TOURISM FACING A PANDEMIC: FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY

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This collection of papers has been written by the international team of scholars teaching at the Master Course in Planning and Management of Tourism Systems of the University of Bergamo, while the Covid-19 emergency was spreading in all parts of the World and especially in the territory of Bergamo.
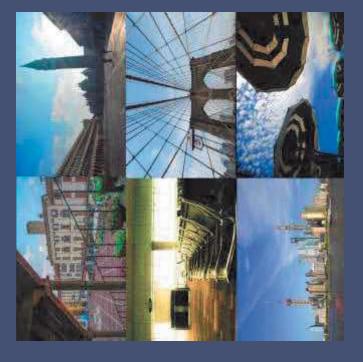
The main aim of the work is to face the topic of Tourism in the case of exogenous shocks, like the Covid-19 pandemic, reflecting on their impacts on territories, communities and heritage both during and after the crisis. The papers adopt different disciplinary approaches and methods, trying to give a multi-focused gaze to the complexity of a global phenomenon and to possible forms of recovery.

This collection is addressed to students and researchers studying in the tourism sector, who are in search of answers in this time of change and crisis. We believe that after reading this volume they won't have all the answers to their dilemmas, but they will reflect about them, they will receive proposals for specific approaches, methodologies, sources, references, examples, useful for the future of their own research.

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Table of contents

9

The unsustainable lightness of tourism

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Abstract:
Between February and March 2020 discussing of the issue of sustainability in tourism became more complex than usual. In Bergamo it became more complex than everywhere. The paper goes across the escalating phases of the pandemic emergency as the MA course in Complex Societies and Tourism Governance unfolds online. We assist to a reshuffling and tentatively reorganizing of the course priorities, as the reality around us overturns the relevance and the urgency of our research and teaching topics. Paradoxically we keep firm the complexity framework, unstable by definition, acknowledging how many complexity keywords appear the most suitable to describe the elusive present. Feedback, recursivity, multiplicity, nonlinearity, all emerge as guidelines more necessary than ever. How these concepts can be helpful to tourism to face and manage the arriving crisis is a matter of choices, of radical and deep changes. In the complexity framework, the compelling conditions driving to immediate change are considered opportunities, they are sudden jumps and leaps not requiring any time for the transition to a totally new scenario. Anthropology is a slow discipline, and it doesn't produce instant shots, but it works in real time, as events unfold, and it produces diaries, draws hypotheses, pinpoints potential, walks in daydreaming and sketches the future. This is what the paper does.
Keywords: *travel, crisis, desire.*

1. Spacetime: now

This year as well, 2020, the course on "Complex Societies and Tourism Governance" is dedicated to the issues of sustainability. Actually, it is such a broad concept that it includes almost everything. Sustainability, expanded to all fields and contexts, has degraded so much as an idea and as a practice, that it has become almost meaningless.

Sustainability for Complex Societies: I wonder again, this year as well, how I will make it a convincing topic for my students in the little space of thirty hours, and I wonder if I will be able to get across the idea that Sustainability and Complex Societies can be dealt with in one only perspective, as inseparable. I'll have to work hard. I have to construct together with the class the path to prove that 'complex' doesn't necessarily imply 'unsustainable'.

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We are in our classroom, Salvecchio, the very center of Città Alta, it's mid-February. It is time for the first live explorations of the competences shared by this group of students, which I inquire walking and lingering among their desks. Every class is different, every year the competences change, expectations shift, and the course follows. *This year our Prof. doesn't know what Eurovision is*. I suddenly realize that something very relevant is changing: nobody says that professors should know everything, of course not. But this time… Eurovision… unheard of. I see something between surprise and disdain arising in almost everybody's eyes. Complex Societies for me begin today, right here.

While we approach our anthropological themes from afar, reasoning on how myths have (maybe) universal meanings, not yet the end of February, suddenly the university shuts before our very eyes. Right away, on the spot, just like that, from morning to night. Without even giving us the time to collect a book from the office, or tidy up the papers on the desk. From morning to night I'm exiled. Not only I can't go to university - the workplace where I have been going without interruptions for seventeen years - but I can't even get any closer to Bergamo. Because if I travel to Bergamo, and then I travel back to where I am now, 300 km away, I'll have to stay in the quarantine, as everyone arriving from the North. From *that* North. All right, it's only two weeks, not really forty days. But I can't do that anyway. I am uncertain, I hesitate, I think again, and eventually I won't go. First direct travel limitation in my life.

Right away my double life begins, my presence in two places starts unfolding: my body remains still, my voice travels to the classroom, or even weirder, it scatters across so many households that I can't even imagine. I become eager to know where the students live. I had never wondered about that before. I become present in a strange way where I've never been. Now on I'll have to manage these multiple presences, or rather, these multiple semi-absences.

From the distance, via a semi-presence in Bergamo through the screen, I move together with the class from mythology to the myth of travel. We talk about material and real travels as chances of travelling in time, we immediately acknowledge the travel in time as the most powerful switch of the imaginary. So, shall we

allow ourselves a little travel in time now? and travel to when? We are coming dangerously closer and closer to now: from myth, to time, to the present moment. But it really takes a lot of imaginaries to bear the now, we should travel really far… Therefore, I dribble. I want to go on, but I'm unsure: if I introduce the right-now in the lesson, I'll remain stuck in it, I know for sure.

We talk of the unsustainable Anthropocene, of the Great Acceleration. I thought I had everything clear, I thought I knew well about it: while actually, how difficult it gets to do lessons about such huge theme on my own, talking to the screen, asking and answering questions to myself. The monitors on my desk become two, then three. I'm trying to simulate a multitude. The Great Acceleration is arriving on my desk, too. I need help. We talk of waste, of CO_2 excess, of desperate need of degrowth (Latouche, 2007), and how to involve the local communities (Leite and Graburn, 2009) in facing all this. We touch the core. We talk of the hyper success of some imaginaries, the hypertrophy of fame overwhelming the most popular destinations, which risks destroying its own objects of desire. Becoming too famous, in tourism, is a scam: if we get the question of scale wrong, when playing with desires, nothing remains to be desired. Everything seems too elusive. I need help.

A colleague from California comes to help us: she flew to Paris instead of Bergamo, where everything was just ready for her lessons, because Bergamo had suddenly entered its lockdown time. Unfortunately, while we were stuck and shocked and lagging behind ten days in our teaching schedules, the lockdown arrived in Paris, and Sorbonne closed down too. Eventually, Jennifer Wells teaches lessons from her laptop, locked in a B&B Parisian room. It's the beginning of March. Things are becoming even more complicated. Yes, it's true that I wanted to talk about complex societies, but I didn't mean it in this way. Not so directly, on our bodies, on our lives: I had been thinking, let's say, more of an intellectual exercise, I had imagined I would discuss complexity as

a theoretical framework. Instead this complexity here is coming right towards us, it's crashing right into us[48].

From our slides and from our maps it's emerging more and more clearly that every event and every entity are deeply entangled, inseparable, interdependent (intra-dependent? as Barad would say) (Barad, 2017). The keywords of complexity arise from every discourse, they are just a few words, but they're difficult ones, proving their decisive presence through all social structures, including the most pleasant like tourism, which is no longer frivolous, nor easy. All processes around us now deal fundamentally with feedback, recursivity, multiplicity. All circles back on itself, and changes. Complexity is everywhere, and we are part of its process. Complexity just as a thought doesn't exist.

It's the middle of March. Concern is spreading by now among students. My course isn't working as a distraction, it doesn't cheer them enough up with topics far from the here and the now, as someone would request. *But then, to manage tourism, should we become experts in everything? And learn about economics, town planning, biology...?* Yes, the Prof is pitiless. I might as well tell the truth. And in fact it emerges from wherever we look, well beyond the slides, that if we don't act quickly against the causes of the Great Acceleration, it will sweep us away, and even worse, we will end up pushing further acceleration, producing impacts that are the very opposite of sustainability, including the effects on tourism. We risk working on the construction of a perverse result for a sector that risks destroying itself.

In these sad times we don't want to admit it and nobody in the class dares saying, but the idea lies just behind the lines: we

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[48] I receive from Jennifer Wells, colleague and friend: "Exactly! The complex framework we were going to study, instead came right in on us – a crash course in nonlinear, networked, societal shutdown! And I had no idea I would get stuck in the short term B&B on the way to my sabbatical sublet. I was happy I had not gone to Bergamo for the dates Elena and I had originally discussed…. the last week of February, because I would still be there, locked in Città Alta. But I have to say, that teaching the class in lockdown Paris, with all of you students in lockdown Lombardy, the intensity of that moment came through in your passion for the class. Thank you, I will always remember that. Even though we were each scattered apart, we lived that time together."

ourselves, with our lifestyles and our frantic planetary movements, are causing all this disaster. We are responsible for our own weakening, as we keep triggering major changes at all levels of ecosystems, and pushing to the coexistence between species that bear consequences we can't control. Is the tourism we are discussing in class just a part of this unsustainable trend? Which kind of tourism do we want to talk about?

One more step, then: we carefully introduce some more theoretical frames to read through emerging and inscrutable tourism effects. 'Resistance', 'protest', 'denial', they are all popping up from socially engaged citizens in the hyper famous tourism destinations (Colomb, Novy, 2017). We call it now *overtourism*, but it isn't new: it already appeared in the famous chart by Steffen *et al.* (2007) which traced a surge in the global tourism business in the last half century comparable to that of the CO_2 in the atmosphere, and to the acidification rate of the oceans (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – The Great Acceleration – detail
Source: Steffen *et al.,* 2015.

We hesitate on the concept of "exponential surge". Interesting conceptual shifts, in this course. While we struggle for a critical and aesthetic meaning to this almost-neologism, a neologism for us, and while I walk through the course alone like an automaton in the fog, the confirmation of the fourth and fifth week of university closure arrives. Help. It's an overclosure for us, more than anything else.

What shall I do now? continue on the path that I decided months ago? follow the track in spite of everything? Yes, because now the course/the track has become a mission: a commitment with these students, already disappointed by my ignorance on

Eurovision and anonymized in the cell phone chat that replaces really badly the session of weird questions that used to take place in the cloister, after lesson. Now I can't lose the unexpected challenge launched by this pandemic, I must keep the commitment to preserve a semblance of normality and rhythm, almost as a ritual, celebrated during this fractured and virtualized part of the semester. Images of emptiness traverse the course, time is scanned by the same repeating scenes: empty Piazza Navona, empty Esplanade, empty Times Square, empty Tien An Men. How can I possibly talk about overtourism? Perhaps the Great Acceleration corresponds to a Super Great Deceleration. It is the old principle of action and reaction, also called the principle of inertia, or principle of Mach: in fact, it's the only classical principle that survived after the rearrangement of thought occurred in 1905, there must have be a reason for that (Geymonat, 1971).

If I have to follow the track, at least I'll do it by developing with the class an exercise of analysis of the crisis. But not this present crisis: we analyze the one that was already there, and that will be there again, I firmly believe it, though I don't know when. Because, as soon as we will be able to go again where we want to go, without explaining why to anyone, the desire to be just everywhere will powerfully return, more intense than before, going, going just to go, touch and run away, go just to be there, before we risk it becomes forbidden again.

But while we were stubbornly following the track, talking about myths, renewable energies, and creative ideas to keep them together, the closure arrived everywhere, far from Bergamo and from Italy, outside Europe, just everywhere. Now we are all locked down, all in front of the same monitors, aligned again, all facing the same problems. All globally synchronized as we were before, but standing still. The main problem now is exactly the opposite of overtourism. *Overzero* writes someone. *Overcrisis* is also read. How strange to become anachronistic in only five weeks?

Therefore, now I really have to stop, and go back to when I spoke of tourism as a journey through time, as an engine of the mind capable of creating imaginaries and forging desires. Travelling with the imaginary as evanescent experience that gives

the powerful possibility of being elsewhere and in another time. This might work, yes, this is the way forward. For the moment.

2. The study of the future

The next travels we will be able to do aren't close in time, and they will not be easy. Therefore, for the time being, there is an abundance of time to think about travelling, to design the journeys, to desire them. All this amount of available time we didn't ask for - just as in reality we were always lacking time, an interesting contradiction - could be considered with some effort as a precious option, an unexpected opportunity that wasn't there before. Of course, this time of now bears a quality that couldn't have been there before, it was just unconceivable. This one we have plenty of now isn't the *same* time as before, when we could just go to any nearby airport and buy an almost last-minute ticket to anywhere, when taking a flight was just a little more complicated than taking a bus. That kind time has vanished. Instead now we can, and against our will, we have to think. We can plan, change our mind, postpone, rethink, restart. We have time for the refinement of the idea, for the slow construction of the desire to move, we have the fundamental quality time for the preventive and detailed study of the destination.

It is a private, individual time of discovery and gradual approach to the knowledge of the destination, that can be deepened, browsed, carefully fathomed, up to imagining it almost step by step. After a while time acquires also a shared quality: when information, aspirations and imagined itineraries are shared, it's almost like making a collective travel diary before the very journey starts. So that, when we'll arrive at the crucial moment of being really able to go, to reach and touch the creved destination, we won't take the risk to neglect any detail, we won't dare to miss even a piece, as we will have already circumnavigated it on the atlas and in the texts who knows how many times. I have the impression - now widely shared - that travels will become less numerous, and less frequent, but they'll become be more important, more in-depth, weighted, selected for the better, empowered. They will be enhanced thanks to the awareness of where we are going; and deeper in the sense of taking

responsibility to preserve what we will see, because we wanted it so intensely in the exact way it is now, that we'll feel compelled to preserve it as it is.

Figure 2 – Clear waters in Venice, March 19, 2020
Source: Reuters

The travelers of the future will have to be more responsible than us, in the sense that they won't arrive at their destinations as omnivorous aliens anymore, replicating the same patterns of behavior wherever they are. The decrease of possibilities must lead to an increase in the symbolic value of the few possibilities that remain. And a decreased mobility, occurred in spite of ourselves, must help us to provide an answer to the demanding requests of the Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene: slow down please, because this way it doesn't work. At least this provides one of the possible answers.

So, in concrete: how can we work at the construction of new awareness and improved responsibility towards our future destinations? Fortunately, classical anthropological literature had provided us with exciting and accurate descriptions of the

elsewhere for centuries, fascinating accounts of the exotic and the unknown: villages and jungles, islands and rituals, as attractive as unattainable. Indeed, the more attractive and exotic have always been the less reachable. Such incredible archive of the exotic is just waiting for us.

Then, the literature produced by those that travel for a living, the modern anthropologists, has explored archaeological sites and incomprehensible megacities, floating markets and desert planes, down to the Antarctic ices. The genre of the anthropological monograph, if analyzed with a not too technical eye, represents a good middle ground between the travel narration and the tourist guide: plenty of descriptions, it often lingers on details, describes the atmospheres, becomes intimate, tries to understand the cosmos of the Others by relating the Unknown to the Known; and being often wrong. It would be quite nice to list here the dense shelves of anthropological classical monographs that invite the readers to imagine traveling, making them feel that they can explore the everywhere and believe that they know everything before they leave. Before leaving, we could read the God of Water (Griaule, 2003), or Tristes Tropiques (2005), or Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic (Evans-Pritchard, 1995), or the stories of the green ants (Garcia Marquez, 1974), or the trails of Patagonia (Chatwin, 1997), and it would be as having been already there. Space is not enough in this paper, so I refer to a next virtual version of the text, but it's important to remain aware that it's possible to travel for months, or maybe years, without leaving the shelves of the library.

The same effect of creating an imagined proximity to the destination can be achieved through to the vast narrative produced by the experts of tourism, the infinite collection of images, films, blogs, virtual tours and individual zooms, all easily accessible to everyone. Via Google Maps we can decide before leaving home every single step we'll take, including choosing on which bench to sit in a given park and from which rock to dive at sea on a certain island. Many years of journeys can be travelled without leaving the computer screen, the horrible screen that is now our cage, and the location of everyone, to date.

So, assumed for sure that sooner or later we will travel again, in the meantime it might be worth studying, dreaming, planning,

becoming more educated, more prepared and more aware kinds of tourists. The construction of the imaginary feeds on knowledge, and those who know more imagine better, and much more. I therefore advise everyone not to let yourself be caught unprepared by the next guaranteed phase of freedom, because, even if guaranteed, for some time freedom will be limited, and therefore better to have made our choices well, after having imagined them very very well.

3. Fake a tour(ism)

In the meantime, as we become aware and responsible travelers, a serious problem arises: standing still in front of the monitor is tiring, boring, and also a little depressing. Not even the smartest students would accept this only theoretical scenario. Better to step to the side for a minute, and watch things from a different angle.

We cannot travel, and this seems a very serious issue: but we are certainly not the first ones in human history who cannot travel. Indeed, to be precise, we are now for the first time living the same experience of a large part of the human population that even before didn't travel at all: it didn't travel because it couldn't, not having the means, nor did it participate in the traveling experience in a broad sense, because their familiar places weren't a destination for the travels of others. The present static condition is alien to us, but perhaps it is worthwhile to deepen it a bit, democratically, as a condition shared with much larger groups of humans than before, and a much more heterogeneous group. We can try to experience the static condition of the others both by sharing it, now that we are forcedly still, or by travelling in time again, to a different space-time, when tourism wasn't an ordinary experience for so many. While remaining still we get to know the feelings that arouse in those who don't travel and instead observe the travel of others, and not by their own choice. These are not meant to be rhetorical exercises, but rather 'mind experiments in the variation of positioning' that anyone who works in tourism should periodically do.

Figure 3 – Goats in Llandudno, Wales
March 31, 2020
Source: C. Furlong/Getty Images

Figure 4 – Ducks in a shopping mall, Florence
April 12, 2020
Source: Fiorenza Moka

I have also another easier idea: we can play a different game, teasing at our (former) frenzy of going, touching, running, showing, telling, starting again, leaving, taking off. For these extreme and incurable cases, the web reserves interesting sites that create your real fake travel photoshoot, adding exotic scenarios to the real photos you choose to send. Photo with tropical beach background, only $ 22.50. There are also 'travel' agencies that rent the entire photoset to take live photos of the place where you want to pretend to have traveled: for example, a private plane, which unfortunately doesn't take off, where instead of the rows of seats has a leather lounge, and various private rooms hazed with blue lights, just like the emergency ones (basic cost $ 250, it depends on whether you bring your trusted photographer, or rent it together with the plane). But the best agencies are the ones that offer the entire fake trip: from the flight ticket to the souvenirs, passing through the making of all necessary documentation: photos, videos, blogs, all updated in real time. It's as easy as moving to the hotel, with the right suitcases, and disappear from the circle of friends for a week, having chosen carefully, and agreed with the agency, where you want to go. Every room in the hotel is a shooting set, and all the options are available: from swimming pools to mountain slopes to cities of art, all with the appropriate UV rays, the right sound backgrounds, and also the inevitable and fictitious setbacks, such as long queues outside museums and unfortunately disturbed telephone lines. But of course it doesn't matter, since all is

carefully documented in the blog, which tells and shows every single "event". Costs go up, but remain negligible compared to real travel.

The boundary between imagining the journey and imagining to have traveled is quite thin: perhaps in the fake news of the fake travel there is no malice, there is only a desire fulfilled in a different way, and a little (not even that much) cheaper. In passing, I always thought that travel agencies were a bit like theater sets, with those incredible posters of stunning scenarios that changed with the seasons, like the sceneries on stage, and operators who spoke all languages on the phone, but never seeing the interlocutors. In fact, perhaps the telephones were fake, as the phone calls played on stage. Let's dedicate ourselves to the construction of exotic sets, in the coming months, and to the shooting of simulation travel films. Happy travels to all, the class is over.

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