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Tourism as Resource in Managing the Valorisation of the Urban and Territorial Heritage within the Mediterranean Basin. MOTRIS a Proposal of Integrated Relational Tourism.

Fabio Naselli*

Kore University of Enna, Italy

Abstract

In this paper, following the issue launched by the Opening Session, I would like to stress the role that some forms of tourism can play as resource to enhance and then to protect the local heritage.

A role that can be particularly significant especially in those marginal areas such as the inland territories of the Mediterranean regions. Places often very rich in a widespread and unstated resources “spontaneous system”.

In the paper, I present a vision of local development reaching through the application of a kind of tourism, the Integrated Relational Tourism (or IRT), which could be useful to enhance and to protect both urban/territorial heritage and local communities. The same communities that have given origin to that heritage, in the past, and that should be the principal custodian of it, today.

I would like to point-out, as premises, one important issues. Not all the kinds of existing tourism can play this role, of course, we cannot think to the massive/industrial touristic offers, that is able only to homologate and to transform to its own needs the places, the heritages and the people culture itself. Just referring to Sharm_El_Sheik, or one of the others tourism main “attractors” in the world, you can easily understand what I want to mean!

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: fabio.naselli@unikore.it

1. Introduction

The countries that surround the biggest closed sea existing in the world (Mare Nostrum) have always been a source of interest for tourists from wherever and, conventionally, up until today they are considered to be some of the most coveted and sought after destinations: because of the richness in historical, architectural, cultural, productive and social heritage.

In this framework, the regional planning applied in the specific field of tourism, could represent a real and great resource for the safeguarding, for the evaluation and for the re-vitalization of this enormous heritage.

In fact, if we want to achieve concrete results by a kind of tourism that respect our places, histories and communities and, in parallel, is able to create integrated models for local sustainable development, also able in improving the living conditions, we should act about deeply changes in the actual strategies and policies for tourism, at all their levels.

This should be done to avoid, as it happened too much times, the expropriation of identities and of cultural and economic resources by external actors. I.e., by the markets were the demands have origin.

This is the only way to follow if we want that the wealth created by tourism, which is considerable, stay in the places and provides real economic resources for the preservation, valorisation and promotion of local heritage.

2. MOTRIS Project: the born of Integrated Relational Tourism

To pass from the theoretical framework to a practical implementation, starting since 1994 in Sicily, and since 1998 jointly with some Egyptian Institutions, our research efforts were oriented to develop a methodology based on a kind of tourism careful to the relations and to the integration between territorial values, peculiar productions and local actors. A form of tourism as a resource and not as destructive factor.

That is why we have designed the MOTRIS Programme, structured in three lines: research, training and application.

The goal of the first line (research) was the one that putted us in condition to elaborate the theories about the IRT. Sharing studies, skills, competences and experiences with numerous colleagues from both Egypt and Italy, also involving other scholars by various Mediterranean areas.

In MOTRIS, we defined an idea of tourism in Sicily that aims at stimulating local economy for reinforcing of reciprocal links between people and lands.

In MOTRIS, particular attention has been paid to the study of inland areas of the island. Inland areas that have an extension of about the 65% of the total regional territory and which presents dwelling structures, infrastructures and facilities, underused in comparison to the real potential of present resources. Especially in comparison with the remaining 35% of Sicilian territory (represented by the coastal areas and by the main urban centres) where the majority of tourism offer is concentrated.

Therefore, all this existing pre-conditions require a more suitable development both of tourism policies and of market strategies, still to be implement in the majority of the Mediterranean Countries. In fact, every future strategy and policies have to be able to consider recent changes, in terms of sustainability and competitiveness, caused by the phenomena of globalization.

This can contemporarily represent one of the means at our disposal in making the negative effects of globalization as sustainable. Tourism in Sicily is certainly growing but needs to be treated with intelligence, considering the market of offer and the market of demand.

Without change, there is a serious risk of giving up potential resources, and entrusting them to a chain of hotel managers and groups of tour operators off shore Sicily.

The research undertaken has brought us to be convinced that when a territory densifies its own internal relations in an organized way, apart from assisting its repopulation it also notes its own capacity to attract external relations, often modifying the direction of these as well. On the contrary, few and disorganized relations, apart from not being attractive, can even thwart new relations.

Another strong conviction is that the creation of homogeneous environments (i.e. local districts) can be stimulating in the organization of these internal and external relations. These environments, which we have called Tourist Districts, can be put together with a dynamic cooperation and a fruitful competitiveness, two terms that we need to confront in the twenty-first century, the century of the access!

To achieve these goals a complex design was made, by distinguishing eleven Districts at our regional scale. The border is characterized by its flexible nature, therefore able to be continually modified. As to follow an idea of territorial and geographical definition that does not depart from a confine or border which limits that which is inside and distinguishes that which is outside; rather than an idea which favours an interaction between points, lines and surfaces, giving a second place to the importance of limits.

The District is intended as a territory of variable dimensions whose design exceeds administrative limits, provincial or communal, with a greater reference to architectural, environmental and landscape aspects of heritage, to cultural identity and traditional artisanship activities.

In the range of every District, potential structures can offer up to four or five-thousand new bed places.

To achieve all of this we have outlined three parallel paths (as already told) that align to the concrete creation of model, composed of:

- RESEARCH (both analysis and theoretical proposal)
- TRAINING (both basic and advanced forms)
- APPLICATION (both private and public participation)

In the specific case of MOTRIS:

A) The research consists of the mapping out of the island territories and in the highlighting of resources and, at the scale of the offer, as it can be considered compatible and sustainable. By analysing the Sicily lands, we have realized the enormity of saleable resources for a non-destructive kind of tourism.

B) Certain basic formative paths have been considered in MOTRIS, activated on a local or regional scale, such as advanced paths consisting in Ph.D. and post-degree level Masters, which thanks to the involvement of more voices allowed us to achieve a comparison between different Mediterranean Regions.

C) Contemporarily, the individualization of actors, both private and public, can become a sweeping example for other operators, a part to be a reference point towards other Districts.

We need, then, to put beside at or, in some cases, to compete with the policies of the international operators and of the great foreigner organizations, with a system of small local networks that can include all the local actors involved. That means a tourism offer originated and managed by the market of offer, itself. We can easily reach these goals also thanks to the new technologies and the potential in knowledge and market that they are able to reach, but we have to be able to watch our world with new eyes!

Now if we want to trace new routes and to characterize new sites on this way, our attention has to be directed to the inland areas of our regions that have not been discovered by the massive tourism (and maybe they will never be).

It is for this reason that these areas have maintained untouched their heritage, understood in a wider sense.

The heritages I am referring to, are those that have made our Mediterranean regions very rich.

These resources are, of course, the cultural, architectural, artistic and archaeological heritage; but can include the relational abilities of our cultures and their historical attitude in sharing; the high quantity of products by traditional handicraft; (and) the richness of the local agro-food productions.

All of this designs a frame of a very rich heritage, able also to preserve the peculiar identity of each local community and place.

To do this we have deeply analysed the existing activities, the potential resources and the real relations that can constitute a concrete integrated offer for the market, without interfering with the local identities and truths. We also identified the existing operators (individuals or small groups or networks), which will be taken as model to stimulate all the other ones who will be interested in the development vision.

To be able to integrate all this theories into the real market we needed to act on the self-organization from the places in a bottom-up view. In fact, the single has few opportunities if he acts in isolation, even with the help of the information technologies available today.

For this reason, the goal of the second line (training) was to act on two key aspects, which were the verification of local visions following a logic of systemic development and the correct training of all levels of operators who have to operate in each context.

The third line of application will allow the places to become active actors in their own development through the designing of a new “offer” that is able to create and guide the “demand” for a new touristic development.

This part was the more delicate because it needed a deep public-private agreement and the involvement of required no-profit actors (like universities, research institutes, NGOs, associations, etc.).

3. IRT, Integrated Relational Tourism

I want to include in my speech a definition of IRT that can clarify the mining and the role that it can play in the valorisation of Heritage and in the subsequent sustainable development, especially, of the more fragile contexts.

About the term relational.

Borrowing the terminology from the economic sciences, we can consider tourism as a part of "relational goods".

The term “relational goods” has used when the consumer of these goods enhances its value, not only based on the finished product but also on its background (cultural, historical, technological, etc.) which is strictly leads to the production of these goods.

But also, in another connotation, we have to take care of other kinds of relations, more important for the territory: the relations between human and human, the relations between natural environment and anthropic environment and the relations between humans and environments!

About the term integration.

The building of a real place-based vision must keep into the play all the local resources and values: human resources, material and immaterial resources, cultural and historical values. In a systemic approach, the only useful to talk and to act in the way of a long-term development.

So, the Integrated Relational Tourism, by transforming the traditional economic relationship between demand and offer, can have a stimulating role on the local economy starting from sectors of cultural heritage, agri-food productions and traditional artisanship. Moreover, whit evident vantages for the offer market.

Therefore, we need to have the collective participation of all actors involved in order to achieve a “small revolution” in the international logics and our governments, both central and local, have to support in clear ways this “small revolution” against the logic of the multinationals that have already destroyed many places and lands. I believe this is one of the goals of us here today.

Contemporary cities, above all Mediterranean cities are going through a period of deep change, characterized by low differences between north coastal cities and south coastal cities.

Huge recent changes translate into a radical transformation of industrial production processes are causing deep modifications on many traditional productive sectors.

Integrated Relational Tourism means playing up the international competitive economic sectors, which can already immediately offer themselves to the Tourism as local resources.

Integrated Tourism can enhance these sectors offering new economic resources and benefit to traditional economic channels.

The resources are vast and various: economic, human, social, architectural, cultural and historical. This great heritage has enriched our lands and countries making them unique on a worldwide scale (often subject to imitation and plagiarism). A heritage to experience, manifested over thousands of civilizations in towns and territories rich in history and culture. A shared heritage of old and new assets that offer themselves to the visitor in continuation with a combination of and multi-layering of styles, languages and cultures. A process that has always been embraced by Mediterranean's.

Integrated Tourism is a resource for our territories and I will look at the important role that this plays in them implementation and in the survival of the activities linked to the peculiar characteristics of places and lands.

The Sicilian situation will be taken into account in an attempt to delineate the tendencies and limits that certain types of tourism presented in comparison to our land's resources.

We need to acknowledge the state of the offer before that of the demand and we must be able to choose which local resources can be put in the ring for the constitution of a sustainable and compatible form of tourism which leads the demand.

Avoiding the indiscriminate exploitation of resources and the falsification of entire territories, cultures, identities and products in many Mediterranean regions.

Integrated Tourism becomes an occasion for new economic resources, aimed at safeguarding, at development and at promotion of local productions.

We also believe that this is an occasion to experience and increase our knowledge of an exchange of societies rich in cultures and religions so different but accustomed to relating and growing in comparison to each other.

We can treat the knowledge and accept the differences as an occasion for reciprocal development and a stimulus for lasting Peace.

On these ways since 1996, we have undertaken a number of projects that involve an exchange with some Egyptian institutions, and in particular with the Faculty of Urban and Regional Planning of Cairo University and the Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management of Helwan University.

The issues which were dealt with by these two partners are those relative to: a) the re-evaluation of historical centres of Mediterranean cities; b) the safeguarding of local productions and particularly the art and tradition of craftsmanship and their compatible role of re-vitalization and innovation; c) the re-interpretation of tourism as a resource with the objective of the safeguarding and evaluation of territories and their importance as a local resource.

For example, traditional activities are able to re-discover a productive vigour in the promotion of tourism with the final aim of enhanced quality and not "rip off". A kind of Tourism in which profits are re-distributed in the same territory and not concentrated in a small number of big tour operators.

4. Conclusions

1) Integrated Tourism is oriented towards a support model, which wants to sponsor the widespread characteristics of the establishment on the territory.

2) Proposed MOTRIS procedures are based on: A) a "point by point" territorial organization stimulated by micro-centralities; B) creation of a network of micro-centralities that brings the inland back to our attention connected to small, medium and large centres.

3) The three characteristics of Integrated Tourism are defined as: a) the innovative range of new technologies; b) the balanced re-evaluation of atrophied territories; c) the interdisciplinary formation, necessary for a new look entrepreneur as Area Operators.

Therefore, it is possible to distinguish the following leading principles in MOTRIS.

Integrated Tourism: a direct relationship between tourist operators and guest, no longer only a tourist but partner in the local reality.

Integrated approach: the many components of various forms of tourism are connected to the local development in terms of reaching strategic objectives.

Regional Dimension: stimulation and creation of network relations to improve external relations and therefore international competition.

So integration between local resources, new policies of re-evaluation and the tourist market, is an opportunity: a) to help a diffuse social-economic development in many regions; b) to stimulate growth towards new forms of minute but organized entrepreneurialism; c) to begin the recovery of traditional activities and guarantee the population and conservation of the characteristics which maintain in time an aware cultural identity.

With Integrated Tourism an experimental action has been initiated which can be considered a reference to so-called "supported development", with which the effects of a type of development induced by globalization and financial markets can be balanced and integrated.

A development model could take form in the re-enforcement the landscape of small and medium enterprises in returning to a “human scale”, far from the immaterial influence of “financial markets”, for the full evaluation of the “real market”.

The MOTRIS project is to be given value for the further contribution of the research in the urban planning field, with the idea of producing a model that can interchange the cycle of present policies and strategies created by the international operators.

Let us talk about supplying alternative policies and strategies inevitably going against the flow compared to mass tourism.

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