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Attractiveness, Harmony, Atarassia*

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## LESSONS FROM THE GRAND TOUR. SICILY SEEKING A RENEWED ATTRACTIVENESS

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**Abstract.** *One year after the beginning of the research study “Sicily as seen by foreign travellers: Architects on the Road”, this contribution addresses some issues concerning the role played by the systematic analysis of the foreign travellers’ experience in Sicily, for a shared acknowledgment of the authentic value of the Sicilian “landscape-cultural mosaic”. In the grounds of a landscape axiology, the Lost Paradise can be considered as an archetype of attraction, ataraxy and harmony, determining the surplus value which typically characterizes the superordinate entities which, like landscape, are not reducible to a sum of parts. The contribution presents some results of the research project aiming at producing and implementing a GeoDatabase on a WebGIS interface describing the experiences of the travelling architects who took part in the Grand Tour from the Eighteenth to the early Twentieth Century.*

**Keywords:** *Digital Humanities, Grand Tour, landscape axiology, WebGIS, cultural local identity.*

### Introduction

The research project “Sicily as seen by the others: travelling architects”, led by Paola Barbera at the Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture of the Catania University, has begun to trace the “open borders” of a progressive but not linear acknowledgment of the nature and culture of the Sicilian landscape as seen from the particular point of view of the travellers in the *Grand Tour* age.

This contribution continues the research project path by selecting the aspects which are most relevant for the aims and interests of the landscape-cultural mosaic issue, and proposes the creation of an archiving and information tool on a WebGIS database which includes all existing documents and makes them accessible; the documents themselves, turned into *significant information units*, are valuable for the purpose of conservation, transmission, coordination and dissemination of this wealth of knowledge.

The contribution intends to highlight the aspects of this path which are consistent with the perspective of growth and sharing of the acknowledgment of the Sicilian landscape-cultural mosaic, which informatics sciences such as Geomatics contribute to as well; the latter allow forms of coordination of knowledge opportunely selected and aimed at creating multiple “synopsis”

researchers or users may build to satisfy individual curiosity or more general research needs.

The implementation of the “logics of information” in the creation process of a “synopsis of wandering” involves some waivers of consistency and detailing of the implemented documental material, but brings about significant advantages for the multiplication and dissemination of the “added information value” as generated by the combination of:

- a unified platform of implementation which allows full consistency of the implemented data, and effective comparisons and connections;
- a source of information progressively boosted as premise of an exponential growth of the relationships between the information units (researchers from different universities and European research institutes participate in the project);
- a WebGIS interface for the visualization in space and time of the queries on the material of the digital archive.

*In the others' view* Sicily, lost paradise – that means contaminated by a-synchronies and a-tunings between economic and infrastructural development (Giuffrida and Trovato, 2015), anomalies in the distribution of wealth and a hardly functioning social state – constitutes an archetype of *attractiveness, ataraxy and harmony*, which, if assumed as criteria of a landscape axiology, may still influence the territorial policies.

## 1. Attractiveness. Space

### 1.1 *The perspective of the foreign architects*

Since, in the Age of Enlightenment, Sicily becomes part of the circuit of the *Grand Tour*, it is regarded as the apex of the Mediterranean experience. A paradise, original and primigenial place, almost uncontaminated, cradle of the classical culture, due to the successful integration between nature and artifice (Dorfles, 1977).

Originally individuated as destination to enjoy a direct experience of the ancient remains of Magna Greece, the island unveiled fresh perspectives concerning just the Mediterranean landscape (Brilli, 1995; 2014; De Seta, 2001; 2005; 2014).

As Karl Friedrich Schinkel observes:

Most part of the monuments of ancient architecture don't offer anything new for the architect, as they are familiar to him since youth. The sight of these works in their natural site has something surprising which is not due to their size, but to the pictorial complex (Cometa and Rieman, 1991).

The investigation on the perspective of the travelling architects is aimed at representing the fabric of the elements not found just in the single event (in the semantic link between the site and its significance), but in the overall fabric (in

the syntactic link between the different sites) which is consolidated through the cultural progress; referring to the latter, it is possible (and legitimate) to distinguish between attractors and detractors, founding their scientific criteria of judgement.

The “view of the others” may be considered as the image *beyond the mirror*, only apparently different from the one *in front of it*. The mirror expands knowledge beyond the limits of the immediately visible and the *probable* (the precept), towards what exists as *possible* (the concept); as in the portrait of the Arnolfini spouses by Van Eyck, the mirror (convex) behind the characters not only extends the visual angle, but “unveils” the presence of the painter as well. “The view of the others” in which Sicily is reflected originates a *difference* between the image of places and their essence; this difference creates the “surplus of value” typical of the heuristic experience.

### 1.2 Paths and aims of the travelling architects: the Geo Data Base

The literary and iconographic sources on travelling in Sicily (Cometa, 1999; Di Matteo, 2000) constitute the raw material from which the data have been selected and organized in a Geo Database (Spatial Database – SDB), a database optimized to file and integrate data correlated to objects in space.

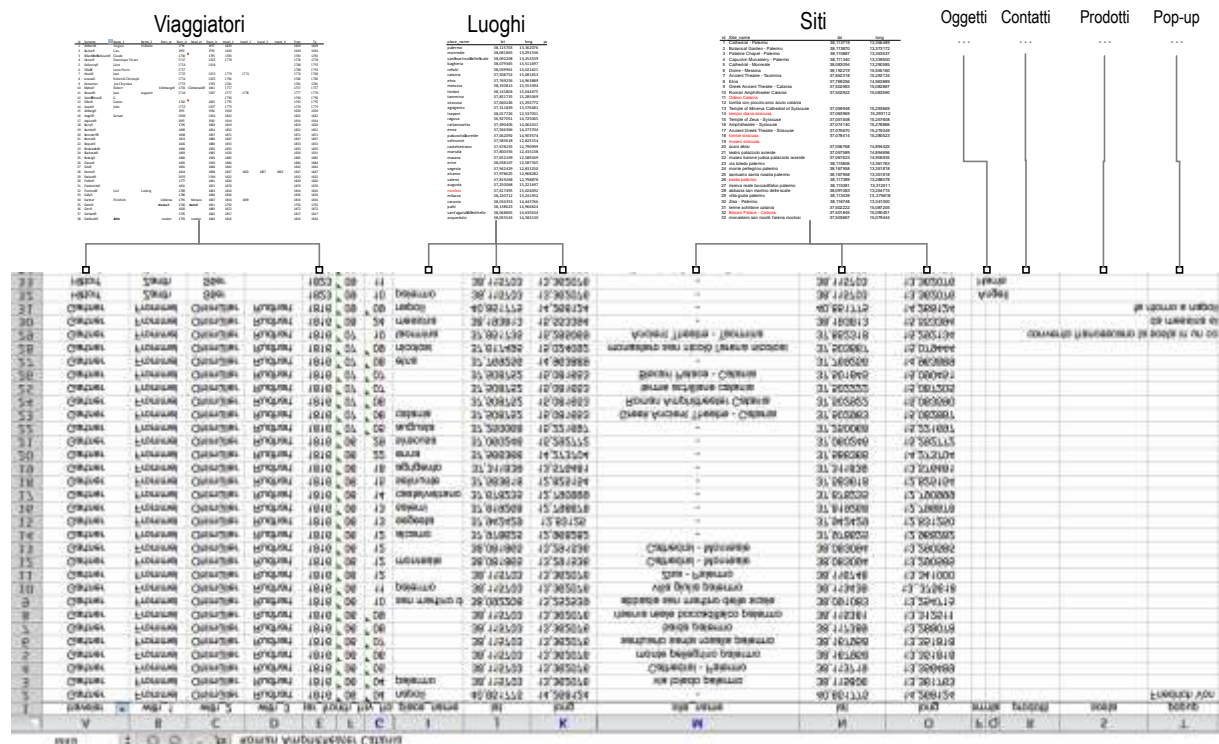


Figure 1. Structure of the Data

Generally, a database consists of *records*, the minimal units bearing significant information, and *fields*, the information contents that means the qualities “necessary” to individuate the units, and “sufficient” for their *distinction*

(identification), *denotation* (description), and *connotation* (characterization).

The database (Fig. 1) is a table where the contents of a coordinated set of archives, including the data extracted from the records completed for each traveller, are collected: *travellers' archive* for a total of 183 records (we have personal data and travel chronology data of 90 travellers only); *place archive* for a total of 157 records; *site archive* – landscape units, monuments etc. – for a total of 330 records, of which 276 ones only are identified and georeferenced; *object archive* for archaeological remains, artworks, etc.; *contact archive*, on persons of importance the encountering of whom was relevant along the itinerary; *work archive*, on graphic material and memoirs produced by the travellers.

The *records* of the main database correspond with a combination of subject (the traveller), spatial unit (the location and/or the site) and the temporal position (the date of the journey and/or of the stop where known). At present the database comprises 916 *records*. The consistency of the documentation on each traveller is very heterogeneous, to the extent of a maximum number of 114 attributed *records* (Houel), compared with an average 7,7, omitting the travellers without information about, and given the presence of 30 travellers each containing just one record.

The *fields* represent the features in the tables described above; the main ones are 17, aggregated in denoted and connoted as follows: *travelling companions; data; place; geographic coordinates of the place; site (ide); geographic coordinates of the site; objects; contacts; products*.

The queries where we can visualize the spatial relation between different travel experiences by place (fig. 2), represented by the position of the bubbles, allow comparing different places basing on the number of visited sites in each place (dimension of the bubble).

Moreover, the WebGIS interface allows tracing the itineraries of several travellers at the same time (fig. 3 top-left); the implementation of special *pop-ups* per site helps making the representation of contents and itineraries more articulated and detailed; the scale depth studies allow for the representation by site as specification of the one by place (fig. 3 top-right and bottom).

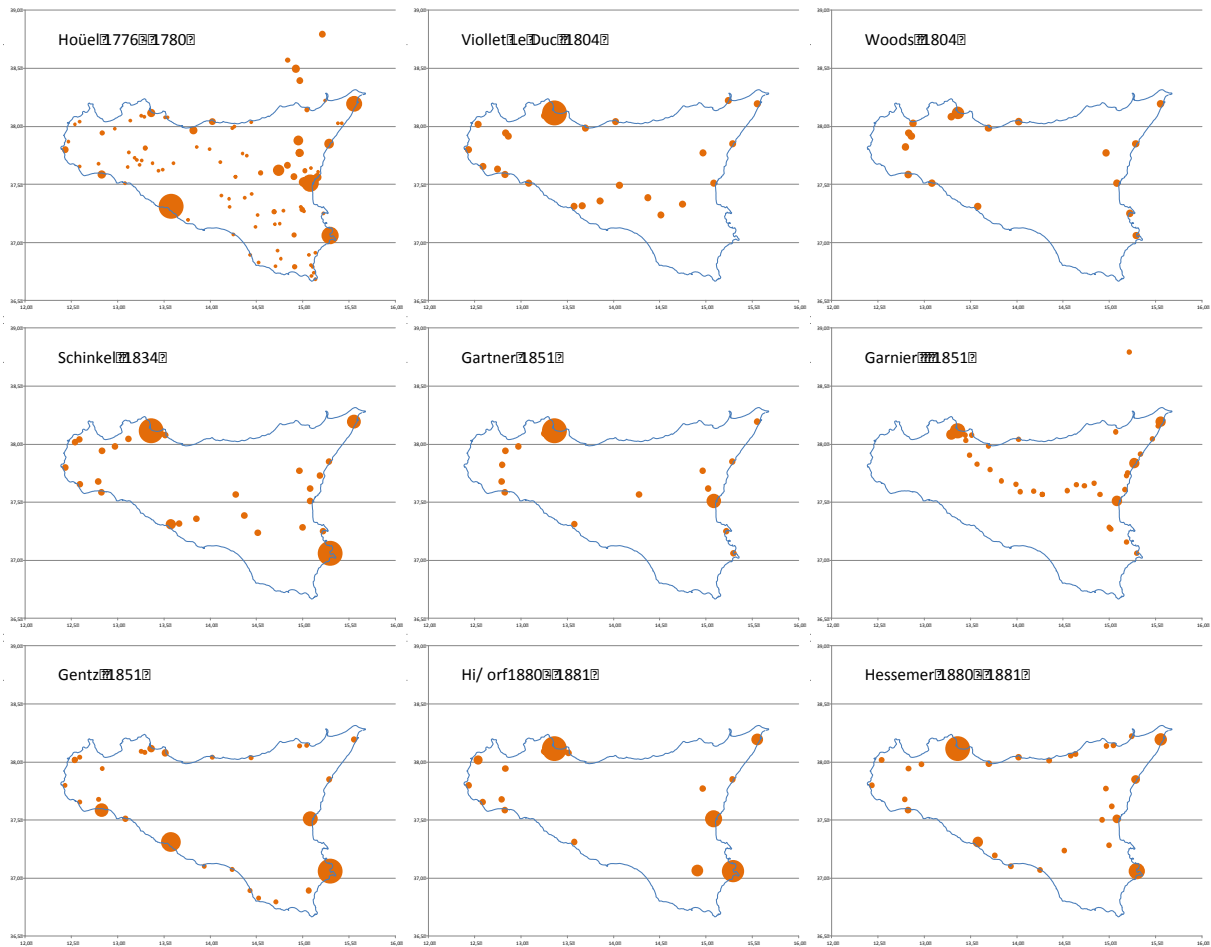


Figure 2. Sample of query on each traveller's itinerary

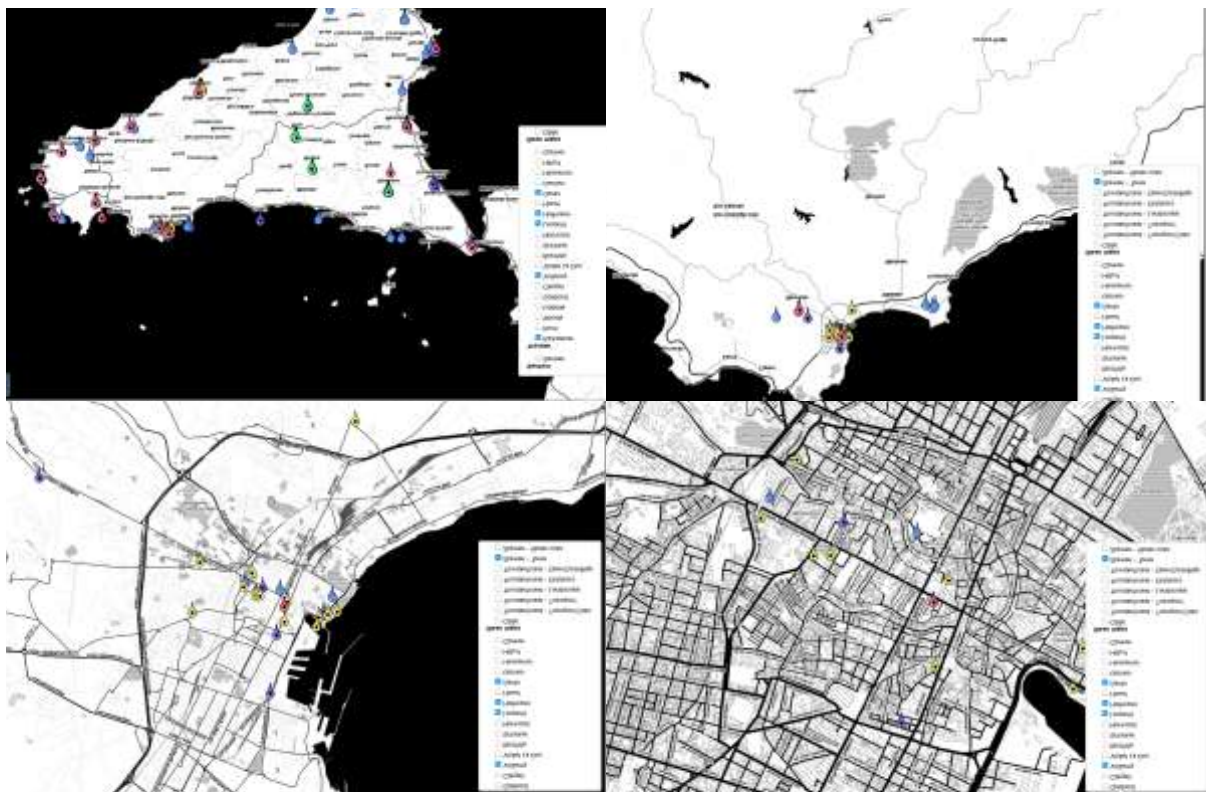


Figure 3. Multiple queries and scale insights

## 2. Ataraxy. Time

### 2.1 Before and after the fall

In *The lost paradise*, Milton poses the question of free will even before it involved humankind (De Monticelli, 2009). In Genesis, Adam and Eve realize they are naked: cut off the link of empathy with God, human existence wouldn't make sense if the trauma of fall wasn't elaborated: Eden is surrogated with its eschatological projection, thus denying, finally, the chance for a new Paradise on Earth.

Promise and hope for Paradise constitute the references for moral behaviour; dealing with the loss of sense, man finds again his centrality, his "being subject" in the discipline of deferring enjoyment according to the "principle of pleasure" (Recalcati, 2011). The image of Sicily-Paradise represented by travellers (Maglio 2009, Mangone 2005) tells about this link between natural capabilities of the territory and economic functions of the settled communities; outside of this empathy, after the fall, the landscape identity (Giuffrida, 2015) can be recovered in an abstract cultural dimension, as "deferred" result of a patient search for "one more value", a not present value, an "hoped for" value.

### 2.2 Time connections of the travel experiences

The creation of the aforementioned digital platform contributes to the development of the landscape-cultural mosaic, as it fosters the awareness: of the progressive consolidation of the iconic forms (monuments and landscape units) still existing and recognizable; of the lost value, due to the cancellation of the no longer existing iconic forms.

To this end, the tool is provided with an interface capable of linking diachronically the information contained in the digital archive: in the two histograms of figure 4, for each traveller a segment is represented, whose start point and endpoint indicate the dates of birth and death on the temporal axis (in the ordinate axis) orientated from the past (at the top) to the present (at the bottom); the red point represents the date (of the beginning) of the journey; the histogram on the left ordinates the travellers by date of birth, the one on the right by date of journey.

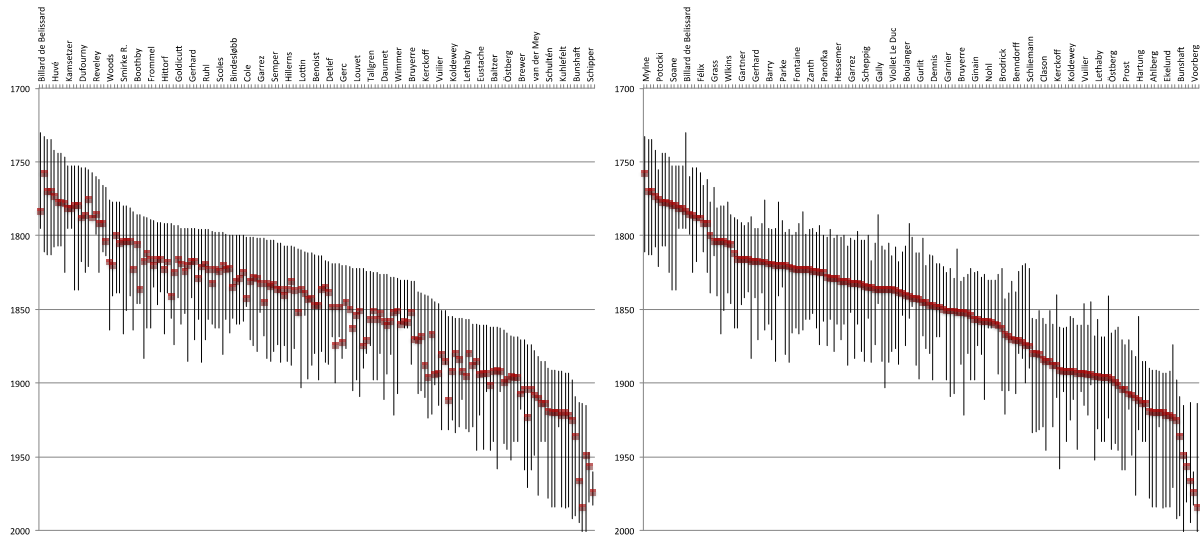


Figure 4. Chronological arrangements of travellers and travels.

A further and more innovative functionality of the WebGIS interface is the “dynamic synopsis”, a specific functionality which allows carrying out queries through time, representing the different travel experiences in a time span whose dimension is set by the user: the top part of the screen visualizes the chronological extremes of the established period (in fig. 5 eight years) and, in its inside, the temporal collocation of the stops (locations and/or sites, according to the selected scale, regional, territorial or urban) of each traveller those years. When the time window is moved left (towards the past) or right (towards the present), the places and the sites visited by different travellers in that period are visualized in the map in chronological order.





Figure 5. Sample of a space-time query from the WebGIS of travellers in Sicily

### 3. Harmony. Language

#### 1. True landscape

“The world of appearances is a jumble of mixed up perceptions [...]. Language is an effective organization of that enigmatic abundance of the world. To say that with different words: we invent substantives to reality” (Borges, 2007, p. 43); the reduction of the informative content of the “abundant” travel experience is necessary in order to transfer and assimilate it.

It is difficult to imagine a harmonic identification between places and settled communities, in presence of many conflicting interests and lacking a language capable of “organizing” the “true landscape”, protecting its notion from forms of hedonistic relativism and destructive scepticism (D’Agostini, 2013).

As it is said, the project intends to create internally consistent semantic chains, and link them in syntactic units open to the progressive increment of the informative support.

The philological research on past experience turns to the future “the eyes of the present”, searching, in the others’ views, for the knowledge of a *different Sicily*, in the perspective of a *better Sicily*.

An extensive documental support, robust and accessible, fosters the reconstruction of an awareness of landscape as ethical and aesthetic entity,

superordinate for the purposes of architecture and economy, revealing its essence despite its transformations (Giuffrida, 2015) and our indifference (Giuffrida *et al.*, 2016a).

In this sense, the synthesis between the sciences of architecture (among which history), and economy (among which the science of valuation) is carried out through the practice of judgement: the latter is a critical faculty to define the conditions of truth of a coordinated set of enunciates which preach, with more or less accentuated assertive strength, a relation between facts and values.

The coordinated observation of the multiple experience of the “Sicilian journey” participates in the discovery of the *truth which creates and shapes reality* (D’Agostini, 2011); as a consequence, landscape is an entity whose reality is reshaped at the progress of the study on the correspondence between evolution of culture and modification of territory, on which the “travelling architects” have provided documentary evidence through time, from different points of view and with complementary intentionality.

## *2. Accounting and assessment*

The interest of the science of valuations in the theme of the *Grand Tour* and the creation of a tool for the standardization and coordination of the territorial information contained in the literary and artistic production of the travellers, is not generic; this interest is centred on the possibility to use this information for the assessment of the landscape value of the territory; indeed, value depends on forms of robust and potentially “spreadable” knowledge, that means capable of becoming identity conscience and motivation for constructive behaviours.

Landscape is an essence, not an image (Giuffrida, 2016); its importance and capability of being worth are linked to the progressive consolidation of the semantic and syntactic ties (Giuffrida *et al.*, 2015) between the different territorial units that constitute it, and therefore the possibility that a greater number of these units is included in an internally coherent “field of form”.

The punctual transformations imposed to these units weaken the ties of the plot of significances, even when they envisage forms of mitigation and compensation.

In absence of a diffused conscience of landscape: mitigations put into practice a *tyranny of image* which hides the ladders in the fabric without sorting them out; compensations put into practice a financial tyranny according to which everything can be sold out and purchased, especially if the bargaining field is fragmented into the different settled communities, instead of comprising the whole landscape. Therefore the (historical) knowledge of the territory from different perspectives becomes the constitutive base of the (contemporary) conscience of landscape.

Some results of this first part of the digital archive of *travelling architects* are consistent with the goals of the science of valuations, and suggest comparisons and sorting useful for a valuation of the importance of places and sites according

to the extension and the intensity of the travel experience, through measurements which interpret:

- the motivation of the characters (number of visited sites and places – fig. 6);
- the attractiveness of places by partial number of visits (the place only – fig. 7 sx) and total number of visits (including the sites in the place – fig. 7 dx).

The historical research and the critical analysis of the results of the elaborations proposed so far may associate to these measurements further aspects concerning:

- The *subjective profile of the traveller*, therefore his socio-economic status, his professional profile, his age, his original geographic and cultural area, his specific aims;
- The circumstances of the journey, and among them the distance from the place of origin, the data (to which the state of the infrastructure, the means of transport and the risks are referred);
- The economy of the itinerary, accessibility, continuity, tortuosity, importance of places corresponding to different stops (Giuffrida et al., 2016b).

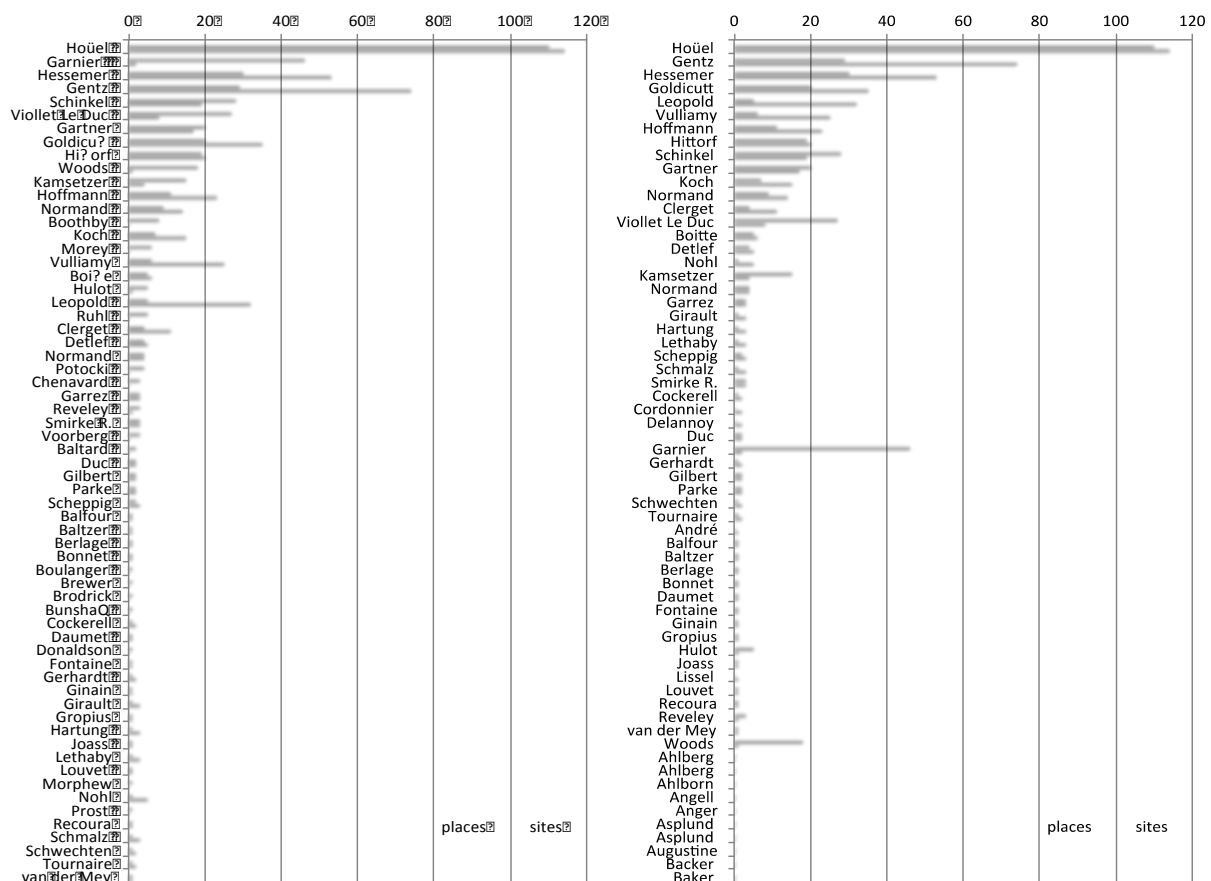


Figure 6. Ranking of travellers by presence and interests in places and/or sites

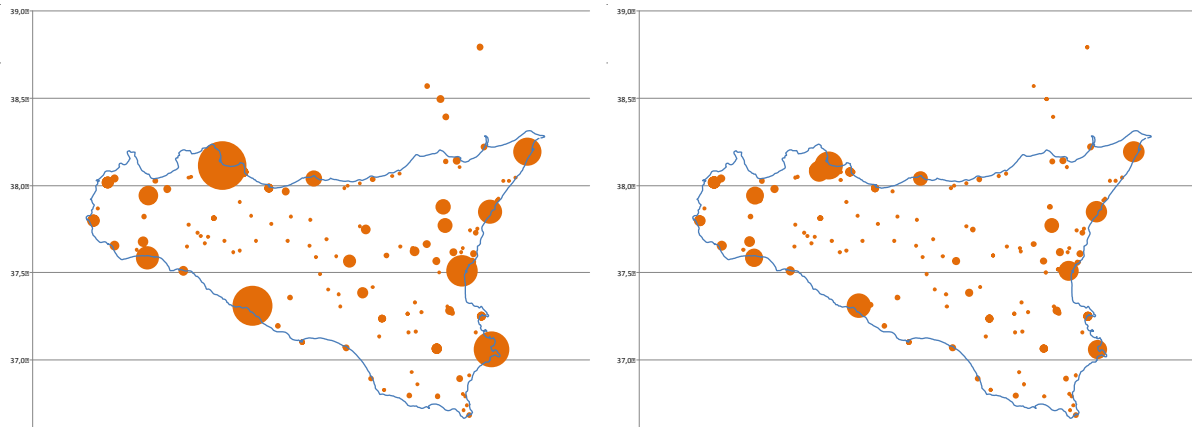
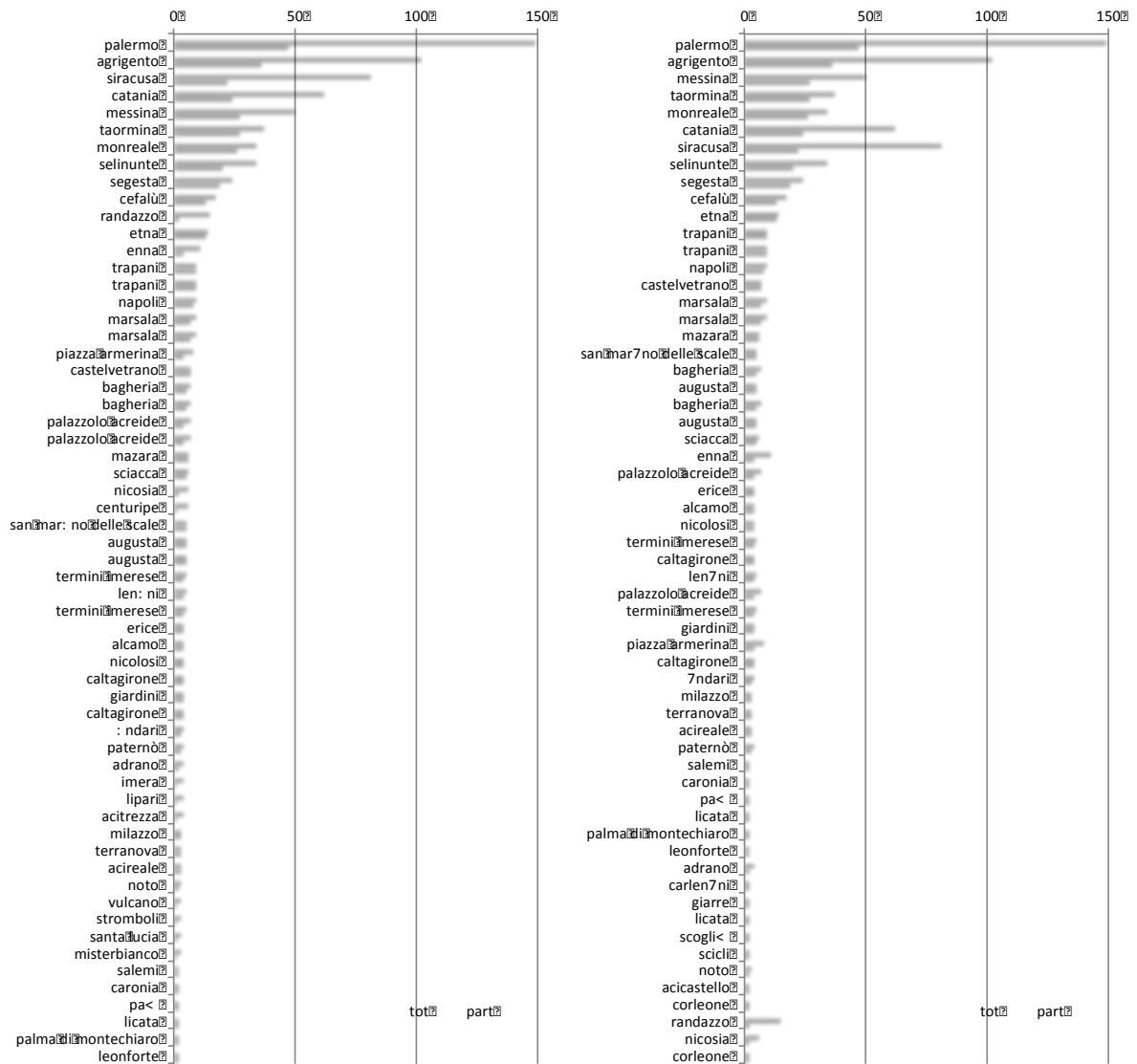


Figure 7. Ranking of places by attractiveness

### Summary

The contribution provides some reflections on the continuation of the research study “*Sicily as seen by the others: travelling architects*”, and on the first outcomes since the creation of a digital archive which collects, organizes and makes available the knowledge on the journeys

to Sicily in the age of the *Grand Tour* and beyond, through a WebGIS interface, with queries which allow comparisons and connections between the different travel experiences, visualizing the results in space and time. These “synopsis” help consolidate the philological research, and extend the knowledge on the influence the “odeporic” experience and its literary and iconographic representations have had on the education of the architects and the development of the architectural theory. It is possible to add to this primary scientific goal further themes concerning the issue of landscape the “tactile” experiences of the travellers – once unified the points of view, arranged in a system the historical, geographic and cultural contexts, and analyzed the different intentionalities which motivated each enterprise – has documented and witnessed in its essence, that means in the entirety of the physical-natural, infrastructural and human components (Giuffrida, 2015b).

These explorations highlighted harmonies and disharmonies of the past and aroused the present regret for that part of the Sicilian landscape, the lost paradise, that today would be a strategic resource to support sustainable development models. Attractiveness, ataraxy and harmony are general contents of the wealth function in the hyper-modern era; in this cultural climate, the communication inflation risks indeed to weaken the axiological link between the cultural-landscape mosaic and the territory.

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