

# Tourism forms and social sustainability

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## **Abstract**

*Sardinia offers a field to study the evolution of the tourist politics, above all in comparison to the relationships between tourist and local society, because it has been, and it is still, one of the best destinations of trip both in the set of the international tourism and for the one who seeks niche forms, however the tourist politics, that have driven the development of the different forms, have been driven in meaningful way, in time, from what that can be defined the tourist ideology. There is a need find the principles of the "relational tourism", new and unexpected forms where the "mutual vulnerability" among guest and hosts are created. Sardinia's tourist territory, as optimal place, offers itself to reason on the possibility to identify appropriate new relational forms that can support a social dialogue and that, through this, can support the perception of a new sense of the place.*

Keywords: Relational tourism, social sustainability, alternative forms of tourism, tourist spaces

## **Introduction**

Contemporary tourist space is today as a vast set of attracting places, services, local or global actions, symbols and elements of authenticity, and touristic destinations appear and disappear with increasing speed. So tourist phenomenon becomes more and more complex, with superficial uses of the places. Tourist forms are proposed with the goal to give an experience conducted as a ready-made product communicated by the media and tourists prefigure an idea of the place to visit before the trip. This complexity obviously sets problems of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Sustainability is often declared as useful for reaching certain tourist segments more careful to environmental issues, but it is not always real, especially there is a need to understand what is meant by the term sustainability, whether the protection of places, the search for resilience of the territory or the comparison with local societies. This last declination of the sustainability is, particularly, the central theme of this paper. Indeed, if the tourism is often a ready-made experience, then it favours the surrender of the individual to an apparatus that receives, protects and guide, it is not so simple to meet the others: the tourist doesn't have real occasions to meet the host society or, often, this meeting is externally directed. Relationships born when a tourist, meeting a local society without previously defined mental maps, realize an equal relationship with them. The construction of an equal relationship is not sufficient to ensure the social sustainability of tourism forms: something is needed more because the tourist will not be barely tolerated, often cheated or exploited. It is important that tourism becomes an opportunity to build urbanity in tourist areas, providing services not only to the tourist but also to the host population.

## Contemporary tourist space

Today tourist places and spaces are decisively Post-Modern ones, with concentration of tourism images and icons and for this reason separated from the context, even physically<sup>1</sup>. It is possible to see a general cultural mutation and, in this way, tourist spaces always assume an increasing importance both for the planning of the territory and for local and social development. Tourism influences and, often, determines some spatial processes that reflect and anticipate changes in society itself. It is interesting to observe as the tourism reflects contemporaneity, on one hand it pursues tight spaces, true atopic territorial "enclaves"<sup>2</sup>, but on the other one it goes in search of deeper meanings, such as the need to know in a better way the places and to compare itself with local societies<sup>3</sup>. The sustainability of tourism forms is largely linked to economic policies<sup>4</sup> but is also expressed in terms of environmental compatibility dwelling too long on reductive visions not considered absolutely satisfactory like that of the tourism exclusively concerned with natural processes or it is just as often confused with the alternative tourism than the traditional one. Sardinia represents a case study of the reduction of tourism to an economic policy: prevailing views in tourism policies are always directed exclusively to receptivity and to the establishment of new structures, focusing on "typicality" of the places and on forms of advertising, marketing, endorsed repeated models such as bed and breakfasts, hotels tout court, tourist residences, diffused hotels and so on. In the towns, both coastal and internal, the number of these structures is increasing more and more<sup>5</sup>. Sardinian context therefore focus almost exclusively to the objects centre of tourism, what hotels, resort, B&B etcetera, without considering in any way impacts on the territory. This marks a perseverant vision about the territory like an object, with tourist politics few farsighted and directed only to the creation of extraordinary spaces, without any relation and temporally limited, where the tourist recognize only in a superficial way local host societies, forming and undoing aleatory relationships. The temporal factor deserves nevertheless a further reasoning. The places are seen immovable in time, as if they were immune from the effects that the tourist flows produce on the territory. This politics could be considered as an ideology that proposes the territory in symbolic form, reviving the archetypes and proposing them to the tourist flows, often with few elaborations giving prominence to the

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<sup>1</sup> Minca C. (1996), *Spazi effimeri*, Cedam, Padova; Ritzer G. (1997), *Il mondo alla McDonald's*, Il Mulino, Bologna; Ritzer, G., A. Liska. (1997), "McDonaldization" and "Post-Tourism": Complementary Perspectives on Contemporary Tourism", in *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*. C. Rojek and J. Urry, eds., Routledge: London; Mustonen P. (2006), *Postmodern Tourism – Alternative Approaches*, Publications of the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, Series A- 2:2006.

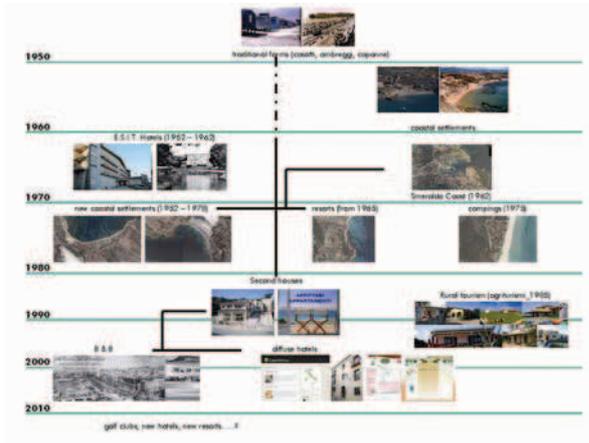
<sup>2</sup> Judd D. R. (2003), "Visitors and the Spatial Ecology of the City" in (a cura di) Hoffman L. M., Fainstein S., Judd D. R. *Cities and Visitors: Regulating People, Markets, and City Space*, Wiley-Blackwell; Edensor T. (1998), *Tourists at the Taj. Performance and Meaning at a Symbolic Site*, Routledge, New York; Hannigan J. (1998), *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*, London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Noy C. (2004), "This Trip Really Changed Me. Backpackers' Narratives of Self-Change", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 31, n. 1, pagg. 78–102.

<sup>4</sup> Nijkamp P., Verdonkshot S. (1995), "Sustainable Tourism Development: a case study in Lesbos", in (a cura di) Cocosis H., Nijkamp P. *Sustainable Tourism Development*, pagg. 127-140, Avebury, London; Garrod B, Fyall A. (1998), "Beyond the rhetoric of sustainable tourism?" *Tourism Management* 19 (3), pagg. 199–212; Lew A.A., Hall C.M. (1998), "The geography of sustainable tourism: Lessons and prospects". In C.M. Hall e A.A. Lew (eds) *Sustainable Tourism. A Geographical Perspective* (pagg 99–203), Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman; World Tourism Organization (1999), *Codice mondiale di etica del turismo*; Mair H., Reid D., George W., Taylor J. (2001), "Planning for growth? Re-thinking the rural tourism opportunity", in *Canadian Society of Extension*; Pigliaru F. (2002), "Economia del turismo: crescita, qualità ambientale e sostenibilità", in (a cura di) R. Paci e S. Usai *L'ultima spiaggia*, Cucc, Cagliari; Briassoulis H. (2002), "Sustainable tourism and the question of the commons", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol 29, N. 4, pagg. 1065-1085; Liu Z. (2003), "Sustainable Tourism Development: A Critique" in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* Vol. 11, n. 6; Ko T.G. (2005), "Development of a tourism sustainability assessment procedure: a conceptual approach", in *Tourism Management*, vol. 26, pagg. 431–445.

<sup>5</sup> Facoltà di Architettura di Alghero (2008), *Terzo rapporto sul turismo ad Alghero - Stagione 2007*. Available from: <http://atoss.lampnet.org/article/articleview/18/1/2/>

ethnocentrism, repeating the same shapes and models and completely detached from a complete planning system. This process of evolution can be defined as a tourism ideology. It is useful to try to represent the tourist path in Sardinia by a modeling tree that shows the continuous generation of new forms, including through the reinterpretation of existing ones. But what effect has had on the territory this continuous and faceted development?.



The development of the Consorzio Costa Smeralda<sup>6</sup> has influenced tourism politics inspiring new forms in existing coastal settlements and the uncontrolled growth of new villages, with a strong intervention of construction, almost exclusively along the coasts. In holiday villages, and especially on the Costa Smeralda, the construction of exotic and imaginary Sardinia is realized, destined to a national and international tourism, but however contained within of the spatial limits and with an eye of respect to the territorial context; vice versa in the coastal villages, grown up without a coherent urban planning, simulacra themselves of the simulacra Costa Smeralda, the quality of the environment has not been observed and has been delegated to the sensitivities of individuals. However, tourist and coastal villages can not be said communities, as subject to seasonal flows. Sardinia's coastal landscape, in time, has seen the development of two almost antithetical processes, sometimes antagonist between them: on the one side there were receptive forms dedicated to tourists, with exclusive accommodation in costs and terms of acceptance, on the other one there was an increase of villages exclusively dedicated for local societies. Exclusive residences against second houses, and for about thirty years, from the sixties to the nineties of last century, this was the prevailing tourism policy, also with episodes of gentrification.

### The social sustainability of spaces and forms

It is clear that typology of tourism is not sustainable, the territory is exploited and there are really few possibilities to generate relations between hosts and tourists. But the interaction between tourists and host societies is commonly founded on some mystifications. Firstly that the tourists represent some homogeneous groups cohesive in "to be" tourists and in "to do" tourism. Secondly that host societies see the tourists like perfect strangers. Thirdly, visited places are homogeneous. Tourists may, if it is possible, strictly interact with host societies to dissolve the myths and stereotypes generated by both parties. The risk is that each one of the two actors of the tourism confines himself in his own "specialized" enclave. Then it is necessary to distinguish among a tourist "experience" and an hospitality "relationship", piercing

<sup>6</sup> Serreli S. (2004), Dimensioni plurali della città ambientale. Prospettive d'integrazione ambientale nel progetto del territorio, Franco Angeli, Milano.

the surface of tourist ideology, based on non-relational spaces and temporally limited. The relationship with an object is always based on something that has already been reduced to a scheme-type, while the relationship with another person comes from the comparison, the relationship is immediate, without the provision of concepts, images or fantasies. Each one is, for the others, pure presence as the action is done "now", in present time<sup>7</sup>. But experience does not happens in a present time, draws strength from its past, as it is anticipated by preconceptions that are inherent in everyone. It is not possible to have a pure presence, but a previously judged and evaluated object; instead tourism forms careful to the subjects, to the people, rather than to the individuals and oriented to the building of "relationships" between the 'I', the 'other' can be defined relational. The problem is how (and where) can be found tourist forms favourable to an equal relationship with the otherness; this means to understand what are the conditions under which a person is generally prepared by interaction with others. Environmental and cognitive psychology studies show that these conditions are created when a person is vulnerable or is in particular conditions to feel mostly inclinable to the contact with the others. The conditions are created when the two parties are each other "vulnerable", where for vulnerability it is intended the possibility to feel "touched" for something or someone, a possibility to feel common, as opposed to the invulnerability that the tourism generally creates, or indifference to the contexts and the local societies. The vulnerability between tourists and between tourists and local society born when it creates a bond due to a particular condition of necessity or need. To realize vulnerability conditions means then to identify what can be the requisite to generate a contact between the parts<sup>8</sup>. It is necessary to think what can be the way for which a tourist experience doesn't hinder the birth of unexpected relationships.

### **Alternative forms of social sustainable tourism: two examples of relational tourism in Sardinia**

Sardinia offers an interesting field of research with respect to relations between tourists and local society, finding new possible tourism forms that favour a social dialogue and through this encourage the perception of a new sense of place. Then the purpose is to find "inclusive" tourism forms that contrast the "exclusive" one typical of the tourist ideology. These forms are contemplated in what is generally considered "social tourism"<sup>9</sup>, i.e. the set of tourism activities that can respond to a request for relationality and is not directed only to specific social tourist categories of persons in situations of disadvantage. Social tourism is essentially founded on a key word, that is service, intended both for tourists and local societies; these are services useful for the tourist as they can share their experiences in the visited places and more pleasant the permanence in places generally few known or less served; to the resident in which permit to enjoy of performances of quality without having to look elsewhere. In order to represent a relationship between the two entities of the process is necessary to identify what form of service can be activated, in the way that the tourist lives experiences in the same places and in the same times of the local societies,

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<sup>7</sup> Buber M. (1921), *I and Thou*, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Martins Cipolla C. (2004), "Tourist or guest: designing tourism experiences or hospitality relations?", *Design philosophy papers*, n. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lanquar R. e Raynouard Y. (1986), *Le Tourisme Social*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France ; Cohen E. (1989), "Alternative tourism – A Critique", in: Singh, T.V., Theuns, H.L. & Go, F.M. (eds). *Towards Appropriate Tourism: The Case of Developing Countries*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, pp. 127-142. Romeril M. (1994), "Alternative tourism: the real tourism alternative?" in: Cooper C. e LockwoodA. (eds), *Progress in Tourism Recreation and Hospitality Management*. Vol 6, Chichester: Wiley, pp. 22-29. Chauvin J. (2002), *Le tourisme social et associatif en France*, Paris: l'Harmattan. McGehee N.G. (2002), "Alternative Tourism and Social Movement Participation." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29:1, 124-143. McGehee N.G.; Norman W.C. (2002), "Alternative Tourism as Impetus for Consciousness-Raising." *Tourism Analysis*, 6:3/4, 239-251. Minnaert L. (2007), "Social tourism: a potential policy to reduce social exclusion? The effects of visitor-related social tourism for low income groups on personal and family development", paper presented at the 39th Annual UTSG Conference, 03 - 05 Jan 2007, Harrogate.

living the everyday, and not assisting to representations. An alternative form of ontological and relational tourism needs these requirements: it appears as a discontinuity with the usual forms of tourism; it shapes as a *not predestined and externally directed tourist form*, but it regenerates thanks to the constant possibility to create optimal conditions to the mutual vulnerability among guest and host; it allows to *override the typical individualisation* of tourist villages and resorts in general; it provides *functions and services related to housing* to improve the quality of life of the host territories and territorial equity. A contest where the services and the functions can be declined in this way is tourism related to personal care. People's life takes place through sequences of actions, circumstances, places, that, for various reasons, they allow the daily meeting of different functions. The whole of these contexts and of these functions is everyday life, the forms of living that it develops and thus the practices of production, use and consumption on which it finds everyday life. On the other hand, given their everyday character, these practices are often routine actions: they happen for habit beginning from motivations that almost appear unaware to those who stay in one place, while on the other hand, they may seem extraordinary, new, authentic, for those who visit. One of the daily practices is the usual self-care, personal care and the tourism market also offers the eventuality of being able to take care of itself during the holidays, just think about SPA tourism, which represents a model case the area of the Dead Sea<sup>10</sup>, to the form of the "protected tourism"<sup>11</sup> i.e. when the tourism is set to disabled or elderly, to the "dental tourism"<sup>12</sup> that pushes more and more tourists to countries like Croatia, Romania and the Netherlands in which the dental treatment are more economic than elsewhere. However, there is a problem, i.e. this tourist forms, although new and alternative, do not consider in any way relationship with the local society. The two case studies, however, are directed to the identification of a form in which personal care service is open to the context, and that implies then a systemic discontinuity in relation to forms listed above. The case studies are directed to the identification of a form in which personal care service is open to the context, and that implies then a systemic discontinuity in relation to forms listed above.

### **Case 1: Capo Testa – Santa Teresa di Gallura**

Anyone who has had the experience of a medical waiting room knows that can develop two attitudes: fear towards the others and personal choice to close in readings or thoughts, or curiosity about the others, desire for knowledge and sharing. The sharing of pain is an essential in the interiorization of an event that has caused suffering<sup>13</sup>. This is not to seek pain in tourism forms, but the decision to use health care, as a tool to undermine the principles of tourism ideology, arises precisely from the assumption that tourist relations, relations that are created during the sharing of medical experience are often very durable, as born in moments of particular need. Capo Testa is a peninsula in the north of Sardinia, Italy. Since the early seventies Capo Testa began its tourist development and is considered one of the most popular sites of the region Gallura and of all entire Sardinia. Here we can find an hotel that is oriented both to tourism and to health care. There may stay inside more than 50 hosts per time, also using the part destined to health care. The treatments include the search for welfare of guests and techniques related to rehabilitation, including the use of animals. It is a sort of first step towards a relational tourism, with services mixed with hospitality, but there is a weakness in the comparison between the proposal and how it intends to achieve, in fact the proposed form can be used only by tourists accommodated in Capo Testa. It's necessary to think in a different way, passing from touristic spaces to semi-public spaces, thus

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<sup>10</sup> [http://it.visitjordan.com/visitjordan\\_it/Principaliattrazioni/MarMorto/tabid/67/Default.aspx](http://it.visitjordan.com/visitjordan_it/Principaliattrazioni/MarMorto/tabid/67/Default.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.animanziani.it/Turismo%20protetto.htm>;

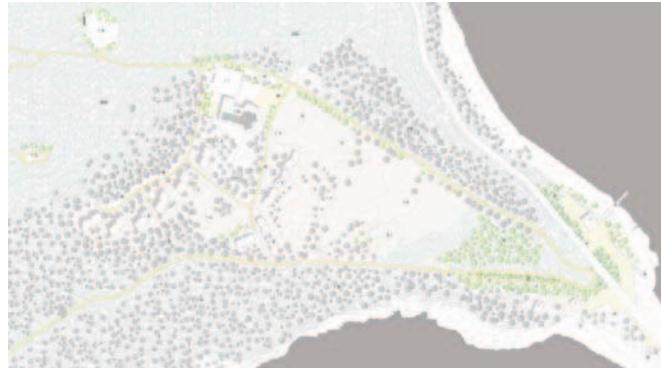
[http://www.isolevergiusia.it/info\\_servizi.htm](http://www.isolevergiusia.it/info_servizi.htm)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.pocacola.com/2007/10/02/la-nuova-frontiera-il-turismo-odontoiatrico/>;

<http://www.odontotecnici.net/news/2006/097articolo2006.htm>; <http://www.turismodontoiatrico.it/>

<sup>13</sup> "If where there is pain there is humanity, then as greater is the ability to feel pain, as greater is the social capability... the attention to other people's suffering and to the common suffering measures the humanity or the inhumanity of the existence itself", Riva F. (2003), Dialogo e libertà. Etica, democrazia e socialità, Città Aperta, Enna.

providing services related to housing and services that are also accessible to who is not a tourist , therefore accessible not only by tourists accommodated, but also by who lives it daily.



An example of a similar type of tourism is identified in the project proposal that has won the Landscape Award banished by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia in 2008, in category H: interventions for landscape planning of wide urban or extra urban areas<sup>14</sup>.

## Case 2: San Lorenzo's valley - Osilo

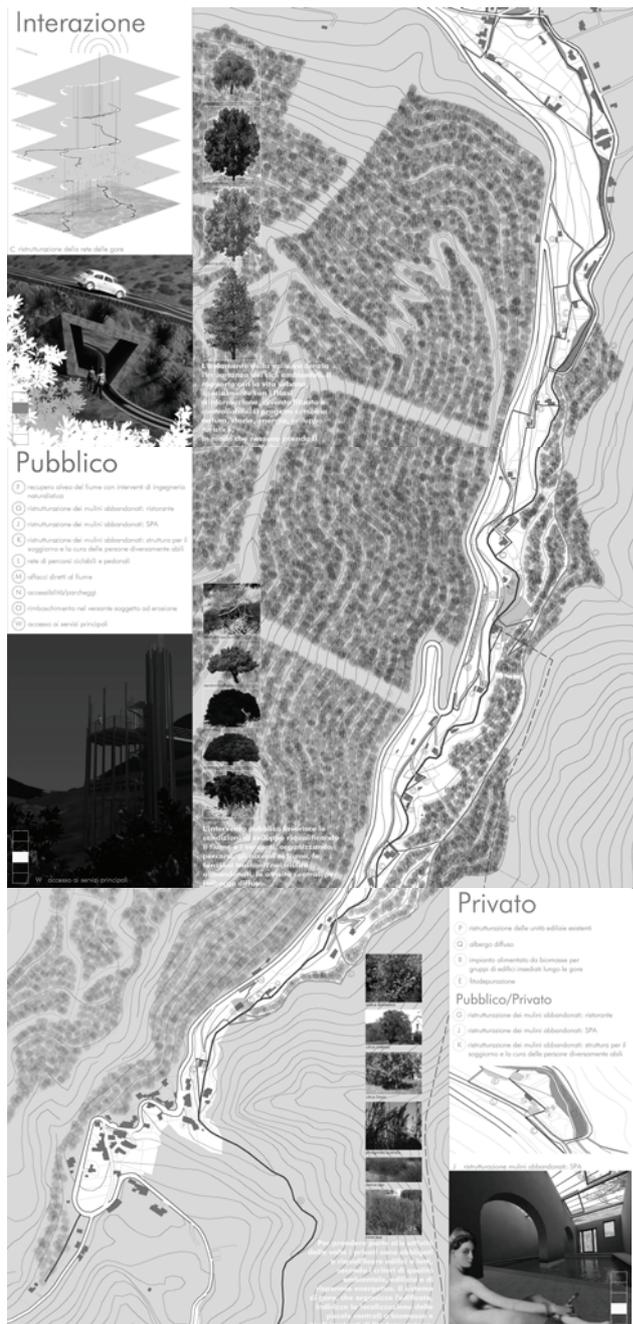
The territory of Osilo (Sassari) has an interesting and unique example of industrial architecture, represented by the system of 36 water mills located in the valley of the San Lorenzo River. Within the valley, in addition to the system of mills, there is a settlement system (about 187 inhabitants) that consists in the village of San Lorenzo a Monte, compact nucleus where live most of the inhabitants, with houses scattered along the river, some of which are represented by the mills, and finally from the village of San Lorenzo a Valle and Pirastredu. The project proposal intends to show that the landscape is a component of the identity and this remains so in spite it brings inside a tourist component. It is oriented towards a relational tourism, not only to recover part of the building stock, of which the greatest part has been turned in homes for residence or for irregular use in the weekend or in the summer, to the river setup and the regeneration of the rural historical landscape, creating the conditions for new tourist forms within a context of wider use. The recognition of the valley as "deceleration space" directs the study to functions related to the welfare and to the mental and physical health through water, through the realization of public-private functions related to health tourism.



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<sup>14</sup> Project Team: Francesco Spanedda, Paola Pittaluga, Martino Marini, Giuseppe Onni, Vlatka Colic, Gianluca Melis, Antonio Serra, Paolo Vargiu, Roberto Serra

The element that can trigger the process can be represented by a spa built in an abandoned mill in the middle of the valley. Another mill, more isolated in the narrowest part of the valley, can accommodate a residence and treatment centre dedicated to people with disabilities, for whom the therapeutic qualities of water and related activities may be useful. The spa and the centre are served by a receptive structure, organized according to the typology of the diffused hotel or guesthouses with the construction of 16 residences where tourists can stay up to 50, with an adjoining structure destined to restoration which has a capacity of up to 60 seats, favouring, however the reception of the disabled who use services and the families or companions so as to provide rare service. It is necessary to think in different ways, passing from private tourist areas in semi-public spaces, with small-scale initiatives that produce effects in large scale, thus providing service functions and services related to housing affordable to those who are not tourists, therefore enjoyable not only by the tourists, but also by who lives daily tourist space. The tourist form is set as a discontinuity respect the usual tourist forms, the opening of the health-care centre to local societies, and not only to the tourists, can allow the meeting and the comparison, generally precluded in tourist areas, thanks even at small places. The tourist structure is configured as a not preordained tourist form, but it regenerates itself thanks to the constant ability to create optimal conditions for mutual vulnerability between guest and host, allowing the generation of a cohesive social fabric, allowing the overcoming of typical individualization of tourist villages and resorts in general. Tourism and welfare, tourism and personal care are more than valid reasons for a tourist to make a choice of travel. To unite the search for self-care and the pursuit of happiness with the opportunity to make an experience of sociality in a different context permits to open very interesting scenarios. First, the generation of new relationships. The relationship between people coming from different places and cultures allows the establishment of a new social contest. In a time of great fragmentation, national and international social tensions, of a severe economic crisis, contact and engage with the otherness, someone different from us, is highly desirable. The relationship between tourists and local society is an important moment in tourism process, and we have seen that if it is mismanaged can cause extensive damage to both one and to others. It is for this that an alternative tourism form must seek to favour social contact. The territory and the tourist space are directly affected by this comparison, which must be direct, without intervention and not externally directed, to re-build the processes of urbanity. San Lorenzo Valley is thus a singular case. To produce urban processes in spaces destined to tourist forms driven by the tourist ideology, changes the way to perceive and to live the tourist spaces, above all those with low population density. Tourist form has again a real importance on low density contexts, generally marginal and with few services. The few presents don't guarantee the same conditions of urbanity of the most densely populated territories. Then it starts a vicious cycle that leads to depopulation, which in turn affect the quality and quantity of services offered. To reason only on the tourism as form of economy in this type of territories, like sardinian ones - the same reasoning is valid in areas most densely populated but very poor and underdeveloped - only requires always new hotels or resorts, while thinking about tourism as an opportunity to provide services for tourists and local society, means not only to intervene on the tourist but also generate positive effects on the host territory and improve their quality of life. Having a service in low density areas such as health and personal care means to allow to whom that live in those places to ensure easier access to goods which may be disposed only at considerable distances. It means, therefore, to build urbanity, to increase the opportunities and the quality of the life to reach a territorial equity. It means also to produce a new sense of the place: on the one hand, thanks to the possibility of having a quality service, the local society is forced to look elsewhere for their own welfare and takes ownership of their sites, on the other the tourist finds that existential authenticity, base in travel motivations. It obtains simultaneously an appropriating and re-appropriation of places by the two subjects of tourism, on a shared space. It also produces a new place, and space tourism ceases to be regarded as deterritorialized. It is not therefore essential to pursue the tourist market, but rather choose to work on people as true stakeholders in tourism process, on the possibility that compares us in an equal way, on the possibility to share a sense of belonging to something that is not a limited time experience but a lasting trace in everyday life.



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