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Cultural tourism: bridging heritage and places, learning and promoting sustainable practices

Antonella Fresa

Promoter srl, Peccioli (Pisa)

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Heritage and places

- For people living in a territory, it is normal that the heritage and the places of that area are linked by history, by traditions, by geography, by the narrations of ancestors.

- However, nowadays, these liaisons risk being broken by forms of tourism that are looking at the destinations as mines to be exploited.

- The consequences are, among others, turistification, overtourism, gentrification, negative impacts on the natural landscapes

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Tourism as a tool

- How to counteract the negative impact of tourism?

- We propose to shift from the simplistic attendance account, to a new concept of tourism as tool to complement a diversify the income of the territories

- In this light, tourism can become
  - A way of giving visibility and recognition to rural areas and their inhabitants
  - A means to promote the installation and the generation of services that are beneficial both for local communities and for visitors
  - A valuable contribution to regeneration and respectful development of the areas
  - A process of rediscovery of territorial commons based on shared resources, assets, and spaces typically managed and used collectively by the community

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A factor of well-being and social cohesion

Many ways can be explored:

- Generating fair, creative and sustainable tourism approaches

- Focusing on culture, nature, knowledge, and experiences

- Meeting together visitors and the local communities

- Taking advantage of digital networks that can allow more and more categories of workers to relocate at a distance from urban centres

- Leveraging on strong place attachment of inhabitants to strengthen social cohesion, bolstering the sense of identity of the rural population

- Developing inclusive development projects, focusing on elements of the territory whose heritage value has been successfully cultivated

- Reconnecting with flavours, traditions, craftsmanship and social practices

- Valuing spirituality and beauty of places

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Heritage Communities

- Heritage Communities: communities of people who share a strong attachment to a piece of heritage, especially the heritage elements that characterise their territory (Faro Convention, 2005)

- Heritage Communities represent an essential support for the development of cultural and sustainable tourism initiatives

- However, a shared attachment to heritage does not guarantee the capacity of the members of the community to coordinate spontaneously, to agree on the necessary rules that allow the management of the heritage to which they are attached

- Operational methods are needed for integrating the participation of local communities in political decisions, economic exchanges and territorial planning, such as
    - The payment for services for the maintenance of heritage resources
    - The creation of links between different economic sectors, i.e. tourism, agriculture, forestry, craftmanship, …

- Re-discovery of territorial commons, inclusion of minorities, valuing circular economy,

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Intangible, tangible and digital heritage

- Intangible aspects such as environmental knowledge, local socio-cultural frames and socio-economic environments, are intrinsically linked with material aspects, such as landscapes, infrastructures and built heritage

- The distinction between tangible and intangible is artificial and is not beneficial for the touristic promotion of a destination, specifically when dealing with peripheral and rural areas

- The tangible heritage is the consequence of the intangible heritage of the territory, and this liaison is needed both for the understanding of the cultural of the visited area and for the enjoyment of the visit itself

- The digital heritage can help, because of the links that are established among artefacts and associated history, which can be fruited via connected narrations

- Furthermore, the adoption of digital instruments can support the mapping the places to visit, and the integration of different layers, ranging from points of interest, accommodations, roads and transportation, healthcare services, etc.

- The holistic documentation of digital contents may be easily inserted into told stories, generating the emotional reaction of the visitors

- And the local communities can participate in providing data, photos, interviews, and other multimedia material to be used for story telling

Europeanization and cultural tourism

Culture and cultural heritage can have a primary role in conveying a sense of belonging among European communities, they have a great potential to strengthen relationships and cohesion between European communities, building on common roots and values

This potential is exacerbated by the significance of tourism in Europe.

Cultural tourism linked to culture and cultural heritage, would represent a process that indirectly may influence and reinforce social and cultural Europeanization

Cultural tourism offers a vehicle for promoting shared value, generating benefits for local destinations to introduce their cultural variety to interested visitors, creating interests for visitors to learn and appreciate similarities and differences across European countries.

Maximise impact of heritage digitisation

The European Commission highlights that the momentum is now to preserve our culture and cultural heritage and bring it together with tourism to this digital decade.

European Commission published in November 2021 the **Recommendation on a common European data space for cultural heritage** (2021/1970).

This Recommendation encourages Member States to put in place appropriate frameworks to enhance the recovery and transformation of the cultural heritage sector and to support cultural heritage institutions in becoming more empowered and more resilient in the future.

This will lead to higher quality digitisation, reuse and digital preservation across the EU, which can have spillover effects in other key sectors of the European economy, such as tourism, education, research, and cultural and creative sectors.

Cultural tourism could contribute to maximize the impact of the heritage digitization investment.

Similarly, the **Transition Pathway for Tourism** emphasis the role of cultural tourism and the need for data sharing.

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Digital promotion and dissemination

Digital promotion and information dissemination play an increasingly important role in the tourism sector, and can help to enhance the visitor experience, improve sustainability, and support the growth of the sector.

To foster digital promotion and information dissemination, it is important to develop and implement effective policies and strategies.

- To support the development of digital marketing and promotion tools, such as social media campaigns, mobile apps, and virtual and augmented reality experiences

- To support the development of digital content and information resources, such as online guides, maps, and cultural heritage databases

Culture, tourism, ICT and their mutual interactions and applications offer a tremendous potential for the digitization of cultural heritage, affecting the way cultural products are produced, assessed, consumed, managed, and promoted for tourists.

All these developments need contents!

Innovation to produce new services

Unprecedented opportunities brought by technologies, such as Data, AI, 3D, and XR bring cultural heritage sites back to life.

Virtual museums offer visitors the possibility of seeing art works in context and experiencing objects or sites inaccessible to the public.

The transformation of the sector results in easier online access to cultural material for everyone.

The output of the digital transformation means to bring innovations in the modes of service delivery, in the forms of direct interactions with customers, in the proliferation of smart products that enable real-time monitoring and updating, in the creation of services that transform the relationship with customer.

Innovations in the preservation of cultural heritage are crucial to the development of the tourism sector and to ensure competitiveness in tourist destinations.

All these innovations need contents!

Visit the margins

Sustainable, Engaging and Creative Tourism as a driver for a better future in rural and remote areas

Tourism in remote areas

Despite the remoteness, less-known areas can be particularly rich in tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage.

The 21st century tourists are not anonymous tourists, totally alien to the territory, who are taken from one "spot" to another without their consent, who buy standardised low-quality products and who will not come back, sucked in by the thirst for new destinations with an ever-higher carbon footprint. This paradigm shift is becoming more pronounced with the climate transition and its negative effects (pandemics, depletion and discrediting of fossil fuels, etc.) accumulate.

Digital infrastructure, digital tools and smart data management can enhance the accessibility and sustainability of remote and less-known cultural sites.

Research should highlight how to collect and use tourism data especially in remote areas, as well as which new infrastructure, services, tools and investments can be leveraged to enhance the digitalisation of remote cultural sites and their attractiveness.
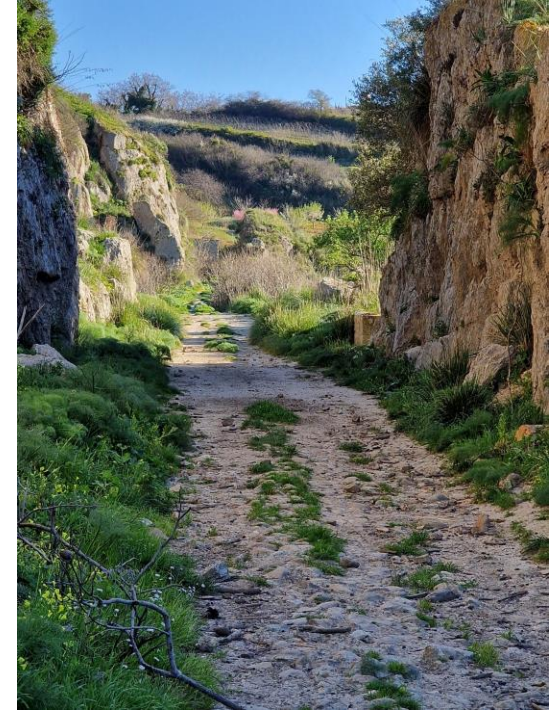
Promoting peripheral destinations

Opening up communities to display their unique strengths and local identities to interested visitors may improve confidence, support broader world-views and if developed with respect for cultural rights holders, can give a sense of ownership and pride.

The contents from cultural heritage institutions can offer knowledge on how local identities historically developed through shared and diverging underlying frameworks of values.

However, to introduce tourism successfully and in a sustainable way, clear demonstrators, training programmes and guidelines are needed on:

- Sustainable business models

- Improving the ability to re-use archival resources

- Transforming heritage into stories to be narrated also on the digital platforms

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The potential of cultural tourism

Europe has held the first spot in international tourism arrivals since the advent of mass-market tourism in the early 1950s.

Due to its valuable, diverse, authentic, and well-preserved cultural heritage, **culturally-inspired tourism is one of the main types of visits.**

The potential of Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism as a competitive regional advantage and production factor in local wealth creation has been recognized and supported by various EU policies, funding and research programmes.

The digital transformation is changing tourism itself by fostering new commercial, marketing, and organisational models, and is making it easier to shape new tourist experiences in terms of education, promotion of cultural diversity, and accessibility.

The interaction of commercial and cultural dimensions is producing a re-design of tourist destinations.

Access to a variety of online archives as well as the emergence of new social, economic, and environmental challenges is stimulating **new research questions and interpretations**.

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Tourism history

- Role of tourism in Europeanisation

- The digitalisation of historical materials has deeply impacted methodologies and approaches

- Apart from macroeconomic series (GDP, balance of payments), digitalisation has also fostered the creation of new datasets focussing on specific tourist products

Application of GIS to tourism history:

- The combination of GIS, historical sources, and 3D virtual reconstructions can be used to reconstruct cultural landscapes that do not exist anymore (e.g. the historic walls of Girona, the transhumance routes in Albania, the history of the Fugger and Thurzo families in Slovakia, the Celts paths in Morvan, the traditional villages in the Greek Epyrus) and that can tell again stories to the visitors

- Similarly, the reconstruction of cultural landscapes can represent the digital territory where remains of tourism history can be placed to track how people moved around our territories in the past, what they did, which are the traces that they left

Multidisciplinarity, multiple perspectives

Digital transformation requires acquisition of **mixed competences** and collaboration between disciplines:

- the collaboration between historians and geographers

- the collaboration between history and the creative industries

- the interest in history by economists to explore the possibility of applying models and statistical techniques to historical analysis

The mix of **analogue and digital sources** provide deeper and more extensive interpretations.

New datasets can be used by scholars of different backgrounds in new research to assess the social, cultural, and environmental impact of tourism.

Sharing data, a pre-requisite for further innovation. This implies interoperability, standards, common platforms of recommendations and guidelines.

SECreTour project

- The SECreTour project is a research and innovation action funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Programme

- The action started on 1/3/2024 and will lasts 3 years, focusing on cultural tourism in the European peripheries, assessing different local contexts, needs and types of cultural heritage

- Novel forms of tourism development will be tested and experimented

- Alternative business models will be studied and promoted

- Governance and citizen engagement will be experimented for contributing to touristic-economic planning and at the same time to community building, management of commons and cultural heritage protection

SECreTour pilots

- A series of pilot cases have been chosen to represent a wide range of European territories, communities and heritage

- They include rural and agrarian landscapes, memory places of local identities, minorities, and conflictive dark heritage.

- Through these pilots, the project will experiment the adoption of new paradigms in local contexts, facilitating effective communication and cooperation, and activating co-creative problem-solving through interdisciplinary and trans-sectoral approaches.

- Four main objectives:
  - To foster bottom-up local strategies, focusing on hidden and under-valued potentialities usually not considered, and on the experience, learning and participation of visitors.
  - To promote fair and sustainable business models based on living communities, avoiding negative impacts of touristification and reinforcing local identities and social ties
  - To generate opportunities of participation and interaction with stakeholders and local communities by the promotion of payment for services agreement
  - To foster the use of innovative approaches by local communities and stakeholders, including the use of ICT

8 cases to experiment innovation

- All the pilots have common elements: networking and cross-border vision, participatory approaches, policy lessons and recommendations, cultural heritage conservation, environmental care, economic diversifications and community building

- They will enable to test general ideas and observations in local detail and in specific governance contexts, to facilitate effective communication, cooperation and problem-solving through an interdisciplinary and transactional approach

- By working with a wide range of stakeholders, we will engage not only with cultural heritage specialists and managers, but also with farmers, local associations, young people, digital nomads, minorities, neo-rural population or the creative and cultural industries

- By integrating citizens and their perspectives into the process, the project will provide new pathways to help them face current and future economic and societal transformations through using cultural heritage and taking advantage of the new digital technologies

The pilots and their elements to promote cultural tourism

- **Bibracte - Morvan des Sommets**: 140 km long cultural route linking villages by making the best use of the existing network of paths dating back to the Celts period

- **Traditional irrigation systems in South-East Spain**: irrigation system dating mainly from the Middle Ages, during the Islamic period, extending throughout the area, from the high peaks (with systems of artificial aquifer recharge and artificial pastures) to the more fertile lowland areas generating oases in the middle of the desert

- **The heritage of the Vlach ethnolinguistic minority in the Upper Vjosa valley (Albania)**: an ethnolinguistic group distinguished by their language, which is a dialect derived from Latin, and their ways of living, based primarily on pastoral transhumance.

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- **Rural Roma heritage in Hungary:** the largest minority group in the Eastern-European countries characterised by varied ethnic and socio-cultural features

- **Historic graves of Ireland and the Irish diaspora** : a community-focused participatory environment sharing grassroots heritage

- **Renaissance of mining-related cultural heritage and heritage communities in central Slovakia** : a rural and remote areas that have a history of mining and are associated with rich cultural heritage

- **Digital nomadism in heritage-rich communities, Idrija (Slovenia) : a** 500-year history started with the discovery of mercury, a rare and valuable liquid metal and its lively mining settle-men
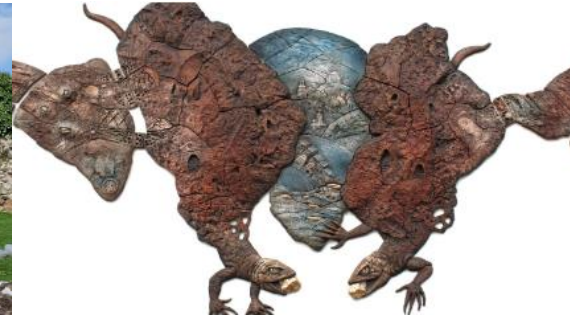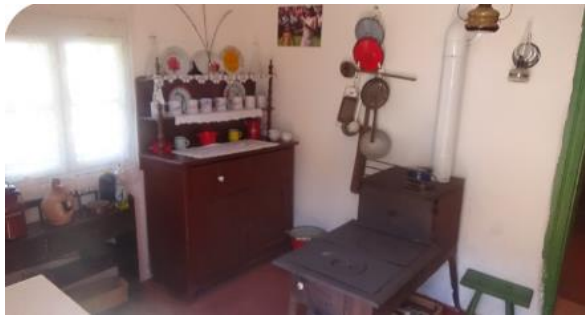
San Giorgio, the Threshold of the Sacred Mountain (Switzerland) : geologically made up of Mesozoic rocks characterized by a high fossil content, preserved in excellent condition, an extensive presence of works of art and religious architecture, testimonies of the living culture linked to the mountain, extremely important evidence of biodiversity

Thank you for your attention