

The city of music, its heritage and its cultural governance

Situated in the Amalfi Coast, **Ravello** is a small town known nationwide as *the city of music*. Its romantic landscape, characterized by the terraced vineyards and notable historic villas, is in fact the setting for a summer music festival that gathers every year almost 20.000 music lovers. The presence of idiosyncratic cultural and territorial resources, the integration and interdependence of firms and initiatives around their exploitation and the a strong institutional leadership governing the valorisation of the area allow to characterize it as a cultural district. As such, it is possible to identify the success and critical factors that will eventually determine its sustainability.

The cultural and territorial resources of Ravello

Firstly, the presence of *cultural and territorial capital*, hardly reproducible outside the territory, provides the town with a well-defined identity, source of competitive advantage: a high-level hospitality offering in a breath-taking landscape, paired by a rich cultural offer, targeting the high-income, educated and international tourist.

As previously stated, Ravello, declared a **World Heritage Site** among with the rest of the Amalfi Coast, can boast a remarkable landscape, where the beauty of the terraced coast is matched by the presence of valuable palaces and ancient churches. Since the 19th century the town became popular with elite tourism, part of the so-called “*Grand Tour*” that was bringing the aristocratic youth, artists and intellectuals to Italy. In the second half of the century two magnificent villas, Villa Rufolo and Villa Cimbrone, that are still open to the public and at the heart of the tangible cultural resources, were acquired and renovated by foreign intellectuals that increased the presence of international intellectual crowds.

It was a short visit by German composer **Wagner** that changed forever the fate of the town: seeing the magnificent gardens of Villa Rufolo, Wagner stated that it was precisely what he imagined to be the setting of the Parsifal, an anecdote that inspired the first “Rievocazioni Wagneriane” in 1932 at the presence of the Savoia family and later local hotelier Paolo Caruso to organize in those very same gardens the “Concerti Wagneriani” in the ‘50s, with the aim of connecting the local development to the ancient fame of Ravello, the crucial

intangible cultural resource of the town. The concept was later recovered by the current *Ravello Festival*, a music festival that also offers jazz, recitals and pop concerts.

Since then the local community has developed a rich touristic offer, drawing from the local tradition of hospitality and the competition fostered by the arrival of two international hotel chains. The **Ravello Foundation**, funded in 2002 to manage the Festival and Villa Rufolo, has catalysed the cultural development of the area by also offering training in the events management field, increasing thus the local know-how. A 320-seats Auditorium, opened in 2010 and designed by the worldwide renowned architect Oscar Niemeyer, allows to enlarge the offering of cultural activities all year long.

The integration of the resources in a total cultural touristic experience

The presence of the Ravello Festival has stimulated the rise of a *high-level hospitality field* and the birth of new services and firms that show a good level of integration with the cultural sector, all sharing the aim of the **valorisation of the territorial resources**.

The hotels of Ravello and many service providers are sponsors of the Festival, proving the linkages between the cultural and touristic sectors. In addition, the *Consorzio Operatori Turistici Ravello-Scala*, that defines itself as “a union of the main tourist and commercial promoters between Ravello and Scala, which embraces the best hotels, bed & breakfasts, restaurants, handmade local factories”, promotes the touristic services of its members through the RavelloSense portal. The events, the religious festivities and the culinary traditions are the core of organized tours and activities that can finally offer the total cultural touristic experience that ensures the attraction of the high-income educated tourist segment. Seen the size and the capacity of the town, it is crucial to attract such segment rather than mass tourism in order to attain **sustainability**.

The creation of the Consortium followed years of negotiation, showing the emergence of social capital and trust among local actors. Furthermore, both the Consortium and the Foundation are spreading **knowledge** in the territory by organizing conferences and educational activities. This offering is a priority of the Foundation by the words of its president, that stated Ravello “can further enhance and qualify the hosting of forums, seminars, meetings and conventions consistent with its economic-cultural strategy”.

Founded in 2002 by the Region, the Province, the Municipality and a private bank foundation (Monte dei Paschi di Siena) to manage Villa Rufolo, the Festival and the cultural events of the town, the *Ravello Foundation* has been successfully coordinating and improving the quality of the cultural offering. Its mission is to

protect and enhance, in cultural and economic terms, the assets of artistic and historical interest located in the area of the Municipality of Ravello; to promote

and coordinate cultural, scientific and artistic initiatives that make the historical-artistic sites of Ravello the venue for national and international events

While the level of integration in the service sector appears to be high, the **agricultural production** still lacks the networking and coordination to contribute consistently to the local economy. Despite Amalfi Coast being the land of origin of typical products such as limoncino and excellent local wines, the lack of cooperation among producers results in a loss of typical products and danger the environment, as well as the lack of integration between the hospitality and agricultural sectors results in local products not being offered and promoted to the public.

The governance of the cultural district

Governance plays an important role in fostering *coordination* and *integration* among the productive sectors and can take the shape of **bottom-up dynamic**, such as the creation of the Consortium by private stakeholders, or **top-down policy**, such as the creation of the Foundation by the local government.

The Municipality of Ravello has played an important role in directing investments in the culture-based development strategy, with the advice of experts who were already visiting the town for leisure reasons and could identify the potential of this strategy. The issue with the local administration is its *instability*: the political shifts cause discontinuity in the strategies adopted. Before 2006 the intervention of non-local experts in the strategy-making was welcomed, whereas after the results of the 2006 elections there was a preference for local involvement.

The political conflicts also affect the enactment of the culture-led strategy, as the case of the *Auditorium* exemplifies. The much-needed infrastructure for cultural activities was commenced after six years of pleas to the local courthouse by the local political opposition, that considered the building a damage to the integrity of the landscape. Even after its completion the Auditorium was at the centre of political controversy, since it was abandoned for most of the year and not correctly preserved. Nowadays those difficulties seem to have ended as the Auditorium hosts a wide range of yearly activities.

The latest developments allow for an optimistic position on the governance of the district, as the Municipality of Ravello has prompted the neighbouring municipalities to participate in the project to make “Ravello Costa d’Amalfi” an **Italian Capital of Culture in 2020**. Furthermore, the project displays a high degree of *participatory nature* as recently a call to propose ideas open to private actors has been diffused, fostering a bottom-up approach and private-public partnerships to promote the territory.

Share • Condividi:

- [Click to email a link to a friend \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on LinkedIn \(Opens in new window\)](#)