States. Nowadays, the States that adhere to the Convention are 188. Out of these 188 States, 153 States have at least one cultural site in the WHL: there are States Parties that have not had any site included as yet in the WHL. Nowadays, the WHL comprehends 936 sites: most of them are cultural sites (7256 equal to 77%); natural sites count for 20%; and mixed sites (cultural and natural) account for the remaining 3%. A large part of the sites in the WHL are located in Europe and North America, which is 48%: more precisely, 53% of the cultural sites and 32% of the natural sites.

These data show the unbalanced distribution of the UNESCO protection which can be explained both by the history of the Convention itself, and the different time each State adhered to it, and by the UNESCO experts' orientation and their idea of culture as western culture, based on ancient human expressions testified by historical buildings, churches, and archeological sites. The unbalanced distribution contributes to a reduction in the WHL credibility (Frey and Steiner, 2010). UNESCO is trying to correct this bias: in the Guidelines of the WHL (2011), priority is given to the cultural sites located in a State that has not yet had any WHS. Another priority recently introduced in the Guidelines, in favor of serial sites, as "The Baroque cities in Val di Noto," and trans-boundary sites, makes the conservation and valorization process more difficult, as more actors are involved. The solutions adopted by UNESCO could not be right, because the more UNESCO extends the Listing, the less UNESCO is really able to protect the World Heritage. The scarcity of resources, on which UNESCO can count, and its weak enforcement power, testified by the only two cases of de-accessioning from the WHL<sup>1</sup>, are other signs of weakness. Therefore, we could argue that the longer the WHL is, the smaller is the importance of the inscription in terms of the historical and artistic value of the site and the economic impact on the local area. The weaknesses should be compared with the strengths that the States Parties evaluate when they present a nomination. They ask for help to preserve heritage, which consists of technical assistance and funding in cases of emergency. An increasing part of the World

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<sup>1</sup>The countryside around Dresden in Germany and the Sanctuary in Oman; the two sites were deleted, respectively, because of the urban development and the discovery of oil in the site.

Heritage is located in countries where the domestic policy has to be focused on other priorities, such as health or education, and the local population is often unaware of the historic and artistic importance of the local heritage. Conservation is not the only goal of the State Parties. Especially for cultural sites that are still appreciated only at the local level, the inscription in the WHL can represent a way of becoming more well known at the national and international level. This notoriety can attract private funds from donors and investors who believe in the tourism development of the area surrounding the WHS. National legislations can also give priority to the WHS in the access to public funds for restoration and maintenance interventions.

The main economic positive impact should come from the increased interest and attractiveness not only for local residents but also for tourists. Some recent empirical studies estimate that there is a positive relationship between the number of sites a country inscribed in the WHL and the international tourism arrivals (Yang et al. 2010), and the long-term economic growth (Arezki et al., 2009). However, the results of the empirical evidence are not univocal, and the debate is still open (Cellini, 2010). In extreme cases, we could have the opposite result: the inscription in the WHL could stimulate such an interest and attractiveness for tourists that congestion phenomena can arise and threaten the conservation and the sustainable valorization of the site (Jimura, 2010). Even if a monitoring process of the sites in the WHL is required by the UNESCO procedure, the low enforcement power of UNESCO cannot completely avoid the congestion phenomena in the WHSs.

The intangible value of the UNESCO trademark is probably the main reason of competing for the inscription. The inscription in the WHL can be considered a quality certification that allows the site and the surrounding area to adopt a collective trademark for differentiation in the market of tourism destinations. However, more sites use this trademark, less the average quality of the heritage certified (Santagata and Cuccia, 2004), and less productive the trademarks are in terms of tourism attractiveness.

Therefore, UNESCO should not cover such a large number of sites on which it is not able to play an effective supervision role *ex-post* on how the conservation and valorization plans of the site are going on; local policy makers should be concerned with the fact that including their own cultural heritage in the WHL is just the beginning and not the final step of a project of local development and this should be based on the cultural district model.

### 3. Cultural districts: a positive or normative model?

The vast literature on the districts as an endogenous model of local development starts with the well-known Marshallian definition of the industrial district, in the late nineteenth century, passes through the Italian experience in manufacture, described and monitored by Becattini (1989) since the 1970s, and arrives to the present times, with attention paid to several specifications of the term *district*: cultural district, tourism district, and so on.

The common element of the different definitions is the presence of a network of small and medium enterprises, more or less horizontally and vertically integrated, localized in a specific area, that compete and cooperate at the same time. In an industrial district, these enterprises share the same industrial specialization. In the cultural and tourism districts, the enterprises produce different types of goods and services that satisfy the residents' and tourists' demands of culture and leisure. The geographical location is an essential element: the firms are established in a certain geographical area where they can share local inputs that are essential to production. The importance of these inputs depends on the stock of idiosyncratic tangible and intangible cultural capital they contain. The boundaries of the district are marked by the presence of the common cultural capital.

Specifically, the definition of cultural districts is quite recent. According to Scott (2004), they are still industrial districts oriented to temporary and permanent cultural productions. The cultural capital can be embedded in tangible cultural goods (books, movies, records, and contemporary art paintings) produced on an industrial scale and in temporary events (exhibitions, performing arts, etc.). The closeness between the producers and consumers of cultural goods contributes to the creative atmosphere in the metropolitan area, which facilitates the innovation pace (Florida, 2002). The industrial origin seems to be an essential element and an essential step in developing a cultural district.

Differently, according to the taxonomy of Santagata (2002), the industrial origin characterizes only a few types of cultural districts: the "industrial cultural district", where the cultural roots of the traditional Marshallian manufacturing district specialization are underlined, and the "metropolitan cultural district", which consists of the concentration of the cultural institutions in urban areas. In the other two types of cultural districts distinguished by Santagata (2002), the industrial specialization and the industrial organization system of production could not be present: the "institutional cultural district", characterized by ancient localized productions based on the transformation of agriculture inputs and/or on the traditional skills of artisans, and the "museum cultural district", where the role played by the public and private actors involved in the conservation of the local cultural heritage is essential.

Both the mentioned models of cultural districts can be interpreted according to a positive and a normative approach. A large part of the literature mainly adopts a positive approach: through an inductive process, starting from the description of a specific case study, it describes the local development process and its determinants. A normative approach changes the view: it is prescriptive and aims at promoting a local process of endogenous growth, supporting the adoption of a district model in those areas where *in nuce* at least some of the characteristics of a district are present, while other characteristics can be reinforced. Policy makers or consultants should be concerned with the significance of the structural change, and, more specifically, with the industrial development stage, to develop a cultural district (Scott, 2004). A central question should be, Can a cultural district be implemented where the local culture is only testified by the heritage and the intangible capital used for the transformation of primary inputs or for the production of art and crafts?

In the case of VdN, for example, the cultural heritage is located in an area where the local economy is still based on agriculture and handcraft; an industrial specialization was never present: Can we say that a cultural district can never exist and creative small enterprises cannot be inspired by this cultural atmosphere?

In this article, we present the case study of Val di Noto (VdN) by following the line of literature which recognizes that a creative environment can exist even in rural and extra-urban areas (McGranahan, 2010; Lorenzini, 2010) and partially amend the idea that VdN cannot be considered a cultural district (Le Blanc, 2010).

#### **4. The case study: “The Baroque cities in Val di Noto”**

Val di Noto (VdN) is one of the three areas based on which ancient Sicily was geographically divided, and it is located in the South East of Sicily.

After the disruptive earthquake in 1693, most of the cities of VdN were re-built while sharing the same architectural style –the Baroque– that had been adopted in the reconstruction of private, noble buildings and churches. In 2002, the peculiarity of this local expression of the Baroque style, its uniqueness, and vulnerability allowed the inscription in the WHL. It represented the first case of an inscription in the WHL of a serial site that involved in the UNESCO procedure eight municipalities adhering to three different provinces<sup>2</sup>. The complexity of the site, that is, the difficulties involved in co-ordinating a common policy for the

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<sup>2</sup>Provinces are the intermediate level of local government in Italy between Municipalities and Region. The municipalities of Noto and Palazzolo Acreide are located in the Province of Siracusa; Catania, Caltagirone, and Militello are located in the Province of Catania; Ragusa, Modica, and Scicli are located in the Province of Ragusa.

preservation and valorization of the site among the large number of local policy makers involved, contributed toward innovating the UNESCO procedure. The presentation of a Management Plan (MP) was made compulsory in order to participate in the selection for the inscription in the List. The MP should state the main lines of the coordinated strategies for all the local subjects involved. Moreover, a periodical monitoring procedure should be followed. We will focus on these issues in Fourth Section.

In the next paragraph, the main socioeconomic characteristics of VdN are briefly described, and we focus on the cultural endowments. This very essential picture that we are about to present can help in an understanding of the starting point based on which we can evaluate the local economic impact of the institutions of the UNESCO site and whether pre-conditions exist in creating a cultural district.

#### *4.1. The socioeconomic framework of the VdN*

VdN is located in Sicily, in the Southern part of Italy, where the GDP per capita is structurally lower than the national average. However, if we compare the economic data registered in VdN with the regional and national data, some positive signals can be found that express a better local entrepreneurship. In 2009, in the Provinces of VdN, the rate of unemployment was lower than in Sicily (respectively, 11,4% in Catania, 8,9% in Ragusa, and 8,5% in Siracusa against 13,9% in Sicily) but higher than in Italy (7,8%); since 2002, in VdN, the economic performance, measured by the annual variation of the GDP per capita, has been better, in some years, than the national one, even if the structural gap has not been radically reduced. The main share of GDP comes from the service sector and, specifically, from the Public Administration (Unioncamere, 2010). A relevant role is also played by the primary sector: the percentage of GDP coming from agriculture in the Provinces of Ragusa and Siracusa is higher than the national percentage, respectively, 8.7% and 5.3%, versus 2.0% in Italy. Agriculture still plays a relevant role in the local economy both in quantitative and mainly in qualitative terms: many typical Mediterranean products cultivated in respect of the idiosyncratic material culture are *niche* products that received national certification of high-quality products (i.e. denomination of origin, geographical indication). The value added from the industry is significant only in the Province of Siracusa (22.4%) thanks to the contribution of the petrochemical plants located in an area of the provincial territory not included in the VdN site. No significant experience of the industrial district can be found in VdN.

The main weakness, especially in view of a local development model based on cultural heritage and tourism, is the chronic scarcity of transport infrastructure compared with the national average, as made clear by Table 1 on the basis of

relevant index numbers.

**Table 1** – *Infrastructural endowment: Index numbers.*

	Roads	Railways	Airports	Ports	Total
Catania	63.6	52.3	113.4	207.3	76.4
Ragusa	44.9	17.7	11.9	84.7	24.8
Siracusa	49.2	65.8	16.8	351.5	43.9
Italy	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *Unioncamere (2006)*.

#### 4.2. *The cultural heritage endowment*

The VdN cultural heritage can be divided into two main categories: the tangible and intangible heritage. The tangible heritage consists of architectural and naturalistic endowment; the intangible heritage consists of historical events and religious representations of anthropological interest and of the common knowledge transmitted generation by generation, which is the fundamental input of the localized high-quality production.

The first MP prepared for the inscription in the WHL (*Consorzio Civita, 2002*) consists of 134 units of the tangible heritage in VdN; more than 80% consists of historical buildings (i.e. churches, religious buildings, and noble residences); and the remaining part consists of naturalistic sites. A study, reported in a second MP (*Mecenate, 2005*) commissioned after the inscription in the WHL to stimulate the start-up of the cultural district, shows that all the buildings of historical and artistic interest were known and catalogued, and their conservation improved after the UNESCO certification. However, all these initiatives and the restorations that followed were financed by public funds established before the formal inscription in the WHL. No relation can be found with the UNESCO recognition; the restoration works are based on emergencies (i.e. 1990 earthquake) and realized with large delays. After the UNESCO recognition, no initiatives focusing on the conservation and valorization of the UNESCO heritage have been proposed yet by a coordinated action of the policy makers of VdN.

Another important component of the tangible heritage is represented by museums' endowment. Comparing the data on the museum density per area (Km-sq) with inhabitants in the municipalities of VdN, in Sicily and in Italy (Table 2), we realize that the museum density is higher in VdN than at the regional and national levels.



**Table 2** – *Museum density per area and inhabitants.*

	area (Km-sq)	Inhabitants (thousands)	Museums	Museums/ Km-sq	Museums/ 5.000 inhabitants
VdN	2.134	537.561	45	0.02	0.42
Sicilia	25.708	5.003.262	174	0.01	0.17
Italia	301.401	57.888.245	3.230	0.01	0.28

Source: *Mecenate '90 (2005)*.

Out of the 45 museums in VdN, 34 are public (16 pertain to the municipalities; only 2 pertain to the Sicilian Region), and 11 are private (the largest part pertains to the Catholic Church). The different ownership of the museum affects their governance and can negatively influence the design of a coordinated action for their promotion (i.e. extending their opening hours), because it involves public and private operators that have different contractual constraints.

Generally, the ownership and the characteristics of the cultural heritage can be a problem for any preservation and valorization program in VdN. The large presence of churches devoted to their traditional religious function did not find the religious authorities prompt enough to introduce other forms of cultural fruition that could require an extension of their opening hours; the fragmented ownership on the properties of the urban historical centers requires the participation of the larger part of the residents in a project of restoration and re-generation of the whole area that aims at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants and at attracting sustainable tourism flows.

In VdN, this kind of initiative has been more effective in those municipalities (Caltagirone, Scicli, and Ragusa) where the projects of urban planning were more advanced and the instrument of the Urban Plan (*Piano Regolatore*) had been already adopted by the local policy makers. It is worth underlining that the MP approved by UNESCO in the selection process of the site was (and is) not binding, even if a monitoring process of the implementation of the projects designed in the Plan is periodically required. Thus, the realization of the planned projects is quite different across the municipalities.

## 5. The economic impact on the creative industries of VdN

To estimate the local economic impact of the inscription in the WHL on the creative industries, we adopt a definition of creativity as *a means* and not as *a goal* of the production process (Santagata, 2009). In the creative industries, we comprehend the production of goods and services that are directly and indirectly connected to the valorization of the cultural heritage. Therefore, we include both

the production of the cultural industries (i.e. publishing, audiovisual, multimedia, etc.) and the production of more traditional sectors, as restoring and renovating buildings, agro-industries, and the supply of tourism services. We can assume that in Italy, where the cultural heritage is spread all over the territory and located in small towns, the creative process for the valorization of cultural heritage is founded on the recovery and the innovative application of the idiosyncratic skills that satisfy the changing preferences of a demand more interested in experiences than in goods and services (Richards, 2011).

Table 3 provides some data on the enterprises and the employment in some critical creative sectors in VdN. We consider as creative sectors both a *stricto sensu* creative sector (“publishing, printing and reproduction”) and the three sectors (“Non metalliferous ore processing”, “Wood processing”, and “Furniture, jewellery and musical instruments manufacturing”)<sup>3</sup> included in the class called *Building and Requalification*, which can be considered *creative* according to the wider definition adopted in this study. The building restoration and requalification activities are mainly interested in Ragusa, and have a positive impact in terms of the number of enterprises in the sector (+15.8%); the negative trend in the employment (-3.3%) is less severe as compared with the regional and national trends (respectively -13.5 and -18.1%). A larger increase in publishing enterprises has been registered in Catania (+9.9%) and confirms that this kind of creative activity better develops in the urban centers with a larger dimension.

**Table 3 - Enterprises and employment in creative industries (%variation, 2000-06).**

	“Building- Requalification” Enterprises	“Building- Requalification” Employees	Publishing Enterprises	Publishing Employees
Catania	3.5	-8.8	9.9	-6.4
Ragusa	15.8	-3.3	-0.9	-14
Siracusa	0.2	-20.1	4.2	-20
VdN	4.8	-9.6	7.2	-10.4
Sicily	5.1	-13.5	10.1	-14
Italy	1.3	-18.1	3.3	-22-7

Source: *Our computations on data provided by Unioncamere (2010).*

Restoration and regeneration interventions conducted on the cultural heritage benefit the buildings of historical and artistic interest and the local real estate market. An increasing demand of apartments, in the historical centers, and country houses, in the typical countryside, comes from national and international potential buyers, and someone speaks about a new “Chiantishire”, evoking what happened in

<sup>3</sup>The economic sectors are defined according to the ISTAT (ATECO 2002) Classification. The detail of the analysis is 3–4 digits.

Tuscany. However, this phenomenon cannot be easily quantified. If we take the Real Estate Intensity Index<sup>4</sup> values, we can realize that the VdN real estate market is more dynamic than the regional market but still far from the national performance. Hence, we can affirm that the private real estate market has been positively affected by the recovery of the cultural heritage in the historical centers and by the urban regeneration process that should usually be followed.

### 5.1. *Effects on intangible culture*

In VdN, there is a deep stratification of localized know-how that passes on generation by generation through the transmission of the production techniques of the main everyday life products: food, wine, art and crafts, and manufactures. Some local entrepreneurs in traditional economic sectors (i.e. agriculture, handcraft manufacturing) are aware of this intangible cultural capital and of the value added that it can give to their productions; they developed some *niche* cultivations (i.e. tomatoes, grapes, carobs, almonds) and agro-industry productions (i.e. oil, wine and cheese) which received national-quality denomination (i.e. Controlled Origin Denomination (Doc), controlled and guarantee origin denomination (Docg), and denomination of the place of origin (Dop).

The recent awareness of the mutual benefit that the intangible capital, used for the local-quality production, and the tangible capital, represented by the Baroque cultural heritage, can have as tourism attractors is at the origin of many local promotion events. The denomination of these events that involves local enterprises of typical high-quality products and cultural operators (i.e. Baroque Slow, Baroque Festival, and Baroque Week) testifies the design of the local tourism development model that has been adopted. The organization of these events that involve entrepreneurs of different local economic sectors could be considered a positive signal toward the implementation of a cultural district. However, a large part of these events are organized only occasionally by single municipalities of VdN, in the summer season, and no coordinated action among the municipalities of VdN is implemented. The only exception is the “Baroque Train”, a special tourist train trip that passes through ancient railways in the VdN landscape, every summer since 2005 (it was planned in the first MP).

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<sup>4</sup>This index estimated by the National Agency of the Territory (*Agenzia del Territorio*, 2009) annually measures the ratio of the number of normalized transactions (weighted to the quota of properties on sale) and the stock of estate properties counted in the province.

## 6. The impact on tourism activity

According to our broad definition of the *creative industry*, cultural tourism can be well included in creative industries, as it uses culture as a fundamental input of its production process. Cultural tourism has many definitions, and some definitions do not allow to distinguish itself from any other tourism experience where tourists visit a place that is beyond their own living environment (ICOMOS, 2002). If it is difficult to define cultural tourism, and it is more difficult to estimate it. It is commonly assumed that the cultural tourism flows are characterized by a lower level of seasonality compared with other segments of tourism demand, as the main scope of cultural tourists is visiting the cultural heritage and knowing new ways of life. On the basis of this assumption, the pattern of the seasonality of the overnight stays might indirectly help estimate the presence of cultural tourist flows in the WHS and the effectiveness of the UNESCO certification; the lower the seasonality of the tourist flows, the higher the segment of cultural tourists and the effectiveness of the UNESCO WHL inscription should be.

However, the increase of the tourism flows greatly depends on the availability of an adequate accommodation capacity in the tourism destinations selected. Otherwise, the visitors of the cultural sites are just excursionists, and their presence will have a lower impact on the local economy, if not a negative effect (i.e. congestion). Therefore, before deepening the analysis on the demand side, it is better to investigate what happens on the supply side, that is, with regard to the accommodation infrastructures, in the municipalities of VdN during the period around the inscription in the WHL (2000–2006).

### 6.1. The accommodation capacity

Data from ISTAT, the Italian Statistical Office on the accommodation structures in seven out of eight municipalities of VdN<sup>5</sup>, show that, in the two years considered (2000 and 2006), in VdN, the number of beds has increased much more than in Sicily and in Italy (respectively +118% compared with + 37 and +15 %, see Table 4).

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<sup>5</sup> In this section and in the next one, we do not include the data on the municipality of Catania, as, in our opinion, at the moment, tourism in Catania mainly presents the characteristics of business tourism and not of cultural tourism (see, Cellini and Cuccia, 2007). These characteristics are not relevant to the aim of this study.

**Table 4** - Number of beds in hotel and extra hotel (% variation, 2000-06).

	Hotel (%)	Extra-hotel (%)	Total (%)
VdN	+47	+1.393	+118
Sicily	+38	+36	+37
Italy	+13	+17	+15

Source: Istat, various years.

The impressive percentage variations registered in VdN are derived from the very low absolute number of beds counted in some interior municipalities in the initial period and the astonishing increase in the number of beds in extra hotels, particularly in Bed and Breakfast (B&B) (+1.393%). In absolute value, we now count 12.794 beds in VdN (approximately one third in extra hotels, 4.629); they are mainly located in the municipalities close to the coast where the “sun and sea” attractiveness is very strong.

The diffusion of B&B –a recent phenomenon in Italy, as compared with other European countries– is striking. B&B are mainly located in the historical centers; some of them are located in ancient and noble private apartments whose costs of preservation and maintenance are so high that the private owners cannot allow them to be used as their private residence and instead prefer to partially change their use, offering this kind of temporary hospitality. They are usually managed by local family businesses and in order to enhance their positive impact on the local economy, higher efforts of coordination are required.

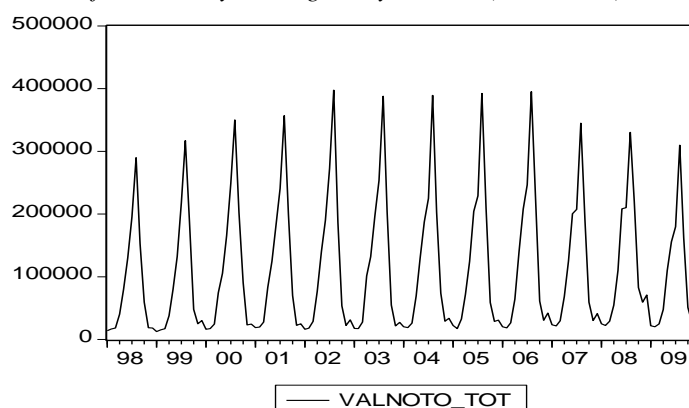
## 6.2. The tourism flows

The analysis is focused on the monthly overnight stays in VdN during the period 1998–2009; we consider the data registered in the statistical units that compound VdN<sup>6</sup>. At a first glance (Fig.1), we observe that in the years immediately preceding the official inscription in WHL (2002), the tourism incoming flow (as measured by overnight stays) has been sharply increasing; it was maintained rather stable in 2002–06; and started slightly decreasing afterwards. A more disaggregated analysis (the data are available on demand) shows that all the destinations of VdN, located along the coast, show the largest number of stays, with a higher

<sup>6</sup>The statistical units considered in the analysis of the tourism presence in VdN are as follows: Siracusa APT, which comprehends the Province of Siracusa where the municipalities of Noto and Piazza Armerina are located but not the main city of Siracusa; the Province of Ragusa, which includes the main city of Ragusa, the municipalities of Modica and Scicli, and the other municipalities of the province; and the unit of Caltagirone, where the municipalities of Caltagirone, Militello, and other small municipalities of the area are included. Catania is not considered for the same reasons explained in Note 5.

concentration of the stays in the summer season and, particularly, in August: the sun and sea seem to attract more than culture, but, in fact, we cannot dismiss the idea that sun and sea and cultural tourism could be complements.

**Figure 1** - Pattern of the monthly overnight stays in VdN (1998-2009).



If we compare the pattern of the monthly overnight stays in VdN with the corresponding regional and national data, measuring the variation of the average monthly overnights stays during the period 1998–2006, we observe that in VdN, the increase is higher than in the Sicilian region and in Italy (+43% compared with +29.6 and 19.9%, respectively, in Sicily and in Italy –see Table 5). We choose 2006 as the final year for the comparison, as we suppose that the decreasing pattern in the presence registered in VdN since 2007 depends more on exogenous negative shocks, as the worldwide macroeconomic crisis that generally negatively influences the trends observed in the tourism sector.

**Table 5** - Monthly overnights during the period 1998-2006.

	Average 1998	Average 2006	% Var
VdN	86.213	123.294	+43,0%
Sicily	933.705	1.210.727	+29,6%
Italy	24.959.032	29.925.875	+19,9%

*Note:* Computations on ISTAT data.

To know more about the cultural tourism flows in VdN, we focus the analysis on the seasonality of the overnight stays, based on the assumption that cultural tourists are less seasonal than sun and sea tourists.

Seasonality is a common characteristic of the tourism market that depends on both the demand side and its institutional constraints (i.e. holiday planning, school

holiday, working timetables, etc.) and the supply side (i.e. the particular geographical and climate characteristics of the destinations). As already mentioned, in VdN tourism, flows are concentrated in the summer season, due to the coasts and the seaside attractiveness. In these years, reducing seasonality becomes a priority of the local tourism development strategies that foster positive impacts and reduce the management costs of the tourism public and private services (Rossellò et al., 2004; Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011). De-seasoning can be pursued in VdN by promoting cultural tourism, and the UNESCO certification could favor this kind of tourism.

Seasonality can be measured in different ways (for a review of the literature, see Lundtorp, 2001). Here, we provide the statistics from the Census-X-12-ARIMA procedure; in particular, some tests are conducted on the significance of seasonality and the stability of seasonal factors across the years (moving seasonality) – see Table 6.

**Table 6 - Tests on seasonality conducted on the time series of the tourism overnight stays .**

	1. F-Test on seasonality (F(11,96))	2. K-Test on seasonality K(11)	3. F-Test on moving seasonality (F(8,88))
VdN	F=1110,68*	K=104,24 <sup>#</sup>	F=0,90
Sicily	F=2160,14*	K=105,4 <sup>#</sup>	F=5,56 <sup>§</sup>
Italy	F=2876,63*	K=93,68 <sup>#</sup>	F=1,65

*Notes:* Column (1) reports a F test on the null that the variance across months is equal to the residual variance: starred values lead to reject the null (i.e., seasonality is significant) at the 0,1% significance level. Column (2) reports the Kruskal-Wallis test on the equality of median values across months: values with # lead to reject the equality of median values, at the 0,1% significance level. Column (3) reports the F test on the stability of seasonal factors over years: the value marked by § is the unique case in which the null is rejected (at the 5% significance level), indicating that seasonal factors are moving over time; more specifically, their variability has increased (min-max passed from 0,29-2,35 in the starting year to 0,26-2,50 in the final year).

According to the considered tests, the seasonality of the overnight stays during the period 1998–2009 is significant, in both Italy and Sicily and in VdN (as well as in each considered unit of the VdN, with the exception of Catania, which is not considered in the analysis for the reasons previously mentioned). The F test on moving seasonality and the seasonal factor values indicate that the seasonal variability has increased in Sicily but not in Italy and in VdN (see Note of Table 6).

To summarize, we can affirm that the UNESCO certification of VdN has definitely contributed to the increase of the tourism flows in the area, along with a concurrent increase of the establishments in the area stimulated by the positive expectations pertaining to the demand and the public financing support. However,

these higher flows have maintained a significant seasonal pattern. We could conclude by saying that the UNESCO certification is not able to attract tourists whose unique interest is culture and, consequently, it is not able to reduce the seasonality of the tourism flows; however, the UNESCO certification has been able to stabilize the pattern of seasonality, whereas the degree of seasonality of tourism in Sicily has increased.

## **7. Governance and policy issues**

The establishment of a cultural district according to the procedure followed in VdN gives rise to two main governance issues: the first one concerns the vertical fragmentation of the functions among different layers of government involved (i.e. international, national, local) that can overlap; the other concerns the horizontal coordination of the single municipalities of VdN.

As to the first issue, the UNESCO procedure for the inscription of a cultural site in the WHL does not finish at the time of the inscription with the approval of the MP of the site; it continues with a periodical check of the implementation of the Plan (every six years). It is absolutely reasonable that UNESCO periodically checks the state of the World Heritage Sites (WHS) and threatens to strike off the list the WHS that are neglected by the local authorities. It is absolutely right that UNESCO intervenes in case of emergency, devoting its scarce resources toward recovering an abandoned WHS. It is much more difficult to believe that an international organization, such as UNESCO, could be effective in monitoring the valorization plans of the WHS implemented by the local policy makers. The cultural district model proposed in the MP of VdN and approved by UNESCO can be easily disregarded by the local policy makers without running any risk. After the inscription in the WHL, UNESCO can give advice, but it cannot impose any behavior to local authorities. Moreover, the advisory function of UNESCO could be disputable. The UNESCO's advice could be considered an outside interference in the local planning of WHS.

The distance from UNESCO and the WHS can be reduced by the intervention of the national layers of government involved in the management of cultural heritage. In Italy, the national UNESCO division of the Ministry of Culture (Mibac) selects the sites that are inserted in the Tentative List before submitting for the final international selection and establishes the Guidelines of the MP. Usually, drawing up the MP requires the intervention of private consulting agencies. Moreover, the national layer of the government mainly devoted to the preservation of the cultural heritage can overlap the management function decentralized to lower layers of the government (i.e. Regions, Provinces, and Municipalities). This



institutional framework can make the UNESCO procedure a very exhausting and expansive bureaucratic one. The institutional framework could also be at the origin of the delay in the approval of the MPs and in the establishment of the cultural districts in VdN. A recent study conducted on the state of the art of the MPs of the Italian UNESCO sites (Badia, 2009) shows that only 17 UNESCO sites (less than 40%) have an MP that was approved and transmitted to UNESCO. In the case of VdN, two MPs were drawn up; the first one was drawn up in 2002, the year of the inscription in the WHL; the second was drawn up in 2005 in order to stimulate a more active participation of the local stakeholders. However, both MPs were not effective. We noted that the UNESCO certification of VdN had an immediate positive impact on tourist stays, but the benefits did not increase in the medium term.

This empirical result introduces the second government issue: the horizontal coordination of the local nodes that connect the cultural district network. In the case of VdN, the management of the cultural endowments has been carried out by each municipality without any coordinated action. Some municipalities benefit more than others: they are the municipalities (Caltagirone, Ragusa and Scicli in the province of Ragusa) in which the policy makers are more aware of the socioeconomic relevance of their cultural endowments and enact their Urban Planning Acts on the line of the strategies advanced in the MP; other municipalities of VdN have not yet enacted any local Urban Planning Act.

However, the main institutional deficiency is the absence of an effective coordination body that designs a common development strategy for the VdN. The cultural association “South-East Cultural District”, established in 2007 (five years after the inscription in the WHL) and managed in turn by the majors of the municipalities of VdN, is not effective; recently, it has also been involved in a regional project for the establishment of cultural and tourism districts, which aims at enlarging the number of municipalities involved in the projects of the cultural district. The enlargement will not make the coordination easier.

This institutional deficiency along with the infrastructural deficiency of the territory have not yet allowed the implementation of the cultural district model proposed in the MP (Le Blanc, 2010). Some positive signals arise in some municipalities of VdN in which culture became a key word of the local development policy and characterized the innovation and differentiation process in different economic sectors. Hopefully, this approach should be extended to the whole VdN. The establishment of a cultural district is an endogenous process that UNESCO can encourage with the inscription of a site in the WHL but is also something which it cannot impose.

## 8. Conclusions

Recently, an increasing number of studies aim at evaluating the effects that the inscription in the WHL has on the economic growth of the area where the site is located (Arezki et al. 2009), on the international tourism arrivals (Yang et al. 2010; Cellini, 2011), and on the local community (Jimura, 2010): the results are not univocal. This study flows in this line of literature. It aims at analyzing the economic impact of the inscription of the “Baroque cities in VdN” in the WHL, which occurred in 2002. Specifically, we have studied the effectiveness of the UNESCO procedure in promoting the adoption of the cultural district model in VdN. This model of local development requires the valorization of the localized tangible and intangible cultural endowments to foster an endogenous development process, which started, thanks to the exogenous shock represented by the UNESCO certification.

The main results of this case study suggest some considerations on the role that an international organization as UNESCO can play in the start-up of a local development process. The following results mainly concern the case study on hand, but some points can have a more general nature:

- A significant number of historical buildings and churches in VdN have been restored even if the interventions had been established and funded before the inscription in the WHL; at the moment, no priority is given to the monuments protected by UNESCO in the public restoration and maintenance plans;
- The valorization of the localized tangible cultural heritage has a positive impact on the local economy: the idiosyncratic material culture becomes a fundamental input of any productive process. It stimulates different economic sectors: traditional sectors, such as agriculture, and creative industries, which are strictly involved in the restoration (i.e. building and requalification enterprises) and the valorization process (i.e. publishing and tourism) of the cultural heritage;
- The tourism impact in VdN has been relevant, especially if we compare the VdN data on the overnight stays with the regional and national data. The accommodation capacity and, particularly, the number of extra-hotel establishments and B&B have significantly increased the promotion of a different kind of accommodation and fruition of the cultural heritage. The pattern of the overnight stays in the period considered (1998–2009) has also increased and arrived at levels it has never attained earlier;
- UNESCO certification seems to have attracted a large number of tourists, but it has not had a permanent effect on the growth rate;
- The seasonality of tourism flows in VdN has remained stable, whereas in Sicily as a whole, it has grown. Since cultural tourism can be considered as being able to reduce tourism seasonality, we can infer that the inscription of the site in the

WHL has had a positive, but limited, impact in attracting tourists. We argue that the cultural tourism flows could only reduce but not cancel the typical seasonality pattern of a sun and sea destination such as Sicily;

- The local governance of the VdN is very deficient, as the single municipalities are not used to coordinate their policies. The valorization of the culture heritage and of the UNESCO certification is founded on the initiatives of single municipalities, the ones that are more aware of the benefits they can derive from a local development policy based on culture and creativity. The South-East cultural district proposed by UNESCO and approved in the MP of VdN has not yet been implemented. However, even if the UNESCO procedure requires both an *ex-ante* and an *ex-post* monitoring of the site, it can really neither enforce any model of local development nor sanction the delay. The case of VdN is an example of how the UNESCO action can be very limited.
- As a final remark, we can affirm that the UNESCO certification should not be considered by the local policy makers as the final goal of a procedure devoted to acquire local consensus; rather, it should be considered the first step of a local development process based on culture and tourism that should involve local communities.

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**SUMMARY****Is it worth being inscribed in the World Heritage List?  
A case study of “The Baroque cities in Val di Noto” (Sicily)**

This article deals with the effects of the inscription of a cultural site which is contained in the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL); in particular, it focuses on the case of the “Baroque cities in Val di Noto” (Sicily, Italy) which is a serial site, constituted by a large number of towns that share the same architectural style and are located in a large area that includes eight municipalities. We discuss whether the model of the “cultural district” is appropriate enough to describe the experience of Val di Noto. More specifically, we analyze the impact of the inscription to the WHL on creative industries and tourism flows. We observe that the most relevant effects occurred in the years around the inscription (2002) and suggest that the difficulties in maintaining sustained economic growth in more recent years rest in the limited enforcement power of the UNESCO resolutions and in the limited coordination among different layers of government.

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