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Chapter 2

POTENTIAL PREFERENCES FOR ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: THE CASE OF RURAL AND INTERGENERATIONAL TOURISM

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“Few sectors are as strategically positioned as tourism to contribute decisively to job creation, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and multicultural peace and understanding.”

(Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General UNWTO, 2015, p.2)

ABSTRACT

This chapter gives a social-psychological analysis of tourists' preferences and experiences concerning alternative (more sustainable) forms of tourism. After a discussion of the principles and definitions of sustainable tourism, the literature on tourists' preferences for sustainable tourism will be reviewed and the potentialities of alternative forms of tourism for tourism sustainability will be highlighted. Subsequently, two examples of alternative tourism experiences will be introduced and critically discussed in the light of such literature: the case of rural tourism and that of intergenerational tourism. The former is considered to be promising form of tourism able to improve the culture and the economy of rural areas and agricultural production. An interesting case is that of China. During the last 20 years, thanks to a policy of governmental incentives, some Chinese rural areas have seen the birth and progressive

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growth of various models of rural tourism. These combine the tourists-citizens needs to experience a style of simple life and the enhancement of agriculture. This chapter will present and analyse the framework and the characteristics of that type of sustainable tourism. The second kind of alternative tourism (intergenerational tourism) refers to the tourism experiences ideated by the Italian Laboratory for Intergenerational Meetings¹ and implemented over the past twenty years in various Italian cities. In a time when relationships among generational groups are mostly superficial or non-existent, the Laboratory has proposed a series of research/experimentations of tourism activities aimed at reducing the distance between groups of different generations. An interconnected set of activities combining indoor (e.g., computer lab, theatrical performances) and outdoor (e.g., explorations of historic and natural trails) experiences have been devised to foster communication among participants of different ages and to strengthen their relationships by reducing reciprocal prejudices and stereotypes. The chapter will sum up the results of the investigations carried out during the many research/experimentations that have taken place over the years.

Keywords: tourism psychology, sustainable tourism, rural tourism, intergenerational tourism, intergenerational relationships

INTRODUCTION

International political and cultural organizations converge on the idea that tourism has potentialities that go beyond the mere economic development of nations worldwide. There is a growing awareness that tourism can represent a pivotal element for improving societies' approach to territory use and fertile ground for experimenting with alternative solutions for matching local interests of growth and global issues of social, economic and environmental relevance. For these reasons, the tourism industry has been challenged to adopt sustainability principles into its scope and prompted opening the doors to a set of additional purposes that might appear unconventional for a purely economic activity. These include - besides the reiterated calls for a reduced social and environmental impact of tourism facilities - a specific and innovative thrust toward the conservation of natural and cultural heritage worldwide, as well as the responsibility to develop culturally sensitive travellers, to encourage respect between tourists and hosts, and to enhance local identities and environmental awareness. More specifically, since 1999 the UNWTO in the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism recognizes "the important dimension and role of tourism as a positive instrument towards the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of the quality of life for all people, the potential to make a contribution to economic and social development, especially of the developing countries, and the emergence as a vital force for the promotion of international understanding, peace and prosperity." That said, it is evident that such ambitious goals cannot be achieved by following the most traditional approaches to the tourism industry and that new approaches to travel and tourism experiences need to be developed.

¹ The Generational Meetings Laboratory has started its activity in 1998 at the Department of Social and Political Studies of the University of Milan, coordinated by Antonietta Albanese. The activities are now continuing within the research group coordinated by Roberta Maeran of the University of Padua.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY

Since its first appearance in 1987 (WCED, 1987) the concept of “sustainable development” has come a long way and has spread all over the world in a number of different social and economic sectors. The annual UN Global Sustainable Development Reports testify to the efforts made worldwide to address sustainability principles. Today, every political resolution, and macro or micro-economic choice is requested, sooner or later, to take into account sustainability issues and make sure that the options adopted are able to meet “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Inter - and intra - generational equity, gender equality, poverty eradication, public participation, environmental protection, caution in dealing with uncertain risks, use of renewable resources and so forth, have become key issues that social, cultural, environmental, economic and political policies worldwide are asked to consider in one way or another. Although several concerns have been expressed over the years as to whether the principles of sustainable development could actually be applied to real world societies, or as to whether they would truly solve the problems identified, overall, it seems evident that “sustainable development” is still well and alive and it has started to evolve. Step by step, year after year, the prophecies preconized as “our common future” proved realistic and many forms of scepticism have been overcome thanks to the evidence produced by a multitude of good practices that have successfully attempted to implement sustainable development in various fields. The principles of sustainable development are now taken seriously, even within those sectors that have traditionally put up the strongest resistance to its diffusion; for example, the economic and industrial sectors. As a matter of fact, the stagnation of economies in many ‘western’ countries has induced some economists to look out for alternative avenues, and sustainable development has finally started to be viewed as one such avenue. This has contributed to turning many “enemies” into “allies,” who are convinced by demonstrations that the application of sustainable development can be remunerative rather than simply costly, productive rather than just obstructive and opportunity-making rather than totally paralyzing. Certainly, we are still far from the situation in which sustainability tenets permeate all economic decisions worldwide and it would be naïve to think that all moves towards sustainability made by the industrial sector are based on the endorsement of a more ethical view of the economy. Nevertheless, it is evident that we have at least moved away from the condition in which sustainable development was seen as a mere ideological utopia. On the contrary, sustainability is now viewed as a concrete and feasible economic reality in many sectors. Tourism is one such sector. More specifically, there is a growing conviction in the tourism domain that “provided a number of principles and a certain number of rules are observed, responsible and sustainable tourism is by no means incompatible with the growing liberalization of the conditions governing trade in services and under whose aegis the enterprises of this sector operate, and that it is possible to reconcile in this sector economy and ecology, environment and development, openness to international trade and protection of social and cultural identities” (UNWTO, 1999, p.2; see also UNEP/UNWTO, 2012).

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS AND CONTINGENT IMPLEMENTATIONS

One of the most cited definitions of sustainable tourism was provided by the World Tourism Organization (WTTC & UNWTO, 1996; see also Bramwell & Lane, 1993) which framed the concept as the “tourism which leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.” However, some authors have considered this definition to be too wide, abstract and generic, and have repeatedly shown their scepticism as to whether competition among the various components of the tourism/environment system could be actually reduced to zero. As a matter of fact, some stated tout court that “the principles and objectives of sustainable development cannot be transposed onto the specific context of tourism.” Others suggested, more optimistically, that the more abstract programmatic levels (inspired by the highest ideals) should be distinguished from the more realistic, everyday practice (motivated by contingent necessities). This does not mean that the goals cannot be achieved in their original formulation, but rather that the great cultural changes they require may need time and are most likely to be reached through small progressive steps in the direction desired. Indeed, according to Hunter (1997), “in reality trade-off decisions taken on a day-to-day basis will almost certainly produce priorities which emerge to skew the destination area based tourism/environment system in favour of certain aspects” (p.859). Hence, a more realistic and “adaptive” approach was suggested that considers sustainable tourism as an “over-arching paradigm which incorporates a range of approaches to the tourism/environment system within destination areas” (Hunter, 1997, p.850). This means that tourism sustainability should be considered less as a discrete, “all or nothing” characteristic, and more as a continuous quality, ranging from an undesirable minimum to a more desirable maximum implementation. Ko (2001) treated tourism sustainability in this way, suggesting that tourist destination offering can be more or less sustainable depending on the extent to which it is able to fulfil the specific needs of its various components (i.e., local residents, tourists, and the natural environment). This conceptualization entails at least two important consequences: i) sustainable tourism can take many forms and facets and ii) every form or facet can be seen as a locally adapted implementation of all the general tenets (or parts of them). A crucial factor to consider in the implementation of sustainable forms of tourism, therefore, becomes the way in which adaptation to local contexts is achieved. To this end, some authors suggest the importance of studying the needs of the various stakeholders² involved. The crucial issues thus concern how to identify and address stakeholders’ needs and which of these needs have to be addressed. Byrd (2007) suggested four types of stakeholders potentially involved in the development of sustainable forms of tourism; these are the present and future members of the local hosting community, and the present and future visitors (tourists). Methodological suggestions and empirical evidence exist concerning how to assess local residents’ and administrators’ needs and expectations, and to increase their participation in the sustainability goals of tourism. Discussions about the involvement of the tourism industry in sustainability issues (both at local and global levels) have been published in the literature as well. Also visitors’ points of

² According to Freeman (1984) a stakeholder is any individual or identifiable group that can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives.

view have been addressed by a number of contributions. However, with regard to the latter, Passafaro and colleagues (Passafaro, Cini, Boi, D'Angelo, Heering, Luchetti, Mancini, Martemucci, Pacella, Patrizi, Sassu & Triolo, 2015; Passafaro, Cini, Diaco, Schirru, Boison, Gasparri & Giannantoni, 2015) recently highlighted some limits that deserve to be discussed further.

UNDERSTANDING TOURISTS' PREFERENCES FOR SUSTAINABLE FORMS OF TOURISM: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

A key tenet of sustainable tourism is that tourists should devote more attention to the consequences of their tourist behaviour and should consider the implications for local and global sustainability when choosing among the possible options available for their vacations (UNWTO, 2007). In particular according to the Davos Declaration, (UNWTO, 2007, p.3) "tourists should be encouraged to consider the climate, economic, societal and environmental impacts of their options before making a decision and, where possible, to reduce their carbon footprint, or offset emissions that cannot be reduced directly." Moreover, "in their choices of activities at the destination, tourists should also be encouraged to opt for environmentally-friendly activities that reduce their carbon footprint as well as contribute to the preservation of the natural environment and cultural heritage" (UNWTO, 2007, p.3). This means that tourists' preferences and choices can be considered as a particular case of sustainable behaviour and could thus be understood in the light of the theoretical and empirical evidences concerning pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours. These suggest, for example, that among the factors that have proved to affect individual pro-social and pro-environmental decisions are personal values, attitudes and worldviews. People holding pro-social and pro-environmental values are more likely to endorse pro-social and pro-ecological behaviours and thus are also more likely to prefer more sustainable forms of tourism such as, for example, ecotourism. However, this same literature also highlighted how the influence of such factors is rarely strong and direct, while it is often moderated by a number of other contingent aspects. Drawing on the tenets of Stern and colleagues' Value-Beliefs-Norms theory of environmentalism, Passafaro and colleagues (Passafaro et al. 2015a; Passafaro et al., 2015b) tried to identify some of these contingent aspects by studying the moderating role of factors such as the overall willingness to endorse personal responsibilities while on vacation, individual attitudes towards diversity, specific beliefs concerning the overall impact of individuals' choices, and personal norms. Results suggest that although these aspects are all correlated to tourism preferences, the strength of their association with pro-environmental orientations can vary reasonably across people. Indeed, the authors noted the existence of groups of people whose tourism preferences were consistent with their environmental attitudes (i.e., people with high pro-environmental attitudes choosing low impact vacations, or people with low environmental attitudes choosing high impact vacations), while inconsistencies between attitudes and tourism preferences emerged for other groups (i.e., people declaring high endorsement of sustainability issues while tending to choose high impact vacations, and *vice versa*). Among other possible explanations for these inconsistencies, the authors discussed the complex nature of environmental issues and environmentally relevant behaviours in general. According to the authors, environmental

issues often raise the dilemma of how to reconcile individual aspirations to satisfy personal needs and motivations with the increasing number of limitations and constraints imposed on the use of natural (and human) resources. In this way, while anyone can generally agree with the idea that environmental and social resources should be managed in a more sustainable manner, not everyone is also then willing to sacrifice their personal necessities and expectations in order to achieve such goals. This may be particularly true in the case of tourism behaviour where the request to endorse social and environmental responsibilities may contrast with one of the main motivations to go on holiday: to take a break from everyday problems and routines. Another factor deemed to be responsible for the inconsistencies recorded is the level of knowledge and/or personal beliefs concerning the actual environmental and social impact of individual tourist choices. Various studies have suggested that such knowledge can be rather low among the populations, while others confirmed that people can be quite sceptical about the actual impact of individual tourism choices. If people are unaware or sceptical about the problems that their decisions can cause to the environment, they cannot make the requested pro-environmental choices, even when their general attitudes strongly favour sustainability. In this sense, a contributory cause could be the difficulty to unequivocally distinguish sustainable and unsustainable activities in the tourism domain and/or the lack of communication campaigns directed toward potential tourists.

The complexity of tourists' approaches to sustainability issues becomes particularly evident in the case of nature-based forms of sustainable tourism, such as ecotourism (see also Cini, Metastasio, Passafaro, Saayman & Van der Merwe, this volume). For example, many studies have found that these kinds of vacations tend to be chosen by people with high pro-environmental attitudes. However, other research works have found opposite results and have led authors such as Blamey and Braithwaite (1997) to note how "the majority of potential ecotourists do not have particularly green values" (p. 1). More generally Passafaro and colleagues (Passafaro et al., 2015a; Passafaro et al., 2015b) found that certain kinds of nature-based vacations (including ecotourism) can be appreciated by people independently of any ecological considerations and, thus, the authors concluded that the increase in ecotourism demand recorded in the last decades might not necessarily be linked to an increased interest in environmental issues. The authors cited Weaver (2005, p. 441) who pointed out, that there are cases in which "the natural environment serves as a convenient setting for facilitating other kinds of motivations including relaxation and hedonism in the case of the 3S (sea, sun and sand) and thrill-seeking and risk-taking in the case of outdoor adventure" (see also Richard & Wilson, 2005).

Indeed, environmental psychology studies have variously pointed out that, for example, natural environments can be appreciated by many people thanks to their restorative powers: in many cases they serve as a refuge from the stressful stimulations of the everyday urban life. Moreover, green areas were found to elicit the idea of pure, clean and healthy environments, connotations which can be appreciated by people looking for high-quality environments. In addition, by adopting an "elemental" focus toward the environment, many people appreciate, for example, ecotourism vacations because they are attracted to specific charismatic elements of the local flora and fauna. Furthermore, as long as ecotourism represents an alternative form of vacation that has restricted diffusion, some people may be attracted by the opportunity of distinguishing themselves from the majority of tourists by participating in an extravagant and elite vacation. Similar considerations could be put forward for cultural heritage sites and for historical renowned sites in general which are able to draw the attention of people interested

in visiting famous places in order to embark in fashionable vacations. Nevertheless, our intent here is not to judge fashion vacationers, but rather to warn tourism managers against the adoption of too simplistic an approach to interpreting tourism choices. In other words, it is important to keep in mind that, for example, a person cannot be assumed to hold pro-social and pro-environmental values (and cannot be expected to behave accordingly) just because he/she has chosen to experience an ecotourism vacation. As Passafaro and colleagues (Passafaro et al., 2015a; Passafaro et al., 2015b) noted, these kinds of considerations might be irrelevant for a purely market-oriented perspective (where selling the product is the sole goal), but they are crucial for a sustainable development approach because, for example, sustainable tourism can only be achieved if tourists' choices and behaviours "on site" support sustainability.

THE MANY FACETS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: FROM RURAL TO INTERGENERATIONAL TOURISM

While sustainable tourism remains a label referring to general and abstract inspiring principles, other labels have appeared which refer to concrete (more market-oriented and locally adapted) forms of sustainable tourism. One of these labels is "responsible tourism" which was coined by the tourism industry to refer to specific tourism options offered to well-defined typologies of tourists, particularly interested in endorsing social and environmental responsibilities while on holidays (e.g., Su, Wang & Wen, 2013; Frey & George, 2010). Another label used to identify specific and concrete forms of sustainable tourism is "ecotourism" (corresponding to sustainable tourism practiced in natural areas; see Cini, Metastasio, Passafaro, Saayman & Van der Merwe, this volume). Today, both ecotourism (sometimes also known as green tourism) and responsible tourism are well-established tourism realities with a market area and development potentialities. However, depending on the ability of the tourism market to draw new ideas from the principles and tenets of sustainable tourism, new alternative forms of it are emerging or may emerge in the future. In this chapter, we will address two of these new and alternative forms of tourism (rural tourism and intergenerational tourism).

RURAL TOURISM: A COMPLEX SOLUTION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Many rural areas in diverse countries all over the world must address the challenge of remaining profitable in spite of the fact that agricultural products (especially those from small to medium farms) are often uncompetitive on the global market (e.g., Giovannucci, 2012). This trend represents a serious problem for the local economy of rural communities as it is responsible for a progressive loss of jobs, and thus for an overall economic and cultural impoverishment of local societies worldwide (e.g., Bruinsma, 2003). In addition, agricultural decline is deemed responsible for many environmental problems. Abandoned rural areas tend to become 'fertile' ground for speculative building and this opens the way for a series of concatenated events, eventually leading to a reduction in the quality of the soil and the loss of

biodiversity and landscape diversity (e.g., Barbero-Serra, Marques, & Ruiz-Pérez, 2013). For these reasons, several political and scientific organisations all over the world have highlighted the importance of avoiding the depopulation of rural areas and of helping farmers to maintain their traditional role as guardians of the countryside (e.g., CEC, Commission for Environmental Cooperation, 2005; EUROPE Rural Development Programs, 2007-2013, 2014-2020; OECD 1995). For instance, the European Commission policy has three long-term strategies for the period 2014 - 2020 that address the goal of enhancing rural business (investing in rural jobs and growth), fostering the sustainable management of all activities (through the use of natural resources and renewable energy) and increasing the quality of life of rural communities (EUROPE, Rural Development Program, 2013). According to some authors, a way to do this is to encourage farmers to diversify their economic activities and to transform rural areas from places of mere food production into places of consumption and recreation. In fact, there is a general conviction that, in order to expand its economic potential, agriculture should develop a wider range of products, interests, and skills, like, for example, offering leisure and accommodation services, selling local organic products, participating in the conservation of forestry, and so forth (e.g., see Kinsella, Wilson, De Jong, & Renting, 2000; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008).

Rural Tourism - or farm-based tourism, or community-based tourism – seems to embody all these features and therefore has started to be proposed in various countries worldwide as a viable and effective opportunity to guarantee the future prosperity of rural areas. From a historical point of view, Rural Tourism (from now RT) does not represent a new invention in the tourism domain. Indeed, early forms of rural tourism appeared in the late nineteenth century in many areas of North America and Europe as a consequence of a romantic interest in bucolic landscapes. However, it is only since the 1970s that it began to acquire those characteristics that led rural people, communities and governments to consider it as a valuable activity for rural development (e.g., Bramwel & Lane, 1994; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). These characteristics will be discussed as follows.

GOALS AND PRINCIPLES OF RURAL TOURISM

It is recognised that RT is a form of tourism characterised by farm or community-based accommodation, attractions and activities. It can take place in small towns and villages of agricultural heritage endowed with traditional architecture and/or located in natural environments, where the vastness of the horizon, landscape quality, wild and/or agricultural lands, cultural resources, and small-size services/activities, are considered the major attractions (e.g., Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Walford, 2001; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). The particular set of resources and localised specialisations existing in an area represent the core elements of RT and, in order for this kind of tourism to be successful, they have to be organised into a sustainable system (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Loureiro, 2014). The system becomes sustainable when it acquires the characteristics identified by Cawley and Gillmor (2008) and generally shared by researchers: multidimensional sustainability, empowerment of local people, a specific use of endogenous ownerships and resources, complementarity to other economic sectors and activities, an appropriate scale of development, a strong network among stakeholders, and roots in the local social systems. In particular, according to the

authors, the combination of local ownership and collective management of the resources available is essential to maximise profits, avoid social conflicts, and sustain conservation policies. This can be done if appropriate horizontal and vertical networks are set up within the area, and if local social actors are also able to establish collaborations at an extra-local level. Empowerment of the local population is another fundamental prerequisite in this business process. To this aim, participatory work methods are recommended as a basis for planning and management procedures (Bramwell, 2010; Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Idziak, Majewski & Zmyslony 2015; Sanoff, 1999). More specifically, the management of the overall system should be constantly negotiated among the various stakeholders, bearing in mind that value can be added or lost at every node of the network from production to consumption, and that the tourism activities should be integrated into other economic sectors and systems. However, since the economies of scale differ radically from those of other tourist sites (urban destinations, beach or mountain resorts, cruises, etc.) RT cannot be expected to achieve the same economic results. Indeed, it should be conceived as a small or medium scale economic activity that does not require large scale capital investment, although it does need some infrastructural support that can be, and usually is, provided by local institutions. In this sense, it is particularly suitable to enhance the employment and economy of families at a local level. Moreover, RT is far from being a homogeneous phenomenon, mechanically replicable anywhere according to ready-made templates. Indeed, since its specific features tend to vary in function of the peculiar characteristics of the area, it is expected to take unique forms. Such distinctiveness represents a key factor of the attraction and thus all efforts should be devoted to its preservation. To this aim, it is crucial that all the stakeholders potentially involved in this productive activity (producers, host communities, support agencies, public administrators, tour operators, tourists, etc.) consider sustainability as a fundamental goal of the whole process and make sure that the use of the local competitive advantage is pursued in a manner that ensures that the endogenous peculiarities of the physical, social, and cultural environment are always preserved in their quality and variety.

RURAL TOURISM: UNIQUE FORMS AND RECURRING FEATURES

Although RT can assume different forms, often of an exclusive nature, some features might recur across contexts. In particular, one of the aspects that can often be retrieved in various forms of RT is the role played by local food, drinks, and/or crafts as core attractions. The association between specific kinds of craft food and a particular tourist venue is a consolidated tradition in the tourism domain (even the mass one), and, in general, tasting local specialties usually represents an integral part of any vacation. However, in more classic forms of tourism, craft foods and drinks represent only a corollary to other more central types of attractions (monuments, museums, amusement parks, beaches, etc.). In contrast, in many forms of RT, local food, and/or drinks can become the main theme or core element of the vacation/visit. This is the case, for example, in culinary tourism, and wine and beer tourism: when visitors to a village or a town are specifically attracted by the opportunity to taste or buy particular renowned local products, and to do it 'on site' (e.g., Murray & Kline, 2015, Sidali, Kastenholz & Bianchi, 2015; Sims, 2009). Some authors have indicated the need for a particular original and unique consumption experience (e.g., Dagevos, 2009), something that

differs from other more common or mass-consumption experiences (e.g., Sims, 2009). This need meets the availability of an increasing number of farmers and producers to develop food-related activities based on the eno-gastronomic heritage of an area. If such a combination of demand and offer at a local level is planned and managed according to the principles previously discussed, it can enable the rise of successful niche food markets and actively contribute to both heritage conservation and rural economic development. Some interesting insights regarding this phenomenon were provided by a set of studies concerning the case of the Breweries of rural North Carolina (USA) by Murray and Kline (2015). The authors noted how tourists visiting the Brewery area liked to learn about the brewery and its historical significance, and were interested in understanding the brewing process and its economic contribution to the community. Researchers suggested that this type of tourism could meet different needs in different kinds of tourists. Indeed, one of the peculiarities that makes this form of tourism different from others is the fact that it tends to attract both long distance travellers and residents of the nearby areas. For example, in the case of North Carolina's Breweries, the authors report that the two breweries studied served local and regional customers living within a 50-mile radius. Hence, for some tourists (mostly those travelling from big cities and the metropolis) such kind of visit can fulfil a desire for authentic and unique experiences that differ radically from those characterizing the urban life. For others (mostly residents of the nearby areas), it can be an opportunity to retrieve and revitalise local traditions and thus contribute to strengthen their links to the local social-cultural identity. For both, however, it can become a way to ascribe specific meaning to one's own life. For example, in the North Carolina study, the fact of drinking a unique beer in a particular microbrewery emerged as representing an aspect of self-definition and constituted a crucial component of loyalty to that specific brand of beer. Murray and Kline (ivi) suggested that the two breweries studied contributed to sustainable tourism development in their rural areas, increased destination competitiveness, and employment creation (entrepreneurship and agricultural expansion contributed to sustainability and rural development strategies). They also found out that connection with local community, satisfaction, and desire for a unique consumer product were the specific factors of tourism loyalty (the decision to repeatedly return to the place and/or continue to consume that kind of brand), and concluded that brewery experiences were also able to enhance place attachment among brewer patrons (who had bonded to the brewery as a place). Their conclusion also provides us with some important tips about RT sustainability: the authors stated that "Craft breweries are tourism attractors in small towns and can work as examples of sustainable tourism businesses. They can meet the triple bottom line of environmental, economic, and sociocultural sustainability (...). They may address sociocultural sustainability through labels, contexts provided during the tours, and their expressions of the local community, history, and landscape in the naming of beers. Environmental sustainability might be addressed by the breweries through the recycling of used grain from local farmers, use of renewable energy, and initiatives involving the promotion of canning beers. Finally, small-scale breweries are typically locally owned and, therefore, provide a positive economic impact on the town." (p. 1213).

Brewery tourism, however, is only one of the many forms that RT can take. Farm holidays (also referred to as Agritourism; e.g., Busby & Rendle, 2000; McGehee & Kin, 2004; Pizam & Poleka, 1980; Weaver & Fennell, 1997; Jennings, Kim & McGehee, 2007), offering tourists the opportunity to spend time in a real farm context, are another well-known and diffused form of RT. Nevertheless, many other typologies have appeared in recent times,

all derived from the idea of using specific features of rural areas as a base for an alternative and thematically specific vacation. In this sense, some rural areas appeared as particularly suitable for the development of forms of wellness tourism (focused on the attention to spiritual and physical well-being), activity tourism (focused on sports activities such as trekking, Nordic walking, cycling, horse-riding, climbing, etc.), cultural heritage tourism (focused on visiting castles, museums, archaeological sites, religious sites etc.; e.g., McKercher & du Cros, 2002), wind-farm tourism (as “green destinations” focused on integrating tourism with wind energy production; e.g., de Sousa & Kastenholz, 2015) and many other forms (see box 1 for a discussion concerning RT in China; see Lane & Kastenholz, 2015, for a discussion of present and future developments of RT), including cross-over typologies that combine two or more features/activities (Wolf, Stricker & Hagenloh, 2015). All these forms of tourism are deemed able to contribute to rural development in many ways: they can sustain rapid economic and social growth, increase diversification of jobs and revenue in farming, craft, accommodation and other services; they can contribute to increasing the economic value of food products and building and land properties, and foster the establishment of new facilities and amenities (restaurants, theatres, retail stores, schools etc.) in once abandoned places. However, several cases of failure have been reported in the literature as well. Indeed, another recurrent feature of RT, often highlighted by researchers, concerns its intrinsic fragility and the existence of a number of limits and drawbacks.

Box 1. The China case

RT in China is an interesting “case study” due to the fact that China has the biggest agrarian population in the world that has seen major investment and specific diversification of rural areas into tourism (folk-custom tourism, rural eco-tourism, agro-tourism, leisure farm tourism, Hu, 2008; Su, 2011).

As Hu (2008) and Su (2011) reported, RT in China has been supported with financial incentives and government policies since 1998. CNTA (China National Tourism Administration) has provided rural areas and a variety of agricultural enterprises with attractions that have pulled in thousands of urban people, as visitors, particularly during the main holidays. Chinese RT has assumed diverse interrelated patterns that have developed into a corresponding succession of events or phases. Typically, during the first phase, an initial form of RT would appear. This form has been named “Nong jia le” (Happy farm family), and took place in rural areas located within one to three hours’ drive from the cities, and situated near specific sites renowned for their scenic beauty (national parks, wetlands, heritage water towns). Generally, in these sites, single families offered farm-based accommodation, food, and entertainments to visitors. This kind of RT was inserted in a traditional matriarchal society: wives in particular were expected to deliver and take care of the tourists services. Generally, tourist experiences consisted of: i) sharing rural lifestyles (tasting simple local dishes, eating local home food), ii) living in local farmhouses (rustic accommodation with basic facilities for toilets and/or bathrooms), iii) participating in entertainment and traditional activities. Tourists would spend about half of the day in their accommodation, mainly for dining, or for one or two days, with a relatively low cost per person (Ling et al., 2013). This kind of RT has had great success, attracting

tourists with cultural interests. Subsequently, this phenomenon has tended to evolve, and some individual farmers began to set up autonomous tourist businesses that expanded on a larger scale than the initial limited form of RT: they would engage workers to provide tourist services (handcrafts, entertainments, local products and others) and increase the business so that other farmers living nearby were then motivated to set up their own specialised activities (poultry rearing, organic vegetables, aquatic products, folk performances). The rural areas involved in this pattern of interrelated tourist activities began to see a restructuring of the agricultural economy, which in turn, would attract external enterprises: investors, invited by the local government, to set up tourism corporations, specialised in developing and managing RT. Corporations would then rent farmers' resources to increase tourism facilities and amenities and would provide technical guidance and training to farmers, otherwise incapable of running a tourist business. In the end, such a tourist venture would stimulate many communities outside of the initial areas to set up village committees or local associations of farm owners interested in the tourism business to build new corporations that organised tourism service (every farm was specialized in some activities) and could guarantee remuneration for the farmers. At the same time, the government would develop large-scale tourism attractions by requisitioning farm lands and turning farmers into employees of private investors or public organisations.

Because of these governmental choices, RT in China "has been developed not only as a new style of holiday making among the Chinese urban residents, but also as a new form of privately owned small enterprise among millions of Chinese farmers" (Su, 2011, p. 1439). Furthermore, some suggested that this kind of activity helped women's emancipation. Generally, researchers agree that the government gave women a key role in this endeavour in order to improve their living and their cultural standards. Women run these activities as a second job, preserving local culture and lifestyles, assuming several responsibilities (family income, protection of social ties), and promoting RT itself.

Ling and colleagues (2013) studied (throughout interviews) facts and opinions concerning their specific role as tourist hosts in a group of women engaged in a RT endeavour. Seventeen years earlier, these women had founded and started a typical RT in a famous tourist attraction (Cuandixia to the west of Beijing, a rural destination for day or weekend trips). Talking about their role, they reported having dealt with managing the farm, growing vegetables and plants, preparing food, selling local products, and making simple handicrafts for their families and the tourists. Sometimes, and especially during holidays, they performed local dances and songs. They claimed that they liked the hospitality business, which occupied much of their time: they have become famous chefs and, often, had to hire other women as waitresses or cooks during weekends. Increasing incomes were reinvested in home renovations, emergencies, helping others, themselves, and the children. Thanks to this activity, their social lives had improved (they got to know everyone in the community, they talk to villagers during their activities or breaks, and they celebrate holidays together), and they were happy to answer tourists questions. The authors concluded that these women had endorsed a specific role: "women's attitudes towards their culture, keeping their traditional courtyard houses and staying in them, taking care of family members; sincerity and kindness had not been changed as a result of long-term involvement with tourism and the world outside of the village. The women successfully presented the 'authenticity of Chinese rural culture' by maintaining rural ways of living,

not making major changes to their homes, and looking after family members as well as tourists, through Nongjiale” (Ling et al., 2013, p. 635).

According to some authors, this process produced a new concept of “cultural rural tourism” (MacDonald, Jolliffe, 2003): a kind of RT that took place in an unpolluted rural environment and in traditional communities that had preserved heritage, arts, lifestyles, and values. Moreover, according to Ying and Zhou (2007) it has helped to redesign the image of rural culture. The communist revolution had created an ambiguous rural image that was both legendary and idyllic (life styles carried out in a natural, simple, uncontaminated social environment), but also stigmatised as poor and underdeveloped in all aspects (education, hygiene, technology, and so on). Indeed, as Shu (2011) highlighted, one of the greatest challenges in RT was related to farmers’ poor general education and technological abilities. This had been a major problem especially in the poorest rural lands or in rural areas where tourists tended to ask for higher quality products and personalised services. However, interventions from the government and external agencies (a consistent field campaign of management and marketing training) could help in coping with these problems and thus contributed to reverse the original stereotype.

Hence, all in all, researchers (He, 2006; Shu, 2011; Ying, Zhou, 2007) considered the balance achieved by RT in China as positive. They agreed that the Chinese government played a fundamental role that led to economic and social benefits for rural communities (the increase of rural tourist numbers has produced new incomes, new employment opportunities and more professionalism), that revitalised restoration activities, local arts and crafts (paper cutting, wood and stone carving, bamboo weaving, lace-making, folk song and dance, local cuisine, wine-making, traditional therapy using medicinal herbs, etc.), and, most important, to the return of many young people to the countryside, generally farmers’ sons, who would come back, and set up new enterprises, thus bringing new skills and aptitudes (greater ability in the use of technology and greater managerial skills).

However, in China, as in other western RT systems, an important challenge is related to farming enterprises that run a small scale business and cannot afford large economic investment. If the government wants to develop a sustainable RT, it will have to keep supporting them with subsidies, in order to integrate their income sources (He, 2006; Shu, 2011). All this seems worthwhile to preserve the beauty of the landscape, the cultural heritage and the environment.

RURAL TOURISM AND ITS FRAGILITIES

Many authors have warned about RT vulnerability to failure due to a set of intrinsic weaknesses that need to be adequately addressed by local planners and managers. For example, referring to food tourism Sidali and colleagues (Sidali et al., 2015, p. 1180) suggested that “researchers have also identified several obstacles to successful development of local food specialties, such as the limited entrepreneurship capabilities of small producers [...] and the high levels of fragmentation and lack of coordination of many farm and rural business [...] Furthermore from a communication viewpoint, signaling the distinctiveness of food specialties to the post-modern consumer is a major challenge for farm and rural operators.” The authors also stated that “the marketing of local food in rural areas requires a reorientation from classical marketing thinking for entrepreneurs and for scholars” (p.1180).

This means that any endeavour aimed at planning and implementing forms of RT should be accompanied by appropriate educational paths directed to enable all the stakeholders to acquire the skills necessary to cope with the upcoming challenges.

Some authors have also warned against the risks deriving from a non-homogeneous diffusion of RT within a nation or a country. Particularly relevant in this sense is the case of Romania. In Romania (Iorio & Corsale, 2010), where RT is an emerging economic sector, tourism has been integrated into the farmers' work as a complementary activity, and has provided a business diversification that maintains positive linkages with agriculture, and the professionalism of farmers. However, due to the relatively high costs of implementation, that had to be covered by the local government, this could happen only in rural areas located near natural and cultural resources (deemed as more attractive and potentially productive), while other areas were excluded from the tourism business. In this way, according to Iorio and Corsale (2010): "The further development of RT in Romania, if the same trend continues, will likely exacerbate the already substantial regional differences [...] The vast majority of Romania's rural settlements have not experienced any tourism development and suffer from serious marginality. [...] (pp. 160-161)."

Other kinds of connate problems in RT concern management issues. For example, various authors have noticed how small RT activities, such as festivals, can struggle with governance issues, including succession planning and problems with leadership (Frost & Laing, 2015). Particularly interesting is the case discussed by Frost and Laing, (2015) concerning rural festival organising committees. The authors illustrated two types of burnout connected to festivals: 'volunteer burnout' and 'festival burnout'. In particular, the authors describe the problems that can arise when local festivals, started as small grassroots initiatives occasionally organised by volunteer committees, evolve into broader and cyclical events, attracting a growing number of visitors and becoming crucial resources for the local community. In these cases, the organising committee that originally started the whole process on a volunteer basis tend to gradually abandon the event, often without passing on the acquired know-how to the new managers, while more professional and central agencies tend to take over the event. In this way, the risk is that the whole event might lose its original meaning and social cultural features and could start to become a mere economic endeavour. The link with the local traditions might be lost and local populations might eventually lose their interest and involvement in it. In conclusion, as the authors stated, "governance issues such as burnout, succession planning and composition of organizing committees are not merely academic niceties, but may ultimately affect the well-being of a community if they are overlooked or ignored" (Frost & Laing, 2015, p. 1314).

Other authors noticed the problematic development of another kind of RT: the one linked to second home properties located in places such as the country-side, sea-side, mountains etc. (e.g., Finnish & Pitkänen, 2010; Hiltunen, Pitkänen, Vepsäläinen & Hall, 2016; Rye, 2011). This kind of tourism has represented a significant trend in the post-productive consumption development of the countryside and it has often been supported by local planning authorities in the hope of stimulating the local economy. Despite this intention, there is evidence that local people often perceive the increased presence of second homes and their owners as an issue, because they can affect the local landscapes, traditional rural ways of life, and social power (who is more legitimated to rule and plan the countryside?). Studies have highlighted that second home owners (often coming from large urban areas) are attracted by the natural and wild landscapes and would practise traditional rural life and leisure activities, but lifestyle

differences, building speculation directed to meet the increasing demand for new second homes, the rise of home prices, and the trends in countryside commodification, have often produced an overt conflict between second home owners and the local populations.

Conflict situations involving the local populations seem to recur in RT and numerous incidents have been recorded. For example, it is well known that RT can also take place in national parks and protected areas (when this happens, it is often labelled as *ecotourism*; see Cini, Metastasio, Passafaro, Saayman & Van der Merwe, this volume) where the wild and uncontaminated (by humans and artefacts) environment is the main tourist attraction (e.g., Amsden, Stedman & Krueger, 2011; Sievänen, Neuvonen & Pouta, 2011; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). In these cases, many authors have recorded the rise of serious conflicts between local populations and parks authorities. This has happened especially when park managers have adopted *top-down* (imposed) rather than *bottom-up* (participatory) procedures to set up the park and manage its resources, and when the populations had been deprived of their necessary resources without being given valuable, effective, and/or acceptable alternatives (see for example, Bonaiuto, Carrus, Martorella & Bonnes, 2002; Carrus, Bonaiuto & Bonnes, 2005; Moscardo, 2011; Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012).

In general, many authors have highlighted the intrinsic complexity of particular forms of RT (e.g., ecotourism, farm tourism, second home tourism, etc.) that entail radical social, cultural and physical transformations of a territory and a different use, distribution, and/or access to the local resources. All the studies conducted agree on the idea that these types of tourism can be successfully implemented only by means of participatory planning approaches, led by academic and institutional planners who are able to take into account the needs of all the stakeholders involved. In particular, such planners should be able to envisage not only the possible economic and political implications, but also the social and cultural factors involved in this phenomenon. Inexperience, improvisation, and/or neglect of the human factors involved increase the risk of the failure of the whole endeavour. Hence, in the next paragraphs we will try to delineate some of these human factors, according to a social-psychological point of view. More specifically we will provide some clues concerning the way in which RT could be seen by two crucial stakeholders: tourists and host communities.

TOURISTS' EXPERIENCE OF RURAL TOURISM

Tourists' experience has always been considered as a key factor for understanding any kind of tourism and it has been studied in several ways. Some of the insights on tourists' experiences come from experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999). In this framework, entertainment and aesthetics (passive absorption and immersion), escapism and education (active immersion and absorption) are considered as the basic components of a tourist experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Nevertheless, to some authors, the tourist experience should be separated into its individual and shared/collective components (Schmitt, 1999): sensing (aesthetics and sensory qualities), feeling (moods and emotions) and thinking (analytical and imaginative thinking) are part of the individual experience, while acting and social experience are the shared component. However, Fridgen (1984) recommended addressing the tourism experience by taking into account the social-physical characteristics of all the 'places' (Canter, 1977) in which it usually occurs. Typically,

the research work on tourist places has focused on the characteristics of the destination only. However, more recent theorisations have highlighted how the tourism experience is a product of all the places encountered. In particular, tourists' experience starts at home, continues in the means of transport and the places traversed during the journey to reach the destination(s), and it finishes back at home, when tourists remember and relive their trip. All these places are relevant for the final experience, because they are all psychologically connected to the trip. For each place, a different combination of personal and social meanings can be identified, as well as specific emotional correlates, and planners should dedicate particular attention to understanding the nature of such factors if they want to meet the needs of potential tourists.

Although the research work on RT experience is still limited, some authors have already attempted to identify some of its constituent aspects. For example, Meyer and Schwager (2007) have carried out an articulated research project about the role of emotions and memories in the RT experience as antecedents of "place attachment"³ and "behavioural intentions" to return to the same rural destination.

They found that, just as in other forms of tourism, people participating in RT were looking for a 'memorable experience' (e.g., Pizam, 2010; see also Tung & Ritchies, 2011): "hedonics, meaning pleasurable feelings that excite, and involvement, personal attachment to an experience, are crucial factors of a memorable tourism experience" (Loureiro, 2014, p. 3). The aesthetic dimension of the experience (passive enjoyment of the stimuli provided by the environment) emerged as the most relevant factor in determining the overall experience. This can include the atmospheric cues inside the rural accommodation and also the sensory contemplation of the landscape. Moreover, the authors noticed the importance of the educational dimension. Indeed, RT would allow fundamental emotions related to a curiosity to learn about rural traditions and life styles (to learn to crafts, to enjoy watching farmers' work), the perception of an escape from reality, and the pleasure of being in a harmonious place (e.g., Anderson & Shimizu, 2007; Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland, 2011; Ballantyne, Packer & Falk, 2011;). The authors noted how these emotions could influence both place attachment, and the intention to return (or even to organise a post-visit experience, shared with family and friends) to the place, as well as the willingness to recommend the destination or place to others (see also Martin, 2010).

The peculiarity of RT experience has also been studied by Sharpley and Jepson (2011) who attempted to determine whether rural tourists visiting the English Lake District (UK) were in search of spiritual fulfilment. The authors found that, although tourists did not purposefully visit that rural area in search of spiritual fulfilment, their visits frequently entailed a subconscious emotional dimension. However, they admitted being unable to determine whether such dimension was the result of a spiritual experience or rather a component of what other authors have labelled as a "sense of place." Indeed, the authors reported how tourists demonstrated "limited or no conscious awareness of spiritual experiences [...] the need for and experience of spirituality is subliminal, intertwined with and, perhaps, inseparable from other emotional responses to being in the countryside [...]," indeed, tourists demonstrated "limited distinctions between experiencing spirituality or transcendent emotions and what in the literature is described as a 'sense of place'" (Sharpley

³ Place attachment has been defined as the affective tie of an individual to a particular social and physical place features (Altman & Low, 1992), due to the emotional investment in it (see also Eisenhauer, Krannic & Blahna, 2000; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

& Jepson, 2011, p. 67). According to the authors, if any spiritual feelings were experienced by their participants, these were not connected to any religious instance. More likely, instead, they were merged with a strong place attachment, built on a mix of past experiences, childhood memories, and national history (association with a countryside nation-state representation, created by literature, tourism planners, tourism marketing and/or operators). For the rural tourists interviewed by the authors, solitude, quiet, remoteness, being high up, the perception of infinity, and the challenge of climbing the mountains were the main elements constituting the tourism experience and thus the main components of the spirituality. Their experience was related to the perception of being away from their ordinary, everyday urban life.

RURAL TOURISM FROM THE HOST COMMUNITIES' POINT OF VIEW: EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES, IDENTITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Two of the most important factors to take into account when dealing with the social-psychological correlates of RT are attitudes and identity. As already stated, some forms of RT entail radical transformations of the territory, life styles, and/or resources distribution. All of these aspects always tend to produce strong effects on the personal and social identities of the hosts (e.g., Brandth & Haugen, 2011; Loureiro, 2014) and tend to directly affect their attitudes towards the whole process. Taken together, the literature on the attitudes of local populations' toward RT has produced mixed results, which are in line with the complexity of this phenomenon as already delineated. Indeed, on the one hand, host communities tend to recognise the positive impact that RT can have on the overall development and quality of life of the local community. For example, besides the positive effects on the local economy as a whole, it is also recognised that RT usually entails the improvement of many infrastructural services (public transport, retail services, cultural and leisure facilities, etc.). Typically, these services are built as facilities for rural tourists, and then they remain available and can be used by all members of the community. Also, RT tends to have a positive effect on the image of the whole area that can acquire specific positive connotations in the eyes of the broader regional, national and even international social community. Such a positive social reputation, in turn, can contribute to positive self-definition for the community members. These positive outcomes, however, do not always automatically translate into positive attitudes toward RT, so that, on the other hand, many studies have recorded dissatisfaction and negative opinions. For example, in a study conducted in a rural area of the "Kan" District, in Northwest Tehran (Iran), characterised by little villages located along the pilgrimage roads to holy places, Dadvar-Khani (2012) found that people of the host communities generally associated negative effects with the tourism development of local areas, and did not show a willingness to engage in tourism activities. The author believed that this attitude was caused by the *top-down* planning procedure adopted in the implementation of this economic activity, which had not involved the host communities in the decisions concerning their own future. More complex results were obtained by Di Domenico and Miller (2012) who set up an empirical investigation about farmers' attitudes and identity in Yorkshire and East Anglia (UK), where an attempt to set up farm-based RT had been recorded. The research showed a complex and ambiguous set of experiences: while some families were completely enthusiastic about the

new opportunities, others stated that they felt obliged to endorse diversification against their will, so that eventually they started to feel unhappy, resentful, or even depressed. According to the authors, most of the problems revolved around the issue of authenticity (the ability to experience that the activities and products in which a person is involved are 'true'). They agreed with Taylor (1992) that authenticity can be a source of tension for farmers, when they feel forced to engage with the tourism business, and when their image of the farm attractions for tourists does not fit their prevailing family and social identity. Similar contrasting results have been obtained by Sharpley and Vass (2006) who analysed farmers' attitudes about activity diversification in rural areas of north-eastern England. The authors found that the majority of farmers with positive attitudes thought that the tourism business was their only available economic option, and they were pleased to be self-employed and to live in a pleasant environment; they also considered their investments to have had great success and could foresee a positive future development for their activity. By contrast, others farmers showed a clearly negative attitude towards diversifying their job into tourism services because they considered that these activities were in contrast with their social-economic role and status. In their view, the role of farmers was to 'produce food', while tourism services were considered as intrinsically 'not productive'.

Other studies highlighted the problems arising from the contact between farmers and tourists. Even those farmers and community members who recognise the many benefits of RT tend to complain often about the expectations and behaviors of some tourists. In particular, the hosts tend to complain about the tourists' desire to experience a non-existent genuine local culture, as well as about the fact that they do not respect their private resources and properties, and engage in antisocial behaviours like organising (noisy and alcohol based) parties that disturb local life and the image of the community (Cawley, Gillmor, 2008). Hosts' can also react to the presence of tourists by changing their representation and organisation of the physical places of their community. For example, Amsden and colleagues (2011) analysed the community's sense of place and place attachment and identity of the Alaskan community of Seward, where many local people offered services and amenities to tourists visiting the local national park. In this way, they could identify four place categories associated with four different sets of meanings: i) the natural environment - the beauty of Seward and its surroundings; ii) the community - people, history, and pride in Seward; iii) recreation and tourism spaces - recreation activities and interactions with tourists; iv) Seward as "home"-continuity, friends, and families. The authors noticed how the first category contained an array of beliefs and conceptions regarding beautiful local places and scenery. In most cases, these beliefs confirmed that perceptions and representations concerning RT landscape attractions are often shared with local and external visitors. However, the authors also noticed that some special places existed, that were not available to the 'outsiders' (visitors): the status of 'insider' included knowledge of hidden places and secrets about them. The second category (the community) included places linked to the inhabitants' every day and cultural life. Most of them had a positive connotation: coffee shops, post offices, art galleries, local landmarks (e.g., the tsunami warning system), historic buildings, tied up to epic-shared community stories, pride and singularity; but also supermarkets and other business facilities, where people meet and talk to each other, have been mentioned. Others, instead, had a negative connotation like, for example, the new hotels which were viewed negatively because they had changed the usual city landscape. Recreational places – often shared with tourists - were also part of the local people's place experiences, although their evaluation (positive vs.

negative) depended mostly on a “numbers” issue: local people saw these tourism facilities as a good possibility to meet new people and to enliven the city life. However, they could also become the cause of trouble, noise, and crowd that threatened the city social life. Most problems (and threats) to their social identity were linked to peak season, when they had to share public spaces and daily life with too many visitors, and all of the inhabitants were busy in activities linked with tourism, so that they could not socialise among themselves or with the tourists.

Finally, the fourth category of place identified by these authors concerned the “home” country. This category included the concepts of love, children, parents and grandparents, community, and work, and are linked to the local environment (the “social landscapes”), all of which sustain place attachment because they produce a sense of continuity. The latter is based on the unchanged landscape and the possibility of finding the same places. People felt that their sense of continuity was put at risk by the changes brought about by tourism: new buildings changed landscapes and crowds affected quiet, so that they only regain their social life when the tourists left.

The authors concluded by suggesting that public and private stakeholders should pay more attention and systematically assess host residents/community attachment and community involvement in the process because that is the base of the necessary support for sustainable RT development.

INTERGENERATIONAL TOURISM

Intergenerational tourism is a form of tourism conceived by the Laboratory for Intergenerational Encounters at the University of Milan (in collaboration with the Association for Interdisciplinary Research in Psychology of Tourism - A.R.I.P.T.) with the aim of contributing to reducing some of the gaps often recorded among people belonging to different generations within a society and to improve communities’ social and environmental *milieu* (Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995; Bonnes, 2005). For over twenty years, the Laboratory has focused its attention on various relevant social issues such as, for example, the social implications of aging and the relationships among people belonging to different age cohorts. Within these lines of study, researchers have identified and investigated a range of recurring social problems among which is what they have described as a new form of poorness: the “poorness of the generational network” (Albanese & Corna Pellegrini, 1999). This corresponds to a progressive loosening of the link between generations, a reduction of true and deep forms of communication and dialogue, and a drastic drop in the opportunities of mutual interactions, beyond those directed to reciprocal health assistance (i.e., when grandparents look after their grandchildren or adults provide assistance to their sick elderly) (Albanese & Bocci, 2016). Within this line of research, not only have the authors variously described the nature and diffusion of such problems, but they have also repeatedly demonstrated how certain types of tourism activities could be of help in compensating many generational fractures of this kind (Albanese & Bocci, 2014).

BACKGROUND STUDIES

The starting point of this line of investigation was a set of studies on people's transition from work to retirement. These studies have deepened the understanding of people's experience of the retirement process, people's attitudes toward it and (most importantly) their plans for the future. For example, in one of these studies, conducted on more than one thousand retired people living in Lombardia (one of the northern regions of Italy), the authors identified three main types of plans for the future (Albanese, Facchini & Vitrotti, 2006). These concerned the willingness to:

- a) Intensify family relationships that had been neglected during the past working period (more specifically, many mentioned explicitly their intention to spend more time with their children and grandchildren);
- b) Join charity associations (for example, 45% of the people interviewed in Milan - the largest city of the region - demonstrated high interest in volunteering in charity associations in order to "feel more alive" and "useful" to society);
- c) Follow personal inclinations neglected during the working period and identify new or renewed sources of interest.

In the meantime, a parallel line of studies, (Serino, 1999; Corna Pellegrini, 2005; Nenci, 2005), within the field of the psychology of tourism, has shown travel and tourism to be meaningful and stimulating activities for aging people; many participants suggested that tourism offered them the perfect opportunity to change and restructure their own "life space" (e.g., Lewin, 1948). Indeed, the authors noted that, thanks to new acquaintances, new contexts, and new experiences, a renewed social identity tended to be elaborated during the trips that could then help to partly compensate for the empty space left by the loss of job-related social roles. Moreover, the possibility to be part of a group again, even for a limited period of time, was seen by aging people as an enriching process, challenging them even from the initial steps of "trip organization." For these people, it was not just about feeling active, it was also about feeling capable and empowered again. Hence, these results suggested how aging people tended to desire more active, constructive and challenging social roles, and provided cues for tourism to produce benefits that go beyond mere leisure and distraction opportunities. It is not simply a way to spend the abundant free time available thanks to retirement; indeed, it could also become a means of reframing people's social and interpersonal lives.

Another starting point for the studies on intergenerational tourism was the findings of classic research work on stereotypes and prejudices. Various authors in social psychology highlighted how people tend to ascribe rigid characteristics to members of groups different from one's own (the so-called "out-group"), and had warned against the possibility that such stereotyped attributions could act as barriers to gaining reciprocal knowledge and understanding, and thus generate dysfunctional relationships among societies (e.g., Tajfel, 1978; 1981; Brown, (1988/2000; Sherif, 1966). Indeed, researchers have consistently noted the existence of stereotyped views of the out-groups, even among people belonging to different age cohorts (e.g., Matheson, Collins & Kuehne, 2000; Löckenhoff, et al., 2009). In particular, the authors noted how, in general, young people's beliefs concerning the elderly

focus more on cognitive competence and physical qualities, while older adults' beliefs concerning youngsters refer more to personality, social and emotional characteristics. For example, a cross-cultural study by Löckenhoff, and colleagues (Löckenhoff, et al., 2009) suggested how, in many cultures, young people (19 - 28 years) think that ageing is socially (and physically) unattractive and implies a reduction of the abilities to perform everyday tasks and to learn new things. Older adults, instead, tend overall to have a more complex (and positive) view of youngsters, although they might hold some negative beliefs concerning particular aspects (being ignorant, careless, disrespectful, etc.; e.g., Matheson, Collins & Kuehne, 2000). Identifying the possible stereotypes and prejudices which hamper or reduce the possibility of a truly reciprocal understanding appears thus to be a crucial step in addressing the issue of intergenerational relationships. These stereotypes might be a side effect of the transformations that have occurred in family relationships during the last decades, which have drastically reduced the possibility of reciprocal knowledge and contact. In this sense, not only are intergenerational relationships affected by a depletion of a quantitative nature, but they are also facing qualitative transformations, often leading to an overall impoverishment. For example, opportunities of functional interactions, in which people of different ages exchange information and cooperate to reach common goals in the community, were more frequent in the rural societies of the past, but have been lost in the urban postmodern ones, where interactions are often limited to reciprocal nursing and framed more by the carrying out of inconvenient duties rather than by challenging pleasures.

For these reasons, researchers at the Laboratory for Intergenerational Encounters have suggested the importance of identifying new forms of activities which enable generations to "socialize," or "re-socialize" and have identified tourism as a promising type of such activities.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INTERGENERATIONAL TOURISM

Intergenerational tourism draws its theoretical foundations from a wide range of applied theories in social psychology. For example, the Theory of Self (e.g., Mead, 1934; Markus, 1977) with its distinction between past, present and future selves, helpfully describes the temporal framing of the social (generational) identities of the actors involved, as well as the dynamism of their changes throughout time. From this theory the postulate can be derived that aging people (the past self) interacting with the younger generations (the present self), can produce specific outcomes on the future selves of all actors, depending on the nature (quantity and quality) of such specific interactions. Theories of intergroup relations (e.g., Allport, 1954; Brown, 1997; Sherif, 1972; Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Turner, 1978) then help to identify specific intra-individual factors of a cognitive and affective nature (i.e., stereotypes and prejudices) influenced by these interactions, that can contribute to explaining the changes occurring within generational identities throughout time. In addition, Allport's (1954) "contact hypotheses" was used as a guide to identify the specific prerequisites that interpersonal and intergroup relationships should have in order to be able to reduce prejudices and stereotypes among people belonging to different groups (and age) cohorts. Furthermore, Moscovici's (1961/1976, 1973) theory of social representations was of help in broadening the view of the possible actors involved in the process of intergenerational socialization, since it

suggests the importance of values, ideas and practices socially constructed within the whole society, the latter including public and private institutions. Finally, an approach inspired by theories of Lewin's and colleagues concerning action research (e.g., Lewin 1946, 1948; Curle, 1949; Cunningham, 1976) permeates the whole process and suggests that a rigorous, scientifically based research activity accompanies all applied interventions.

GOALS OF INTERGENERATIONAL TOURISM

Based on the theoretical postulates reported above, the general goal of intergenerational tourism is that of socializing different generational cohorts throughout the tourism experience.

A set of supporting "pillars," each one with its own specific sub-goals and methods, and all crucial for the effective result of the whole process, have been identified. These are namely:

- The intergroup (intergenerational) context
- The dyadic interactions between "grandparents and grandchildren"
- A clearly articulated set of facilitative activities
- The involvement of local private and public institutions and associations
- Constant scientific studying and monitoring of the whole process

THE INTERGROUP (INTERGENERATIONAL) CONTEXT

All experiences of intergenerational tourism start with the building of groups of participants belonging to different generational cohorts. In particular, the whole process is directed to ensure that the "tourist" group includes the two subgroups called "grandparents" (participants over '60 years old) and "grandchildren" (age range 12 – 17). The use of these labels, however, should not mislead the reader, since a crucial prerequisite is that no family ties exist between participants from the two subgroups (this is done in order to avoid the effects of previous interactions among participants). The labels are rather intended to evoke a specific social framing (i.e., to induce a specific social categorization process; e.g., Turner, 1978; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) for the relationships between them. In this way, all the possible corresponding (positive and negative) attributions, emotions and behavioural practices can emerge spontaneously from the beginning, and the researchers can then monitor their evolution throughout the whole process.

THE DYADIC INTERACTIONS BETWEEN "GRANDPARENTS AND GRAND-CHILDREN"

Allport (1954) suggested that stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations could be altered only when people belonging to different groups have the opportunity to know each other deeply. However, intergroup contexts do not *per se* provide such opportunities of deep reciprocal knowledge. Dyadic interactions are more functional in this sense. A distinctive

element characterizing intergenerational tourism is thus the alternation of group interactions with dyadic interactions. More specifically, a key aim of intergenerational tourism is to support (and monitor over time) the evolution of dyadic interactions between specific couples composed of one “grandparent” and one “grandchild” within the group context. With this aim, specific activities were conceived in a way that favours particular dyadic relationships.

A CLEARLY ARTICULATED SET OF FACILITATIVE ACTIVITIES

Classic studies in social psychology have pointed out how another key factor which reduces stereotypes and prejudices between two distinct groups is their engagement in cooperative activities guided by superordinate goals. Within this process, the maximum positive effect is then recorded when people initially belonging to distinct groups also have the possibility to identify with a unifying superordinate social category or group (e.g., Sherif, 1966; Allport, 1954). Intergenerational tourism aims to recreate such conditions and involve participants in structured sets of group activities guided by a common overarching goal or “theme” characterizing the “vacation.” The “theme” is identified by following various criteria among which are its meaningfulness for the history and/or the costumes of the local community and the possibility to stimulate activities that include exploration and discovery (typical of the tourism experience), social commitment (typical of charity associations), and mutual teaching (typical of cooperative learning). It should be noted that the term “tourism” here is intended in its broadest sense, implying both outdoor (external, e.g., visits to the relevant territorial venues and places, as in classic tourism tours) and indoor (reciprocal) explorations (e.g., ranging from computer laboratories, to theatrical experiences). Hence, although recreational goals are a fundamental part of the vacation experience, intergenerational tourism mirrors more the didactical and experiential goals of the “grand tour” of the past, rather than the “hit and run” features of millennial mass tourism. However, it differs from the goals of the “grand tour” because personal growth is intertwined here with groups’ and (possibly) the community’s development, and because the focus and venues of the vacation are unknown and/or unexpected features of the local environments, rather than exotic worldwide destinations.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

As Allport (1954) noted, the possibility to reduce intergroup discrimination also depends on the extent to which the broader social and institutional reality is willing to endorse and support such an endeavour. Defining a “theme” for the vacation is, thus, also important to bridge the small group of tourists with the wider social and institutional context in which they live. In particular, “themes” relevant to both the tourist group and the local institutions and associations should be identified so that the latter can be invited to provide various kinds of practical (financial, logistic and/or ideological) support. Identifying the right “theme” appears to be crucial in order to attain the goal of “socializing the generations by socializing the institutions” (Albanese, 1999, 2000a) and it functions to frame intergenerational tourism

within the range of the sustainable forms of tourism. Indeed, if the right “theme” is chosen, community goals and personal goals tend to match and the vacation is transformed into a way of promoting individual and societal growth through the endorsement of social and environmental responsibilities while on holiday.

CONSTANT SCIENTIFIC STUDYING AND MONITORING OF THE WHOLE PROCESS

Since its initial phases, intergenerational tourism has proved to be a valuable context in which to analyse the relationships among people belonging to different generational cohorts. So far, the authors have dedicated particular attention to the analysis of specific aspects concerning group, intergroup and dyadic relationships among participants. For example, some of the studies conducted have focused on the modifications which have occurred over time in the quantity and quality of the communicational exchanges and the content of the reciprocal cognitive attributions among participants. Field experiments with pre and post intervention tests have been set up, in which emotions, beliefs, and behaviours were recorded at different moments during the process, using various measurement instruments (questionnaires, interviews, field observations) (Albanese & Bocci, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Albanese, Bocci & Conigliaro 2010; Albanese, Conigliaro & Bocci 2011).

Preliminary results suggest the effectiveness of the intervention in producing the expected outcomes on the target factors (see Box 2, for a more detailed report of one of these interventions/studies), though the potentialities of this approach for deepening the understanding of intergenerational relationships are still to be weighed in full. Moreover, further studies could stem from these preliminary analyses and extend in various directions beyond the disciplinary boundaries of social psychology. For example, the effects of intergenerational tourism at the community and institutional levels could be analysed and the economic potentialities of these kinds of tourism could be assessed. In this sense, intergenerational tourism offers various opportunities for interdisciplinary studies and collaborations.

Hence, all in all, intergenerational tourism is a new, promising form of alternative tourism directed at the promotion of personal, group and societal growth, as well as the assumption of social and environmental responsibility while on holiday. In this sense, it respects in full many of the basic principles of sustainable tourism.

Box 2. Intergenerational tourism: the Viterbo experience

A long series of research/interventions of intergenerational tourism has been repeated for over a decade in different geographical contexts in Italy. In particular, we will refer to those concerning the area of Viterbo (a city located in central Italy about one hundreds km north of the capital, Rome)⁴.

⁴ The project was coordinated by Dr. E. Bocci, under the supervision of Prof. A. Albanese and in collaboration with the network of the Laboratory for Intergenerational Encounters and the A.R.I.P.T. Association. The project also draws on the expertise of Dr. P. Passafaro for the analysis of the environmental factors involved in the process.

The general goals of these experiences were:

- i. to promote knowledge and awareness of local heritage and identity, as well as of the principles of social-cultural and environmental sustainability.
- ii. to increase reciprocal knowledge and mutual understanding among participants of different ages (“grandparents” and “grandchildren”)
- iii. to develop a network of local associations and institutions in support of intergenerational tourism.

A more detailed description of the characteristics of this intervention is provided as follows.

i) Promoting knowledge and awareness of local heritage and identity

The first experience of intergenerational tourism in Viterbo took place during the summer of 2002. Today, the intervention has reached its fourteenth edition, involving 20 participants each year (10 grandparents and 10 grandchildren) and is still ongoing.

The city of Viterbo and its surroundings have been recognized as particularly suitable for this kind of intervention because of their richness in historical sites (Etruscan, Roman and mediaeval), the broad diffusion of folk and religious traditions, and the astonishing geophysical endowment (given the volcanic origins of the area, important and renowned thermal sites have existed here since the ancient ages). All this constituted a valuable historical and cultural heritage for the present and future local generations. However, the issue existed as to whether the local populations were fully aware of the relevance and potentialities of the area in which they lived, and how this heritage could be handed down to the new generations. Intergenerational tourism thus appeared to be particularly well able to address such issues. The theme and location chosen for the first three editions (implemented in the summers of 2002, 2003, and 2004) concerned the local thermal facilities (vacation title: “Nonni e nipoti in un contesto di vacanza termale” [Grandparents and grandchildren in a thermal vacation context] and aimed to increase the knowledge and awareness of their characteristics, history and relevance in the local territory. The subsequent editions have focused on several other locally meaningful topics such as the historical origins of the city and its connections with the former papal reign, the origin of the local patron saint and of the traditions and feast yearly dedicated to this saint, the Etruscan and Roman origins of the whole area, and so forth (time and titles or themes of all the fourteen editions of intergenerational tourism held in the Viterbo area are detailed in Table 1). All the themes were explored and deepened by participants thanks to a set of coordinated activities that could vary depending on the nature of the topic and included guided visits to the places and venues relevant to the theme, as well as various kinds of indoor workshops. Of the different indoor activities, the computer laboratory is a fundamental one. This has been organized in every edition and provides an average of five encounters (lasting one hour each), where participants are organized in couples (one grandfather or grandmother and one grandson or granddaughter) who can work together on the theme of the project, using various PC software packages and other electronic devices (e.g., a 3D printer was made available to participants in the most recent editions). Among the other laboratory activities, those particularly appreciated by the groups involved the

participation in the making of a short movie concerning the life of a local historical preacher (David Lazzaretti; Edition 2011), as well as the historical re-enactment of a trial in which a local bandit (Damiano Menichetti di Toscanella, Edition 2011) was legally prosecuted and sentenced to death in the late 1800s hundreds. In this case, a theatre play was written by a professional theatre writer and participants from the grandparents and grandchildren's group were recruited as actors. Since 2012, the play has gone on to be performed in various theatres in the region, under the guidance of a professional director. The groups were also involved in other activities relevant from a social and environmental point of view. For example, in the year 2012 the group participated in the creation of two urban woods (see Picture 1), and two solidarity orchards for families in need (see Picture 2).

Table 1. Time and titles of the fourteen editions of the research/interventions of intergenerational tourism implemented in the Viterbo area as of September, 2016

- I Edition: 06 -13 September, 2002. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti in un contesto di vacanza termale” [Grandparents and grandchildren in a thermal context]
- II Ed.: 03 -10 September, 2003. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti in un contesto di vacanza termale” [Grandparents and grandchildren in a thermal context]
- III Ed.: August, 29 – September, 05, 2004. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti in un contesto di vacanza termale” [Grandparents and grandchildren in a thermal context]
- IV Ed.: August, 29 –September, 05, 2005: Title: “Nonni e Nipoti alla scoperta della Città dei Papi” [Grandparents and grandchildren discovering the City of Popes’]
- V Ed.: 24-30 September 2006. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti sulle tracce di Santa Rosa” [Grandparents and grandchildren tracking down Saint Rose]
- VI Ed.: 02-9 September, 2007. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti sulle tracce degli Etruschi” [Grandparents and grandchildren tracking down the Etruscans]
- VII Ed.: August, 25 - September, 01, 2008. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti sulle tracce dei Romani” [Grandparents and grandchildren tracking down the Romans]
- VIII Ed.: 04-12 September 2010. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti alla scoperta dei borghi medioevali” [Grandparents and grandchildren discovering the medioeval towns]
- IX Ed.: August, 27 –December, 172011. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti sulle tracce dei briganti della Maremma” [Grandparents and grandchildren tracking down the ‘briganti della maremma’ i.e., historical bandits]
- X Ed.: July, 06, February, 02, 2013. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti tra cultura e tradizione.” [Grandparents and grandchildren between culture and tradition]
- XI Ed.: April, 20, December, 30, 2013. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti a spasso nella storia” [Grandparents and grandchildren walking down the history]
- XII Ed. May, 16, 2014 - May, 30, 2015. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti a spasso nella storia: tra il 1870 e il 1971” [Grandparents and grandchildren walking down the history: 1870 – 1971]
- XIII Ed. August, 28, 2015 - August, 30, 2015. Title: Ricerca/sperimentazione “Nonni e Nipoti: Intergenerazionalità ed Expo” [Grandparents, grandchildren and the Expo]
- IV Ed. July, 12, 2016 - December, 31, 2016. Title: “Nonni e Nipoti e la macchina del tempo” [Grandparents, grandchildren and the time machine]



Source: Albanese & Bocci, 2014.

Picture 1. Opening day of the Urban Forest. Edition 2012.



Picture 2. Opening day of the Solidarity Orchard. Edition 2012.

ii) Increasing reciprocal knowledge and mutual understanding among participants of different ages

The activities of intergenerational tourism implemented in Viterbo started from the assumption that both young people and adults have a lot to teach to each other and could profitably exchange their knowledge if only there existed a context which would favour this kind of interaction. For example, older people usually have a greater knowledge of the

local traditions as well as of the (personal and collective) “facts” and “events” that have taken place in the local territory over the years. Youngsters, however, usually have greater knowledge and greater abilities concerning the use of new technologies. This means that grandparents could better guide the group in the physical exploration of the local territory, while grandchildren could better guide the group in the digital and technological exploration of the information concerning it. The activities of intergenerational tourism implemented in Viterbo were thus distinguished taking into account the different potentialities of the two groups and were designed in order to provide each of them with the opportunity to play a guiding role, though in different situational contexts. Hence, during the visits to specific sites and venues, grandparents could communicate to grandchildren facts and events of the past that made up the history and the “stories” of the territory. Computer laboratories were then organized so that grandchildren could show grandparents the way in which to use new technologies to recover useful information concerning the target topic. This combination of activities was deemed crucial to establish what Allport (1954) referred to as an “equal social status” among interacting groups and likely represented one of the aspects that has contributed most to the positive outcomes recorded for the social psychological factors monitored so far. As for this latter aspect, three main factors have been monitored, thus far:

- a) The modifications throughout time in the characteristics and content of the reciprocal attributions (positive *vs.* negative attributions) between the two groups (grandparents and grandchildren)
- b) The modifications throughout time of the nature of intergroup and dyadic interactions (cognitive *vs.* emotional interaction)
- c) Representations and meanings associated by participants with their “grandparents and grandchildren” experience.

In order to fulfil these aims, the effects of the activities at the inter-group and interpersonal level were monitored at different moments (before, during and at the end) of the vacation experience using various measurement instruments (ranging from questionnaires to participant observation). Preliminary results suggest that intergenerational tourism can contribute to reducing negative attributions between the two generational groups (see Table 2). Moreover, a radical change in the nature of the relationships at the dyadic level (i.e., grandparent - grandchild) during the timeframe was recorded. In particular, these relationships tend to progressively evolve from cognitive types of communicational interactions (mainly recorded during the initial phases and directed toward exchanging basic essential information) to a more emotional one (mainly recorded during intermediate phases, in which expressions of affection and reciprocal appreciation start to accompany the information exchanged), and eventually reaching a truly empathic level (i.e., an high reciprocal emotional understanding is recorded at the end of the process; see Figure 1 and Picture 3). Moreover, evidence was found that the specific experience of intergenerational tourism is associated by participants with a set of positive values that include, among other things: sharing, integration, solidarity, fun and collaboration (see Figures 2, 3 and 4).

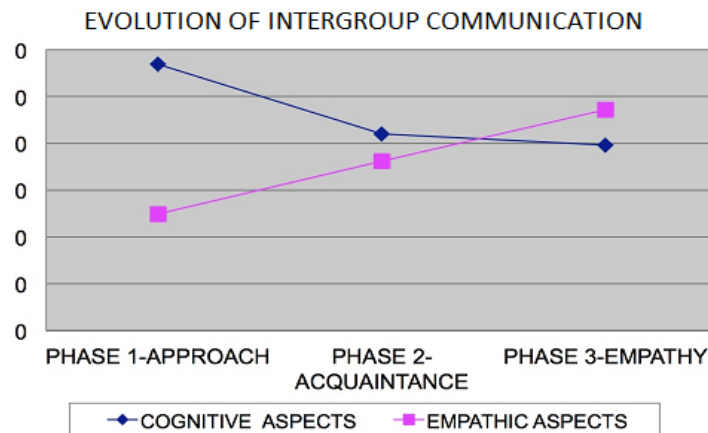


Source: Albanese & Bocci, 2014.

Picture 3. Effects of Intergenerational Tourism on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren: 'Osmosis' between a grandmother and a granddaughter [i.e., during the computer laboratory two participants spontaneously decided to use a specific computer software package to produce pictures in which the facial characteristic of each one were mixed with those of the other.

Table 2. Evolution [reduction] of the amount of negative reciprocal attribution between participants across Editions 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013. Percentages refer to the mean difference between the negative attributions recorded at the beginning of the project and those recorded at the end of the project

YEAR	NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTIONS GRANDCHILDREN VERSUS GRANDPARENTS	NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTIONS GRANDPARENTS VERSUS GRANDCHILDREN
2010	-30%	-30%
2011	-40%	-80%
2012	-35%	-70%
2013	-40%	-100%



Source: Albanese & Bocci, 2016.

Figure 1. Evolution of the communication between groups across the three phases of reciprocal knowledge.



Source: Albanese & Bocci, 2014.

Figure 2. The logo of Edition 2012. During Edition 2012, participants felt the need to realize their own logo. Various draft were proposed and voted by participants. The figure reports the one that won the competition totalising the majority of votes. The logo was ideated and realized by Dr. Sabrina Polimeni.

iii) Developing a network of local associations and institutions

None of the activities of the “grandparents-grandchildren” project would have produced the expected effects if a synergic net of cooperating private and public associations and institutions had not been set up and maintained during the whole process. These included charity associations (e.g., the Association Emmaus connected to the Caritas Viterbo and ACLI Viterbo), public institutions (the City Council, the local Forest Rangers, a scholastic institute, university institutes), and private local companies (specific companies that sponsored particular initiatives). Each associations and/or institution contributed by providing either financial or logistical support, and/or ideologically supporting the initiative, thus enhancing the opportunity to increase its social visibility.

CONCLUSION

All in all, both Rural and Intergenerational tourism (respectively RT and IT) represent promising forms of alternative tourism able to fulfil a variety of societal needs. Indeed, they can contribute to the promotion of personal, group and societal growth, and prompt the endorsement of social and environmental responsibilities while on holiday. RT appears to be particularly suitable to meet the needs of postmodern tourists, generally city dwellers, who are attracted by peripheral coastal areas, upland landscapes, and the countryside to regenerate the body, the mind, and/or the spirit. From this point of view, RT can function as an antidote to the stressful stimulations of urban life, and it can sustain a representation of rural areas as repositories of traditional and accessible ways of life. Tourists’ quest for an enjoyable “rural” experience and governments’ interest in revitalising rural areas have encouraged many rural inhabitants and farmers to diversify (and sometimes even change radically) their activities in order to turn what seemed to be an inevitable declining trend into a potential economic success. However, more efforts are needed in order to make this kind of tourism less similar to another financial speculation and more in line with a truly sustainable endeavour. A first crucial step in this direction is to analyse this phenomenon in its complexity. It is fundamental that tourism planners are able to identify all the possible stakeholders involved and take into account their specific interests and needs. Participatory methods should then be put in place to share information and negotiate decisions at all levels. Educational programs appear to be essential to help all actors (from planners to tourism entrepreneurs, and from farmers to local inhabitants) to develop the skills necessary to manage and cope with the challenges arising from the new activities. Nevertheless, if the whole process were merely aimed at obtaining a good management structure and a successful economic endeavour, the goals of rural tourism would not be different from any classic financial enterprise, and, as such, would lead to failure in the long term. Indeed, the possibilities for rural tourism to attain its goal of revitalising rural territories and culture lie in the willingness of all stakeholders to understand and endorse an overall and long term sustainable perspective in their programs and plans. A perspective based on a true effort to pursue authenticity and innovation, development and conservation, learning and education (the China case is reported here as one such case). If all these goals are attained, RT becomes something more than a mere economic operation, and local residents are trusted with a crucial social role: preserving the unique features of a place.

They are the only one who can do this because they are bound (via social and self-identification) to their familiar landscapes, towards which they have an intuitive “aesthetic judgment” that include the totality of beauty, rights, and usefulness (Mura & Strazzera, 2012). In this sense, RT has much in common with intergenerational tourism. Indeed, both aim at the valorisation of the local human capital, and both plan to use it in order to preserve the uniqueness of the territory, to promote awareness of their meanings and importance, and to ensure the transmission of knowledge and values to future generations. These goals are particularly prominent in the case of IT that has not yet developed a true financial vocation (although there is no reason to think that this could not become a goal of the future). Born within the academic field of social psychology, this tourism proposal has been able to combine a scientific analysis of social and interpersonal relationships with an effective intervention in the territory. At a time when relationships among generational groups are mostly superficial or non-existent, the Generational Meetings Laboratory has proposed a series of research projects/experiments aimed at reducing the distance between groups belonging to different age cohorts. An articulated set of tourism activities combining in-door (e.g., computer laboratories, theatrical performances) and out-door (e.g., explorations of historic and nature trails) experiences has been devised to foster communication among participants and to strengthen their relationships by reducing reciprocal prejudices and stereotypes. Such experiences are still on-going, at the time at which this chapter is being written, so that we can say that the social and scientific challenges of IT are likely to continue (hopefully for a long time) to engage planners and scientists in the analysis of the way in which ‘socialising the institutions’ could be a means to ‘socialise the generations’. In a general sense, the goal of this chapter was to highlight the crucial role that a scientific study of the human dimension of the tourism experience can play in the development of alternative (more sustainable) forms of tourism. Besides the implications of such an approach for practitioners, tour operators and planners, it seems relevant to highlight how these alternative forms of tourism can also represent new challenging research avenues in the social sciences. For example, they can be an appropriate field for social and environmental psychologists to test the applicability and functioning of specific theoretical models such as, for example, the “reasonable person environment” (RPM, Kaplan and Kaplan 2003). This model attempt to identify the factors and the conditions under which an environment is able to “bring out the best in an individual” (Kaplan, Basu, 2015) in many senses. Hence, new studies could be carried out on how specific tourism settings (within RT and or IT) could enhance individuals’ skills and competencies (for example, local residents, farmers, planners, etc.), well-being and ‘restorativeness’ (e.g., Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Korpela, Kitta, & Hartig, 2002; Scopelliti & Giuliani, 2004, 2005; Carrus et al., 2015) (for example, in tourists), and/or support for social and environmental sustainability (in all stakeholders involved) (e.g., Passafaro et al., 2015a,b). The role of specific factors such as place identity and attachment could be further investigated in relation to the persistence of farm activities over time, and people’s willingness to maintain the uniqueness of the features of their territories. Results of this kind of studies can then be made available to practitioners and planners so that they can learn to improve how they handle the human dimension of sustainable tourism.

We can conclude that both RT and IT can be alternative kinds of sustainable tourism and a good opportunity for current and future tourists’ experiences, for the host community’s wellbeing, and for maintaining social-cultural and biological (bio)diversity, as well as for producing new insights within the studies about the people-environment relationship.

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

This chapter was conceived and planned conjunctly by all authors. The Introduction was written by Paola Passafaro. The paragraphs on rural tourism were written by Marina Mura and Paola Passafaro. The paragraphs on intergenerational tourism were written by Elena Bocci, Antonietta Albanese and Paola Passafaro. The conclusions have been written conjunctly by Paola Passafaro, Marina Mura, Elena Bocci, and Antonietta Albanese.

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