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Per una migliore
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Patrimonio, attività e servizi
culturali per lo sviluppo di
comunità e territori attraverso
la pandemia



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Covid-19 as an opportunity to tackle the phenomenon of overtourism in European historic centres: the case of Rome

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Abstract

I centri urbani sono i beni culturali che maggiormente hanno risentito degli effetti del Covid-19. Fino ai giorni in cui è esplosa la pandemia le città storiche erano interessate da flussi di grandi dimensioni di turisti, nazionali ed internazionali, che si andavano a sovrapporre alla presenza di quanti vi lavoravano e vi risiedevano in una modalità definita nella letteratura specialistica internazionale con il termine “overtourism” per sottolineare gli eccessi di una situazione ormai fuori controllo. Alla fine del *lockdown* le stesse città storiche si sono ritrovate disabitate. Non vi erano più turisti, per la crisi della mobilità umana, e non vi erano più neppure gli impiegati degli uffici pubblici e privati, che ormai operavano a distanza e quindi rimanevano nelle aree di residenza. Il problema che ci si pone è se dobbiamo pensare di riproporre, appena possibile ed utilizzando fondi pubblici, la situazione precedente al Covid-19 oppure se dobbiamo utilizzare gli effetti della pandemia come una opportunità per modificare in tutto o in parte i presupposti economici e sociali che hanno contribuito all'overtourism. Il saggio contribuisce a ricostruire la modalità con cui negli anni si è arrivati al fenomeno dell'overtourism e a proporre la necessità di riformare drasticamente i modi in cui il turismo si è sviluppato nei centri storici.

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Urban centres are the cultural assets that have been affected the most by Covid-19. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, historic cities were subject to large flows of both national and international tourists, in addition to the presence of local workers and residents, thus creating a phenomenon referred to as “overtourism” in international specialised literature, a term that highlights the excesses of an situation that is now out of control. When the *lockdown* ended, historic cities remained empty. There were no tourists, due to the crisis of human mobility, and there were no public and private office employees, due to widespread smart working practices. This paper deals with the question of whether we should return to the pre-Covid-19 status quo as soon as possible and by making use of public funding, or whether we should take advantage of the effects of the pandemic as an opportunity to modify, partially or totally, the economic and social conditions that led to overtourism. This essay will also analyse the ways in which the phenomenon of overtourism has developed over time, and will also propose the need to drastically reform the ways in which tourism has developed in historic centres.

1. *Introduction*

In recent decades, the emergence of low-cost services together with the widespread growth of social media has contributed to an increase in visitor flows in European historic centres. These large masses of people were not motivated to travel for a specific interest in cultural heritage. They were persuaded by economic reasons, such as the significant reduction in the cost of air travel to a particular destination and during a particular period. Airlines often offered very low fares to fill up planes with “last minute” offers. This led to a new profile of tourist, who travelled just for the sake of travelling, without even knowing what interest he might have in visiting one city rather than another. The main purpose of this ritual of taking a journey as an end to itself was to take a selfie in front of the most famous local attraction to be shared with one’s network of friends and acquaintances. Low-cost trips came complete with accommodation, visits to the city, restaurants, and consequently with all those tourist services that could be defined as low-cost. While low-cost may be fine in principle, it becomes a problem when the flow of visitors becomes excessive. Such an uninterested demand has resulted in the banalization of cultural offerings, both material and immaterial, engendering what is conventionally known as overtourism. In recent years, some European cities have started taking measures to limit the negative effects of overtourism, but without significant results. The turning point came as a consequence of Covid-19, when the number of flights dropped dramatically and the size of international mobility nearly fell to zero. By the end of the *lockdown*, the European historic centres that used to see heavy tourist flows had plunged into a deep economic, social and psychological crisis. To stimulate a recovery, governments and the media adopted the slogan “everything will go back to normal”. This essay tries to explain that “back

to normal” in urban tourism is definitely not a positive value, given that it is full of defects and distortions. At various levels, governments should be striving to exploit the Covid-19 opportunity to improve a situation that is not worth reproducing. They should be trying to reorganize the tourism industry, taking into consideration the need for adequate economic initiatives while also fostering training initiatives that can support quality offerings, as opposed to the discredited quantity offerings of the past.

2. Tourism in historic cities in the face of growing mass tourism

Urban tourism is a complex phenomenon whose success relies on many economic and social factors¹. Historic centres have always been considered central to European cultural identity, generally represented by monumental public spaces, hubs of socialization, literature and civic spirit. The life of the community has traditionally unfolded in the open air, and for this reason the squares, streets, places of art, culture and history, have been considered spaces of collective identity, civic pride, craftsmanship and skills. Places where the sense of belonging is based and develops.

International tourism as we know it today was born at the end of the Second World War, as a consequence of the transformations of the labour market and of the economic opportunities of more developed societies, together with an irrepressible need to re-establish a positive relationship with other populations in a society that had been torn apart by conflict. International tourism has not only been urban tourism: statistics show us many forms of tourism, helping us to understand how the tourism phenomenon has developed, starting from a few dozen million in 1950, then rising to more than four hundred million in 1990, and finally reaching 1.4 billion in 2018. European tourists that initially represented 66% (1950) of this huge number of arrivals have fallen to just over 50% (2018). The year 2000 was a turning point: non-European tourists arriving in European countries gradually rose from just under 400 million to over 713 million in 2018. The turn of the century and the millennium provided an opportunity to concentrate events in all the European cities. The aim was to celebrate, but also to take the opportunity to exploit the considerable potential for regional development that tourism promised, especially for those urban areas that were emerging from the economic crisis and the resulting social conflicts and poverty of previous decades. At that time, urban area authorities were evaluated on the basis of the annual increase in tourist arrivals, but the focus was only on the benefits and not on the associated costs. The benefits were limited to a few business categories, while the burden fell on others, i.e.

¹ Montanari 2008.

on the community, the environment, as well as on the quality of life of residents and other types of tourists. A study by the European Commission² examined the problems related to the environment and tourism in a dozen historic European cities. One of the main conclusions was that the interest in tourism as an element of short-term economic promotion outweighed any caution about the consequences, due to the lack of proper planning and management of the phenomenon by local authorities. What little was done to tackle the problems created at the environmental, cultural, economic and social level was considered by the Commission to be insufficient, inadequate, and even counterproductive. The Commission considered it necessary to promote intensive cultural action involving all stakeholders in more environmentally responsible behaviour. We should also note that the issue of tourism could have been considered by the Commission in terms of subsidiarity, but the real responsibilities remained firmly in the hands of the individual states, while in others, where federalism or regionalism prevailed, decisions remained solely at the local authority level. Notwithstanding the obstacles imposed by Member States, the European Commission was aware of and concerned about the need to protect the fragile character of historic cities urban structure. For this reason it sponsored the Report on European Sustainable Cities³, whose chapter 7.3, Sustainability and Cultural Heritage, Leisure and Tourism, stressed the need to introduce measures capable of controlling and counteracting the negative effects of mass tourism that national and regional authorities seemed unable to manage. The Expert Group on the Urban Environment of the European Commission, of which this article's author was also a member, urged the definition of new management models aimed at protecting traditional commercial activities, traditional craftsmanship, activities related to the maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage, and authentically local products (art, crafts, food, music, folklore). The Report also states that tourism and leisure activities should become the new foundations of the urban economy. These economic sectors should be used to reinforce the multifunctional characteristics of historic centres and to recover all possible activities necessary for the protection of cultural heritage. The new management models may differ from place to place, but they must share common policies capable of contributing to the human and cultural growth of residents and visitors. A survey was carried out⁴ which found that only 20% of urban tourists travel for cultural reasons, even though a higher percentage ends up engaging in cultural activities without having planned them. Therefore the problem lays in the inadequacy of how urban tourism is offered.

It was clear, however, that urban tourism will increase considerably in the coming decades also due to the ageing of the European population and the

² European Commission 1993.

³ European Commission 1996.

⁴ ETC, UNWTO 2005.

trend towards cultural tourism by over-55s and pensioners in general. Urban tourism offerings take the form of competitiveness between cities whose administrations believe that an increase in the number of tourists could improve the positive perception of the city, as well as being useful for the establishment of international economic activities. For these reasons, since the beginning of the 21st century, we have witnessed an increase in large events, sometimes not even of a cultural nature, and of festivals aimed at attracting new visitors or at persuading regular visitors to come back. Due to the concentration of tourist flows in time and space, the annual volume of human mobility (tourists, visitors, non-resident students, commuters) is more than twenty times the number of residents. Figures show that in Florence, every day the total number of people is almost three times the number of residents. In the historic centre of Venice the situation is even worse, as the number of residents is constantly falling also due to the economic and social consequences of mass tourism. In addition to the economic, sociological and psychological consequences in historic centres where quantitatively excessive forms of tourism can be found, there is also the problem of constantly rising costs to maintain the infrastructure and services, costs that are borne solely by the residents. Unfortunately, the issues identified and highlighted at the international level have not been reflected in the policies enacted by state, regional and European city authorities. In the case of Rome, for example, Walter Veltroni, who was Mayor from 2001 to 2008, intervened in the historic centre mainly with special events such as the Festa del Cinema (film festival), the Estate romana (Roman Summer festival), and other extraordinary cultural events that contributed to worsening the tourism management issues in the historic centre. Following the example of many other European cities, in 2003 the City of Rome established Trambus Open, a tourist bus company managing two lines: 110 OPEN, with 16 buses, and ARCHEOBUS, with 4 buses. In 2008, there were eight companies providing a Hop-on / Hop-off tourist service, with a total of 11 lines. The service was promoted as particularly interesting for people visiting the city for the first time and with little available time. Advertisements state that this allows tourists to learn the city's general history and to get to know its major monuments. Service providers admit that the explanations they provide are far from complete, but they believe that the basic knowledge they present is sufficient to help tourists that arrive in town without a clear idea of where to go. If we consider the service objectives and the proposed itineraries, we can understand how we have reached a situation of so-called "overtourism". A classic itinerary followed by various companies includes: 1) the Central train station (Termini), 2) Santa Maria Maggiore, 3) the Colosseum, 4) the Circus Maximus (to visit the Mouth of Truth), 5) Piazza Venezia (to reach the Shopping area), 6) Vatican City (to visit the Sistine Chapel), 7) the Spanish Steps, 8) Barberini (to reach the Trevi Fountain). The uncontrolled overlap means buses reach their stops every few minutes, contributing to tourist overcrowding near monuments and to the

chaotic city traffic. In December 2019, the City of Rome decided to take action by establishing ten lines with fixed itineraries that should also include visits to areas outside the historic centre. The City had provided for a possible increase from the current 51 operating buses to a maximum of 71, but applying an itinerary decentration policy, based on the “one bus out of three outside of the historic centre” principle. The new regulation was due to be enacted in May-June 2020, but was not applied due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To tackle these issues, the Istituto per la conservazione e la valorizzazione dei beni culturali (ICVBC), part of the CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche), has set up an international research group to carry out the PLACE Project (“Preserving Places: Managing Mass Tourism, Urban Conservation and Quality of Life in Historic Centres”) that was funded by the European Commission within the Culture Programme (2007-2013). PLACE aimed to evaluate the impact of tourism on monumental and symbolic areas of historic cities and to analyze, by means of a compared analysis methodology, urban conservation practices and tourism policies, in order to propose some best practices for sustainable development⁵. The Project partners included universities and research centres from Belgium, France, Greece, Italy (CNR and Sapienza University), Spain, Turkey and the UK. Two conferences were organized as part of the PLACE Project: one in Ankara (5-6.12.2008) and one in Rome (13-14.11.2008). During the first phase of the project, documentation regarding already documented historic centres was gathered and the results were presented at the Ankara conference. The second phase of the project, which was completed with the conference in Rome, included a survey based on in-depth interviews with privileged observers. These conferences had two main objectives: i) debating tourism management in historic centres, and ii) bringing together key stakeholders (state entities, local authorities, tour operators and NGOs) to raise their awareness on the risks that the cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, was under due to tourism and the need for a collective participation in remedial actions. In order to complete this action, a publication was produced⁶ in which an interdisciplinary approach (tourism, geography, urban planning) was adopted to work on theoretical aspects of urban conservation and empirical case studies (Athens, Brussels, Genoa, Istanbul, Ljubljana, London, Rome, Thessaloniki, Turin and Venice) in an attempt to identify and highlight solutions for a sustainable management of historic centres.

⁵ Porfyriou 2010.

⁶ Montanari 2010a.

3. *The phenomenon of overtourism in historic centres*

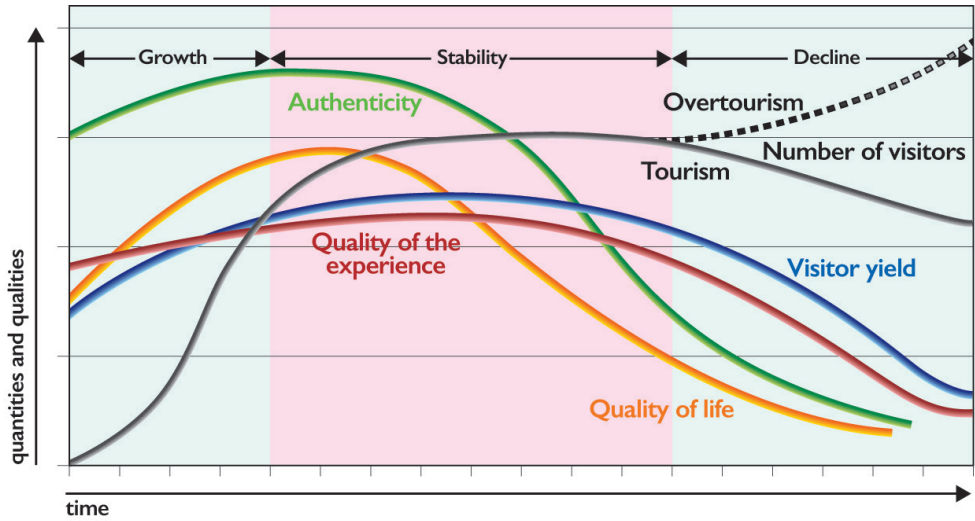
Notwithstanding information and warnings issued by European authorities and the obvious results of research activities, the situation in the early decades of the 21st century has worsened due to various concurrent elements that fall under the general label of “low-cost”: flights, tourist accommodation, transport services, urban area touring choices, and the presence of harbours for cruise ships. For many decades, geographers have studied the issue of the evolution of qualitative and quantitative characteristics of tourist flows. Christaller (1963) defined his own methodological approach to explain the development and growth of tourist locations. At the beginning we have the discoverers, such as poets and those who love uncrowded places. In a subsequent phase, tourism industries, tour operators and travel agencies step in with their catalogues and “all-inclusive” offers. Drawing on the work of Christaller and developing his model, Butler⁷ reflected on the tourism load capacity. Tourist destinations are fragile and should be managed so as not to exceed their capacity and to avoid self-destruction. With regard to capacity, Butler took into consideration (i) environmental factors (air, water and soil); (ii) physical factors (transport, accommodation, services); (iii) social factors (crowding, negative reactions by residents). When these parameters start to deteriorate and thus lose their power of attraction, the number of visitors also drops. He refers to six phases of the tourist cycle, and in the sixth phase, the possible crisis of demand, he identifies five possible scenarios that vary from the radical restructuring of the offerings right down to the total and final decline of the tourist destination. However, it is widely believed that the most recent transformations of society, driven by globalization, internationalization and intense direct communication among individuals thanks to social media, have given significant weight to the psychological component and to mass emulation phenomena. For this approach, Plog’s⁸ contribution has been of fundamental importance: he studied demand in relation to tourist personality, following a diagram representing a continuum, from the position of psychocentrics, on the one hand, and of allocentrics, on the other. Plog⁹ subsequently reviews his theory based on the emulation spirit of demand, catalogued from “dependable” to “venturer”, and assigns to each category a theoretical percentage of individuals of a given population. He identifies the evolution of demand in relation to supply, based on a more complex system of variables. The same variables have been used, verified and broadened in the PLACE project, as indicated in Figure 1.

The number of visitors continues to maintain a central role in the assessment of the demand, also because it is the only variable that can be defined in a

⁷ Butler 1980.

⁸ Plog 1974.

⁹ Plog 2001.



Source: elaboration of a model by Plog (2001)

Fig 1. Tourists and visitors: quantitative vs qualitative approach

quantitative manner. This variable is the last one to decrease when all others have already largely begun their decline phase. This can justify the inactivity of local authorities that essentially assess tourism performance based on tourist numbers, without being aware of the decline phase that has already started and is by now unstoppable. The phenomenon of overtourism makes the situation even worse because tourists that continue to arrive in growing numbers are not the result of the destinations' attractiveness, but rather of marketing as well as behaviour and consumption emulations. Quantitative increases in tourist flows are appreciated by local administrators because statistical data cannot be questioned and large tourist organizations, airlines, airports, tour operators, travel agencies, all currently controlled by big players, are interested in maintaining this situation. For this reason, the number of tourist arrivals continues to grow (Fig.1) even in a phase¹⁰ that should have been of decline. Instead the decline involves small players, small tourist companies, residents and retailers. Within the PLACE Project we have been able to verify that with mass tourism the first dimensions that are negatively affected are product authenticity and the quality of life of residents. Increasing the number of visitors without limitation inevitably tampers with the authenticity of an historic centre, artificially increasing the supply of assets that instead are finite. Such authenticity, in order to be protected, needs to be put in relation with a hypothetical load capacity, an operation that is certainly not easy and that

¹⁰ Butler 1980.

nobody wants to promote. It is not uncommon therefore to witness that an historic centre becomes more similar to an artificial amusement park than to a cultural asset. A non-authentic cultural asset causes the remainder of the tourist offerings to become less authentic: shops start selling international junk and food is offered by restaurants that are all but traditional. The “polenta alla romana” that can be found in some Roman *trattorias* and that is certainly not a typical Roman dish, is as authentic as the Venetian *gondolas* and the Pisa leaning towers that can be purchased in shops near the Trevi Fountain, as well as the Neapolitan songs that are offered as local music in the Venetian canals. It should also be noted that a low-quality offering leads to a low-quality experience for tourists. The psychological component is the most significant part of tourism, as we can infer from the works of eminent masters of psychology such as Freud, Foucault and Lacan (Montanari, 2013). We must also not forget that the excesses of mass tourism have a negative impact on the quality of life of residents, due to noise pollution, the excessive occupation of space as well as the changes that this type of demand favours in the commercial system, in infrastructure management and in service utilization. In the case of Rome, changes to the city life have been documented in the essays by Sepe¹¹ and Porfyriou¹² as well as in the findings of interviews conducted with some privileged observers¹³. There is also the question of the visitor yield, i.e. the value added by the presence of different types of tourists and the way in which each of them acts when on holiday. With regard to this issue, in addition to the question “what is the use of tourism in my city?” we need to ask ourselves another question: who gains (and how much?) and who loses (and in what measure?) due to the presence of a number of tourists that is all too often excessive? The idea of negative effects of mass tourism has already been highlighted for many decades by the European Commission and other international organizations, as well as by researchers in the fields of sociology, regional economy and especially geography. The term “overtourism” was used for the first time in August 2012 on Twitter to refer to places where both visitors and residents believe there are too many visitors and that the quality of life and the quality of the tourist experience have gradually reached intolerable levels¹⁴. Goodwin¹⁵ (2019) also believes that the term was used for the first time in a scientific text by An, Phung and Chau¹⁶, who coined the term based on the concept of overfishing, a significant reference because excessive and unregulated fishing results in a scarcity of fish. An excessive tourist presence has such a strong impact on our lives that we can well define our times as the “age of tourism”, just like we had the iron age or the age of imperialism in

¹¹ Sepe 2010.

¹² Porfyriou 2010.

¹³ Montanari, Staniscia 2010.

¹⁴ Goodwin 2019.

¹⁵ Goodwin 2019.

¹⁶ An, Phung, Chau 2008.

the past¹⁷. D'Eramo recognizes the “tourist city” in the historic centre of Rome in August when the city is empty, shops are closed, but crowds of tourists roam the city in the blazing heat, totally absorbed in their exhausting duty of seeing without understanding, of occupying space without knowing, of accumulating selfies to send to friends and relatives. When watching the behaviour of tourists at the Trevi Fountain you notice that the monument is not important, that the residents, the people who live and are active in the neighbourhood, are not important. Instead, what is considered important is the presence of the crowds of other tourists: in fact, they contribute to the atmosphere of the location. As Urry¹⁸ argues, it is the crowd of people who want to reach the first row to throw the coin that confirms it was worth travelling thousands of miles to be in that place and not somewhere else. What is worth watching is the other tourists and the gaze becomes mutual and even self-sufficient.

In their Report to the European Parliament, Peeters *et al.*¹⁹, write that overtourism has not yet been tackled with adequate policies. Up until now the issue has only been part of the political agenda, but there still aren't initiatives aimed at limiting the impact of tourism that in certain periods and places exceeds the physical, ecological, social, economic and psychological capacity thresholds. Some elements that take place in a tourist location are considered important for overtourism phenomena: (i) tourist density (overnight stays per km²); (ii) tourist intensity (ratio of overnight stays to the number of residents); (iii) the supply of beds in Airbnb apartments that can be found in the booking.com site; (iv) tourism share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); (v) the intensity of flights (arrivals of travellers in the nearest airports in relation with the number of residents); (vi) closeness to international airports; (vii) closeness to ports where cruise ships dock; (viii) closeness to UNESCO World Heritage sites²⁰. The Report bemoans the lack of statistical data that should be collected at least at the NUTS 3 level; it highlights the serious consequences of overtourism for natural and cultural assets and the risks for tourism in European countries; it denounces the fact that many tourist locations are managed by only taking into consideration the advantages of the volume of arrivals. If one considers the characteristics of the tourist flow that concerns the historic centre of Rome, it turns out that within the Metropolitan Area (AMR) at least two types of unbalances have taken place between very small areas subject to overtourism and larger areas of great potential tourist interest where tourists are absent and there is a major phenomenon of undertourism. Overtourism in Rome is concentrated in the area between the Trevi Fountain and the Pantheon, about

¹⁷ D'Eramo 2017.

¹⁸ Urry 1990.

¹⁹ Peters *et al.* 2018.

²⁰ Peters *et al.* 2018.

600 metres, possibly including Piazza Navona, for a total of slightly less than 1 km (Fig. 2).

This itinerary is ideal for producing overtourism, due to the importance of the monuments, the beauty of the environment, the fame of the places that have been celebrated by cinema and literature. Porfyriou (2010) analyzes the policies enacted by the Municipal authority that are responsible for the excess of tourist concentration. These have caused a transformation of shops along the itinerary, the occupation of public space by peddlers, the transformation of monumental buildings into a banal landscape resembling a theatrical reconstruction of roads, squares and buildings made of cardboard. In Figure 3 you can see the locations of Airbnb properties, both single rooms in apartments inhabited by residents and full apartments and buildings, amounting to 29,000 properties, a significant increase between 2017 and 2019.

Figure 3 shows the location of properties offered by Airbnb in the whole historic centre and in most of the outskirts. In Figure 3, in addition to the Trevi Fountain, you can find the location of neighbourhoods around Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, the centre of undertourism. These are areas of high artistic value but with no relevance for tourist flows, which ignore them even though many tourists stay there. For the historic centre of Rome, the phenomenon of overtourism is the cause of: i) crowded public spaces; ii) private use of public spaces by some shops; iii) increase of residential property prices; iv) the loss of purchasing power of residents; v) an unbalanced ratio between residents and visitors; vi) imbalances in the supply of consumer goods; vii) degradation of environmental resources; viii) the increase in waste production, whose management cost is borne by the residents; ix) the increase in noise at all times of the day and night; x) deterioration of air and water quality. Airbnb, accused of being the main culprit for this situation, has replied to those who criticized the company for the excessive number of rooms and apartments rented to tourists that the historic centre of Rome has gradually depopulated in the past decades and that the quality of life was already deteriorating. Airbnb has offered small landlords an extra opportunity to earn an income that is necessary to safeguard properties often not sufficiently exploited, poorly maintained and subject to high costs. Removing so many properties from the long-term rental market for Airbnb purposes has created social and economic problems, as rents have increased, the number of residents has decreased, and the commercial businesses have been affected. Also around the Northern Coast of AMR you can feel the effects of overtourism. This area has a strong concentration of tourist locations: Fiumicino Airport, with dozens of millions of passengers (2019), Civitavecchia Port, that together with Barcelona is the main cruise ship harbour in the Mediterranean, with about 2.5 million passengers (2019), and the historic centre of Rome that is the main destination of nearly 40 million tourists every year (2019). In this area, there are less than a million tourists even though more than two million tourists stay overnight in Airbnb properties. So

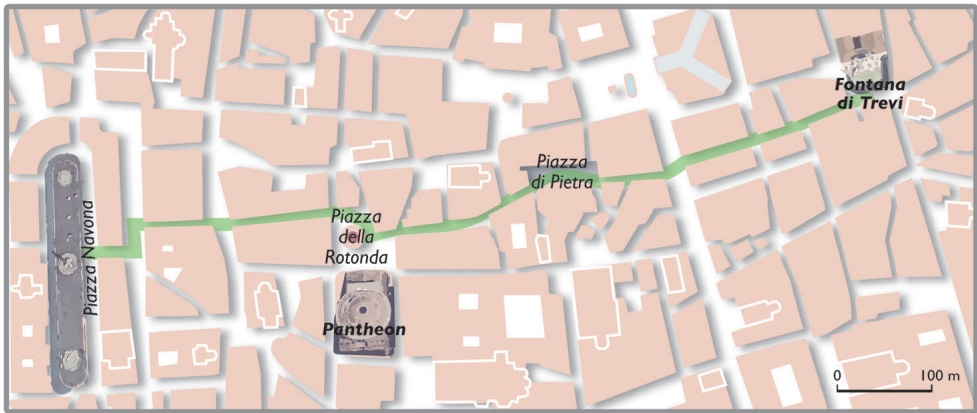


Fig. 2. Pantheon – Trevi Fountain itinerary

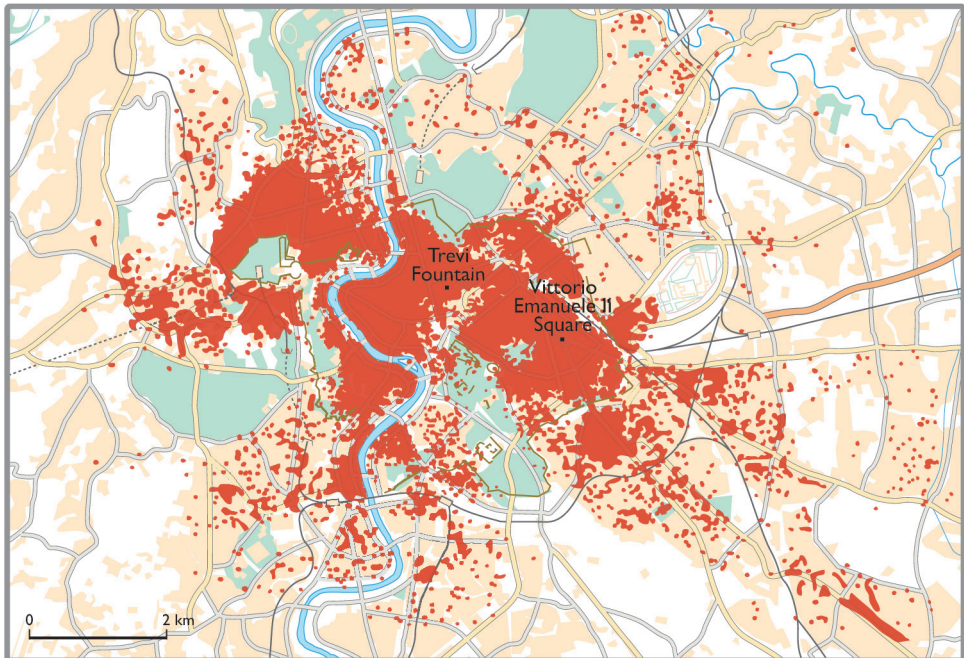


Fig. 3. Supply of Airbnb properties, rooms and apartments. Source: Airbnb

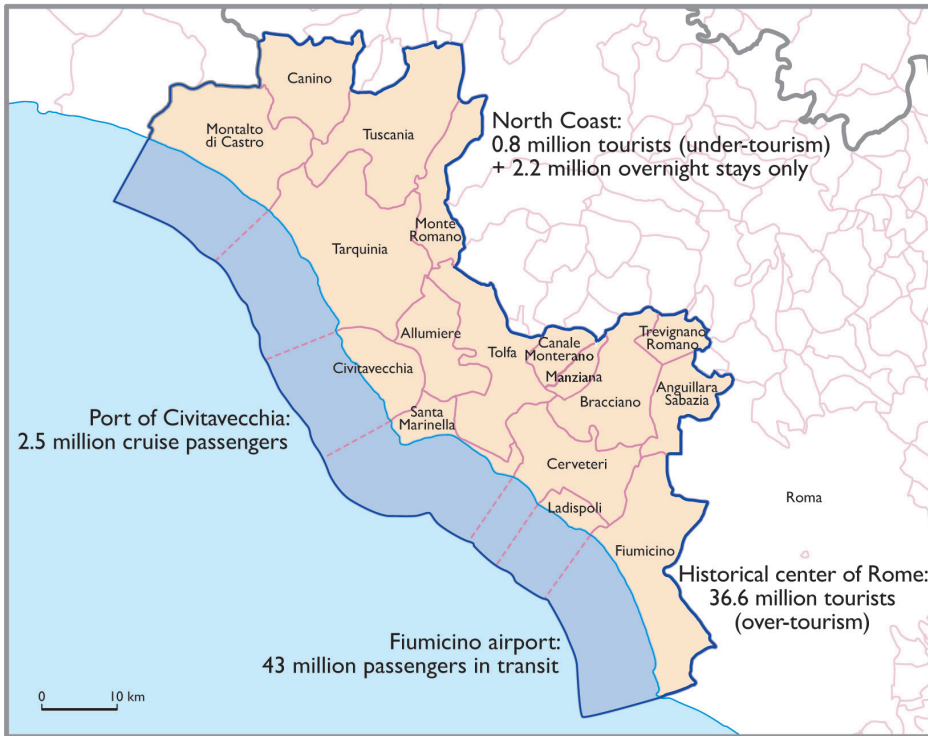


Fig. 4. Lazio, Northern Coast. Fiumicino Airport, Civitavecchia Port and historic centre of Rome

even at a metropolitan level there is an undertourism area just a few kilometres from the centre of overtourism (Fig.4).

There is no objective explanation why this area should be ignored by tourists. Figure 5 shows the hotels that are used by proximity tourists during the Summer season.

During the rest of the year, other types of tourists use these facilities, from where they reach the historic centre of Rome. There are 171 hotels, compared to the almost 3,000 Airbnb properties. The area is not only home to a rich cultural heritage, but it is also rich in natural assets, both marine and land sites. This is confirmed by the European Commission, which has established a significant number of SCI areas²¹. The most problematic initiative, which has been evaluated by various City Council governments, has been the proposal to organize a Formula One Gran Prix in Rome, maintaining that such an event would be very important for the Capital because it would attract a great number of tourists and would foster great interest in the international media, thus

²¹ Castellano, Montanari 2020.

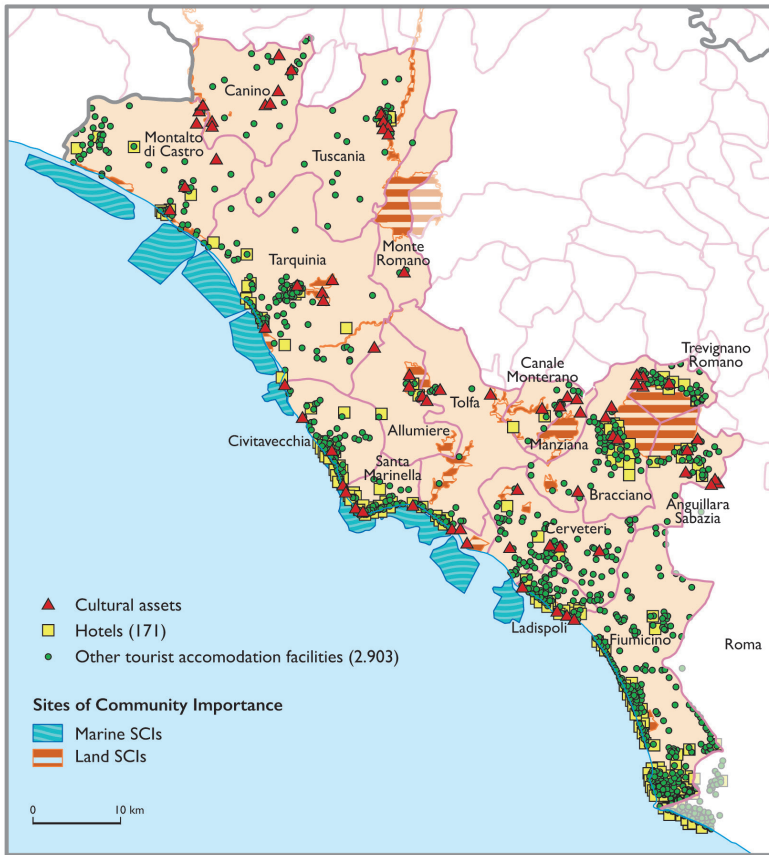


Fig. 5. Lazio. Northern Coast: an example of undertourism

creating an important spin-off for the city of Rome. The promoters believed that the ideal circuit should pass near the Colosseum, but when they were unable to include this monument, they opted for the Roman neighbourhood that most resembles it, EUR, where the World Exhibition was supposed to take place in the 1940s. We can take as an example the F1 Grand Prix of Monza, which attracted tens of thousands of spectators (in 2019 there were 200,000 spectators), or the F1 Grand Prix of Montecarlo where the number of spectators was smaller but where tickets sold for € 400.00. The first administration that considered F1 in Rome was the one led by Mayor Alemanno (2008-2013), but fortunately he did not succeed (Fig. 6).

Subsequently, the Administration led by Mayor Raggi (2018-2021) succeeded with Formula E, a formula for electric cars (Fig. 7).

The 2019 event attracted 35,000 spectators and took place at EUR, even though its marketing reference was the Colosseum and the Imperial Forum area. In other historic European cities, for example Barcelona, Amsterdam, Vienna,



Fig. 6. The project of the F1 Grand Prix circuit in the EUR neighbourhood

and many others, the authorities took initiatives to limit Airbnb's offerings. One measure was to define a maximum number of days for the Airbnb offering and thus make this type of use less cost-effective. No initiative was taken in Rome, perhaps out of prudence, since any policy limiting the Airbnb offerings would then require actual control and supervision.

4. *Urban tourism potential and the effects of Corona Virus*

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, in just a few days the situation changed completely. The historic city was empty also due to the lack of residents who, as happened in many European cities, had been replaced by guests in Airbnb residences which, due to the Covid-19, were



Fig. 7. The circuit of the Formula E Grand Prix

reduced to zero. In Spring 2020, at the end of the *lockdown*, Trevi Fountain looked different. The voices of tourists and street vendors were absent, the silence was only broken by the sound of water roaring down from the marble sculptures. Without the absurd noise and the swirling movement of the masses of tourists, even the colours seemed softer, with everything inviting reflection and contemplation. Behind this idyllic situation lies a “gloomy” tourist season that at the end of the year will see a reduction in arrivals of about 50%, with revenues that will probably be even lower; some operators believe that the figures related to tourism in Rome are falling to the levels of the 1960s and that the situation will return to 2019 levels only in 2023. In its Press Release n. 63 (28.07.2020) which updated the data on the impact of Covid-19, IATA, the International Air Transport Association, announced that global revenues for all carriers are expected to halve in 2020, while global passenger traffic will not return to pre-Covid-19 levels before 2024. The impact on the budgets of tourism companies and all related activities will be catastrophic, and the

impact on employment will be equally serious. We believe that the phenomenon of overtourism will have to be a thing of the past and, in any case, we don't agree with the idea that everything in tourism should go back to the way it was before. Covid-19 should represent an opportunity to completely reshape the services offered in the tourism industry, by accelerating the consequences of a need that had already become evident before the *lockdown*. The new tourism approach in urban areas will be built on the following foundations: (i) environmental sustainability; (ii) tailor-made experiences; (iii) promotion of alternative destinations currently relegated to undertourism; (iv) authenticity of the offerings; (v) uniqueness of the tourism product in order to avoid any form of artificial reproducibility; (vi) digital transformation of supply and demand management. This new urban tourism will be inspired by the principles already widely developed and tested for ecotourism, i.e. tourism in protected areas, where the individual to whom the visit is proposed needs to be properly informed and educated, ready to be an aware tourist (Montanari, 2009). Therefore, urban tourism will have to: (i) have a low impact on natural and cultural resources; (ii) contribute to an increasing awareness and understanding of cultural systems; (iii) contribute to the conservation and recovery of the cultural heritage; (iv) promote the participation of the local community in protection measures; (v) direct all the benefits of its tourism activities towards the local community; (vi) share with the local community the opportunities to visit and appreciate the cultural heritage that is being visited. The tool to bring about these transformations could be Artificial Intelligence. It will be necessary to build a powerful database in which to enter data related to: (i) number of arrivals; (ii) number of presences; (iii) nationality of tourists; (iv) preferred destinations; (v) authenticity of the product on offer; (vi) quality of life of residents; (vii) quality of the tourist experience; (viii) added value brought by tourism. The continuously updated database should be made up of quantitative values, statistical data, and qualitative values, the result of interviews with privileged observers and simple users, related to the perception of the experience by residents, and the measurement of the presence and depth of the experience made by tourists, as well as the added value in relation to the interest in tangible and intangible assets. The tools to process this data will be neural networks in which Geographic Information Science (GISc) elements can also be incorporated. These data are diverse by their very nature, but can all be linked to a geographical location. This is possible, either because they have a geographical location, as they refer to a specific place, or because on the basis of Tobler's Law, and its subsequent interpretations and applications, the geo-referencing of each data allows further interpretations (Montanari, 2019). The method that can be used is the one tested in previous research projects, which consists in aligning geographical analogies, using Geographic Information Systems (GISy), and logical analogies, using Self-Organizing Maps (SOM).

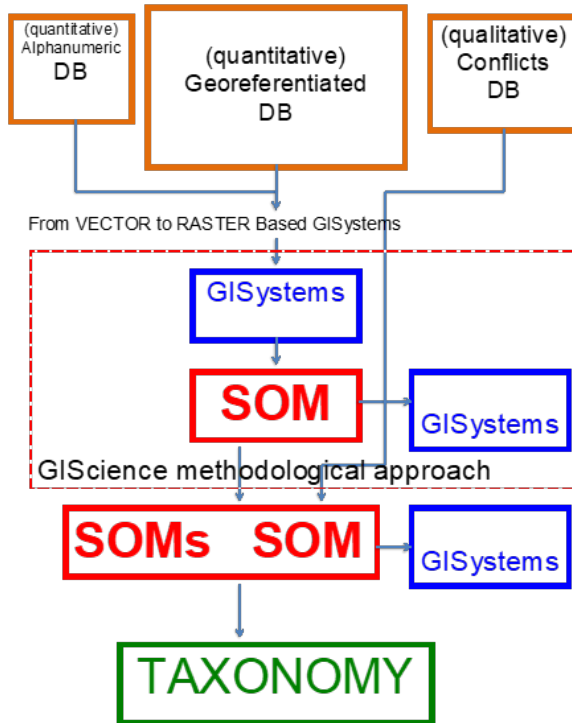


Fig. 8. The logical model of a possible taxonomy for managing tourism in a historic centre

As shown in Figure 8, the organization of data in the GISy database will enable faster and more integrated data transfer to a SOM. This will in turn enable organizing and structuring the variables of urban tourism according to a sequence of quality parameters grouped in different ways. A further construction – a SOM of SOMs – will make it possible to identify certain “types of situations” in the specific metropolitan area being studied. The aim of the operation will be to offer a system that can be used by those in charge of planning development and management policies. In particular, it is expected that the system will be able to develop a number of scenarios, two or three, on which the authorities responsible for tourism can work. Appropriately stimulated, these scenarios will be able to offer in advance the results of sector-specific interventions on services, on infrastructure, and on the management of the cultural heritage offerings. The same basis stimulated in a different way may also be available to the demand that, in its complexity as illustrated above, will be able to decide in advance the itineraries and facilities to visit. While today, for each resort or tourist facility, the social media evaluations of previous visitors can be examined, in the near future the system will have to elaborate the tourist offerings on the basis of the numerous variables available in relation

to individual interests and behaviours. In a phase in which the EU and national governments are preparing to help the tourism sector to emerge from the crisis, it is necessary to make sure that funding contributes to the use of the IT tools needed to process the large quantities of data required to make the most of one's cultural heritage, interpret the needs of the demand, and anticipate demand by directing it towards consumption appropriate to the characteristics of the assets of each territory²². In order to do this, many of the resources will have to be used for training, especially for the operators of small and very small tourism enterprises on which the Italian tourism system is based.

Conclusions

In this paper we have analyzed the elements that have led to the transformation of tourism – starting from the end of the Second World War – from an initial tool of reconciliation between peoples to an element of recovery for cities that had experienced social crises due to the transition from a local economic dimension to competition on a global scale. The rebound from this situation has led to an unbridled growth of urban tourism at any cost supported by the economy of low-cost services and an uncontrolled civil society restructured on the basis of social networks. Almost all the local authorities that were responsible for the management of tourism in historic European cities did little to control the excesses of mass tourism and overtourism, perhaps because they were convinced of the need to leave total freedom to the operations of multinational companies that were always offering new forms of low-cost services that seemed to facilitate a form of tourism that was apparently democratic, because it was within everyone's reach. In this paper, we have tried to show that in recent decades there has not been any form of cultural tourism within everyone's reach in which to share and transmit the history and culture of the numerous European civilisations. What has been promoted in the recent past has been the consumption of leisure time as an end in itself, in a cultural context that was considered little more than a mere theatrical setting. The consequences of Covid-19 have hit an urban tourism that was already undergoing a qualitative crisis while the euphoria for a scale of tourist flows that were soon to disappear still survived. Tourism offers an important economic and social contribution to Europe's cultural heritage, so it is good that it can receive an extraordinary economic support to help it overcome the current crisis. However, it would be detrimental if huge economic contributions were aimed at promoting a return to the mistakes of the recent past. This sector must change, and in order to adapt to the needs of a new European society, it needs adequate tools and

²² Castellano, Montanari 2020.

services, the careful training of tourism operators, and information for the new generations of users.

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