



Sinergie SIMA
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Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society

Conference Proceedings

Short Papers

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Short Papers

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To the reader,

this volume contains the long papers of the Sinergie-SIMA 2024 Management Conference, hosted by the University of Parma on June 13th and 14th 2024.

Theory and practice in the field of management have been challenged by the emergence of sustainability and well-being as major global policy priorities. Both sustainability and well-being are complex, value-laden, and strongly interconnected; however, they tend to exist in separate realms.

Sustainability literature has recorded an evolution in the way the concept of sustainable development is understood, leading to the articulation of sustainable development as human “well-being” and “flourishing”, rather than “needs”. Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out a lack of clarity in the conceptualization, which causes some ambiguity in terms of definition (Ronen & Kerret, 2020). Kjell (2011) observed that human needs and well-being are poorly understood, characterized, and developed by sustainability research. Along the same vein, Helne & Hirvilammi (2015) observed that the overarching goal of sustainable development (i.e., well-being) has often been narrowly interpreted, mainly in economic terms, while connections between the natural environment and human flourishing have been overlooked. More recently, O’Mahony (2022) remarked that the literature conceptualizing human well-being continues to exist largely outside sustainable development. Hence, placing well-being more clearly within the sustainability framework could be highly beneficial to sustainability.

Concurrently, the literature on well-being is almost entirely dissociated from the contributions of nature or the relationships with ecological and planetary systems (Roberts et al., 2015), and the importance of social dimensions is an emergent conclusion. Therefore, the rationale of contextual systems inherent to sustainability research (incorporating views of times, society, and biosphere) could significantly enrich well-being research, fostering a more holistic perspective on well-being and an increased awareness of the limits of individual well-being pursuits (Kjell, 2011).

In brief, though well-being has major implications for sustainable development and vice versa, the body of literature that effectively integrates sustainability and well-being remains in an embryonic stage.

The above considerations aim to act as catalysts for an interdisciplinary debate within the field of management. Enriching the conception of flourishing well-being in sustainability and the contribution of nature to well-being can produce impactful scientific research, as O’Mahony (2022) points out. Equally important is the analysis of the links between sustainability and well-being, encompassing synergies and trade-offs at the organizational level, in value chains, and in interactions with stakeholders across various industries.

The Sinergie-SIMA 2024 Management Conference welcomed contributions based on different theories, methodological approaches, and units of analysis with the potential to empower a transformation for flourishing individuals, society, and the natural world alike. More precisely, the Conference was a great occasion to discuss the research efforts of our research community within tracks related to the:

- Conference theme (Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society),
- SIMA thematic groups (Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology Management, Intelligenza manageriale nel management, International Business, Marketing, Purpose-driven Businesses, Retailing & Service Management, Small & Family Business, Strategic Communication, Strategy & Governance, Supply Chain Management, Logistics & Operations, Sustainability, and Tourism & Culture Management),
- special tracks (Examining the social and environmental relevance of sustainable digital business models: Impact on business practices and consumers, Growing resilient Italian SMEs, and Perspectives on grand challenges in international business and implications for companies),
- Management Case Studies.

The Conference call for papers gave the opportunity to submit either short and long papers. Overall, the editorial staff received 277 submissions of which 215 short papers and 62 long papers.

For the *short and long papers*, the evaluation followed the peer review process, with a double-blind review performed by, respectively, one or two referees - university lecturers and experts about the topic - selected among SIMA and the community of Sinergie members.

In detail, the referees applied the following criteria to evaluate the submissions:

- clarity of the research aims,
- accuracy of the methodological approach,
- contribution in terms of originality/innovativeness,
- theoretical and practical contribution,
- clarity of communication,
- significance of the bibliographical basis.

The *peer review* process resulted in full acceptance or rejection of the submissions. In the case of disagreement among reviewers' evaluations, the decision was taken by the Chairs of the SIMA thematic groups or conference track. Each work was then sent back to the Authors together with the referees' reports. The suggestions received by the referees were used by the Authors during the presentation of their research works at the Conference.

The evaluation process ended with the acceptance of 211 short papers and 58 long papers. This volume proposes the papers whose Authors have authorized their publication.

All the long papers published in this volume were presented and discussed during the Conference and published online on the web portal of Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference (<https://www.sijmsima.it/>).

While thanking all the Authors, Chairs, and participants, we hope that this volume will contribute to advance knowledge about the management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society.

The Conference Chairs

Guido Cristini, Beatrice Luceri, Arabella Mocciaro Li Destri, and Marta Ugolini

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Crossing Green Tracks: The Role of Monumental Railways in Promoting Eco-Sustainable Business in Slow Tourism

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Abstract

Rail tourism is an industry that consistently generates economic value in numerous global regions, making substantial contributions to the fiscal well-being of governments that frequently provide support. Its growth can be attributed to emerging trends and increased environmental awareness among tourists. Monumental railways in Europe are significant sources of prosperity, encompassing substantial financial gains and a substantial influx of tourists. This form of rail tourism is classified as “slow tourism” which encompasses more than simply commuting to reach a destination; it also provides an opportunity to appreciate the journey, explore the uniqueness of historical sites, dine on cuisine originating from within a zero-kilometer radius, and interact with local communities and their culture.

By employing Green theory and Co-creation value, this article attempts to demonstrate how the utilization of the historic railway network in a particular Italian region, Sardinia, can serve as an example of a novel eco-sustainable business model capable of fostering revenue generation (economic sustainability), positive impacts on the local community (social sustainability), and territorial stewardship (environmental sustainability).

Key words: Railway Tourism; Slow Tourism; Historic Railways; Sustainability; Green Theory; Co-creation Value.

Framing of the research. *Rail tourism is a sector that in various parts of the planet manages to create value year after year, making an important contribution to the economic growth of the countries that support it. Although the figures for rail tourism are significantly lower than those for air tourism, the rail tourism sector is growing mainly due to new trends and awareness among tourists who are more and more aware of their ‘environmental footprint’ than in the past (Commission, 2020).*

In the rail tourism, the scenic view is a pivotal element, regardless of the journey’s length. This consideration radically shifts the perspective of analysis of the phenomenon from a purely transport point of view to a more complex one which involves the tourist, cultural and environmental dimensions. Consequently, it is no longer a question of choosing a means of transport but of conceiving the travel experience as something much more engaging guided by important values such as sustainability. Examples of this perspective can be found in the United States, where Amtrak provides a complete network connecting the entire country with Canada, treating travellers to an exceptional voyage highlighted by the breathtaking landscapes and natural beauty encountered along the route. In Africa, the prestigious Blue Train connects Cairo to Cape Town, traversing pristine landscapes and protected nature reserves, offering passengers a lavish travel experience. In Europe, the unique geography and distinct borders between countries create a highly segmented landscape, ideal for rail tourism that goes beyond long-distance travel, aligned with the concept of slow tourism, as it favours the discovery of historic centres, local cuisine at “km zero”, of the culture and communities along the route (Campolo, 2018).

Among the European countries that already exploit historical railways for tourism purposes, Great Britain and France are the ones with particularly significant values, both in terms of tourist flows and annual revenue. Great Britain with 850 km of lines has 139 tourist railways, and generates revenues of £400 million by attracting 13 million visitors per year (F.I.F.T.M., 2018). In France, on the other hand, it can be observed how the 1,200 km of tourist railways attract almost 4.5 million visitors per year, creating a turnover of about 60 million euros and a total of about 1,000 new jobs (Blancheton & Marchi, 2013).

In Italy, tourist railways are regulated by the Italian Law 23 August 2017, n. 128 and subsequent amendments and additions. The railway routes for tourist use are identified in Annex 1 of Interministerial Decree no. 146 of 17/05/2022 and add up to a total of 1,142 km. Of these, four sections are in Sardinia, for a total length of the routes equal to 438.7 km corresponding to 38.4% of the overall Italian total, (ARST, 2019). Moreover, in the case of Sardinia it must also be

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considered that these are “narrow gauge” railway routes, these stretches are unique in Europe, representing as much as 90% of the European total.

Purpose of the paper. Unlocking the Potential of Slow Tourism through Italian Legislation. *This research proposal is designed to explore how to leverage the opportunities presented by the aforementioned law to enrich the tourism sector through slow tourism. The goal is to drive economic growth for the region and deliver beneficial outcomes for both the land and its people (social sustainability), while steadfastly upholding environmental conservation (environmental sustainability) and enhancing financial prosperity (economic sustainability).*

To grasp the potential of this initiative, it is helpful to revisit Article 1 of Law 128/2017, which explicitly states:

“The purpose of this law is to safeguard and enhance railway sections of particular cultural, landscape and tourist value, which include the railway routes, stations and related works of art and appurtenances, and of the historic and tourist rolling stock authorized to use them, as well as the regulation of the use of velorails”.

The mention of the Law 128/2017 helps us categorize two distinct types of railway tourism. The first, of a contemplative nature, relies on the traditional use of trains, frequently comprised of vintage rolling stock that has been refurbished and, in certain instances, specifically adapted to be truly ‘green’—a status not yet achieved in areas like Sardinia. The second type is ‘active/experiential’ tourism, uniquely associated with the opportunity to travel these routes aboard a “ferrocycle”, a four-seater vehicle propelled by the pedalling of its passengers (Melis, 2021).

Furthermore, a significant innovation of Law 128/2017 is highlighted in Article 5, which offers the opportunity for regions traversed by railway routes to become key drivers in their socio-economic development. This is achieved by allowing them to request control over parts of these routes. Consequently, they can plan, organize, and implement their own tourism initiatives, ranging from contemplative to experiential activities, across the entire railway network. This approach enables a broad spectrum of entrepreneurial, social, and cultural entities to actively engage in enhancing the travel experience. They can do so by offering accommodation, local gastronomy, visits to nearby natural and archaeological sites, and participation in historical and cultural festivities, among others. Such engagement fosters a more profound connection with the local environment, culture, and traditions.

This research aims to exploit the potential of this law, in accordance with the paradigm that not only mitigates the carbon footprint linked with frequent travel but also champions the conservation of cultural heritages and natural resources, and moreover generating value by involving, in a bottom-up perspective, neighboring communities through job creation and entrepreneurial activities.

Although the academic literature lacks a consensus on slow tourism’s precise definition, scholars like Babou and Callot (2009) and Blanco (2011), and others have explored its multifaceted dimensions, underscoring its emphasis on quality experiences, local immersion, and environmental consciousness (Conway & Timms, 2010; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson et al., 2011; Matos, 2012; Savoja, 2011), all aspects strongly present in the purposes that the Italian law aims to promote.

The research further explores how slow tourism, both contemplative and, more importantly, active, bolsters local economies by channeling tourist expenditures toward small businesses, artisanal ventures, and local services, thus nurturing community development and resilience. This strategic shift from mass tourism, with its penchant for concentrated economic benefits and environmental disregard, paves the way for a more equitable and sustainable tourism revenue distribution.

Intriguingly, Timms and Conway (2012) anchor slow tourism within alternative tourism models like eco-tourism and community tourism, which are sustainable by nature, utilizing local resources effectively. They tie the concept of slow tourism to sustainable development as outlined by Campbell (1996), advocating for economic growth, environmental preservation, and social equity as its foundational pillars.

Monumental (or historical) railways stand as a testament to slow tourism’s ethos, offering transformative journeys that immerse travelers in the rich tapestry of regional histories, cultures, and landscapes, thereby endorsing sustainable travel experiences. As a cornerstone of rail tourism, these railways attract enthusiasts eager to relive the grandeur of travel’s golden era, navigating scenic and historical corridors. This segment, though smaller in comparison to air travel, significantly contributes to regional economic vitality, spurred by evolving trends and heightened environmental awareness among travelers. Italian Federation of Tourist and Museum Railways (FIFTM) statistics highlight the economic impact of tourist railways in Great Britain and France, underscoring the viability of rail tourism as a lucrative and sustainable venture.

This narrative of rail tourism, evolving towards more leisurely and experience-centric travel, in France dovetails with the Special Interest Tourism (SIT) category, emphasizing sustainable practices within the railway tourism sector Blancheton and Marchi (2013). This evolution towards slow rail tourism, prioritizing landscape exploration, cultural immersion, and the pursuit of new experiences, marks a shift away from the necessity of rapid travel, enhancing the overall journey’s allure.

The Italian legislation of 2017, then signifies a watershed moment for sustainable tourism, highlighting the untapped potential of historical and cultural rail routes for fostering sustainable tourism initiatives (Maggi, 2003).

For Sardinia, leveraging Italian Law 128 effectively could mitigate several challenges facing tourism in the region by:

- a) enabling the development of tourist offerings beyond the summer season, diversifying the region’s attractions beyond just beach resorts;

- b) *facilitating the integration of coastal tourism with that of the interior regions, which are experiencing alarming depopulation trends, thus reversing a seemingly irreversible negative trend;*
- c) *Transforming historic railways into assets that generate economic growth through entrepreneurial ventures, while also safeguarding cultural heritage and environmental legacies;*
- d) *To forge a robust partnership between communities and public administration, aimed at fostering and advancing the growth of this initiative.*

Methodology. *Our study is rooted in the Green Theory (Dunne et al., 2021; Wagner, 2002) and value co-creation (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).*

This interdisciplinary approach allows us to delve deeper into environmental sustainability, highlighting the imperative for businesses to implement strategies that reduce their ecological footprint while promoting environmental protection (Raimi, 2017). At the same time, it considers synergistic collaborations between different actors (public and private) as an essential element for designing, supporting, including financially, organizing and managing the multiplicity of services to be activated or the infrastructural implementation and maintenance activities, in a perspective of co-construction of value for the different stakeholders (Melis, 2018; Melis et al., 2023).

On one side, Green Theory, under the Corporate Social Responsibility umbrella, advocates for the infusion of environmental considerations into corporate operations. This perspective not only scrutinizes the environmental repercussions of business activities but also evaluates their contributions towards sustainable development. Green theory represents a cross-disciplinary approach that intersects management, environmental sciences, social sciences, and more recently, international relations. It highlights the negative impacts of economic growth on climate change, emphasizing the importance of considering the rights of individuals, justice, citizenship, good governance, and environmental preservation. In line with this, environmentalists and ecologists encourage industries and manufacturers to integrate green principles into their operations and production strategies, aiming for sustainable benefits for both consumers and the environment over time. On the other hand, the value co-creation theory strengthens the previous approach as it places emphasis on the strategic importance of collaboration and mutual learning to operate together with a view to generating value for all stakeholders. This approach requires capabilities about dialogue, access of relevant resources for strategic making, risk assessment and individual responsibility making choices, transparency and reciprocity in the relationship among several stakeholders (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In order to evaluate the potential inherent in the law we make use of two methodological tools:

- *An exploratory market research carried out with a semi-structured questionnaire submitted to potential consumers to evaluate their knowledge on railway tourism and, above all, evaluate the interest in enjoying a ferrocycle experience (study a);*
- *a case study focused on the use of the ferrocycle along a short stretch of the historic “Mandas – Arbatax” railway line, exactly the “Gairo – Niala” one, combined with a business plan to evaluate the financial feasibility of the project (study b).*

Results. *This analysis is still in progress and early results can be summarized as follow:*

Study (a). The questionnaire.

We conduct an initial analysis using a semi-structured questionnaire comprising 28 questions. This is designed to gauge understanding of previously defined slow, contemplative, and active tourism forms, with a specific focus on familiarity with ferrocycling and interest in engaging with this muscle-powered mode of transport.

In this paper, we present only a selection of our findings for two reasons: data collection is still in progress, and our researchers aim to produce a more comprehensive study for future publication, supported by a stronger dataset.

The data collected at the time of preparation of this work concerns 810 questionnaires, of which 760 were correctly completed, divided by gender: 46.5% male and 53.5% female.

Early following elements emerge:

- *87.5% of respondents did not know the existence of the ferrocycle while 74.32% had no idea that in the context of slow tourism it is possible to distinguish between “contemplative” and “active” tourism;*
- *Among those who know it, 37.5% have tried it in France, 12.5% in Switzerland and 6.25% in Belgium;*
- *Again, among those who have experienced the ferrocycle all declared that they were able to cross and visit rural and naturalistic areas, partly also archaeological or areas of historical and artistic interest;*
- *Everyone who has lived the experience has benefited from it and would recommend others to do it;*
- *When asked if they would have liked to travel along a railway line in Sardinia with the ferrocycle, 43.35% answered “definitely yes”, 37.85% “maybe yes”, while 10.49% answered “I don’t know” and only 7.3% answered “maybe not” or “definitely not”;*
- *Similar percentages are found regarding the interest in staying in accommodation facilities located along the railway route that have been adequately renovated to provide quality services;*
- *Furthermore, another interesting data concerns the duration of a trip to be made with the ferrocycle for which 42.6% hypothesized “from 1 to 2 days”, 30.82% “from 3 to 5 days”, 13.43% “no more than one day”, 9.46% “from 6 to 7 days” and, a small percentage even for a longer time.*

These preliminary findings indicate a substantial interest among both local communities and prospective users. Study (a) uncovers considerable potential for ferrocycle utilization in Sardinia.

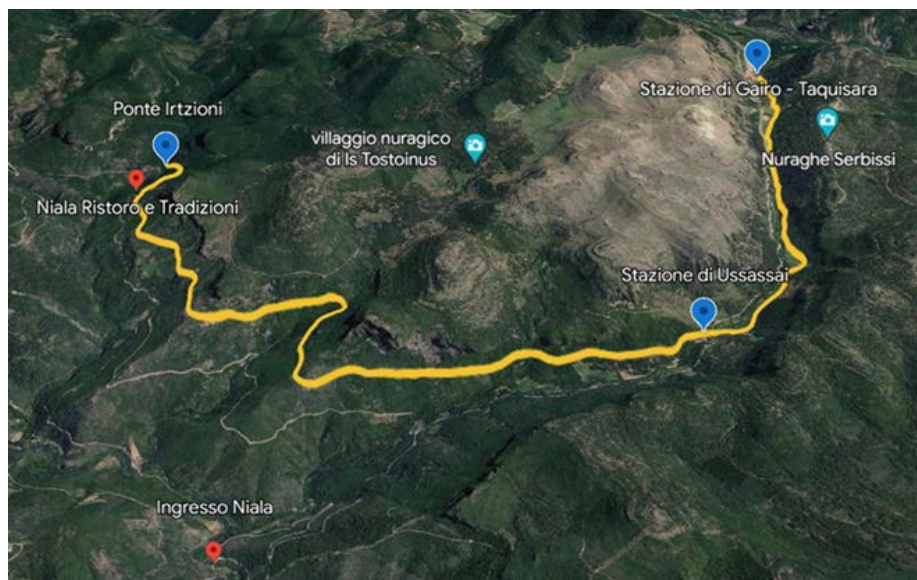
Study (b). The business plan.

In order to support the idea also from a financial and economic point of view, the study (a) was also supported by the provision of a Business Plan.

The findings from this business plan, shortened below, illustrate qualitative features and the economic feasibility of the investment, showcasing its viability.

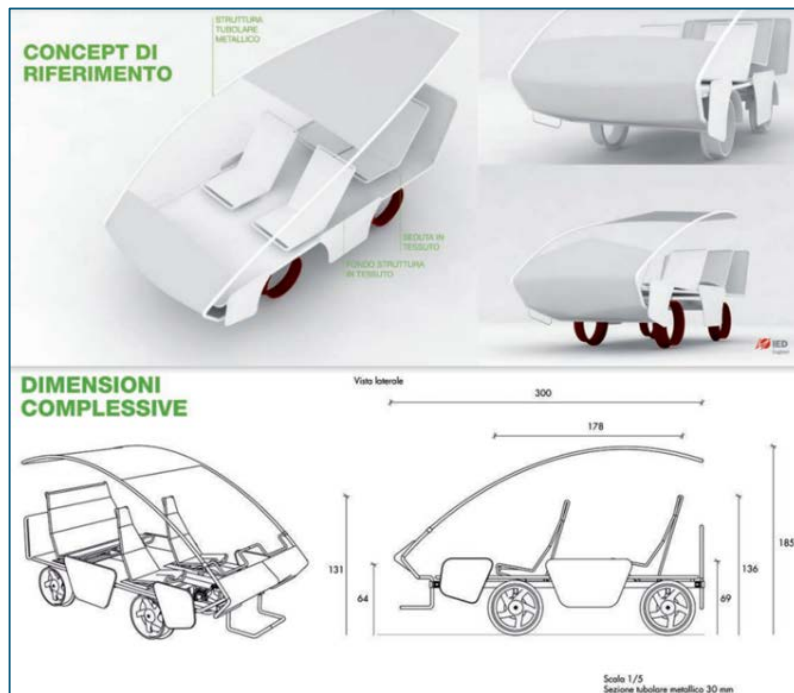
Business Model: In harmony with the law 128/2017, the business plan provide the management of the Gairo-Niala route is envisioned to adopt a cooperative approach, with the train station and the route being managed by a consortium of operators, through which to plan, organize and manage, in safety, tourist services complementary to the railway, taking advantage, above all, of the great experiential opportunity offered by the ferrocycle. It is reasonable to expect that this management role will be undertaken by a local tourism-sector cooperative, similar to practices observed with comparable entities across regional and national contexts. Such a cooperative would be tasked with staffing the station with skilled personnel dedicated to providing visitors with an exceptional tourism experience. The organization will form strategic partnerships with local entities like restaurants, producers, riding stables, hiking operators, and transfer services. This collaboration aims to offer clients exclusive discounts and broaden our venture's visibility through mutual promotion. Naturally, an important commitment must be dedicated to building these partnerships from a value co-creation perspective, without which there is a risk that the initiative will not function adequately and in compliance with the spirit of Italian law.

Figure 1. Gairo-Naila' railway route, train station called Taquisara



Product and Service description: The Gairo - Taquisara station is set to offer a diverse and enriching experience, aiming to provide visitors with a comprehensive journey. The primary attractive service will be the rental of ferrocycles for traversing the scenic 10-kilometer Gairo - Niala route. Beyond its core offering, the station will be transformed into a "museum station," enabling its spaces to serve multiple functions beyond just ferrocycle usage. These include hosting special events by renting out parts of the station, thereby leveraging its historical and cultural significance. Characteristic of Sardinia's historic railway stations, the Gairo-Taquisara station possesses unique qualities conducive to historical and cultural promotion, thereby adding to the region's rich heritage. A distinctive feature of this station will be an on-site shop offering tourists a glimpse into local craftsmanship and the opportunity to purchase souvenirs, enhancing the visitor experience. Furthermore, the station will provide bicycle rentals to encourage exploration of the surrounding landscapes, enriching the visitor's experience further. This multifaceted approach, combining leisure with cultural and historical education within the station-museum, is key to the initiative's success. As detailed in the financial overview, this model is projected to yield positive outcomes from the second year onward. Introducing ferrocycle rentals presents an unparalleled innovation in Sardinia, distinct from any existing options like the Green Train, which operates without conflicting schedules. Additionally, there are indirect competitors, specifically eight bicycle rental services across Ogliastra, none of which are in close proximity to the Gairo station. These services, however, cater to a different demand, focusing on traditional cycling experiences rather than the niche ferrocycle rail journey. Consequently, our competitive analysis will primarily focus on the Green Train, the sole direct competitor in this innovative tourism venture.

Figure 2. By courtesy of IED.



IED-owned project, designers: M.Bosa, S.Carta Vasconcellos, A.Cocco

Figure 3. Source blog.tuttotreno.it (2018)



ref. <https://blog.tuttotreno.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Velorail.pdf> retrieved march 2024

(We express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Engineer Gianfranco Damiani for generously allowing us the use of the photograph and for sharing pertinent data regarding the ferrocycle prototype.)

Market and opportunities: The primary audience for the experience we offer is centered around slow tourism, outdoor adventures, and nature exploration. However, it's important to note that our offering is designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of market segments, making it a universal proposition. The real breakthrough lies in the introduction of the ferrocycle to rail tourism. As we will delve into in subsequent sections, this innovative mode of travel has the potential to attract a significant number of tourists not only from Ogliastro but from wider regions as well. Introducing the ferrocycle is expected to drive deseasonalization, fostering economic expansion, particularly in regions like Ogliastro, predominantly recognized for their picturesque coastlines. The forthcoming charts, courtesy of the Sardinia Region Tourist Observatory, illustrate the patterns in tourist arrivals across Sardinia, zooming in on Ogliastro and, more specifically, the municipality of Gairo over the past three years. This data underscores the potential for the ferrocycle to diversify and enrich the tourist appeal of these areas throughout the year. Moreover, The 2022 Sardinia Tourism Report

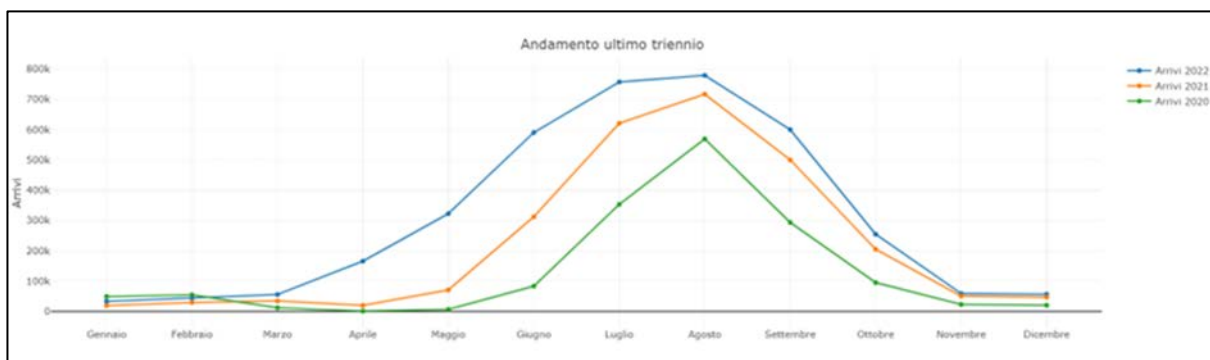
highlights that Nuoro province experienced 598,315 tourist arrivals and 2,896,781 overnight stays, with an average duration of 4.84 nights, predominantly from Italian visitors. Gairo municipality saw 8,130 arrivals and 13,873 stays, with a notable majority of foreign tourists. Projections suggest that introducing the ferrocycle at the Gairo station for the “Gairo - Niala” route could surpass Gairo’s 2022 tourist arrivals by the second year of operation. This anticipated success is attributed to the unique appeal of renting ferrocycles in the province, positioning the Gairo station as a major draw not just locally but also for visitors from nearby areas like Cardedu. The expected increase in visitor flow to the Gairo - Taquisara station is depicted in the accompanying graph, showcasing the station’s potential to boost tourism significantly.

Competitive advantage: Our business model mandates that each station within the tourist railway network, as well as their operating entities, are to be coordinated under the oversight of a Foundation that should involve the municipalities crossed by the railway, the Sardinian Region and the private actors interested to offer local products and services. This arrangement ensures that the ferrocycle service complements, rather than competes with, the already existing Green Train service in region. To achieve harmony and avoid any operational overlap, the usage of rail routes will be meticulously scheduled, ensuring seamless integration between the two services without any interference.

The ferrocycle represents a forward-thinking step into the “slow” and “active” tourism sector, an expanding market niche ripe for competitive differentiation. Our organization will establish its competitive edge through three key factors:

1. **The unique context** The chosen territory boasts distinct features that make it especially appealing to our target audience, providing an ideal backdrop for the ferrocycle experience.
2. **Expert Staffing:** Our team of knowledgeable personnel ensures that visitors will receive high-quality service and an immersive experience, further enhancing the appeal of our offering.
3. **Eco-Friendly and Economical:** The ferrocycle stands out as an entirely eco-sustainable mode of transport, with low maintenance costs. Its design is particularly well-suited to navigate Sardinia’s historic railways, characterized by their “narrow” gauge of 950 mm. This alignment with both environmental sustainability and economic efficiency forms the foundation of our project’s competitive advantage, positioning the ferrocycle as a unique and sustainable choice for exploring Sardinia’s rich heritage.

Figure 4. Source: osservatorio.sardegnaturismo.it



ref. <http://osservatorio.sardegnaturismo.it/it/dashboard/dati-2022>
retrieved march 2024

Management team and Financial and economic previsions: According to our projections, the station’s management team will comprise two key roles: a Station Manager and an Experience Coordinator. The Station Manager will oversee the financial and commercial operations, including accounting, reservations, retail operations, cash flow, performance reporting, and inventory management. The Experience Coordinator will be responsible for the enriching aspects of the service, including organizing guided tours, performing routine maintenance of the ferrocycles, and coordinating events. Supporting these primary roles, we plan to employ up to two seasonal staff members during peak periods to manage increased demand.

The projected income statement illustrates the financial outcomes anticipated from this initiative. Positive financial results are expected by the second year, ensuring the organization’s viability and prosperity. This statement will be dissected to thoroughly examine both revenue streams and cost factors, providing transparency on the calculation methodology employed.

Research limitations. Two principal constraints in our examination of the respective studies are:

The initial study, employing a sample size of over 800 questionnaires, yielded remarkably definitive findings concerning the ferrocycle’s potential. However, this sample predominantly reflects perspectives within the Sardinian context. To enhance the study’s applicability and robustness, it’s recommended to broaden the participant base to include prospective users from beyond this geographic scope.

Regarding the business plan analysis, its primary limitation stems from the relatively narrow focus on a specific route segment. This segment represents only a fraction of the extensive 438 km network of Sardinia’s historic railways as

documented by (ARST, 2019). Future research endeavors would greatly benefit from an all-encompassing study covering the entire network. Such a comprehensive approach could yield a deeper understanding of the opportunities for fostering slow tourism and eco-friendly transportation throughout the region. Expanding the scope of analysis promises valuable insights into the feasibility of scaling the ferrocycle integration and business model across broader regional or even national boundaries.

Managerial implications. This research offers substantial contributions to both the academic discourse and practical implementations, particularly within the domains of slow tourism and sustainable business models. From a theoretical standpoint, it advances the discourse in slow tourism by delineating two key segments: “contemplative” tourism and “active” tourism. This distinction enhances our understanding of visitor engagement and preferences within the context of railway tourism. Furthermore, the study underscores the emergence of a novel vehicle, known in Italian as the “ferrocycle.” It facilitates a deeply immersive and engaging experience for travelers, allowing them to connect intimately with the journey. This model is anchored in the rich cultural heritage of the region’s historical railways, emphasizing the preservation and valorization of cultural heritage as a cornerstone for sustainable tourism practices.

From a managerial standpoint, our research outlines a viable business model that demonstrates how to effectively utilize existing infrastructure by incorporating an innovative transportation method that change it moving the experience from the transport point of view to a one much more immersive cultural, environmental, historical, and territorial grounded. It showcases the potential of transforming traditional tourism practices through strategic partnerships with public administrations, highlighting the benefits of such collaborations in revitalizing neglected or underused infrastructures. This approach not only opens new avenues for business ventures but also emphasizes the importance of synergy between the private sector and public authorities in fostering sustainable development, in a value co-creative perspective.

Furthermore, our findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, advocating for the formulation and implementation of policies that encourage private-public partnerships. It is imperative for the Autonomous Region of Sardinia to legislate on this subject with fidelity to the principles outlined in Law 128/2017, ensuring the law’s integrity is maintained. This means allowing for the development of regional offerings from the grassroots level, thereby empowering local territories to take charge of their own tourism and economic development initiatives. In this context, the proposal to establish a Foundation must adhere to a bottom-up approach. It is critical that such an entity is not formed through top-down directives, nor should it include the railway network’s maintenance service provider in its management. Involving the maintenance service provider could lead to potential conflicts of interest between those tasked with strategic planning and those responsible for operational oversight. This separation ensures that the development of the region’s tourism and cultural heritage can proceed without compromising the objectivity and independence necessary for sustainable growth and innovation.

These policies, aimed at redeveloping and repurposing existing infrastructures, have the dual benefit of stimulating economic growth and enhancing community welfare. By facilitating the integration of eco-friendly transportation options like the ferrocycle into the tourism sector, policy-makers can ensure the sustainable development of tourist attractions that minimize environmental footprints. Consequently, this research underscores the potential of such initiatives to generate value not only for business operators but also for the broader community, by transforming previously neglected areas into vibrant tourist destinations without compromising environmental integrity.

Originality of the paper. This investigation establishes a transformative method to stimulate Sardinia’s legacy rail paths by endorsing the ferrocycle, an innovative vehicle set to redefine the essence of leisurely exploration while foregrounding ecological integrity. The originality of our inquiry lies in the strategic deployment of this entirely green transportation mode. It aims to rejuvenate the disused historical railways of Sardinia, propelling the island into the spotlight as an ideal locale for the contemplative tourism. This maycraft a paradigm of innovation that could encourage similar revivals across Italy.

Moreover, the analysis extends to examining the pivotal role of Law 128/2017 in backing sustainable business endeavors that seek to refurbish ancient railway corridors. The ferrocycle, a wholly sustainable cycling railcar, is at the core of our proposal, designed to marry the conservation of historical sites with the advancement of eco-friendly tourism. The study highlights the ferrocycle’s ability to reenergize Sardinia’s railway infrastructure, enriching the tourist experience with leisurely paced journeys and simultaneously stimulating economic prosperity through the integration of ancillary services. Beyond uncovering the latent potential of Sardinia’s historical rail tracks, and the exploitation of the Law 128/2017 position the ferrocycle as a trailblazing instrument for sustainable progress and innovation in tourism, with far-reaching implications.

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