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Regenerative Thinking in Yachting Tourism. Insights from the Northern Adriatic Sea.

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Abstract

The ‘turn to the sea’ through yachting tourism recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic prompts the relocation of the sea, including its nature and culture, back at the centre of processes of change in selected coastal resorts. The recent revamp of regenerative thinking in tourism offers a theoretical and practical ground on which to consider the development potential of yachting tourism as agent of societal change and coastal resort evolution. Using the Northern Adriatic Sea as a geographical point of reference, and Rimini as an exemplary model of second-generation coastal resort, we used a constructivist variant of grounded theory. Findings shows that in the Northern Adriatic Sea area some favourable conditions do exist for the YT sector to contribute to reconnecting humans with the nature and culture of the sea confirming its regenerative tourism potential. Nevertheless, formal efforts to support the needed for a cultural shift, from international agencies to local administration, are undermined by a culture of the sea that is fragmented by the disjointed agendas of distinct sea communitas.

Key Words

Regenerative Tourism, Yachting Tourism, Constructivist Grounded Theory, Maritime Culture, Coastal Resort Regeneration, Northern Adriatic Sea.

1. Introduction.

The alteration of conventional spatial and temporal patterns by the SARS-Cov-2 outbreak sparked a renewed public urge of being immersed in nature (UNCTAD, 2020). By prompting a visible shift in public perception of the coast and the open sea as accessible and safe spaces (Łapko *et.al.*, 2022), this urge turned swiftly into a surge of interest in yachting tourism (YT) venting a longing for ‘being at’ and ‘going by’ sea (MIT, 2021; GVR, 2021).

This trend however cannot be considered in isolation: it coincides with the advent of the UN Decade of Ocean Science (Ryabinin *et al.*, 2019) and a plethora of affiliated marine

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4 management initiatives seeking to bridge an established human-ocean divide, and with
5 emerging discussions about coastal resorts as spatial embodiments and perpetrators of a
6 material and symbolic separation of humans from nature (Forte, 2022). Above all, it appears in
7 the midst of a planetary environmental crisis that is imputable, by some (e.g. Mang and Reed
8 2017; Latour, 2017), to a longstanding fracture between society and the web of life and in need
9 of an urgent, yet hard to come by, cultural shift.

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14 The notion that a cultural shift is necessary in order to channel a collective response to
15 the current global environmental crisis runs through several contributions to sustainability
16 science (e.g. Folke, 2006, 2016; Ives, *et al.* 2018; Loehr and Becken, 2023). Within the growing
17 regenerative sustainability subfield in particular (e.g. Reed, 2007; du Plessis and Brandon,
18 2015; Mang and Reed, 2017) there is the belief that this shift concurs with a challenging process
19 of human-nature reconnection, reconciliation and harmonization.

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Seen within the debate over the human-nature divide, the ‘turn to the sea’ through
yachting recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic prompts an opportunistic investigation into
views and practices that, by harmonizing human (cultural) and natural (ecological) dimensions,
are in the ideal position of relocating the sea, including its nature and culture, back at the centre
of processes of change in selected coastal resorts. This is based on the premise that YT features
linkages with both land-based structures and marine dynamics beside holding strong
associations with the ‘culture of the sea’, including the maritime culture of ‘going by’ and
‘being at’ sea, that entails a significant level of interaction between humans and the marine
environment.

The recent revamp of regenerative thinking in tourism offers a theoretical and practical
“niche innovation” (Bellato et al. 2022b, p.7) on the base of which to consider the development
potential of YT as agent of societal change and, in turn, of coastal resort evolution. Despite the
reciprocity that binds tourism and marine environments, coastal and maritime tourism have
remained at the margins of the tourism and regenerative development discourse. Although
partially problematized elsewhere (e.g. Bellato and Pollock, 2023), the aspect of human-nature
reconnection and reconciliation was also scantily investigated upon as a precondition to move
to an impactful regenerative uptake in development and design thinking (Reed, 2007). This
scenario invites an exploratory investigation that answers the following questions: do
favourable conditions (e.g. social, cultural, geographical, institutional and political) exist at
systemic level (i.e. from international to local) for YT to facilitate the reconnection of humans
with the sea and, subsequently, act as agent of change in coastal resort evolution? Moreover,
based on the premise that the quality of human interaction with nature relates to the

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4 development paradigm exercised locally, does the emergent regenerative development
5 paradigm offer a pathway for YT to express its full regenerative development potential?
6 Consequently, does YT hold the potential of stimulating the ontological shift necessary to
7 address, collectively, the environmental pitfalls of a human-nature divide? The aim is therefore
8 that of exploring the potential of YT in re-establishing the lost connection between humans and
9 the sea and then investigate its role as agent of change in the evolution of a specific coastal
10 resort type identifiable along the Italian Adriatic Riviera.
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15 We first introduce the theoretical framework connecting regenerative tourism, human-
16 nature divide and YT as part of coastal resort evolution in sections 2 and 3. The methodological
17 approach is illustrated in section 4, and the findings are presented in section 5. In section 6 we
18 analyze the findings in relation to regenerative tourism development. In section 7 we offer some
19 conclusive remarks.
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24 **2. The human-nature divide and the regenerative turn in tourism development.**

25 The environmental crisis that humankind is facing is of unprecedented magnitude
26 (Stengers, 2017; Robertson, 2021). Advocates of the living systems theory claimed that current
27 environmental problems are primarily social and cultural issues resulting from a “fractured
28 relationship between people and the living web of nature” (Mang and Reed 2017, p.9).
29 Resolving so-called environmental problems is deemed to require an ontological shift capable
30 of transforming the way humans relate to nature (Rees, 1999) thereby subverting an established
31 logic of systemic exploitation and re-establish one of mutuality and co-evolution. Despite the
32 breadth of this debate, the implementation of the imperatives set by successive sustainability
33 agendas has remained, to date, an unresolved challenge (du Plessis, 2012; Becken and Coghlan,
34 2024).
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41 Regenerative orientations have recently come to represent an alternative take on
42 development thinking and practice. Framed around an ecological, or living systems, worldview
43 (Mang and Reed, 2012), regenerative development takes a unified bio-cultural perspective that
44 harmonizes (Mang and Reed, 2017) otherwise separated cultural and ecological dimensions.
45 This process of harmonization abides by principles of wholeness, relationality and
46 impermanence and entails the (re)integration of human and natural systems into socio-
47 ecological systems (Du Plessis and Brandon, 2015). As illustrated in Figure 1 this
48 “reconciliation” (Reed, 2007: 676) is a precondition for moving development trajectories from
49 the current reductionist, mechanistic, industrial and issue-based worldview of sustainable
50 development up through a “biocentric” (Mang and Reed, 2017, p. 15) and then regenerative
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4 living systems-based approach. The outcome is in terms of co-evolving mutualism deriving
5 from “the reconnection of human aspirations and activities with the evolution of natural
6 systems” (Du Plessis and Brandon, 2015, p. 56).
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17 Figure 1: Development trajectory towards regeneration. Adapted from Reed (2007) Trajectory
18 of Environmentally Responsible Design.
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27 The operationalization of this ‘upward spiral’ however presents challenges that supersede
28 the mere “integration of human technology into ecological processes” (Du Plessis and Brandon,
29 2015, p. 57). It calls instead for a practical reconnection of humans to nature that is from a
30 cognitive and emotional to a spiritual level of depth. In view of this regenerative turn to
31 development thinking, tourism has come to be valued as a potential tool to facilitate such quality
32 of reconnection.
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36 ***2.1 Regenerative thinking in Tourism.***

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38 With the recognition of the need for a cultural (i.e. paradigmatic) shift and in the light
39 of the many pitfalls of sustainable tourism as an expression of an extractive industrial take on
40 sustainable development (Cave and Dredge, 2020; Bellato et al., 2022a, 2022b; Bellato and
41 Pollock, 2023), tourism scholarship has looked at the regenerative paradigm as a desirable
42 alternative through which to rethink tourism in two new ways. First, tourism places as nested
43 whole living systems contributing to the health and wellbeing of larger socio-ecological
44 systems and, second, regenerative tourism (RT) as a transformational approach leveraging on
45 the inherent potential of tourism places for their flourishing and thriving (Cheer, 2020).
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51 The popularization of regenerative thinking in tourism has resulted in a vast array of
52 contributions spanning theorizations and applications in a range of tourism subfields including
53 that of tourism geographies (Ateljevic, 2020; Bellato et al. 2024; Lazic and Della Lucia, 2024;
54 Mura and Wijesinghe, 2023; Paddison and Hall, 2024; Pearson et al. 2024; Scheyvens, 2024;
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4 Spalazzi and Mariotti, 2024; Taveras-Dalmau, 2024), sustainable tourism (Becken and Kaur,
5 2021; Becken and Coghlan, 2024; Bellato et al. 2024; Gerke et al. 2024), travel research (e.g.
6 Alvarez, 2024), ecotourism (Fenjie et al. 2024), hospitality (Caruso, 2023; Inversini et al., 2024)
7 among others (e.g. Bellato and Cheer, 2021; Dredge, 2022; Suárez-Rojas et al., 2023; Dini et
8 al. 2024; Schmidt Rojas et al, 2024). Bellato and Pollock (2023, p.2), however, have been
9 critical of the way that the regenerative tourism concept is adopted and warned of
10 misinterpretations, distortions, simplifications and partial applications caused by the
11 “complexity of the regeneration concept and its paradigm-shifting implications”. In order to
12 increase conceptual clarity, Bellato *et al.* (2022) proposed seven RT practice principles
13 including: 1. an ecological worldview and 2. living systems thinking; 3. the discovery of the
14 unique potential of place; 4. catalysing transformations as a living system; 5. healing
15 approaches to cultural and ecological revival; 6. the creation of regenerative places and
16 communities; and 7. collaborating to evolve and enact regenerative tourism approaches. As
17 such, they concluded that the outcome of the ensuing conceptual RT framework is tourism
18 living systems that:

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28 “facilitate encounters, create connections and develop reciprocal and mutually beneficial
29 relationships through travel practices and experiences, uniquely reflecting tourism places.
30 Regeneration occurs mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, culturally, socially,
31 environmentally, and economically” (Bellato *et al.*, 2022, p.17).

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33 In line with Reed’s (2007) argument of human-nature reconciliation, the framework
34 proposed by Bellato *et al.* (2022, p. 14) considers principles 1 and 2, and related paradigmatic
35 shift to a regeneration mindset, as the “entry point” (i.e. the precondition) for operationalizing
36 RT. Only a few RT sources address this issue comprehensively (e.g. Bellato et al., 2024), when
37 investigating inner transformation (Taveras-Dalmau, 2024), framing regenerative literacy
38 (Becken and Coghlan, 2024), and examining the regenerative mindset shift (Dredge, 2022).
39 Others looked at the human-nature reconnection as an outcome of a transformative take on
40 tourism (Ateljevic, 2020), or of interpretations of RT when considering tourism as a potential
41 re-connector of people and nature (e.g. Becken and Kaur, 2021; Omma, 2024). The current
42 state of RT scholarship leaves ample space for investigating further into the aspect of human-
43 nature reconnection and reconciliation as a precondition for operationalizing RT. Coastal and
44 maritime tourism, of which both traditional seaside tourism and YT are part, hold limited space
45 within the RT discourse although, in this context, the spatiality of a human-nature divide
46 persists as pervasive. The seaside, that is where landed, maritime and marine life often meet, is
47 a suitable space where to see manifested this quality of separation in practice and where
48 reconciliation could be facilitated.
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3. Coastal Resort Evolution and Yachting Tourism.

Following a critical line of enquiry into the political economy and ecology of the tourism-human-nature nexus (e.g. Duffy, 2015; Holden, 2015; Mosedale, 2015), Forte (2022) blueprinted first (i.e. Hastings in the UK) and second generation (e.g. Rimini along the North Adriatic Riviera) coastal resorts as embodiments of a fractured human-nature relationship. Their tourism development path has been marked by an extractive land-based mindset (or ontology) that, by setting a distinctive quality of human interaction with the sea, used the marine landscape as both cosmetic device in urban regeneration strategies and object of circumscribed hedonism and escapism in tourism rejuvenation manoeuvres (Rabbiosi and Giovanardi, 2017). As morphologically an interface between landed and marine life, these coastal resorts missed two intertwined opportunities: one, to champion the human need for a deep contact and connection with the sea as a natural environment; two, to adopt a socio-ecological perspective over the land-sea geophysical binary and take a systemic approach capable of leveraging on the real potential of place including, as a complex spatiality, the open sea, coastline and hinterland areas. Coastal and maritime tourism are now recognized as key players in the novel sustainable blue economy (Picken, 2023), an agenda set by the EC (2022; 2023) calling for the need to revert a crystalized ‘land-sea’ viewpoint. Renewed interest in ‘going by’ and ‘being at sea’ amplified by the SARS-Cov-2 outbreak puts YT in the position of potential enabler of reconnection and (re)integration of the open sea, in its multiple dimensions, into the management of coastal resort evolution.

YT is a diverse tourism typology and part of the maritime tourism sector (Spinelli and Benevolo, 2022). The bulk of scholarly production in this field takes a business and management orientation with significant attention paid to the growing charter segment (e.g. Lett, 1983; Diakomihalis and Lagos, 2008 Payeras et al. 2011; Alcover et al. 2011) within which “sailing yachts” (Luković, 2012, p.402) are reduced to a “symbol of luxury” and status. YT is described as “a maritime leisure activity in which travellers use yachts for pleasure” (Chen *et al.*, 2016, p.2) and then associated with “a wider experience in the sea where a yacht plays the role of the accommodation facility and a tool for the satisfaction of [tourists’] needs” (Ioannidis, 2019, p.31). Only few studies of sailing tourism offer a more sophisticated reading of the human dimensions (i.e. experiential and sociological) of a complex travel culture.

Jirásek and Hurych (2019, p.2) demonstrated that long-term transoceanic sailing tourism experiences hold an ‘eudaimonic’ emphasis whereby virtuous behaviour, transcendence, wholeness and interconnectedness are prioritized to chase existential transformation and self-actualisation. Rhoden and Kaaristo (2020, p.7) investigated sailing

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4 tourism and discussed ‘liquidness’ as the property of a constantly changing ‘water-boat-human’
5 assemblage and a key factor in the formation of the embodied (sailing) tourist experience.
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7 Liquidness entails that human practices (executed embodied skills), physicality of the
8 actant boat and agentive surrounding environment (i.e. water, bottom of the sea and the coast)
9 coalesce in the co-constitution of a sense of wholeness. The sociology of ocean cruising profiled
10 instead ‘communitas’ (Lusby and Anderson, 2010, p.88) of ‘cruisers’ (MacBeth, 1992, p. 320)
11 as ‘long-term small-boat sailors’ (LTS) (MacBeth, 2000; 2021) distinguishing the lifestyle
12 subculture of the former from the artificial and consumeristic leisure subculture of the charter
13 yacht tourist, generally devoid of any significant seafaring aspirations. LTS cherish personal
14 growth, deep, prolonged and enriching experiences of the cultural and natural environments
15 encountered. They also observe a “positive social evolution” paradigm (MacBeth, 1992, p. 1)
16 to deviate from western patterns of life: pursue a life spent “with and on the water” (Lusby and
17 Anderson, 2010, p.95) based on the “the rhythms of nature” (MacBeth, 2000, p.28). Other
18 sociological accounts advanced the idea of using YT development as a tool for the social re-
19 appropriation of the sea in Italy leading to the reintegration of the Adriatic Sea social -scape, a
20 “seascape” (Cocco and Sabatino, 2013, p.42), into coastal urban dynamics. The ensuing
21 integrated coastal urban tourism product would appeal to the communitas of cruisers but this
22 process demands a paradigm shift to re-combine cultural and natural dimensions with the
23 establishment of missing inter-Adriatic cooperation arrangements.
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26 Overall, YT research is limited both conceptually and thematically. Conceptual
27 fragmentation demanded the adoption of a broad definition. We defined YT as a wider
28 experience in the sea where sailing yachts play the role of both accommodation facilities and
29 tools for the satisfaction of a large spectrum of tourists’ needs, from vacation and pleasure, to
30 self-actualization. The potential of YT as a transformational device in coastal resort
31 regeneration and tourism rejuvenation was rarely discussed, apart from sparse cases where
32 charter yachting tourism is strategically considered for the repositioning of mature Spanish
33 resorts (e.g. Payeras *et al.* 2011). Treatment of applied sustainability science in YT is minimal;
34 the potential of YT as a tool for human-nature reconnection is rarely addressed in mainstream
35 YT literature that fails to take a broader relational view over this complex sea-based activity as
36 a potentially transformative device for both participants and related maritime spaces.
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52 **4. Methodological choices.**

53 Grounded theory and related qualitative methods turned out to be valuable tools to
54 explore YT as an activity that binds human and natural dimensions. Lusby and Anderson (2010)
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4 conducted the only one Grounded Theory-based study of long-term cruisers and in the United
5 States context alone leaving ample space for exploring further into YT as a human activity in
6 natural environments.
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9 Grounded Theory (GT) is used when, after identifying a problem, there is the need to
10 find a way forward. We opted for a constructivist variant of GT (CGT) due to the multivariate
11 nature of the phenomenon investigated, the complexity of the issues considered, and the
12 contextual relativity of the process explored. With data being co-constructed through a
13 researchers-participants interaction, “the knowledge generated is posited as constitutive of an
14 interpretive portrayal” (Timonen, et al., 2018, p.3).
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18 ***4.a Spatial Focus.***

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20 The Adriatic-Ionian macro-region was selected as the broader spatial context. It is
21 targeted as one of the five sea-basins and macro-regions for strategic interventions by the EU
22 commission within the new Sustainable Blue Economy framework (EC, 2021). Due to the rich
23 variety of what is on offer, some sections of the Adriatic basin were described as the most
24 cherished yachting destinations in the world by industry representatives (SNV, 2021) although
25 the North West Adriatic coast has been much less exposed to strategic interventions in terms of
26 YT development as compared to other Med areas.
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31 At local level, the city of Rimini was selected as a paradigmatic exemplar of a traditional
32 second-generation coastal resort epitome of a fierce tourism urbanization process but subject to
33 a recent history of combined urban regeneration and tourism rejuvenation manoeuvres.
34 Spatially located at the centre of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, it holds historic associations
35 with a maritime culture drawing back to the Roman empire that left a fully functioning and
36 industrious canal port behind. Rimini hosts an industrial fishing fleet, leisure boating berths, a
37 working marina offering 622 berths, other marine-based recreational activities (e.g. diving
38 schools), world-famous shipyards, brokerage agencies, nautical schools, an established
39 boating/sailing dimension represented by dedicated associations (e.g. Circolo Velico Riminese,
40 Club Nautico Rimini, Yacht Club Rimini), and novel YT initiatives (e.g. Sailingfor Blue
41 Life/Lab; Velalibre) a selection of which were included in the research.
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49 ***4.b Data Collection.***

50 Primary data gathering involved document analysis of grey literature, attendance to key
51 international events, intensive interviewing, elements of ethnographic research and participant
52 observation, focus groups and related analysis of documents (e.g. Logbooks) and memos (see
53 Appendix 1 and section 5). Focus of data collection was on YT organisations and initiatives
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4 that either originated from Rimini and surroundings or which operational space spans the
5 Adriatic-Ionian macro-region.
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7 Data collection was slow, lengthy (February 2021 to August 2023), challenged by the
8 requirement of conducting both data collection and analysis simultaneously. It took place in the
9 context: at sea in navigation for days on end and at various maritime spaces (e.g. berths,
10 marinas, regatta events; nautical shops) for serendipitous encounters. At first exploratory
11 openness in data gathering was maintained to then go onto practicing theoretical sampling pre-
12 empting the investigative phase. Figure 2 offers a representation of such process. Data richness
13 made possible the formulation of emerging codes (open) to then focus on specific codes
14 (focused codes) and direct the next phases of data collection by addressing at specific units of
15 analysis with precise questions. Memo writing was key in the analytical process that was then
16 organized in a *Dimension – Substantive Code – Sub-Codes* manner (in italics in section 5).
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27 Figure 2. CGT research process. Adapted from Fernandez (2004).
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32 ***4.c Extant Literature.***

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34 Regenerative development theorizations and pedagogy at sea contributions emerged
35 during the research process when seeking theoretical ground, reframe and answer question 2.
36 The principles of the regenerative framework in section 2 align with the unfolding of the CGT
37 process. The concept of ‘nested system’ (Mang & Haggard, 2016, p.18) for example emerged
38 as a selection criterion for the spatial focus representing 3 nested systems (i.e. international-
39 UN/supranational-EU; Adriatic-Ionian macro-region; Rimini).
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44 **5. Data Analysis.**

45 The adoption of CGT allowed two emerging sets of opposite codes (in italics). The first
46 part of this section (5.a) concerns factors favouring the reconnection of humans with the nature
47 and culture of the sea whilst the second (5.b) concerns those that impedes it.
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51 ***5.a Factors in Favour.***

52 *5.a.1 Sustainable Management of Ocean and Seas.*

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54 The marine management narrative set under the UN Decade of Ocean Science for
55 Sustainable Development (2021-2030) provides the contextual terms of reference within which
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4 the human-sea interaction will unfold at all levels of society in the upcoming years. Within it,
5 *Healthy Oceans and Seas* is a leading agenda. With reference to the blue economy (EC, 2022;
6 2023), this agenda indicates that “without a healthy ocean, there is no life on Earth”, that
7 “investing in biodiversity, conservation and sustainable practices is key for a peaceful and
8 prosperous future” (Bertarelli), and that following this direction requires a change in the way
9 humans relate to nature.

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13 A cascade of concepts trickled down from UN to the EU level namely: *restoring*
14 *ecosystems, shifting mindset, transitioning and transforming, integrating green and blue,*
15 *thinking systemically, extending sea protection, reconnecting to and affiliating with nature,*
16 *collective responsibility, and mobilizing the public.* At the EU level a *shifting mindset* translates
17 into “transitioning from a Blue Growth agenda to a Sustainable Blue Economy approach and
18 shift the focus from mere exploitation to sustainability and resilience” (Sinkevičius). This shift
19 calls for reintegrating the sea into landed dynamics by “placing the marine environment at the
20 very heart of [this] great transition”, integrating the ‘blue’ and the ‘green’ and “making peace
21 with nature” (Bell).

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28 The *Healthy Oceans and Seas* agenda is split in two. Interconnected initiatives respond
29 to the concepts of *understanding the marine environment* and *reconnecting people with nature*
30 (EuroGOOS). The former enticed myriads of research-based programs. The latter generated an
31 ocean literacy movement targeting junior levels of education (EU4Ocean) based on the notion
32 that “to protect the ocean we first need to understand it” collectively (IOC-UNESCO, 2023).
33 Elements of the yachting sector, of which YT is part, have contributed to delivering on both
34 concepts.

35 36 37 38 39 *5.a.2 Maritime.*

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41 The following substantiates the concept of *reuniting with the sea*. It demonstrates that
42 the correlated goals of *understanding the marine environment* and *reconnecting people with*
43 *nature* filtered down from international to macro-regional and local level and that the yachting
44 sector participated in this process.

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47 Highly visible professional sailing competitions (e.g. RWP, 2022; UNESCO-IMOCA,
48 2023; TOR, 2022-2023) turned into *Healthy Oceans and Seas* agents. A growing number of
49 teams championed the concept of *sailing with purpose* and contributed to *advancing science at*
50 *sea* by transforming high-performance oceanic sailboats into tools of marine data collection in
51 areas of the globe otherwise inaccessible to conventional means.

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55 In the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, nascent YT programs aim at bringing the sea back
56 to centre stage in the life of participating citizens and places visited. Although with a gradation
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4 of intentions, they champion the concept of *reuniting with the sea*. It is intended as a deep
5 human reconnection with “life at sea” conveyed through synergetic (a) cultural revival
6 initiatives and (b) ecological protection and restoration actions. The former aspires at *reviving*
7 *marine intelligence*; the latter at leveraging on *widening citizen participation* to advancing
8 ocean science and inclusion in environmental education. The aspiration is to widen engagement
9 in a relational socio-ecological dimension of transformative and mutualistic community-
10 orientated encounters with the coastal and marine environment through sailing-based
11 navigation:
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16 “Our challenge is to bring people back to the culture of the sea. The idea is that participants
17 reintroduce the “blue language” into their daily life. This is key to rebalancing the current imbalance
18 between the green and the blue [...]. Reuniting the ecological and the social dimensions is essential
19 to our project because they are interrelated. We offer experimenting relationships at sea [...] going
20 by sea exalts relationships: this way there is a natural opening to syntonising with the natural
21 environment whereby relating to others and the surroundings becomes the same thing” (SFBL2).
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23 On board, citizen science initiatives contribute to *reviving marine intelligence*.
24 Participants connect deeply with the sea by practicing diving-based ocean science activities
25 with an on-board marine biologist who brings “deep awareness of marine life” (SFBL2, see
26 also SFBL1 appendix 1). *Bringing participants beyond the beach line into the open sea* and
27 then *diving in beyond the sea surface*, acquires a key role to *getting to see the sea with different*
28 *eyes* and contributing to reverting the public viewpoint over the land-sea geo-cultural binary:
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32 “This form of holiday aims at taking a distance from conventional landed dynamics [...]; an
33 opportunity to get in full contact with nature and the places visited from the sea” (SFBL2, see also
34 SFBL1, YTP3, YTP2, VLP1, VL3 in appendix 1).
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36 This perspective switch transpires in other initiatives. In Rimini the Velalibre sailing
37 association set to demonstrate to the rest of the city that part of the local community demands
38 to go beyond the beachline and into the open sea and, after the recent pandemics, make a new
39 start *from* the sea.
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44 *5.a.3 Coastal Transformations.*

45 The beachline in Rimini became change catalyst in the latest phase of waterfront
46 requalification initiatives. After marginalizing the sea to a mere backdrop for decades, the
47 redevelopment project named Parco del Mare (PSR, 2010) combined urban regeneration and
48 tourism rejuvenation manoeuvres and aimed at *reintegrating the sea* into the resort and wider
49 urban dynamics (PSR1, Appendix 1).
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53 The following substantiates a downside to this process with an analysis from local to
54 macro-regional level.
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5.b Impeding Factors.

5.b.1 Coastal Transformations.

The latest phase of urban transformations in Rimini is marked by what PSR1 discussed as the most integrated and inclusive strategic plan (PSR, 2010) ever implemented locally. Despite this policy arrangement, the sea community, including those local actors who either live off the sea or engage in the leisure dimensions of ‘going by sea’ (i.e. yachters), did not take part in this process (PSR1, Appendix 1). The issue is that a sea community in Rimini does not exist as such. Instead, a range of interested organisations hold “disjointed agendas with nuances of provincialism” (VL2-CVR2) which is described as a common phenomenon in Italy (see PSR Appendix 1). The plan (PSR, 2010) also considered the evolution of Rimini within the wider Adriatic-Ionian macro-region and envisaged the reestablishment of a koine’ Adriatica (i.e. a unified community) but implementation concentrated on the physical redevelopment of the seafront “without a reflection on the nature of the sea and the blue economy broadly” (PSR1). *Sustaining the traditional resort economy remained* a policy priority at the expenses of other marine forms of tourism (e.g. YT) (see VL3, Appendix 1), more attune to an eco-centric or even socio-ecological logic, therefore reinforcing a material and symbolic separation between landed and maritime life.

The development of the Marina di Rimini also follows this same pattern. Rather than being designed as a well-integrated living maritime space with significant transits, it remains cordoned off from the centre as “an exclusive parking lot” (IND3, see also IND4 Appendix 1). The practice of *separating the city from its maritime signifiers* is not exclusive to Rimini. Marinas along the Adriatic coast are often isolated from the surroundings areas as it is the case for Marina Dorica in Ancona (IT) (Appuntamento in Adriatico). The concept of *disconnecting land and sea* is just another managerial feature of the very Italian ‘culture of the sea’.

5.b.2 Culture of the Sea.

In this section the expression ‘culture of the sea’ refers at the way yachters understand and use the marine environment. *Objectifying the sea* (using the sea as object) as opposed to relating deeply to its multidimensionality, is associated to the concept of *commoditizing the sea* whereby ‘going by’ and ‘being at’ sea become subject to rapacious market forces (Appuntamento in Adriatico).

Compared to other Mediterranean countries (i.e. Greece, France and Spain), *rising costs of ownership* and *tightening bureaucratization* in Italy pair with a fundamental *misunderstanding of yachting* as a luxurious practice. The outcomes are in terms of

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4 *discouraging the popularization of YT and eroding a maritime culture* of mutualism and marine
5 stewardship (see ASN1; ASN2 Appendix 1). The threat of giant investors acquiring marinas in
6 Croatia, Greece and Italy (e.g. the Redbull company recently purchased the once very
7 affordable Marina di Monfalcone in North Italy) and aiming at the nautical high-end market by
8 applying an unaffordable price policy (IND2) nurture this eroding downward spiral.
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12 National industry associations like Assonautica have battled for governments to
13 consider YT as any other form of leisure tourism, that is, to lift the luxury tag off the sector.
14 The launch of Appuntamento in Adriatico in 1989 and the ENIT-Assonautica ‘Italy Viewed
15 from the Sea’ programme in 2023 aimed also at expanding YT in the Adriatic Sea by adding a
16 sustainable cultural tourism element to it whilst pressing on governments for a mindset shift.
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20 Under the *objectifying the sea* heading stands also four communitas of sea goers
21 expressing four ways of understanding and using the sea namely: the ‘Racer’, the ‘New Charter
22 Tourist’, the ‘Motorsailer’ and the ‘Navigator’. “70% of the YT flows in the Adriatic falls into
23 the second and third category” (IND1). They pursue “maximum comfort” (Morelli) in “Ikea-
24 styled sailboats” (Appuntamento in Adriatico), featuring “squared hotel room-like berths and
25 lounge bar-styled wood interiors for familiarity and ample space for hedonism and
26 entertainment” (SFBL2) which distance these two YT types from “bygone knowledgeable
27 mariners seeking a full encounter with the marine environment” (Morelli). The institutional
28 power of the Italian Sailing Federation (FIV) is also complicit in forcing a competitive edge
29 into the YT value chain and “denaturalize going by sea” (CVR1). “The FIV is in the position
30 of disseminating a yachting culture where the priority is to establish a human-nature
31 relationship. Instead, it diverts attention to mere competition” (VL1; see also SFBL2 Appendix
32 1) where human-sea interaction is mediated by landed rules of competition *reducing the sea to*
33 *racecourse* and ‘going by sea’ to mere technical gesture.
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42 **6. Discussion**

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44 In the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region some favourable conditions do exist for the YT
45 sector to contribute to reconnecting humans with the nature and culture of the sea and then act
46 as agent of change in the evolution of coastal resorts.
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49 From international to supranational EU level of governance the marine management
50 narrative speaks a unifying language over a human-nature continuum. It shifts, with a rhetoric
51 of public reconnection to the sea, to an integrated socio-ecological take on development dear to
52 the advocates of a living system worldview (Reed, 2007; Du Plessis and Brandon, 2015).
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55 Within the maritime sector, both international yacht racing competitions and few
56 nascent regional and local YT initiatives adhere to this narrative exhibiting a will to engage in
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4 opportunities that allow such reconciliation. The ontological shift advocated within
5 regenerative development and RT circuits seems therefore well on its way to support a broad
6 systemic transition to a healthier planet. The exploration of YT dynamics highlighted the
7 emergence of programmes that, despite conceptual differences, business arrangements and the
8 quality of opportunities offered, aim at reuniting society with the culture and nature of the sea
9 through direct exposure to the marine environment. Based on the conceptual framework by
10 Bellato et al. (2022) outlined in section 2.1, one YT programme in particular (Sailing for Blue
11 Lab) abide by the regenerative mindset with some rigour, others less so. We discuss here only
12 some RT practice principles in detail.

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18 As occurred elsewhere (Paddison and Hall, 2024), the RT framework was not practiced
19 by design. It unfolded organically pursued by *navigators* that, by ‘going by sea’, experienced
20 *wholeness* as the unity of all things and where “the sea [is lived as] a necessary bond between
21 our landed life and universal life” (Pandimiglio, 2018, p. XXII). The concept of wholeness
22 binds RT practice principle 1 and 2 (Bellato et al., 2022, p.14) and lead to human-nature
23 *reconciliation* as precondition to operationalise RT. The qualities of the YT initiatives
24 considered resound with the lifestyle of long-term sailors (MacBeth, 1992, 2000, 2021), with
25 the search for “eudaimonic” (Jirásek and Hurych, 2019, p.2) experiences infused of a sense of
26 wholeness, interconnectedness and contemplation of own place in the world because deriving
27 from sea voyages that trigger deep, enriching and transformative (Ateljevic, 2020; Dredge,
28 2022; Taveras-Dalmau, 2024) encounters with “liquidness” (Rhoden and Kaalisto, 2020, p.7).
29 The stewarding and transformational role of cooperating knowledgeable mariners and marine
30 biologists on board catalysed transformations not only on participants but also on places visited.
31 RT principle 3 concerns the real potential of place that, in this context, is expressed in terms of
32 a sea-land continuum with tourists participating in the social re-appropriation of the Adriatic
33 Sea as a lived space. Cultural and ecological revival (RT principle 5) is a key goal for the Sailing
34 for Blue Lab programme. It seeks to revive “marine intelligence [as] a pluralistic and
35 communitarian intelligence” (Pandimiglio, 2018, p.49) that reverses an established land-sea
36 standpoint on life and re-establishes a long-gone sea-land viewpoint. Reverting this “relational
37 order” (Pandimiglio, 2018, p.XXII) is key to constructing an *oikos*: a relational climate suitable
38 to holding together all living systems.

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Despite these conditions favouring a human-nature reconnection there are others in
stark antagonism. Rimini, epitome of a second-generation coastal resort type, demonstrates
that, at local level, there are some seeds of a perspective change with initiatives aimed at
reconnecting the city with the sea despite a past of piecemeal interventions that deter a

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4 paradigmatic shift. The nascent regenerative ethos in the region battles with a culture of
5 objectification of the sea keeping it separated from landed life. Even formal efforts to popularize
6 a systemic way of thinking, from international agencies to the bottom, is undermined by a
7 culture of the sea that is fragmented, even within the YT community, by the disjointed agendas
8 of distinct sea communitas.
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10 11 12 13 **7. Conclusions.** 14

15 We set to explore the potential of YT in re-establishing the lost connection between humans
16 and the sea and then investigate its role as agent of change in the evolution of a specific coastal
17 resort typology identifiable along the Italian Adriatic Riviera.
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19 The adoption of a constructivist grounded theory methodology was functional to the
20 exploratory investigation operated. Although uncommon in geographical research of coastal
21 and maritime tourism, and even more so in the context of RT, it provided a detailed reading of
22 the conditions that are favouring, and those that are playing against, this reconnection. The
23 observation of emerging regenerative development conceptualizations and applications in
24 tourism offered solid ground on which to locate: first the debate over the environmental crisis
25 caused by a longstanding fracture between society and the web of life; second, the concept of
26 human-nature reconnection and reconciliation within a wider and integrative socio-ecological,
27 living system worldview; and third notions of landed vs marine life.
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30 Conceptually, we challenged the notion that YT is a univocal tourism category
31 contributing to both YT scholarship and the tourism geographies subfield. By identifying four
32 sea communitas, four ways of understanding and making use of the sea, we problematized the
33 fragmentation that characterizes the 'sea community' in the investigated area and claimed it a
34 key obstacle to the establishment of a shared living system worldview in support of a collective
35 cultural shift. Moreover, this reified the navigator as a YT type. By aligning with the principles
36 of RT, it bridges the artificial and consumerist *leisure* subculture of the New Charter Tourist
37 with the contemplative and transformative seafaring *lifestyle* of the long-term small-boat sailor.
38 As a model for positive social evolution the navigator becomes potential catalyst for the
39 necessary reintegration of the Adriatic Sea social -scape (a seascape) into the mechanics of
40 coastal resort evolution. This way YT becomes agent of change in a complex spatiality.
41 Leveraging on the real potential of place in the coastal and marine context calls for an
42 integrative view over the land-sea geophysical binary where YT, in regenerative guise, has a
43 potential reconnecting role to play.
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4 These contributions are specific to the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region given the cultural
5 specificities that were highlighted. The application of the RT framework to coastal and
6 maritime tourism, explored in this work, goes instead beyond the set perimeters.
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9 10 **8. References.**

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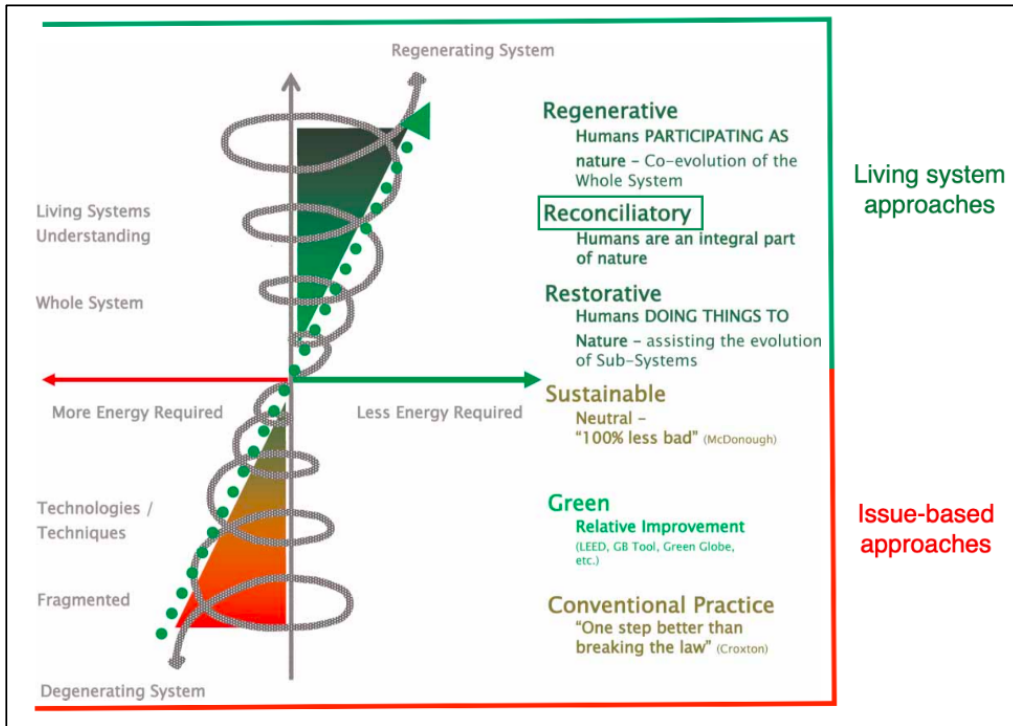


Figure 1: Development trajectory towards regeneration. Adapted from Reed (2007).

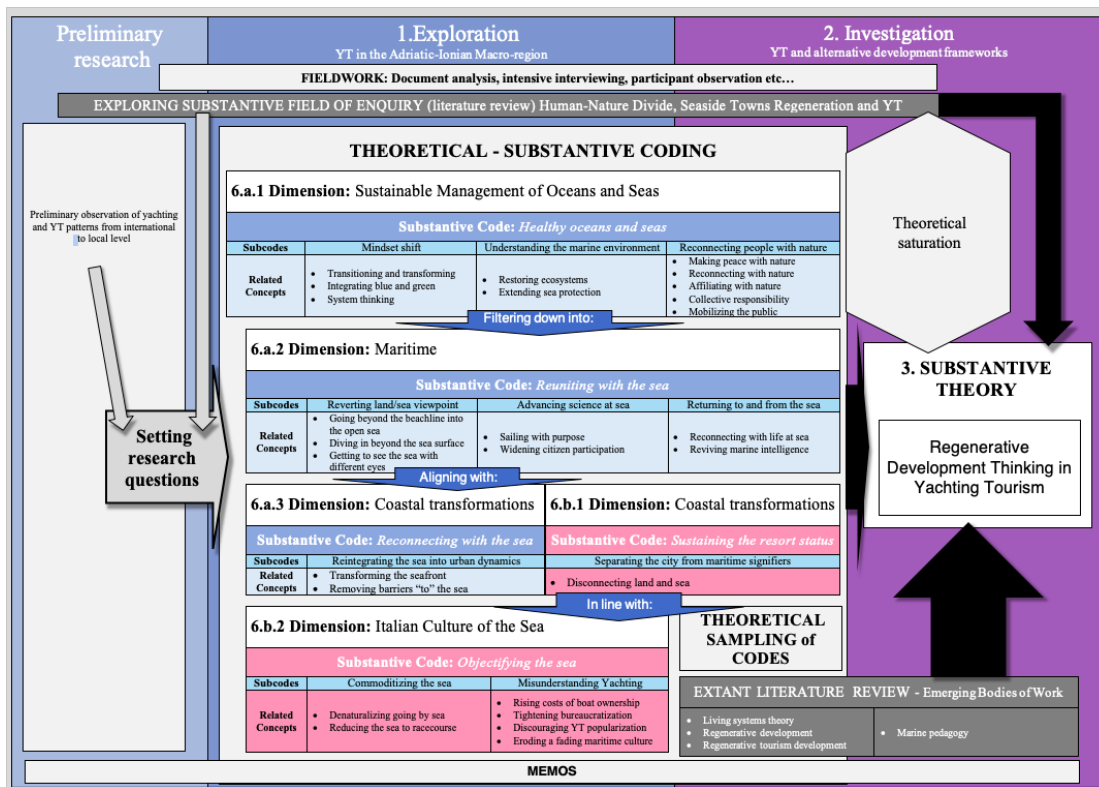


Table 2. CGT research process. Adapted from Fernandez (2004).

Appendix 1.

International and Supranational Level	
Public sector – International Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bertarelli, D. Special Adviser for Blue Economy, UNCTAD. Speaker at EMD 2022 (Ravenna, IT). UNDESA, <i>Making Waves for A Blue Economy</i>. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, https://www.un.org/en/desa/making-waves-blue-economy Ryabinin, V. Exec. Sec. IOC-UNESCO, in IOC-UNESCO (2023). 	
Public sector - Supranational Level (EU) conventions, plans, official policy documents and reports, representatives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sinkevičius, V. Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries. Speaker at EMD 2022 (Ravenna, IT). Bell, J. EU Healthy Planet (Director), EU Commission. Speaker at EMD 2022 (Ravenna, IT). EuroGOOS, European Global Ocean Observing System https://eurogoos.eu/ EU4Ocean Coalition https://maritime-forum.ec.europa.eu/en/frontpage/1482 	
YT Industry and Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNESCO-IMOCA (2023) <i>Sport and Science</i>. TOR (2022-2023) <i>The Ocean Race Teams Commit to Protecting the Seas</i>. RWP (2022) <i>Racing with Purpose</i>. 	
National level	
YT Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Morelli, S. Speaker at SNV (2021). Confindustria Nautica Charter Division (President) and NSS Charters (CEO). 	<p>“in order for YT to take off and express its sustainability potential in Italy there is the need to simplify the bureaucratic system that surrounds it [...] but change is far too slow to keep up with the evolution of the market”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appuntamento in Adriatico, Assonautica Italia; 30+ participants; participant observation and focus group with 15 boat owners. 	<p>p.23 - “There is the belief that boat owners are rich and can pay any fee, which is not true. The boating market is flooded, at a boat repair shop you pay three times more the price for a gasoline filter as compared to the same spare part at car shops. For the marinas same thing”</p> <p>p. 14 - “raising costs of maintenance and berthing [with] marinas becoming increasingly expensive [...] as if you were staying in a hotel room”</p> <p>p. 14 “there is no longer the freedom to get on your boat and move freely. It has become far too commercialized”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASN1 (Interviewee). Assonautica Italia – Confindustria Nautica (National Advisor); Assonautica Ferrara, Local Section of Confindustria Nautica (Director); Appuntamento in Adriatico (Director). 	<p>p. 14 - “becoming members of nautical associations like Assonautica, and partaking in YT initiatives like the Appuntamento in Adriatico, is a forced choice in order to afford navigating the sea and exploring the Italian natural and cultural landscape”</p>
Macro-regional level (Adriatic-Ionian) (programmes, initiatives, representatives)	
YT Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IND1 (Interviewee). Boat Owner, Italian Sailing Federation (FIV) Instructor, Professional Skipper. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IND2 (Interviewee). Boat Owner, Professional Skipper, Lega Navale Italiana (L.N.I) Instructor. 	<p>p. 14 - “90% of yacht ownership in Italy [being] of minor entity”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASN2 (Interviewee). Assonautica Ravenna (President); local section of Confindustria Nautica. Speaker at Ravenna Seaside Events 2022 (an element of EMD, 2022). 	<p>p.23 - “In Italy access to the sea is dependent on clubs or nautical associations; you have to belong to a club in order to be able to deal even with the minimum level of bureaucracy involved in getting out at sea”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ENIT-Assonautica. (Programme) “Italy Viewed from the Sea – Discover Where I’m Taking You”. 	
YT Third Sector	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFBL1 (Interviewee). Founder of Sailing for Blue Life. Representative of Fondazione Cetacea ONLUS; Marine Biologist; Scuba Instructor. 	<p>p.12 - “if I hadn’t been on-board participants would have had a conventional charter holiday”.</p> <p>p.20 – “Overcoming the idea that the beach is the sea is a challenge [...]. Few know that turtles and cetaceans populate the Adriatic and this is mainly because only few ventures beyond the beachline. Beyond the beachline there is a world that only few know of [...] normally people have no time or even the change to get in contact with these things and reflect on the encounter”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFBL2 (Interviewee). Founder of Sailing for Blue Life and Sailingfor Blue Lab. Aganoor Aps. (President); Architect, Humanitarian Activist; Skipper; Yacht Ocean Racer; FIV Instructor). 	<p>p.19 - “With the ambition to reconnect, stopovers are opportunities to engage with the local communities we encounter [...] we propose a deep encounter with the places we touch on. In Bari and Brindisi we met with the association Libera Contro le Mafie”</p> <p>p. 25 - “Sailing schools generally claim to do and disseminate the culture of the sea but in effect what is being disseminated is mainly a technical gesture” [...]. In order to conduct a sailboat, you are required to attending courses at sailing schools that needs to be FIV affiliated. The charter sector sources skippers with an expertise that derives from this culture; it misses out on aspects concerning the marine environment and the social side [...] In Italy what is missing is an education system that forms skippers besides the obvious technical aspects.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Velalibre: Il Mare in Movimento. For the dissemination of the culture of the sea. https://www.velalibre.org/ 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conti, L. (Founder of Velalibre) Opening Speech: Velalibre Launch at Rock Island (Rimini, 17/07/2022, IT). 	<p>p. 20 - "The goal is to make this community, the sea community, the community of sea lovers visible to the city of Rimini. We are a large group of individuals, we have a great chance to get to the heart of Rimini and show the city that there is a part of the city that goes beyond the beach. Much has changed with the pandemics, but we know that we can start anew from the sea"</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VL1 (Interviewee). Founder of Velalibre, Professional Skipper and Maritime Educator at Albatros Nautica (Rimini, IT), FIV Instructor, Social and Ecological Activist. 	<p>"By bureaucratically 'inducing' sailing schools to become FIV associates and taking part in designing boat licencing programmes, the first official port of entry into the yachting world, the FIV force a competitive edge into the YT value chain"</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VL2 (Interviewee). Founder of Velalibre, Professional Skipper, Sea Ways Agency (CEO), FIV Instructor, Social and Ecological Activists. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VL3 (Interviewee). Founder of Velalibre, Professional Skipper, Ocean Skipper and Yacht Ocean Racers, FIV instructor. 	<p>p.20 - "If you take the 'rush' element off, you are already at rhythm with that of the sea"</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FIV (Italian Sailing Federation) 	
YT Participants	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YTP1 (Interviewee). Participant to Sailingfor Blue Lab. Archaeologist/Researcher. 	<p>"The land and marine components are indivisible"</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YTP2 (Interviewee). Participant to Sailingfor Blue Lab. Economist/Solidarity finance. 	<p>"Distancing from landed dynamics; at sea in navigation there is the space and the time to feel deeply. On land this is inhibited, suppressed, put on the side. On land the priorities shift from those met at sea"</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YTP3 (Interviewee). Participant to Sailingfor Blue Lab. Psychotherapist. 	<p>"spending time at sea allowed me to stop and immerse myself in the marine rhythms, rediscover the sea as much more than just being by the seaside"</p> <p>p. 13 - "the strong white lights pointed at the beachline along the Rimini coast for safety of the beach are a hazard to navigation and this is a simple yet telling example of the extent to which the resort economy remains a priority over safety at sea for navigators. Along the Croatian coast, where YT is a priority sector with a different maritime culture, this does not happen"</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VLP1 (Interviewee). Velalibre Participant to Boat Transfer. Business consultant. 	<p>"The open sea is a space of silence where slow pace and constantly changing sea conditions lead to contemplation and presence"</p>
Local level (policy documents, reports, representatives)	
Public/Private Agencies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PSR1 (Interviewee). Coordinator of the <i>Strategic Plan Agency (SPA) for Rimini Srl. (Rimini, IT).</i> 	<p>p. 13 - "The <i>Parco del Mare</i> concept derives from the intention of retrieving the role of the sea in the life of the town, from that of backdrop to that of a protagonist. It is an urban park: 15 km along the coast defining a new seafront dedicated to nature, wellbeing and the fruition of natural spaces for tourists and locals. It seeks to fix that urban fracture generated by the railway splitting the winter and the summer city. This is a very attractive model [...] everyone is copying it from Ravenna to Bellaria"</p> <p>p.13 - "This sea community was not part of the forum [that designed this policy document]. They participated indirectly being represented by larger trade associations like Confindustria that, as the main association representing manufacturing and service companies in Italy, included [the views] of the industrial sector broadly"</p> <p>p. 13 - "It is true, such sea community was missing, and I think this is a cultural problem of our country".</p>
Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IND3 (Interviewee). Albatros Rimini (CEO). Sailboat Dealer, Broker, International Chartering (<i>Rimini, IT</i>). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IND4 (Interviewee). Marina di Rimini (Director) (<i>Rimini, IT</i>). 	<p>p. 14 - "most people in Rimini not knowing that there is a Marina"</p>
Third sector	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CVR1 (Interviewee). Member of Circolo Velico Riminese (<i>Rimini, IT</i>). CVR2 (Interviewee). Member of Circolo Velico Riminese (<i>Rimini, IT</i>). 	