SEASONAL CITIES
THE ADRIATIC COAST BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND RENEWAL

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Abstract

This work is related to the ongoing survey for the PHD program of Architecture, Environment and design, PhD Curriculum in Knowledge and Design of Urban Landscape, at the School of Advanced Studies of the University of Camerino, concerning the transformation of tourist resorts built in the 1960s and 1970s along the Italian coasts of the Marche region.

The present article deals with the problems involved in the reorganization of consolidated tourist destinations in consideration of the evolution of the areas dedicated to tourism and the intensification of international mobility as an analytic and theoretical reference for the interpretation of renovation necessities in respect to the observed contemporary dynamics.

It further analyzes the recent transformations of the Italian Adriatic coast of the Marche region and finally discusses the role of the urban-tourist areas which are ready to promote reorganization strategies within a new urban geographical framework.

Keywords: coast, tourism, mature destination, urban, renovation

Introduction

Since the 1950s, the construction of areas dedicated to seaside holidays has modified the European seascape and the structure of coastal towns and cities, thus highlighting the potential of tourism as a complex evolving phenomena, which can trigger alteration processes in urban transformation dynamics.

After the building boom that accompanied the development of seaside resorts in the 60s and 70s, the early 80s began with the issue of mature tourist destinations. Three main strategies were adopted along the Mediterranean coast to revive the widespread beach&sun tourist models: the first concentrated on improving the existing tourist facilities, often reintroducing the prevailing development pattern of the 60s, characterized by the construction of new areas and buildings destined to this specific use, which was supported by a strong real estate market; the second method suggested an increase of tourist facilities as a formula to diversify and differentiate the tourist offer; the third aimed at exploiting local resources promoting alternative forms of tourism such as cultural tourism, rural tourism and tourism closely connected to nature. In general, these measures were used along the British coast to renew the local tourist offer (Clegg A. and Essex S., 2000) and were influenced by the various theories concerning the life cycle of tourist destinations (Plog S.C. ,1973; Thurot J.M., 1974; Turner L. and Ash J., 1975; Miossec J. M., 1977; Butler R. W., 1980).

Deep changes have occurred in the organizational policies of tourist activities due to global transformations, which have determined the need to revise both the theoretical models used as benchmarks and the interpretation of the relations between tourism and territory (Lozato Giotard J.P., 1993) in the evolutionary process of the tourist phenomena from the fordist to the post-fordist period.
The phase that numerous seaside destinations are going through after a long period of mass tourism (which has not completely disappeared, at least not in Italy) needs to be interpreted within a context of urban complexity theories (Martinotti G., 200...?; Nuvolati G., 2007) that identify new urban forms that derive from the intensification of international mobility according to a new paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2004).

Recent studies of urban systems along the Italian Adriatic coast of Marche (Calafati A. G. and Mazzoni F., 2009) highlight the recent evolution of the process of territorial integration. They show the existence of relational densities areas, defined “città in nuce” or embryonic, that formed through territorial coalescence processes in the 1950s merging municipalities and smaller settlements.

Almost every consolidated tourist destination along the Adriatic coast of Marche is included in these urban systems. In some cases, the “scattered city” is already metabolizing and transforming them into low-cost winter accommodation units for new immigrants or privileged suburban areas (thanks to their geographical position in respect to central areas and local trends), where new buildings are added to the extensive repertoire of settlements in accordance with the predominant 1960s policy and speculative markets.

Among the distinct dimensions of analysis and various work scales that should be considered in the reorganization of tourist destinations, it is important to concentrate on the role of the urban design and on the physical qualities of urban areas (the architecture of buildings, the configuration of open spaces and the organization of public areas). seaside destinations in Marche, seasonal cities, are facing a new phase between continuity and renewal, which suggest new challenges for the coast such as renovated tourist potentialities and/or different urban specificities.

From a proactive perspective and on the basis of the recent evolution processes this work analyses the necessity to interpret new strategies for the renovation of consolidated seaside settlements as these areas can contribute in redesigning new urban geographies (territorial scale). The specific role of urban design (local scale) is, therefore, crucial for the future of new urban-tourist platforms.

Tourist spaces evolution

Although industry has been the base of society in the last two centuries and, therefore, industrialization has been the principle of urban development, in the light of recent evolution processes we should reconsider some general criteria in the analysis of space transformation and include tourism as a necessary activity in the culture of consumption in advanced societies (Clavè, 1997). Its high impact has crucially contributed to the final urbanization of space1. After the consolidation of international tourism as a social mass-phenomenon, the complex relations that bind the tourist phenomenon to its territory, the basic resource and the aim of each activity, have become the subject matter of consolidated studies.

Since the ’50s, geographers have elaborated and diffused a certain number of spatial models, most of which are based on the sequence origin-tourist destination (origin-linkage-destination system). We owe to the Italian U. Toschi (1948) one of the first interpretational schemes concerning the spatial configuration of tourism. It carries out a fine distinction between departure regions (active), arrival regions (passive) and passage/transition regions. His interesting interpretation leads tourism back to the elaborate phenomenology of the circulation of people, goods, capital and information that affects the tourist “station” in a complex manner (Fig. 1).

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1 In 2007, for the first time in the history of mankind, the urban population has surpassed the rural population: more than 3 billion individuals now live in cities or urban habitats. www.unescol.org
During the 70s this line of study was enhanced with the numerous anglosaxon contributions of researchers such as C. K. Campbell (1967), J.M. Thurot (1974), L. Turner y J. Ash (1975), who attempted to provide a formal interpretation of several aspects of tourist spatiality; the models that were mainly used as theoretical references by other authors are those by S. Plog, J. M. Miossec and R. W. Butler. According to the interpretation of Plog (S.C Plog., 1973) the development and maturity of a destination can be assessed depending on the tourist population it hosts. Miossec (Miossec. J.M, 1977) adds that saturation follows a peak in the evolution process of a tourist region: the overload of communications and infrastructures leads to the prelude of a crisis causing rejection in the local community and the migration of other categories of tourists towards new areas. In particular, Miossec explains the structural evolution of a tourist region through time and space, including an analysis of territorial impacts. He suggests tourist regionalization as based on stages of development. This is a process oriented towards the interaction of tourists’ and residents’ behaviors in the territorial planning by public and private institutions such as municipalities, provinces, regions, consortiums, trade associations etc., mixing private and public marketing. The perceptive component is fundamental in this model as it plays a major role in the destiny of a station or tourist area: on the long run, the perception of a territory and its related image influence the spatial organization of the region and its territorial demarcation. Regional planning must necessarily be connected with the collective image in context.

Based on these intuitions, geographers claim that together with the concept of “region”, seen as a tangible reality which can be verified within a geographical reality, a region can also be considered an individually “perceived geographical reality”. R. W. Butler’s life cycle model of a tourist destination (1980)\(^2\) foresees several evolutionary phases. Each one is characterised by a different demand trend, specific offer configurations, different territorial structures and development issues that basically concern exploration, involvement, development and consolidation, characterized by a presence in the critical zone for its carrying capacity: the first symptoms of degeneration appear, and the excessive pressure upon the environment causes a reduction in growth rate and stimulates the employment of incentives to prolong the tourist season. During this phase the first forms of opposition to tourism and its effects on the local population appear. At the same time congestion and environmental degradation tend to push away the privileged segments of demand. After consolidation it is possible to observe different evolutionary processes. During stagnation phases the number of arrivals reaches its peak then a slow decrease begins; excessive tourist pressure leads to overstepping the marks imposed by the load capacity of a tourist area and a decline phase thus confirms the loss of competitiveness of a destination to new attraction areas. The decline phase might progress until a destination finally disappears from the tourist market, although it is probable that local authorities will try to revitalize the offer and the image of their destination with a series of renovation measures. There is, therefore, a chance for

\(^2\) The publication in 2006 of contributions derived from the theory of Butler R. W. (Butler R. W., 2006) put an end to the controversy that this theory created in several academic environments.
temporary or permanent recovery that is generally obtained through the creation of artificial accessory attractions and entertainment, such as casinos, water parks, sport facilities. It is also possible to enhance existing resources that have been so far overlooked.

A typological classification of the spatial shape of tourist destinations is suggested by Lozato-Giotart J. P. (1988) based on two fundamental criteria: 1. the territorial distribution of tourist resources (characterised by two extremes that coincide on one side with a strong polarization of concentrated functions in a central area, and on the side with widespread tourist functions); 2. the strategic orientation of the offer system (there is a classification of tourist regions based on the typological characterization of the offer and the level of specialization of local spaces). The schematization of the different typologies of tourist spaces is particularly interesting. It identifies the localization of tourist activities according to geographical criteria such as tourist fluxes, the localization of tourist activities and the sharing of spaces with other economic activities as well as the spatial shapes of different tourist settlements and their impact on local environments. It is possible to identify at least three types of tourist spaces by assessing these different elements: 1-specialised or multipurpose, according to the number of activities that are carried out and the importance of tourism in local routine; 2-mononuclear or multinuclear, according to the number of settlements or tourist localizations; 3-polarized or multipolarized if there are one or more attractions of different kinds in the same place.

Several activities, including those for tourists, are found in multipurpose spaces, but this is quite rare in specialized tourist spaces, where everything is structured and organized for and by tourism, although the interaction of tourist activities and other structures benefits both the tourist sector and the entire economy due to the induced effects it produces. Most seaside resorts along the Mediterranean are mononuclear and uni-polarized spaces, whereas some of the most famous seaside resorts (Rimini, Taormina, Sorrento) are specialized centres with multinuclear or multipolarized structures. Famous spas shifted from a polarized to a multipolarized structure thanks to the diversification that followed the evolution of a sector that was no longer based on thermal treatment only, but also concentrated on recreational activities, sports and entertainment spread out in different places.

The traditional tools used by geographers reveal an unquestionable interpretative effectiveness in territorial analyses. However, the deep transformations occurred in the organizational logics of tourist activities have on the long run determined the need to revise the early theoretical models used as references. They need to be adapted to the complexity that characterizes this sector. Tourism today has to be acknowledged as a social phenomenon with a strong capacity to organize territorial spaces, a complex of dynamics that are typically localized and connected through their spatiality to all the other elements of the natural, social and economic environments as well as urban and architectonic settings.

As a social phenomenon and cultural expression of consumption, the evolution of tourism in the post-modern age is affected by the passage from Fordism to post-Fordism (Urry J and Sheller M., 2004; Battilani P., 2009), which is revealed through a deep “pluralisation” of the demand and a “multiplication/differentiation” of tourist fruition; in other words, there has been a shift from mass tourism to niche tourism (location, tourist typologies, times and mode of consumption). Together with social and economic transformations in contemporary society the demand changes both qualitatively (tourist behaviour reflected in different needs, tourist fruition models, aggregation models, use of structures and services, identikit) and quantitatively (different tourist segments to which a specific offer must appeal; differentiation of tourist markets, both national and foreign, both potential and existing, which determine the image of areas and tourists’ everyday lives). Tourism produces a significant influence upon the contents of space, affecting the landscape (origin and development of new settlements and road networks) and the social and economic structures of the local population (the induced effects studied by economists). Among the changes in the organizational modalities of tourism, territorialisation processes are gaining importance. They represent a modelling social action that transforms, codifies, dominates and structures a defined space (Savelli A, 2010); this social action underlines the widespread effects of an increased tourist mobility, of the evolution of the competitive scenario and saturation of tourist resorts, as well as the necessity to acknowledge the territory/city as a new organizational environment that becomes an interactive space that is able to
systematically configure itself, in which integration is the result of a sociocultural process that does not only involve tourist spaces but the entire territorial system it refers to. (Pollice F., 2002).

Tourist destinations (territory and cities) also become more flexible in order to face ongoing changes (Clavè A. S., 1998), thus influencing the quality of architecture and urban spaces: this is an aspect of the local dimensions of mature destinations that is rarely underlined in surveys that aim at identifying the reason for the decline of certain areas, although it is presented as an important eye-catching element for tourists. (Urry J, 2002).

Globalization unifies and apparently levels out everything. It nonetheless develops an infinite multiplicity of possible tourist routes for individuals or diversified group tourism. The constant evolution and volubility of the demand, always “unpredictable” and “imponderable”, seems to create a new offer “subject”, the territory, which redisCOVERs its complexity and activates an infinite multiplicity of unclassified and uncoordinated spaces and situations. In contemporary society, converging processes (globalization, complexity) tend to emphasize a space as an expression of the choices carried out by a plurality of actors within the frame of infinite territorial relations, spaces and interstitial time (Gatti F. and Pugelli F. R., 2006).

The disappearance of the separation of spaces and subsets of coexisting relations (everyday life and extraordinary experiences, production and consumption, work and fun) makes the role of architecture and urban planning fundamental as they carry the assumption for competition between areas and the resources and modalities for tourist practice that express themselves in the choices that suit spatial experiences.

**Continuity and renewal in seasonal cities in Marche region (italian adriatic coast)**

Tourism as a mass phenomenon boomed in Italy at the beginning of the 50s: between 1959 and 1982, according to ISTAT, the number of tourists increased from 124 to 340 million and the number of Italian holidaymakers rose from 6.6 to 24.3 million (Battilani P., 2009); this widespread growth flooded the territory thus becoming an essential element in the economic development that influenced settlements along vast coastal areas (Lanzani A., 2003).

Although the positive influence of tourism was immediately acknowledged and exploited in several economic sectors (building trade, commerce, services) its potential as a new social practice, capable of modifying the territory and transforming urban spaces, was disregarded. There were nonetheless those who pointed out the urge to concentrate on tourism (Sheller and Urry, 2004). The immediate effect was the urbanization of wide unused areas, mainly along the coast, according to a quantitative offer approach destined for a wide public (Trillo C., 2003); the delayed town-planning regulations and the short-sightedness of public policies incentivised a diversified and fragmented tourist development that lacked foresight and left wide margins to speculative and privatistic enterprise.

Despite the tens of years that divide us from the sun and beach mass-tourism boom many issues are still unsolved. Research concerning the tourist phenomenon has not been dynamic in architectural and town-planning circles if compared with other disciplinary fields (in particular geography, sociology and economics). A reason for this is that tourist efficiency is often associated with a disciplinary sector that obeys a speculative market logic and is therefore beyond the margins of “intellectual” in-depth research. On the other hand, public territorial institutions have mainly considered this phenomenon and the measures involved in “tourist improvement” as economic growth catalysts thus underestimating the interactions with the physical transformations of cities.

Observing the present urban situation of coastal Marche it is evident that the seaside tourist development model of the 1960s, characterized by the presence of buildings constructed for this specific purpose and supported by a rich real-estate market, is maintained and intensified by a town-planning policy based on an uninterrupted classification of building land. This has caused a considerable occupation of land and the welding of coastal cities that were once distant. As a consequence, tourist spaces have become complementary urban systems, especially in those transition areas where mixed spaces are created for temporal use and urban residential areas. In other instances,
the seasonality of seaside destination is still worsening local degradation due to the low quality of the architectural structures and an insufficient use during the winter season, a very frequent condition in areas close to beaches where flats are overabundant.

In general, the seaside destinations of Marche are in a more or less advanced state of maturity. In some cases seaside resorts are no longer summer holiday destinations but have become low cost seasonal accommodation for the winter period or for immigrants. Some of them have completely lost their tourist appeal and have slowly been metabolized by recent urban processes that refer to complex territorial dynamics, as stated by Calafati A. and Mazzoni F. (2009) in their study. During the past fifty years many neighbouring municipalities have found themselves with a high level of social, economic and spatial interdependence that has determined the formation of a single local system; this phenomenon is developing together with territorial coalescence (Calafati A. and Mazzoni F., 2009) and has occurred in most of the Marche territory originating “città in nuce” (embryonic cities) (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 – Urban systems in Marche region (Source: Calafati G. A. and Mazzoni F., 2009).

A careful analysis of the evolution of buildings along the coast of Marche (Fig. 3), carried out comparing the evolution of coastal municipalities and based on a study of land consumption by the Marche Region (2009), showed that the construction of new cities mainly spreads from coastal municipalities toward hill towns. It is important to point out that this shift from a territorial organization of small urban poles to a medium-sized urban system occurred between 1954 and 1984, in conjunction with the mass-tourism wave. It is, therefore, presumable that most buildings were destined for temporary residential or tourist uses.

Fig. 3. Urban evolution in the coast Marche region from 1954 to 2007; in evidence the seaside destinations (source: Regione Marche, 2009. Graphic elaboration of the author)

A new perspective called “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry J. 2010) that suggests the concept of mobility as a key to the reading of contemporary society originated from
studies on tourism and migration. It is adopted in its multidimensionality to define both the global scale movement and everyday movement on a local scale of people, goods, money, information, communication and images. The evolution of tourism, at first defined as a “mass” phenomenon and later reconsidered according to the concept of mobility, leads to the fading of boundaries between social spheres that were once distinct, in particular between tourists and local inhabitants. In particular, the difference between the dimension of “travel” and that of “home” disappears. The complex sets and interconnections of different physical and symbolic mobility systems overlap (Mascheroni G., 2007).

On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider the coming of the network society (Castells M., 2010). The changes in the physical morphology of cities, which have built up during the 20th century, can be ascribed to radical transformations in the management of everyday life. Every evolutionary step in cities has been accompanied by new urban populations. The evolution process, from a first-generation metropolis with its inhabitants and commuters, to its current configuration, more and more dependent on the NRP (Non Resident Population), has powered two macro processes; they are the physical expression of the relationships that the new mixed social figures establish with urban spaces: the regression of city boundaries and the progressive erosion of bonds between social groups and lived-in space (Martinotti G., in Nuvolati G., 2007) (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Mobility in the traditional city and mobility in the contemporary metropolitan area (source: Nuvolati G., 2007).

In the Marche we can, therefore, consider the mature seaside destinations as new urban-tourist platforms included in an unfinished transformation process of the urban territorial system (widespread cities) which is consequently subject to new perspectives, namely renovated tourist potentialities and/or different urban specificities on a large scale. The binomial beach-urban density defines a tourist settlement topography that associates numerous European coastal areas (Gausa M., Banchini S., Falcón L., 2005) and represents the predominant image of many parts of the “megalopoleis” that overlook the Mediterranean Sea. On a smaller scale the overlapping of a broader leisure culture and the populations’ daily life gives rise to new questions and may suggest new interpretations for reconstruction strategies in consolidated destinations measured on a specific local scale.

The role of urban design is fundamental to interpret the specificities of new urban-tourist platforms in respect to specific territorial dynamics and in order to requalify entire parts of the urban fabric which no longer equals tourist reception.

Conclusions

We have seen how the evolution of tourist spaces is strictly connected to the complexity of contemporary dynamics (evolution of tourism, international mobility, recent migrations, critical
situations with possible friction between tourist practices and stable habitats, new social figures, new forms of urbanity) and that many consolidated tourist areas need to be reinterpreted through strategies that do not exclusively aim at the tourist sector.

The understanding of the transformations of the urban system in Marche from a “territorial coalescence” perspective allows to spot a “widespread city” that needs to find a new correspondence between authorities (redefinition of municipal boundaries) and the dimension of the urban system. There is a double finality: to render its government’s tools efficient (new town-planning) and promote public measures of cooperation in the tourist, urban and economic fields. These measures could be supported by the European Union.

Assuming it is necessary to find renovation strategies for mature destinations that suggest an alternative to the traditional seaside development model (which is still being put forward and intensified) it is necessary to envision an urban system that develops in a coalescent manner (no longer linear or comb-shaped as other interpretations suggest), which implies a careful evaluation of new building interventions as built-up areas are already redundant. The physical morphological transformations of the current new urban-tourist platforms (Fig. 5) originate from unprecedented relationships between the local populations and the entire urban system. They are no longer only relate to tourism and, therefore, call into questions the validity of the renovation strategies for mature destinations that have been chosen so far (real estate, recreational specialization, other forms of experiential tourism, desseasonalised tourism).

Summing up, we can affirm that seaside resorts in Marche, “seasonal cities”, are going through a new stage verging between continuity and renovation; this is a new challenge for the coast, that is to say renewed tourist potentialities and/or different urban specificities within a coalescent territorial development scheme (widespread cities). In this new phase the role of urban design in respect to the future of new urban-tourist platforms is crucial.

Fig. 5. Seaside tourist destination in the Marche region (photos by autor)

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