Golf: Is It a New Form of Sustainable Tourism or a Violation of Traditional Rural Vocations? Italy and Brazil: Comparison between Two Case Studies

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Abstract: The present research work analyzes the path of territorial reconfiguration that has led to the new uses of agricultural land. In particular, the analysis focuses on the conflict of use between agriculture and sport. Is the sporting practice of golf a new form of sustainable tourism or a violation of traditional rural vocations? The paper compares two case studies in Italy and Brazil to try to answer the aforementioned research question. The two cases under study represent a conflict of land use between the hypothesis of persevering solely agricultural activity and the possibility of introducing new activities. Often, however, agriculture as the only activity practiced by a population is not enough to ensure a sufficient income; it is therefore necessary to diversify economic activities. As will be seen in the text, this does not mean a total abandonment of the primary activity in favor of other land uses apparently in contrast with it.

Keywords: sustainability; sport; tourism; local development

1. New Ways of Tourism and New Forms of the Touristic Use of Places: Interpretative Features

Sustainable tourism, slow tourism, quality tourism, responsible and ethical tourism are all expressions that, although today are in some circumstances rather abused, refer to and imply the use of non-“traditional” forms of tourism. In other words, a tourism that intends to experience natural and cultural resources (material and immaterial) in a fair and coherent way; which intends to give priority to the places, with their own unique characteristics, their own traditions, their own pace of daily life, enhancing the value of local identities. In this sense, tourism can be defined as “slow,” because if it is true that the territories are slow—responding to some intrinsic characteristics that refer to the concepts of uniqueness, typicality, authenticity—it is also true that “slow” is mainly the behaviour of the tourists themselves; that is to say that what changes is essentially the touristic choices that are clearly stated. The philosophy behind this new way of tourism aims to redefine the concepts of time, productivity, and efficiency, respecting the person and the environment [1] (p. 118). It is a way of using tourism that, not coinciding with a mass offer, is linked to the territory in terms of landscape, culture, and anthropic capital. Not only that, this innovative form of tourism of the territories also plays a significant role in the local communities with which the tourist intends to establish a more or less strong contact, from which they can create new opportunities for economic development for the territorial context and its inhabitants [1]. The communities, therefore, become an active part of the touristic experience in the sense that the touristic success of their territory will certainly derive from the attractiveness that it is able to exercise, but also, and
above all, by the propensity of people to internalize tourism, making it an integral part of their quality of life [2]. It is a question of favoring the value of territorial differences and local characteristics and favoring the identity processes of local societies. This is a new form of touristic practices oriented to environmental sustainability and not only a holistic sustainability, responsibility, and ethics: they “are interested in deepening their knowledge, in discovering the specific characteristics of a given territory and the people who built their history on it, empathic involvement with the way of life and with the structure of social relations typical of that specific reality” [3] (p. 36). Being a positive response to the negative effects of massification, sustainable tourism “has been defined as a tourism that meets the needs of visitors, host communities, the environment and industry, taking into account its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts (UN World Tourism Organization 2005)” [1] (p. 118). If this touristic “practice” favors behaviors aimed at the acquisition of physical well-being, as well as the knowledge of the places and the ability to relate to the territory and its stakeholders while respecting territorial contexts and environment, sports tourism can be traced back to using tourism of the territories, provided it is implemented according to the parameters related to the paradigm of sustainability. At the base of the tourism project, there are sports that are not an accessory, instead they characterize journey, travel and the choice of touristic destinations. Whatever product sports tourism takes on—entertainment, action or culture—it can generate benefits and repercussions at a territorial level in economic, social and cultural terms (promoting well-being, job opportunities, synergies with local communities, etc.) and, when this happens, sports tourism is linked to a broader meaning of sustainability. It is certainly a complex phenomenon characterized by different aspects that are not easy to trace back to a single definition and a single concept. Grumo and Ivona argue that “The sporting experience is the fundamental and characteristic element of sports tourism” [4] (p. 54). At the same time, we can understand it, along the lines of Hall [5,6], as a journey for “non-commercial” purposes with the ultimate aim of participating—active or not—in sporting events outside one’s residence; many other definitions always refer to the idea of a physical activity practiced personally or as a spectator [7–9]. However, the combination of sports tourism and sustainability does not always exist and, therefore, we cannot always attribute this tourism segment to that experience of “quality” tourism, of which we have already stressed the fundamental aspects that favor the relationship with the places and the environment. This is especially true when considering the possibility of building a relationship with the local population and a link with the anthropized spaces.

These are the requirements for analyzing golf as a sporting phenomenon in Italy and Brazil, highlight its main characteristics and dynamics in an attempt to understand whether this sport is compatible with the principles of sustainability and, therefore, respectful of the environment, ecosystems and local cultures. It is also to determine, as many protest movements point out, whether golf solicits property transactions and often speculative, environmental issues related to the excessive use of water that is necessary for the maintenance of the structure, running the risk of salinization of the groundwater in coastal areas and possible pollution from pesticides. “Other reasons for strong opposition are the potential dangers in areas of high naturalistic value (woods, forests, lakes and wetlands) and the conflict with existing economic activities (agriculture and livestock in particular)” [10].

In the event that it emerges, however, when looking significantly at the standards of eco-sustainability (provided that this is possible), both in managing the design of existing and new golf courses (limiting water consumption, soil, cubature), it is legitimate to ask whether golf tourism can effectively contribute to the development and promotion of territories, safeguarding them and accepting the idea that the environment must be understood exclusively as a resource to be exploited with a view of containing environmental debt. As a matter of fact, today everything is played at a “glocal” level around the concept of ecological transition: a challenge certainly necessary to embrace a strategic vision focused on sustainability and sustainable ecology.
In order to investigate the phenomenon of golf in the two countries examined, and in an attempt, above all, to understand the sustainability of this practice in relation to tourism, this work has embraced a qualitative-quantitative methodology with integrated scales and sources from the national to the regional and local levels. A plurality and integration of scales is necessary to problematize the issue and describe the main planning programs and strategies in relation to the response of the territories. In this sense, the empirical analysis was oriented towards understanding to what extent golf tourism can really be respectful of places, their identities and vocations. Using desk analysis and field surveys, combining quantitative data (statistics on golf in Italy, in Apulia and in the golf resorts in the State of Rio de Janeiro and in Teresópolis as well as in Brazil) with the qualitative aspect (listening to the main stakeholders and the population), it was possible to describe the transformations of the territories and get to know what the innovations in the field of golf tourism are compared to the analysis of policies and planning tools at a national and regional level.

2. Eco-Sustainable Tourism and Golf in Italy

Golf is one of the sports activities that best demonstrate the close synergy between tourism and sport. In recent years, golf and tourism activities, strictly speaking, have seen a steady increase both at a European and world level. The flows of “golf tourism” are gradually increasing, especially in areas that host golf facilities with a landscape-background of high cultural and natural value. Regions such as Sicily and Apulia in Italy and the Algarve in Portugal or Andalusia in Spain have seen a marked increase in tourist-golfers who move from the northern countries in search of more pleasant destinations and milder climates [4]. However, with the appropriate diversity these regions are developing tourist routes that synthesize purely sporting needs with those of visiting the places. The expected result is the expansion of potential tourist demand and the attractiveness of places not only limited to the summer period. In other words, sports tourists can be motivated mainly by sport or travel. As far as we have been able to record so far, the most requested golf facilities are those located at a relative distance from culturally and landscape-relevant cities; this helps to strengthen the belief that the profitable combination of golf and tourism is far from being achieved. Therefore, it will be increasingly necessary to integrate collaboration between public and private bodies in the design and promotion of a diversified touristic offering that can integrate golf infrastructures with territorial characteristics. The need for environmental protection should also lead both of these bodies to a design that is attentive to the needs of the territories concerned. In line with the recent trend that has decreed that tourism be increasingly aware and oriented to the protection of territories, even the golf tourist seems interested in combining the vacation spot for sports purposes with the knowledge of the destinations reached. Golf tourism, as a matter of fact, is carried out at any time of the year, avoids the destinations typical of the massification of tourism and is strongly driven not only by the quality and diversification of golf courses (moreover related to different environments) but also by the cultural and social diversification of the target regions. Italy, acknowledging the trends described and the delay in its policies, is outlining new strategies. An example is the Strategic Plan for the development of tourism in Italy “Turismo Italia 2020. Leadership, Lavoro, Sud,” according to which the combination of golf and tourism must be part of the strategies of Italian tourism promotion in the coming years. Alongside the more traditional products of the sector (sea, mountain, art cities), a number of important segments of demand defined on the basis of specific interests and needs are emerging. Golf tourism in Western Europe generates a market of 3.6 billion euros, of which Italy intercepts, however, only 7%. The cost of international tourist-golfers for golf courses in Italy is equal to an eighth of that of Portugal. The reasons for this weakness in a sector that is certainly interesting for the appropriate per capita expense depends on the low number of golf courses compared to the main European competitors, their poor diffusion on the territory (mainly in the South, where it would be necessary to develop diversified and integrated products as mentioned
above) and the lack of integration and collaboration in the management of golf courses. For these reasons, the development of the activity of golf in a number of facilities and players has attracted the attention of the public regarding the repercussions on the territory from the construction and management of golf courses, especially when the golf course is located in particularly sensitive areas.

Golfing in Italy dates back to 1903 with the foundation of the Circolo Golf in Rome. Over a century later there are 386 clubs (of which 280 clubs are tout court and 136 are practice fields) with just over 90,000 members, and an increasing number of players and golf facilities (Figures 1 and 2). The regions with the largest number of fields are Lombardy with 23,700 members (Figure 3), Piedmont, Veneto, Lazio and Emilia-Romagna, then other regions. There are no golf courses in Molise and Calabria, only clubs (with 266 members in total) [11].

Even more marked is the increase from the point of view of the members. Sure enough, in the same period of time the number of memberships increased from 1220 to about 100,000, an increase of more than 80 times the initial number.

![Figure 1. Progression in the number of golfers registered in Italy from 1954 to 2019. Source: authors’ processing based on FIG data [11].](image1)

![Figure 2. Progression in the number of golf clubs and golf courses in Italy from 1954 to 2019. Source: authors’ processing based on FIG data [11].](image2)
Although Italy cannot be counted among the main destinations for golf tourism, it has, however, all the potentiality of becoming one in the future. Further localizations of golf courses in the South of Italy would strengthen the union between sport and tourism in an area with very large potentiality given its physical and anthropogenic characteristics.

From many places and for many years the approval of the National Golf Law would regulate the rules for the construction of new facilities, especially in regions such as Calabria and Molise that although being without had great potential in attracting golf tourists. For example, the Ryder cup will be held for the first time in Italy in 2023. This will be a great opportunity for the affirmation of golf and tourism in Italy.

If on the one hand the flow of golfing tourists hopes to increase with the consequent multiplier effect of the local economy, on the other hand, careful consideration should be given to the diseconomies of the territories in terms of land and water consumption. Each 18-hole course occupies an average of fifty/sixty hectares (it is estimated that in Europe over 300,000 hectares of land are used for golf courses). The risk is that behind a project of golf structures mere financial speculation can be hidden. Furthermore, the maintenance of existing courses requires a massive consumption of water and often this conflicts with other civil uses, such as salinization of the groundwater in coastal areas. In addition, careful regional planning must take into account the landscape, especially in the presence of areas of high naturalistic value and a possible conflict of land use with other economic activities such as agriculture and livestock farming. Therefore, an appropriate national law framework on golf could and should harmonize regional autonomous legislation.

3. Towards a New Form of Sustainable Sports Tourism: The Case of Apulia

According to Pigeassou [8], sports tourism is a destination chosen so tourists can participate in characteristic sports culture phenomena, conceived as an expression of physical activity and/or cultural events. Therefore, according to the author, sports tourism is an autonomous type of tourism that combines tourist and cultural experiences in the field of sport. Pitts [12] then highlighted how, in essence, sport has introduced a new management perspective on the market, distinguishing sports tourism into two categories: participatory tourism (travel for the purpose of participating in sporting activities) and entertainment (travel for the purpose of entertainment including sports, recreation, events, etc.).
In recent years there has been a change in the relationship between the participants, increases in demand, spread and diversification of infrastructure, and by the multiplication of forms and opportunities for practice. All this has raised the perception of the social and economic importance of sport, triggering commercialisation of segmentation not only of the market but also of the supply, a process of specialization and professionalization of the operators and organizations of the sector.

On the demand side, there are three different types of sports tourism [7] which concern the degree of involvement of the tourist and the motivation for the trip. In the first type, active sports tourism, the reason for the trip is sports; in the second, events, the motivation is participation; the last type is that of nostalgia, where the sports tourist travels to admire. They differ in the manner of participation and in the underlying motivations but they interact with each other.

On the sports tourism side, authors Zauhar and Kurtzman [13] identified five macro areas: attractions, resorts, cruises, organized tour packages and events. These are areas that offer tourists things to observe and do related to sport. For example, sports can be natural (parks, mountains) or artificially constructed by man (stadiums, museums). Sports resorts are very large complexes that have a high standard of services, offer different types of sports activities at various levels, offer the presence of highly experienced and renowned instructors, and it is all organized and assembled in all-inclusive packages. The category of cruises includes, on the other hand, all voyages made with ships and boats that combine sports and/or sporting activities as a main market strategy. In the panorama of organized tourism there are many proposals for travel, including both short or long stays that have sports as their main theme and that manage to move millions of tourists around the world to their favourite destinations, sports facilities or events. Golf in Apulia is relatively recent; the first 18-hole golf course was built in Castellaneta (Taranto) in 1968 in an area overlooking the sea already intended to host a luxurious resort. Subsequently, in 1996 the Malopra practice course was built, a pioneering initiative south of Lecce. A year later (1997) Barialto Golf Club was completed with 18 holes in Casamassima, near Bari. In the nineties it was thought that golf could enhance an area in the Municipality of Vernole (Lecce) that would become a golfing reality with the birth of the Acaya Golf Club (2009, 18 holes). The latest facilities are the San Domenico Golf Club, finished in 2001 with 18 holes, and the Golf Club Torre Coccaro (2006, nine holes), both in Savelletri di Fasano (Brindisi) [4], about 1 km from each other. In total, there are ten golf courses in Apulia, seven of which are affiliated with the Italian Golf Federation and the others are aggregated as practice courses and for sports promotion. The number of members is 720 (2019 data), slightly decreased compared to the increasing trend of recent years.

Among the infrastructure for touristic activities, golf courses have a strong impact on the surrounding environment. The consumption of resources (for example, the extraction of water, the occupation of soil, etc.) and the pollution produced, for example from the use of pesticides, are of major concern. As a result, the Italian golf movement is increasingly directing its development towards an environmentally friendly approach through environmental certifications or acknowledgements. Golf courses require a huge amount of water every day and, as with other causes of excessive extraction, this can result in a water deficit [14]. Golf resorts are increasingly located in protected areas or in areas where resources are limited, further intensifying the pressure generated. This awareness has led the Italian Golf Federation to sensitize its members to environmental issues with increasing initiatives. For example, one of the most effective is the Environmental Certification of the Golf Environment Organisation (GEO) which can be considered a sort of environmental balance for golf. The objective of the GEO certification is to ensure that the environmental commitment undertaken by a golf course is recognized, rewarded and disclosed. Among other initiatives in raising awareness about environmental issues, the FIG has paid attention to the cultural heritage that exists on the perimeter of the fields, saving water consumption (through routes that use macro-thermal species that are more suitable for hot-arid climates, with water scarcity, and more resistant to water stress and wear), and the construction
of golf courses designed and managed according to the principles of eco-sustainability. Eco-sustainability, therefore, has a potentially considerable function in environmental protection and reconstruction becoming an integral part of land use planning and local environmental policies.

In Apulia, the San Domenico Golf Club obtained the GEO certification in 2019 and obtained the recognition of a club engaged in the conservation and protection of cultural heritage (a Messapian necropolis of the fifth century B.C. and a Masseria (large farm) of the eighteenth century) in 2017. The latter recognition was awarded in the same year to the Golf Club of Acaya (Caves of Basilian monks dating back to the fourth century AD) along with one for saving water consumption. There are also four Golf Clubs in Apulia that currently use macro-thermic species: Barialto di Bari, Acaya, Torre Coccaro and San Domenico. The latter two clubs, which are the subject of this discussion, both belong to an area known as the “productive agricultural park” and the “agricultural area of environmental protection” (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The location of the Torre Coccaro Golf Club and San Domenico Golf Club. Source: authors’ processing based on IGM Charter of Italy 1: 25,000.

Referring to the Regional Landscape Plan of Apulia, the two golf centres have two fortified large farms from their original housing units which fall into areas of considerable concern for the landscape. In fact, the whole area is included in the perimeter of the rural landscapes, with particular reference to the Multifunctional Agricultural Park of Enhancement of Monumental Olive Trees. In this area, you can distinguish two predominant rural landscapes: the centuries-old olive groves and the landscape of the blades,
episodic watercourses, which interrupt the peri-coastal agricultural territory at irregular intervals. There are two morphotypes of the blade landscapes, the agricultural mosaic associated with elements of naturalness (arable land/wooden arable land associated with olive groves/woods, arable land/woods and pasture) and the arable land associated with the olive groves. The prevailing crops are, therefore, the simple arable land in non-irrigated areas and the olive groves. The area is subject to landscape protection and almost entirely surrounds the archaeological site of Egnazia, among the most important in the region. The historical environmental context is, therefore, characterized by the presence of monumental olive trees and large fortified farms that accentuate, as further landscape resources, the touristic vocation of the entire area.

Both structures fall, therefore, into an area of prevalent and historically agricultural use. The structure of the G.C. Torre Coccaro is complementary to the ancient large farm Torre Maizza, transformed in 2002 into a luxury hotel. Over the centuries, Torre Maizza was a fortress in the line of defense that crossed the Apulian region, a fortified watchtower of the sixteenth century, against the incursions of Ottoman Turks and Saracens and a place of refuge for pilgrims during the invasions. A symbol of protection and safe haven for many years, Torre Maizza has slowly evolved into a large farm with the succession of generations. Now it is a five star luxury resort immersed in the plain of ancient olive trees with adjoining stables of cows, sheep stables, an oil mill on the ground floor, fortified orange groves and a fortified vegetable garden. After a long period of abandonment, it was purchased in the early 2000s by a family of local entrepreneurs in the tourist accommodation sector. Since 2018 the management (with a thirty-year contract) has been taken over by a chain of English luxury hotels. At present, the agricultural activity carried out in the land belonging to the structure, although evidently not representing the heart of the business of the hotel group, is in full swing. The manager of the same group has confirmed on several occasions that it is precisely this agricultural landscape that was the real vis attractiva (attraction) of the entire investment (over EUR 6 million). The total area of the structure is about twenty hectares; the golf course occupies about twelve. The total number of full-time employees is about 80 and a tenth are dedicated to the golf club.

The San Domenico Golf Club is located a short distance from Borgo Egnazia in Savelletri of Fasano. The inside of the Masseria Cimino, of the eighteenth century, is considered the guesthouse of the field. These properties are part of the San Domenico Hotels group. The main nucleus of the Masseria San Domenico dates back to the fifteenth century and consists of a watchtower belonging to the Knights of Malta who had their main base in Apulia in the nearby port of St. Stephen. The tower, still intact, stands at the centre of the residential area that was gradually transformed until the eighteenth century, becoming one of the most important fortified farms in the area. A family originally from Fasano owned and used it sporadically in the summer for many years. The management was entrusted to a farmer who lived there throughout the year and was responsible for the conservation and the harvest of 100 hectares of surrounding land, consisting of orchards and mostly olive groves. In 1996, the owners decided to return to Apulia and turn it into a luxury hotel; seven years later followed the golf club not far from the hotel, which covers about 60 hectares. As can be seen, agriculture is not the predominant activity of the San Domenico Group, but it is still one of the support activities managed by a special agricultural and forestry company with its employees.

Compared to the conditions that existed before the construction of the two golf courses, it can certainly be said that they have contributed to the overall development of the land on which they stand and with positive effects on a local scale. As previously seen, in terms of direct employment the numbers are rather low, but the presence of this sport has generated considerable flows of tourists to the Apulian territory. After all, sports have taken a leading role in our society, both for the economic flows linked to it and for the many environmental changes produced, which can be highly pervasive [15]. It is sufficient to recall, for example, the remarkable urban transformations of cities and all the venues of medium and large sports events. For several years golf has been fought against by the
associations of environmentalists. It is not a sport that is in close contact with nature, as fans have always argued, but an activity that has a negative impact on the territory, with artificial landscapes, deforestation actions and introduction of plant species not consistent or even in conflict with the local ecosystem [15,16]. In the two case studies, this is partially true because the construction of the golf courses has, at the same time, caused the owners to undertake a path of overall environmental quality. It remains an objective fact, however, that in different parts of Italy several hectares of agricultural land have been lost and used for golf courses and the change in the use of agricultural areas “has often been converted into a distortion of the landscape and environmental structures of the areas” [16] (79).

4. New Sustainable (Eco) Tourism Strategies in Brazil

Over the past few years, the tourism sector has assumed a role of a certain importance within the Brazilian economy; despite the fact that the international tourism movement has gone through alternating phases, since the 1980s it has nevertheless shown an almost positive trend. In fact, recently (2016), the direct participation of tourism in the economy reached 56.8 billion, or 3.2% of GDP. The sector’s total contribution was 152.2 billion, 8.5% of GDP. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates a 3.3% growth in the tourism sector until 2027, reaching 9.1% of GDP [17]. In relation to international demand, tourist arrivals in the country have not changed substantially from previous years, but have reached the highest level ever recorded: 6.57 million arrivals in 2016. Argentina is the largest issuer of international tourists to Brazil, followed by the United States, accounting for 34.9% and 8.7% of total tourists in 2016, respectively. When assessing the number of arrivals by continent, South America accounted for more than half of the total volume of foreign tourists in 2016 (56.75%). Europe, with 24.42%, and North America, with 11.17%, are the other two continents that show significant participation in the Brazilian tourism sector.

Greater attention began to spread in Brazil, on a political and speculative level, towards issues related to the concept of sustainability in relation to touristic activities, although not always in a substantial and continuous way, mainly influenced by “alternating” political decisions and by the change of governments. As rightly pointed out by Varani and Moscatelli, the need to finance sustainable touristic activities “supported” within different projects is clear (for example, Proecotour is a tourism development program aimed at eco-sustainable activities, activated with the Banco Interamericano de Desenvolvimento (BID), under the direction of the Ministry of the Environment for the Amazons and Pantanal); on the other, the Brazilian government is also a supporter—as widely known—of programs with a strong environmental impact, especially to the advantage of the speculations implemented by multinationals [18]. In this latter case, we need only think of the aggression against the Amazon forest, whose deforestation and logging are aimed at extensive soya cultivation and grazing. This practice has increased especially since the Bolsonaro government’s policy.

Tourism that is known as a sector that respects the environment, culture, society and local economies is above all a bottom-up policy: “communities and NGOs now feel the need to claim the right to sustainability and to enjoy the positive implications that tourism can potentially have, thus not only referring to respect for the environment, but also to an economic return for the local population. Sustainable tourism is therefore a fundamental tool for enhancing local culture” [18] (p. 701). In other words, the intention is to put the people at the center of attention and, consequently, to activate participatory processes to ensure that the communities are not passive subjects, but protagonists of the tourist offer; prerogatives recognized as necessary for making Brazilian tourism a community and solidarity-based activity. This is the case of the “Projecto bagagem” Association, founded in 2002 with the aim of creating a network for solidarity and community-based tourism. “The association developed a partnership with various NGOs in Brazil, developing community-based tourism packages that would have a positive impact on the local population and, at the same time, be able to offer conscious tourists a real experience in contact with the living conditions, rhythms and culture of the place. In order to implement these projects,
training programmes for communities have also been devised so that they can manage tourism” [18] (p. 701).

The need to support new forms of tourism based on responsibility and in tune with the needs of local populations is therefore becoming increasingly evident. While this new trend is fairly widespread in civil society, it is less firmly established in the policies of the Brazilian government. Nevertheless, there is a consensus on the idea that tourism, with its various segments (including ecotourism and sustainable tourism), can represent an opportunity for the country’s development with a view of creating new jobs, reducing inequalities and protecting the territory.

The Ministry of Tourism (Mitur) presented four national tourism plans: the “National Tourism Plan (2003–2007): Guidelines, objectives and programs”; the “National Tourism Plan (2007–2010): A journey of inclusion”; the “National Tourism Plan: Tourism does much more for Brazil (2013–2016)”, and the last, the “National Tourism Plan (2018–2022): More jobs and income for Brazil”. Particularly, starting with the 2007–2010 plan, these plans lay the foundations for a more socially inclusive policy and emphasize the need to encourage domestic tourism, while recognizing the importance of international flows. Above all, however, the idea of paying greater attention to cultural and regional diversity is beginning to emerge, thus facilitating the launch of new tourism and new tourist destinations that are far from the traditional circuits, while also spatially redistributing the benefits deriving from touristic activities. Diversification also means including a range of options along with the possibility of “experiencing” the culture and traditions of the host communities in the tourism offering.

The latest National Tourism Plan (NTP 2018–2022) has set as a programmed objective to modernize and reduce bureaucracy in the tourism sector in an attempt to expand investment and facilitate accessing credit to stimulate competitiveness and innovation. This involves investing in the promotion of Brazilian tourist destinations not only on a national but also on an international scale, and also by promoting greater professional qualifications for operators and strengthening decentralized management and regionalization processes in tourism. In 2017 the Ministry of Tourism promoted a program called “Brazil + Tourism,” with the aim of strengthening and making tourism an important driving force for the development of the territory. The objectives to be achieved by 2022, included in the same program, consist of improving the strategies and initiatives to be implemented and shared in the latest National Tourism Plan (NTP). The general objectives of the NTP are to strengthen regionalization; to improve quality and competitiveness; to innovate; and to promote sustainability (the latter objective was also supported in previous plans). The aim is to raise the level of Brazilian tourism and consolidate it as an important player in the national economy, together with the implementing coordination between the different levels of government: federal, state and municipal [19]. This aspect goes in the direction of strengthening an alternative approach to tourism management, emphasizing the need to promote decentralized processes of participation and decision-making. The introduction of the concept of “regionalization” implies the necessary creation of a regional tourism network capable of extending economic and social benefits, not only to the municipality with a clear vocation for tourism but also to all those municipalities that orbit the regional network.

Another aspect dealt with in the framework of the latest Tourism Development Plan concerns—as aforementioned—the sustainability and the implementation of sustainable tourism. Promoting the development of sustainable tourism has always been a concern in national tourism plans. In particular, the three-year period of 2013–2016 was an important period to strengthen the agenda of inclusion and sustainability in tourism. The United Nations Agenda 2030 refers to the need for sustainability to penetrate the guidelines of the tourism policy, considering the environment, culture, society and the economy, in total harmony with the concept of sustainable development, at all levels: state, federal, regional and municipal. The desired objective of embracing sustainable tourism includes the idea of the necessary adoption of tourism that is above all “responsible,” including issues ranging
from ethics to social responsibility, to the protection of children’s rights, to respect for the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of local cultures, as well as to a greater participation of the destined communities in defining development policies and access to this economic sector. All this involves the adoption of sustainable practices to promote the integration of local production in the tourism sector and the development of local tourism; to allow democratic access to segments of special demand for tourism; and to encourage an ethical approach to tourism.

Furthermore, since the second segment chosen by foreign tourists in Brazil is eco-tourism (about 16.3% in 2017), after “sun and sea” with 72.4%, the goal of NTP 2018–2022 to diversify the tourist offer in Brazil by promoting the natural and cultural heritage should be recognized as having great potential to be better used. Brazil, moreover, is a country that is easily identifiable and recognizable by its vast and diverse natural areas available for exploration, in a responsible and sustainable way [20]. According to the report of the World Economic Forum [21], Brazil is in first place at a global level in terms of diversity of natural resources, as well as distinguishing itself in cultural resources. However, despite this advantage, in terms of “priority in the tourism sector,” the country is in the 106th place in the world. This confirms the need for strategic planning in order to achieve significant improvements. The Brazilian Ministry of Tourism (Mitur) recognizes ecotourism as a “segment of tourism that uses, in a sustainable way,” the natural and anthropogenic capital, “encouraging its conservation, with the aim of forming environmental awareness, to promote the well-being of the population” [22] (p. 17). Ecotourism has been discussed in Brazil since 1985, but at the government level the first initiative to organize ecotourism activities took place in 1987, with the creation of the National Technical Commission with the aim of monitoring the “ecological tourism” project [23]. In the following decade, coinciding with the United Nations Conference on the Environment held in Rio de Janeiro (1992), ecotourism gained more visibility and the issues of eco-technologies, human labor retraining, scientific-technical development and sustainability were discussed. A new focus on rural landscapes, forests, coastal regions and other ecosystems was called for, especially in relation to the way they are experienced, opening a debate on a new way of using and enjoying spaces by tourists [22]. The ultimate goal was to establish a sustainable relationship with nature and host communities committed to conservation, environmental education and socio-economic development [22]. In other words, ecotourism is emerging as a legitimate option to diversify the tourism offering in Brazil, given the need for innovation, competitive advantages and conservation of natural resources [24].

However, as a result of this interest in the practice of ecotourism supported by national tourism policies (guided by the principles of sustainability), according to Cristiano Henrique da Silva Maranhão and Francisco Fransualdo de Azevedo [24], the National Tourism Plan 2018–2022 disregards these concerns. Neither the objectives nor the guiding principles, nor the lines of action of the NTP 2018–2022 give due importance to the ecotourism sector, including the contemporary policy directives of national tourism. It is not presented as a significant vector for the planning and management of Brazilian tourism; on the contrary, it seems weakened in its dimension as a “sustainable” practice, precisely because aspects related to environmental education and the participation of territorial stakeholders seem to be on the margins of the planning and management process. “For this reason, Ecotourism promoted in Brazil is still far from seeing broader and more significant results, from an educational, participatory and social point of view. Therefore, the challenge remains to standardize a language that not only meets the economic expectations of the various social groups interested in the development of the activity, but also provides a clear interpretation of its content and meaning, contributing to policy-making, planning and decision-making more consistent with reality” [24] (p. 33).

5. Golf in Teresópolis: From a New Touristic Resource to Disused Space to Be Re-Functionalized

Studying a touristic phenomenon on a local scale from a geographical perspective requires, as the literature urges, an integrated, transcalar approach which looks at the
territory and at the transformations induced by tourism. These are new spaces that are
generated and modify the landscape without neglecting the global dimension that imposes
new models, often capable of engulfing and transforming the local territory [25,26].

Aware of this complexity, the case of Teresópolis in Brazil is an example of a reality in
which golfing, unlike the case of Apulia, no longer constitutes a representative segment of
the tourism phenomenon. The context of Teresópolis is profoundly marked by its history
and by the events that led to its birth and evolution within the Serrana region [27,28].

Some of the characterizing icons are still strategic today for the construction of a
sustainable touristic offer because, if rightly valued and inserted in a network of both
horizontal and vertical relationships, they can represent a strong response of the local
territory to the demands of a dominant global touristic economy, often conformed and
standardized. Attention to local values is not only dictated by cultural sensitivity, it is also
justified by the fact that they generate a local economy behind which important family
dynamics are hidden. Therefore, recognizing, enhancing and valuing the behaviour of
family businesses and especially microenterprises becomes a strategic element in achieving
sustainable and aware tourism.

The history of Teresópolis begins with a farm—the fazenda March—built by George
March in 1813 who came into contact with the territory to undertake a mining activity
(Figure 5). Having abandoned the idea, he devoted himself to a project of real territorial
ruralization: from this moment on, the history of the settlement center began, strongly
characterized by a distinctly agricultural function. Certainly, the work of March and
his descendants has contributed significantly to the development of this reality, also af-
fecting its economic and social functions, considering the English trader the founder of
the city of Teresópolis. The territorial project put in place called for the improvement of
infrastructures [29].

After the death of the founder of the March family, Teresópolis entered a new era
characterized by the presence of heirs and the fragmentation of property into smaller farms,
sites and plots, thus beginning a process of populating the region. Today the municipality
of Teresópolis (Serrana region) covers an area of approximately 770 km² (Figure 6). The
homonymous town has been developing in a north-south direction within the catchment
area of the Paquequer River following its direction (secundum naturam) in the shadow of
the Orgaos orogenic complex (Figure 7).

Examining the number of residences, an interesting fact emerges regarding their
function with respect to the dynamics of internal tourism: of the 72,129 residences, approx-
imately 16.1% are occasionally used as second vacation homes for the Carioca population,
confirming the role that Teresópolis has been assuming since the second half of the 20th
century [30,31].

An analysis of the Tourism Plan of 2001 (TP 2001), promoted by the State of Rio
de Janeiro which includes Teresópolis in the Serrana (B) tourist region, shows that the
entire region offers excellent opportunities with respect to the segment of ecological and
rural tourism, which is already well advanced for Teresópolis and the municipalities of
Vassouras, Paty do Alferes, Cachoeiras de Macacu, Petropolis and Nova Friburgo [32].
Figure 5. Detail of the topographic map of Capitania do Rio de Janeiro of 1767, kept in the National Library of Rio de Janeiro. An empty space reads: Certão ocupado por Índios bravos beyond the Orgaons mountains is represented in this map. The empty space and the caption “certainly occupied by good Indians” give us the information that this territory, where the city of Terepolis stands today, was practically unknown in the second half of the 18th century.
Figure 6. Details of the topographical map of Teresópolis (1:10,000) kept in the library of the UERJ State University. The center of Teresópolis developed secundum naturam, close to the Paquequer River and following its course, in the shadow of the Orgaos mountain range.

Figure 7. The city of Teresópolis, developed in the alluvial plain next to the Paquequer River. Photos by the authors.
The TP 2001 had identified, moreover, the presence of 14 natural attractions, six of historical-cultural types and five linked to traditional and popular events; in that same year, the touristic flows registered in Teresópolis came exclusively from the national borders (99.70%) and only in a small part from abroad (0.30%). The municipality had an important receptive capacity with a number of tourists that amounted to 506,155 visitors. (The report also highlighted Teresópolis’ significant role in generating jobs in the tourism sector. In the ranking of the tourism region, it was third with 1616 employees after Petropolis and New Freiburg). The same report also highlighted Teresópolis’ significant role in creating jobs in the tourism sector. The municipality was found to be third in the ranking of the touristic region, with 1616 jobs after Petropolis and New Freiburg.

With a responsible and sustainable view to tourism in 2010, the State of Rio de Janeiro launched a sustainable tourism development plan whose main objective was to develop tourism in an integrated and conscious manner, associated with cultural enhancement, conservation and community participation, resulting in creating jobs and income.

Six strategic regions have been identified, three of which belong to the coastal tourism centres and the rest to the mountain tourism centres. The latter includes Teresópolis, which is included in the Serra Verde Imperial region together with the municipalities of Petrópolis, Cachoeiras de Macacu and Nova Friburgo. This new taxonomy took into account homogeneity in terms of attractiveness, tourist segments, facilities and services, as well as distance and travel time from the capital.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism, with the aim of supporting municipal governments, classified them into five categories—the letter A distinguishes municipalities with an excellent performance while municipalities that present a mediocre and inadequate tourist performance are characterized by letter E—which return the tourist performance of these territories by evaluating the number of jobs generated by tourist activities and national and international tourist flows.

The thematic cartography (Figure 8), made from the touristic performance of the municipalities of the State of Rio de Janeiro, gives us, through the different colours, the information that the State of Rio de Janeiro consists of 57 municipalities in category A, 179 in category B, 539 in category C and 1961 in category D. Only one municipality belongs to category E. In this taxonomy, Teresópolis falls under category B. This hierarchisation tool improves tourism management, optimizes the distribution of resources and promotes the development of the sector.

The National Tourism Plan 2018–2022 has instead set itself the programmatic objective of modernizing and reducing bureaucracy in the tourism sector with the aim of expanding investments and facilitating access to credit to stimulate competitiveness and innovation, investing in the promotion of Brazilian tourist destinations not only on a national but also on an international scale, and by promoting a greater professional qualification of operators, strengthening decentralized management and regionalization processes in tourism.

Quantitative data found at the Statistical Office of the Municipality of Teresópolis (sampling of visitors at the Tourism Office in 2018), although partial and incomplete, confirm that visitors who came to Teresópolis were predominantly Cariocas (83.25%) and Paulistas (8.16%); on the other hand, there were not many foreigners and it was mainly German (14.48%) and French (11.84%) welcomed, almost exclusively in the summer period, in 58 structures. These included nine agritourisms, of which 14 were located in the Centro district, 19 in the Alto area, 3 in Barra, 1 in Rio Bahia and 12 in Tere-Fri. According to the data provided by the Parco, the trend of visitors since 1992 has been increasing more and more until 2012, reaching a presence more than 137,000 visitors. The main and consolidated touristic function of Teresópolis, recognized by NTP 2001, remains that of a summer resort that attracts exclusively visitors from the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro in a type of short-term tourism, mainly related to the weekend. This phenomenon, despite being limited in duration and type of visitors, has a significant impact. Teresópolis is also recognized as a rural touristic resort since there is important economic activity in this territory linked to the rural landscape that provides a type of tourist attraction
increasingly required, especially by tourists from the city [33,34]. Moreover, this form of tourism strengthens and supports the economic activities of the primary sector, giving life to multifunctional agriculture. In this regard, a program to support the development of rural tourism has been promoted. Teresópolis is a part, together with the municipalities of Comendador Levy Gasparian, Guapimirim, Magé, Paraíba do Sul, Petrópolis, São José do Vale do Rio Preto, Sapucaia and Três Rios, of the IV area where there is a significant presence of rural farms of different sizes that present different agricultural activities in an extremely suggestive and attractive rural landscape. Furthermore, Teresópolis was included among the municipalities of the State of Rio de Janeiro where there is a record of business tourism. The TP 2001 summarizes that the seventh touristic region which, in addition to Teresópolis, also includes the municipalities of Cachoeiras de Macacu, Guapimirim, Nova Friburgo and Petrópolis, highlights the natural potential (orogeny that has given rise to unique forms such as the infamous Dedo de Deus) and environmental potential (Atlantic Forest of exuberant beauty) represented by the Serra dos Órgãos National Park, with a special attraction for trekking and mountain climbing (Figure 9).

![Figure 8](image-url)  
**Figure 8.** Teresópolis, which is part of the Serra Verde Imperial tourist region, is among those municipalities with a good tourist performance, marked with the color blue which refers to the letter B. Source: [http://mapa.turismo.gov.br/mapa/init.html#/home](http://mapa.turismo.gov.br/mapa/init.html#/home) (Accessed on 26 April 2021).

A positive factor is also represented by gastronomy, enriched by a culinary tradition. The touristic region offers excellent opportunities for the development of activities related to ecotourism, rural tourism and business tourism (Figure 10). The presence of fairs and conventions enhances the touristic offering. There are also weaknesses, mainly due to poor road infrastructure which lacks the awareness of the importance of tourism for the regional economy, lacks a public safety system and lacks the advertising of events. Another weakness of regional tourism is the lack of coordination between local bodies and institutions which do not work in an integrated manner.
6. The Teresópolis Golf Club and the Perception of the Touristic Landscape through a Quali-Quantitative Analysis

Among the many attractions of Teresópolis, the Teresópolis Golf Club (Figure 11) founded in the first half of the twentieth century emerges. This structure that has great potential today is experiencing a moment of great difficulty and seems like a cathedral in a desert, alien to a context that does not recognize and value it. Teresópolis Golf Club was the eighth golf club founded in Brazil.
It all began in 1934 when a group of friends from the upper middle class of Rio de Janeiro, called by Carlos Guinle, a doctor, met in Rio de Janeiro to lay the foundations of Teresópolis Golf Club, a sports club set up on land (500,000 m²) generously donated by the Vieira family, free of charge and for an indefinite period of time, with the hope of enhancing the value of that territory so as to make it even richer and more economically fruitful [35]. The club should, as stated in the intentions defined in the founding document, provide its members with a sporting space to practice golf, tennis, swimming, horseback riding, as well as social, artistic and athletic meetings, and should have also provide an airport equipped for efficient military use. Today we could have called it a multipurpose space. The Vieira family had become owners of these and several other lands in Teresópolis thanks to José Augusto Vieira, who in 1895 received the concession to build the railroad that would connect Teresópolis with Rio de Janeiro. Other lots were added to the first one sold by the Vieira family so that in 1937 the first sporting activity took place. The nine-hole golf course of Teresópolis was designed by the Canadian architects Thompson and Jones who were in Brazil to design a golf course in the municipality of Itanhanga. In 1939, GOLF magazine was founded, a bimonthly publication created to advertise the Club and, above all, to attract new members. A swimming pool was built in the 1960s and it attracted a large number of visitors, so much so that the entrances were regulated. In the 1970s and 1980s the offer of the Golf Club of Teresópolis expanded to include courses, swimming competitions and gymnastics, as well as an intense social activity that promoted parties, dinners and art exhibitions. Towards the end of the 1970s, the Club’s financial situation was very critical, with debts and damage to the golf course mainly due to summer rains. The world economic situation in the 1980s, with persistent inflation, the increase in fuel prices, the cost of living that was increasing more and more and the environmental problems due to the flooding of the Paquequer River significantly compromised the fortune of this center, leading to a gradual number of members who stop paying their dues. Of the 403 members at the end of the 1970s, there were about 328 in 1982, destined further to decrease. Expenses were rationalized, starting with personnel (10 employees were laid off). This precarious situation has marked the club even now, as confirmed by the current president, who highlighted the serious economic conditions in which the club finds itself,
increasingly losing members, identity and functions despite processes of redevelopment and refunctionalization. Today, golf tourism lives, or rather survives, with great difficulty in a territorial context that neither recognizes nor values it. In the various plans for the development of tourism, there is a total lack of attention and valorization towards that trend of golf tourism that, in Brazil, has been an important tradition since 1958 when the Brazilian Golf Association was created in Rio de Janeiro and transferred to Sao Paulo in 1960. With the inauguration of the Olympic Golf Course in 2015 in Barra da Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro, which hosted the return of golf to the Olympic Games after 112 years, an important season for golf began, whose numerous and increasingly equipped and functional facilities in the Brazilian territory recreated a new geography of Golf. This was done by favoring sport realities linked to multifunctional urban centers rather than to peripheral realities that had an attraction for the native population in the twentieth century. This was an opportunity for tourists at the golf center, located in a suburban reality, not only to play the sport but for relaxation from chaotic city life. The qualitative and quantitative surveys carried out in the city of Teresópolis confirm what has been shown so far. The city of Teresópolis is visited very rarely (78% come only once) and the type of visit is mainly limited to one day (hiking). For tourists who stay overnight, many choose to stay at a hotel (68%). They reach the city mostly by their own means (75%) and to a lesser extent by public ones. Teresópolis is chosen, in order of priority, as a destination that will allow them to go for a walk, to be in contact with nature, to buy at the fair and to experience a tourism linked mainly to ecological sustainability rather than golf. The main attraction, in fact, is the Serra dos Orgaos National Park. With reference to the perceptive aspects, Teresópolis is preferred for its safety, its environmental quality and also for its gastronomy, but there was no opinion on the golf center. The qualitative-quantitative and documentary survey, the meeting with the stakeholders and the field research through the questionnaire give a clear picture of the economic, social and cultural reality of Teresópolis that presents itself with an important touristic potential that is not sufficiently valued and put into place. Teresópolis is recognized for its environmental values, its rural landscape and also for its social and cultural activities, starting with the handicraft fair. The national development plans that have recognized Teresópolis as an important tourist attraction have included it in an inter-municipal network in order to fully develop the many iconic elements of the landscape of Teresópolis, together with the hope of creating a more organic and structured touristic offer to determine more conscious and sustainable tourism. Until now, this has been characterized by a mainly excursionist form and a touristic formula circumscribed in time that has recorded little economic impact on the territory. The weaknesses of the municipality of Teresópolis are certainly to be found in the precarious road infrastructure, the lack of awareness of the importance of tourism for the local economy, the lack of a promotional system and the lack of development of the municipality consistent with the territorial vocations. There is a lack of coordination between local bodies and institutions which do not work in an integrated manner, resulting in a segmented and often inconsistent touristic offer. With regards to golf, it should be clarified that the problem is limited to the golf club of Teresópolis, but not to golf in general, which in Brazil, as in most of the rest of the world [36], enjoys good health, boasting its own tradition as evidenced by the many activities in Brazil. The golf center of Teresópolis was born from a wealthy bourgeoisie that in Teresópolis had identified, a pleasant place where you could enjoy, thanks to the mild climate, a favorable environment, especially in the summer. In this area, which had a rural vocation, as the territorial history of Teresópolis teaches us, a sports club was implanted in a top-down process that was to have the function of upgrading the area by offering a viable alternative to the urban middle class that in the summer and weekends sought a place to practice sports. More generally, a real lusus was confirmed by the infrastructure works that were created in the years following its foundation. The crisis at the Teresópolis golf center stemmed from an international economic crisis that then affected the middle class on a local scale, which immediately renounced a series of benefits including membership in an exclusive but expensive club. The decrease in registrations and the arrears of many
members who were then excluded from the club could be seen both in the interview with the President of the Golf Club and in the documents analyzed. The arrears and expulsions affected the finances of the golf club, compromising its functionality at full capacity and assuming more and more new functions so as to no longer be recognized by the community as a golf center. The creation of new centers related to the urban and international context such as in Rio de Janeiro contributes to making the Golf Club of Teresópolis an increasingly marginal and little-known structure.

7. Conclusions: The Development of Golf, a Sustainable Touristic Resource to Be Monitored for the Protection of Traditional Rural Landscapes

Cultivated fields and golf courses, known as the primary sector and the tertiary sector, are competing for use of rural areas to which financial investments are being directed with increasing interest, as is always the case in the phases of the economic crisis, such as the one we have been experiencing since the beginning of the third millennium. Land grabbing and acquisition of vast agroforestry areas, regardless of the use that is stated to be its intention, are phenomena so widespread and scandalous that we need a reflection at all levels of political-administrative management, from the local to the international [37]. The land grabbing and land concentration processes are heavily conditioning any attempt to implement sustainable and supportive forms of economy, including those linked to tourism and sports activities, which are the most suitable, at least in theory, to safeguard the well-being and health of man and the environment. The two case studies examined relating to the tourism and golf show that sustainability, ethics, enhancement of the territory and recovery of traditional quality products are objectives always motivating land investments even if the results, inevitably submissive to private interests, always respond only to speculative needs. The Italian example of the Apulian region and the Brazilian example of the Serrana region are united not only by the graft of golf facilities in two territories with a deep-rooted agricultural tradition, but also by rural landscapes definitely attractive for their high cultural and environmental value.

The experience started in 1934 by the golf center of Teresópolis to enhance for touristic purposes lands already profitably exploited by flourishing agricultural activities can teach a lot to the ancient Apulian farms (Torre Maizza; San Domenico), which in recent decades have been transformed into luxurious hotels. The fragmentation of the historic Brazilian fazenda into small farms, carried out in the second half of the 19th century, had the merit of promoting the demographic and touristic development of the entire area, while the construction, a century later, of the Golf Club sports center—solicited not only by the amenities of the place but also by the beauty of the agricultural landscape—has gradually been extinguished, along with the touristic interest, tertiary activities and employment opportunities for the local workers. Today that same structure, which has not been able to communicate with the local agricultural reality, is now abandoned and, precisely because it is extraneous to the territorial context, it appears lacking in attractiveness, even a disgrace in the presumption of wanting to impose models of development extraneous to the traditional culture. The most recent creation of golf clubs in Apulia seems to have learned this lesson: some agricultural land of the historic farms, which have also given up more than half of their cultivated area to the artificial lawns of the golf courses, preserve the traditional crops of centuries-old olive trees that have remained to narrate the traditional farming culture. A choice that, even if entrusted by local entrepreneurship to international groups, seems to avoid the risk of an irreversible violation of rural reality being expressly motivated by the desire to protect and enhance the identity landscape heritage. It is therefore up to geographers to monitor the transformations of these territories over time, just as it is up to regional and national administrations and governments to ensure that so many precious historical heritages are truly combined with the most current innovative instances for the benefit of local development. Only by implementing these control actions will we be able to extinguish the fears repeatedly expressed by scholars and environmental associations [16] over seeing agricultural landscapes of great beauty, true monuments to ingenuity and the tenacity of farmers, disappear.
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