

Sharing wider European regions' examples on sustainable tourism: Venice

It is only possible to fully address the theme of sustainable tourism if we do it from a 'scientific' analysis of the tourism phenomenon today, in the age of globalisation.

Marco D'Eramo's recent book "The Selfie of the World" (published by Feltrinelli) is an extraordinarily rich and useful source for this purpose.

We need to look at the evolution of tourism by using a number of approaches, starting with a materialistic one. According to D'Eramo: "Tourism is now the most important industry in this new century ... According to the WTO, in 2015 international tourism revenues amounted to US\$ 1,522 billion... Direct turnover should be added to a complete upstream and downstream ... exactly because it involves such a heavy infrastructure and superstructure, tourism is also the most polluting industry: according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourist air transport produces by itself 5% of global carbon dioxide emitted by humankind and, if everything remains as it is today, by 2035 the carbon dioxide emissions of tourism will increase by 130%."

The ecological footprint and the social, environmental and economic impact of tourism should be measured, taking into account all the sectors involved, including construction, transportation, aeronautics, naval, steel and metal engineering. It is not possible to think about sustainable tourism unless we include it within the overall ecological transition of the economy and of the society in which we live.

Good practices and examples, advanced projects and innovative policies, which are still presented today, must be supported by a broad, shared and strategically better-equipped vision.

Last night, we watched the film *Das Venedig Prinzip* by Andreas Pichler who, with great refinement and mastery, tells how Venice – my city – was dramatically affected by the violent aggression of voracious and ubiquitous tourism, and the intolerance and anger of its inhabitants, now reduced to 55,000, who are rebelling against this situation, looking for a way to save Venice from the fate of a tourism monoculture and its nasty consequences. Demonstrations against uncontrolled tourism and the degeneration of the city are multiplying and attracting a growing number of civil society organisations and individuals.

On 18 June, a municipal referendum organised by the city's environmental and cultural associations on the expulsion from the lagoon of cruise ships, which currently cross the city for the enjoyment of both their passengers (who can look at the scenery from above) and the shipowners, who can impose a higher price. In 2015, there were around 2 million passengers (although the number has dropped to about 1.4 million, partly due to the companies' self-imposed limits), and the impact of tourism on the city widened dramatically. Not to mention the impact on the hydrogeological balance, air quality and the precious fragility of the urban system. In the same year, according to data from the City of Venice tourism office, there were 10.1 million overnight stays, 28,000 each day, and 20 million day trippers, around 55,000 per day. According to Federalberghi (Italy's largest union for hoteliers), the city has 5,166

non-hotel facilities, of which only 20% are authentic b&bs. UNESCO could put Venice in the list of heritage sites at risk, like some Middle Eastern cities.

By 6pm on 18 June, they had already run out of all the 25,000 cards made available for the referendum. Such unexpected participation is also a sign of the vitality and civic engagement in my city.

Venice is symbol of what unsustainable tourism is and the complexity and difficulties facing the policies to be pursued to secure a real change in direction.

The left-wing administrations, of which the Greens were part until 2015, have had to deal with a swirling and chaotic rise in tourist flows.

In 2008, the Municipal Administration (I was the councillor for culture, youth and international relations) commissioned a COSES (Consortium for Research and Training) study for coordinating tourism strategies, called 'Sustainable Tourism in Venice'¹. The study proposed a logical model of urban sustainability for tourism, taking into account all interconnected variables, such as the different types of people present, residents, workers, students, second homes, city users, tourists and different access to the city center. The Santa Lucia railway station (which, on average, brings in a third of the arrivals) was flagged as an extremely critical point in terms of control. In early 2009, the municipality launched the 'Venice Connected' project (promoted by then deputy mayor Michele Vianello), an official portal for tourism for the city of Venice. This is an integrated platform in five languages which enables the online purchase, at advantageous rates, of the main services such as tickets for civic museums, transfer from the airport and cruise terminals, car parks, transport, even wedding planning. Rates were set to favour booking ahead, reduce seasonal peaks, improve road safety, sustainability, and urban usability. The project received numerous awards and in May 2010 it was presented at the Shanghai Expo as a sustainable tourism model.

In May 2012, the Municipal Environment Commissioner, Green Gianfranco Bettin, achieved a decisive breakthrough by securing the town council's approval for the historical establishment of the Laguna Nord Park, after more than 10 years of debate (I myself signed, alongside Paolo Cacciari and others, a similar proposal submitted to the Chamber of Deputies in 2007). It was a tough political and cultural battle, during which he was subjected to harsh threats to himself and his family from fringe, yet dangerous, minorities. We finally received effective instruments for protection and for the unitary and participatory management of the lagoon ecosystem – instruments to revitalise the isles' traditional and biological agricultural production, and to promote a conscious and compatible tourism, a source of new employment, especially for the youth.

Unfortunately, the experiment of sustainable and alternative tourism in Venice was destroyed by the decision of the centre-right mayor, Luigi Brugnaro (in government since 2015) who cancelled the Laguna Park, as he promised during his electoral campaign, thereby appeasing the hunters and obscurantists.

"We do not want a city just for tourists, we do not want to be like Venice," said Barcelona's mayor Ada Colau who, earlier this year, approved a plan for receiving tourists which prohibits the opening of new hotels and tries to respond to the citizens' uprising against the tourist invasion. Unfortunately, the

¹ archive.comune.venezia.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/IT/D/D.../pdf

rampant offers of accommodation in the historical centre and beyond, especially through websites such as Airbnb, are difficult to control.

I would like to add some thoughts based on my recent experience as president of the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice. I am familiar with the reality of over 1,300 students, art, history and culture enthusiasts who are able to use and work with the new technologies, and who live in Venice as a capital of international culture, home to major cultural institutions such as the Biennale, which offers great opportunities for growth, training and dialogue. In Venice, there is an historical Conservatory of Music, Ca' Foscari University (20,000 students), University of Architecture and Urbanism, IUAV (over 3,000 students). There is a district for research and innovation which unites many of the city's cultural institutions to coordinate their activities. There are some very ambitious projects in the pipeline dedicated to young people, such as 'Science Gallery Venice', promoted by Ca' Foscari University in collaboration with the district, a space where science and technology can interact with art and design, inspiring new ways of thinking and generating innovation.

Supporting local cultural production, research, innovation; promoting, by means of effective and structural measures, youth employment; fostering the integration of new citizens, promoting sustainable social and environmental economics – these are the main ways to emerge from the tourism monoculture!

I conclude by reminding us all, starting with myself, that we must look closely at the feeling of impatience, almost intense dislike, that sneaks into the resident population in the face of the unbearable invasion of tourist masses. We think that we too are tourists, even though we try to travel with greater awareness. Consider the fact that the so-called mass tourism, as D'Eramo explains in his book, is linked to the availability of income, paid holidays, the right to retirement: challenges which result from the secular struggles of workers. I saw a video of a demonstration in Barcelona, which portrayed a sign with a tourist's silhouette and the words 'kill him'. I was dismayed. We must also respect the dream of freedom and cultural growth that has pushed tourists to queue in order to enter the Doge's Palace or to visit the Louvre. And we must also take into account the imaginary and symbolism upon which, among many other things, the global tourism industry is extremely dependent.

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