

Onsernone 2020: Development Scenarios of a Peripheral Region

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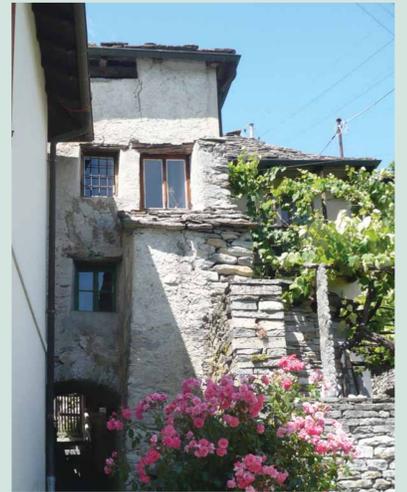
Introduction:

Onsernone is the name of one of the most charming and mysterious valleys of Ticino. Nature appears pristine, wild, and is dominated by forest, water and rock, with a flora and fauna of considerable interest. The harshness of the territory and remoteness from urban centers have made it a valley of emigration. The phenomenon has caused a decline in the resident population: from over 3,000 inhabitants in the second half of 1800, it currently has fewer than 800 inhabitants, spread out an area of over 100 sq. km. The richness of the past is reflected today by a major historical and cultural heritage, boasting many mills, mansions, works of art and a museum.



Objective:

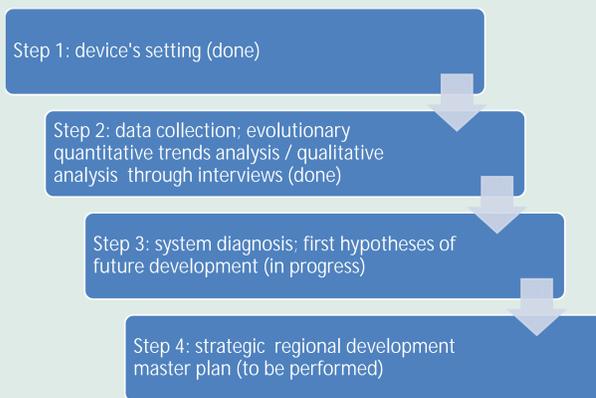
The aim of the study is to develop and implement a strategic analysis of the Onsernone Valley, following a broader approach than the “technical” one usually applied to previous municipalities merger studies. In a first step, that means to face the issue of the future of the Valley as perceived and desired by the people who in it, in relation to changes and challenges, both internal and external (demography, economy, society, environment). This study is part of the new regional policy approach, of the municipalities merging policy, and more generally of the revitalization policy of local Government. The final aim is to create a tool that allows local institutions to properly exploit and develop their regional competitive advantages.



Method:

Our methodological approach follows the principles of the prospective analysis, as well as the ones of the strategic planning and the territorial competitiveness applied to regional development.

Among the several methods of the strategic analysis we use the SWOT and the PEST analysis, the scenario approach and the competitive positioning approach. We go through quantitative as well as qualitative analysis in order to draw the main evolutionary trends of the region, as well as the perceptions the inhabitants have about those trends. Thanks to creative problem solving techniques we finally help (accompany) the inhabitants to design their own strategic regional master plan (vision, mission, goals, strategic development axes, strategic development project and actions, governance structures).



Results:

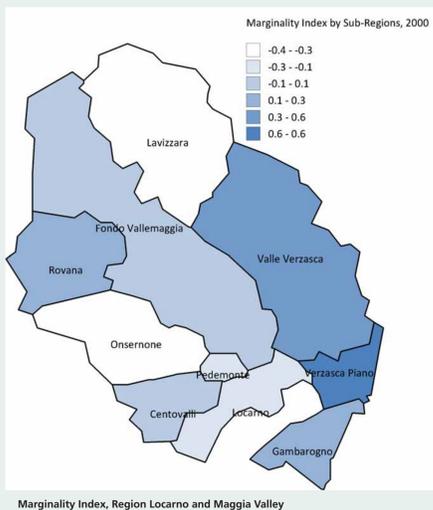
This poster presents the results of quantitative analysis (main socio-economic variables and spatial characteristic of the area of the Valley Onsernone), as well as of the inhabitants' qualitative perceptions collected directly by interview. It's a summary of the current regional “health status”, of the evolutionary dynamics known in the past 10-15 years and of its positioning with respect to the cantonal and regional performance. In this first step, we summarize the results of descriptive statistics and the SWOT analysis, according to the principles of the territorial management and competitiveness. The next steps will aim to provide a comprehensive set of different development scenarios, with the final goal of drawing the strategic master plan for the Onsernone Valley 2020.

From the qualitative analysis, it emerges a regional profile dominated by a very strong balance of physical and natural resources, but with a profound weakness in human resources and in economic activities, as well as with an (increasing) development disparities between the bottom and the upper part of the Valley.

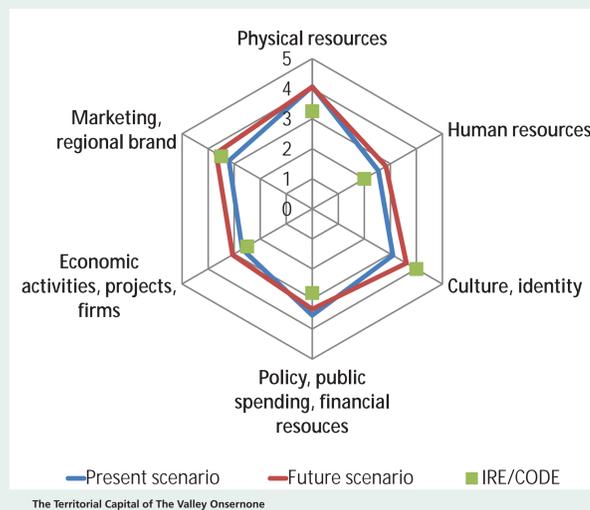
The presence of a preserved natural landscape and wild, high-value natural landscape, is a distinctive feature. The quietude, the silence, the almost untouched nature and its remoteness from the city are elements shared and appreciated.

This “natural sanctuary” however, has structural weaknesses that prevent it from effectively exploiting this enormous natural wealth. The problem of population decline, in particular, is often cited as a source of concern: the situation in this respect is often portrayed as “critical,” “gray,” and even “dying”, while people is losing more and more contact with the territory, mainly because of the abandonment of some houses, pastures, as well as the increasing dimension of second homes.

The economy is considered “weak”, “fragile”, with few employment opportunities and no great development prospects because of the abandonment of the young. It is generally acknowledged a lack of interest - only a few people decide to invest and carry out specific projects - and of an overall shared vision.



Marginality Index, Region Locarno and Maggia Valley



The Territorial Capital of The Valley Onsernone

Discussion:

The study seeks to understand what can be done in regions considered as having low potential in order to develop renewed local development, thinking about the best balance between endogenous dynamics (local factors of development) and external forces (urban centers).

We also ask ourselves how well do the principles of NRP (innovation, competition, ...) fit in regions with low potential and if it is more appropriate to reflect upon the design of specific programs of support and encouragement with less ambitious goals for growth.

In Step 3 we plan to consult with the local players in order to find out the determinants of local development and to draw future development scenarios. The study will be performed through focus groups and workshops that are based on the principles of creative problem-solving. In particular, we'll analyze the possibilities offered by the (relative) strong specialization in health and social sectors as well as in tourism (any comparable examples?).



Strengths	Weaknesses
Natural resources, landscape, biodiversity, river	Human resources(both quantity and quality): young people
Historical and cultural heritage	Internal differences (upper and lower Valley)
Identity, neighborhood	Infighting, inconsistency
	infrastructure quality (tourism)
	B2B services
	Economic fragility
	Policy: replacement, power groups, closure
Opportunities	Threats
National Park: tourism/brand	Protection of land (forest, rocks, waters); loss of value
Tourism, new markets? (wellbeing/regeneration/seminars)	Project of the Italian powerhouse, diverting river
Municipal merger; regional power	National Park, misconception/information

Results of the SWOT Analysis