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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.

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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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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.

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