



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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TOURISM FACING A PANDEMIC: FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY



edited by Federica Burini



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*To our students of the Master Course
in Planning and Management of Tourism Systems
of the University of Bergamo*

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Presentation and executive summary

This collection of papers has been written in April 2020 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. The first section is focused on the impacts of global shocks in travel behaviours seen from economic, marketing and legal perspectives (Peter Keller, Greg Richards, Andrea Macchiavelli, Roberta Garibaldi, Andrea Pozzi, Daniela Andreini, Federico Mangiò, Simon Taylor), followed by a second section which analyses territorial and environmental issues related to tourism sustainability and adaptation to global changes (Andrew Holden, Federica Burini, Jennifer Wells, Elena Bougleux). The third section investigates tourism discourses and imageries during and after a pandemic (Rossana Bonadei, Cinzia Spinzi, Stefania Maci, Milos Nacic, Sanja Iguman), followed by a fourth section focusing on behaviours and social impacts (Roberto Peretta, Gabriella Alberti, Domenico Perrotta, Kerstin Heuwinkel). The fifth section analyses survival strategies to a pandemic for art, culture and science (Terry Stevens, Iolanda Pensa, Gemma Tully, Raffaella Pulejo, Patrizia Anesa, Gloria Pastorino). The last section deals with tourism teaching during crisis by analysing the results of a survey (Stephanie Pyne and Federica Burini).

This collection is addressed to students interested 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.

I wish to thank the colleagues from the University of Bergamo and the visiting professors from British, Canadian, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Serbian, Swiss, US universities for having accepted with great enthusiasm this challenge in a so difficult period of resistance. Their valuable contributions will undoubtedly be of great interest and demonstrate that a global phenomenon should be always analysed by a global network of researchers. I also thank the anonymous referees from foreign universities who dedicated their time to read and approve this publication.

The book is dedicated to our students of the Master Course in *Planning and Management of Tourism Systems* and to those of them who particularly suffered for Covid-19.

Federica Burini

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A fragmented system in the face of the crisis

Andrea Macchiavelli*

Abstract:

The paper analyses tourism as a fragmented system in the face of the crisis. It analyses the previous periods of recession having an impact on tourism and then it focuses on the Italian context. It concludes by looking at how the conditions of flexibility that are typical of a diversified and fragmented system could allow for a greater capacity for adaptation and innovation to face a different future.

Keywords: *tourism, fragmented system, crisis adaptation*

1. Tourism and recession

From the analysis of the well-known curve of post-war world tourism development, proposed by the UNWTO (Fig. 1) in several publications and presented to the students of many tourism courses, we can notice that the growth trend of international arrivals is always very high. The trend is indeed characterized by higher and higher annual rates with respect to the average world economic growth, and the only indication of a real recession (i.e. a decrease in flows) dates back to 2009, following the well-known world financial crisis.



Figure 1 – World tourism trends

Source: UNWTO

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There have certainly been moments of slowdown, but these have never given rise to a significant decrease in international movements. We can be briefly highlighted as follows:

- The first half of the 1980s were years of great economic and consequently social transformation worldwide, especially in the Western world. The first application of technologies (microchips and their derivatives) began to spread and led to a radical change in production and work, with consequent problems of employment and slowdown in consumption, after a long period of prosperity. Tourism was affected and, as can be seen from the trend of the curve, there were some years of stagnation, without, however, any decrease in international arrivals;
- In 1990-91 there was the first Gulf War between Iraq and a coalition of states under the auspices of the UN. It lasted a few months but it was enough to slow down most of the international movements; the curve shows in fact a negative trend, which however lasted very little, recovering positively immediately afterwards;
- A certainly negative decrease occurred following the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, but it did not lead to a real decrease in flows worldwide, since it mainly affected the Western world (Fig. 2);
- The Sars epidemic in 2003 led to a very modest decline of -0.3% (UNWTO 2020). In this case the Asian area was mainly involved and the worldwide decline was almost non-existent (Fig. 2);



Figure 2 – International Tourist Arrivals and Forecast
Source: UNWTO

So the only real recession occurred in 2009 (Smeral, 2011), when there was a decrease of 4% in terms of flows (Fig. 2) and 5.4% in terms of expenditures.

From these preliminary observations we can understand the seriousness of the Covid-19 global tourism crisis in 2020, because, as can be seen in Fig.2, the forecast of the decrease in international flows is so far absolutely not comparable to previous situations; the UNWTO forecasts a decrease of both variables of 20-30 %, which would mean a return to the level of international flows in 2009-10.

There are, however, other considerations to be made on the relationship between tourism and crisis. In the face of the very limited global crises and few accidents that we have mentioned above, however, in recent years there have been many local crises, induced both by war or terrorist events and natural events (earthquakes and tsunamis). As far as the terrorist attacks are concerned, it is enough to recall the attacks in Bali, Egypt, Thailand and in the European cities themselves (Nice, Paris, London and others); in the case of natural disasters, the example for all to remember is the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, during which almost fifteen countries were hit, some of which were highly tourism-intensive; as a result, there were around 250,000 victims and devastating destructions. The effect of these crises was mostly local (albeit sometimes on a large scale) and in most cases the damage caused by the event was far greater than the actual scale of its dangers. Let us think of some attacks that occurred in Egypt in 2005; although serious (almost 90 victims) and occurred in three locations, they were prompt events that subsequently resulted in the almost total blockage of tourist flows for a few years. However, subsequent analyses carried out in the territories affected by any kind of critical event, including those of an economic nature, have shown that, although at different times and intensities, local tourism showed a particularly higher degree of resilience. In other words, in the face of local crises and immediate stress, there seems to be a strong resilience on the part of tourist destinations (Keller, Bieger 2011), which rapidly leads them to a recovery in their tourism function. The stress resulting from the event leads the tourist to immediately exclude the

affected destination and the whole country as well, due to a wide substitutability of the chosen location, which however exists for any type of tourism. Afterwards, when there has been a decrease in media clamor about the event and potential tourists feel reassured, they can take the destination into account again very quickly.

All this in order to highlight the context in which the current Covid-19 crisis is taking place, well aware, however, that the characteristics of the crisis, its globality, its duration and its future unpredictability have dimensions and implications never seen and happened before. Moreover, in this crisis what is directly affected is precisely tourism in its essence of "encounter with the other", which is precisely any way of making tourism, both in the short and long distances. The measures against the pandemic aim to contain the proximity between one person and another, exactly what tourism tends to favour or puts as a condition, both during the trip, during the stay and during visits. It goes without saying that tourism therefore ends up being the sector most affected by the pandemic in all its productive activities.

2. The Italian tourism system in the face of the crisis

Addressing issues of the Italian tourism system regardless of the overall economic context of the country would not help to understand the conditions in which tourism companies will find themselves following the crisis for Covid-19. Not because tourism companies are dependent on public financial sources; indeed, the great majority of Italian companies are totally made up of private capital and they have always enjoyed very little funding from the public administration. The only exceptions are given by those regions with a special status and by some public interventions in the South of Italy. The problem arises because in the current situation public intervention becomes a condition of survival for most companies in tourism sector and the level of indebtedness of the Italian economic system certainly does not allow sufficient room for manoeuvre. The Italian public debt is among the highest in Europe with over 135% of GDP, following only that of Greece; the public finance balance remains negative (public deficit) mainly due to the interest to be paid because of the huge debt. Therefore, the

conditions of public finance do not allow the Public Administration to exceed in to face the crisis. Taking into account the appropriations already made and those planned, the Government's forecasts of April 2020 foresee to bring the public deficit in 2020 from 2.4% of GDP, before the crisis, to 10.4% and the public debt to 155%. All this in the face of a drop in Gross Domestic Product of 8%. As we can imagine, these are huge figures which reflect economic conditions that the country has never managed after the war. In this scenario there are some large companies that play (or could play) an important role in the tourist flows of the country and that for many years have been absorbing huge public resources. Alitalia is one of them and someone, in these times of pandemic, has pointed out that "Alitalia burned until a few weeks ago and presumably still burns, every day, the equivalent of about 40 lung ventilators" (Rossi, 2020, p. 10). It is worth remembering that, following the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 and the consequent blockade of air transport, some important flag carriers, such as Swissair (Switzerland) and Sabena (Belgium), for example, declared bankruptcy because their respective governments took the opportunity to restructure and relaunch national air transport on other management bases. Alitalia was in a precarious situation even then, but until today it has continued to absorb public funds with the outcome mentioned above.

The characteristic that distinguishes the Italian tourism system from that of the other major European tourist countries is fragmentation and consequently the small size of the companies. The average size of Italian hotels is about 68 beds, which means about 34 rooms; the penetration of hotel chains is the lowest among European countries, equal to 16% of the total number of rooms (and 5% of the number of hotels), compared to 48% in Great Britain, 49% in France and 56% in Spain (Horwath, 2019). A similar situation can be found in intermediation system (Tour Operators and Travel Agencies). Precisely this fragmentation has been one of the strengths for many years because it is the expression of an autonomous, lively, innovative entrepreneurship and above all able of interpreting the needs of the emerging tourism market of the 1960s and 1970s, when the countries that are competitors today (in particular Spain) were not yet able to offer a tourism

proposal in line with the needs of the northern European populations, attracted by the sun, climate and resources of Italy. Indeed, in the 1970s Italy was the leading tourist country in the world, as it received more international tourists than all the others, including the United States, whose demographic size was five times greater. This model based on small and very small businesses has substantially remained the same even today, because it cannot be changed in short or medium time, even if it has certainly evolved in terms of quality, as well as quantity, generating niche specializations, territorial characterizations and excellence, even in the luxury market. It is enough to remember that even today less than 30% of the accommodation businesses still have the legal form of joint-stock companies, while over 40% are sole proprietorships, the most basic legal form to operate. In organized intermediation the percentage of corporations rises to 35%, but also in this case too sole proprietorships represent 40%. (Bazzucchi, Coccia, 2018). This means a largely undercapitalized system of enterprises, in which the resources that support them are the result of the company's accumulation over the years, which in the vast majority have been translated into substantial investments in the structures themselves, through self-financing; therefore, not having external sources of support, the accumulated capital has gone to support the company's development and it is reasonable to believe that it has brought a certain structural debt. In essence, tourism companies have little margin to cope with an unforeseen and unforeseeable shock and for this reason they are now clamouring for State intervention. In tourism the object of the exchange between supply and demand is in fact a perishable product, as if it were food. What is not sold today cannot be stored in warehouses to be sold tomorrow; a hotel room or a seat on an unsold flight for two to three months (or more) are hopelessly lost (Vanhoe, 2005). This puts companies in the condition of having to compensate for that net loss either with private capital accumulated over time or with external funds; the recovery from the production activity will never be able to compensate for the loss suffered, it may at most (if things go very well) allow a greater accumulation in the future.

But this fragmentation and fragility of the Italian tourist system shows on another side its strong point. The small size of the companies and their spontaneous development over time in the face of a growing market, enriched by inventiveness and the typically Italian capacity for hospitality, have produced an extremely flexible system, capable of innovation, creativity and enterprise, which in times of crisis can represent an irreplaceable resource. It is a system undoubtedly resilient to crises as it has repeatedly shown on previous occasions, even if it is a capacity for adaptation that is not homogeneous among all the companies in the system. The presence of a multiplicity of companies that differ in size, characteristics and entrepreneurial and managerial skills means that the capacity to resist, adapt and evolve according to new market perspectives is a capacity that is expressed at very different levels from one company to another. Once again, as already happened during the great economic transformations of the last century, we must expect that there will be companies that will face change (because change will be involved) and adapt to the new market conditions, perhaps creating new types of activities, new niches and new market positions and others that will not succeed, realistically determining a new physiognomy of the tourist offer system of the country. The entrepreneurial capacity and innovative spirit of individuals will play a decisive role in this process, but the economic conditions of origin and the financial support offered by the institutions will also be a decisive variable.

3. Prospects and trends

At the moment of writing, the public funds in favour of tourism are still very poor, even though they have been promised. The orientation so far seems to go primarily towards guarantees and loans at very low rates, rather than towards resources directly provided to companies. This is in addition to the real critical node of the Italian economic system even in normal times, namely bureaucracy. It has been amply demonstrated that companies find it difficult to access financial contributions because the regulations protecting them from abuse and the organisation of disbursements that are pivotal to the banks do not allow the

fluidity of disbursement that would be necessary. Moreover, the granting of loans does not bode well because, as has been said, the main problem is that of covering losses that are expected to be considerable. Finally, all this seems to lack an overall plan for the stability of our tourism system, as a result of which the granting of loans is aimed at precise objectives and not only spread evenly across the regions. What may happen in the close future will depend to a large extent on the restrictions that will be imposed in the coming months and therefore on the health conditions in the country. ISTAT announces that from March to May 2020 about 81 million presences will be lost, equal to 18.5% of annual presences, with a total loss of about 9 billion Euros. Even if a controlled tourist movement is allowed in the summer months, it will still generate very scarce flows for several reasons: first of all because we will have to renounce to a large extent foreign flows, which represent about 50% of the total movement, and then because the economic conditions of a large part of the population, forced to give up work for about two months, will not leave much room for holiday tourism, mainly because of the need of recovering on the productive activity. Therefore, it will be mainly a local tourism, developed through people's own means or at most rented, of short duration and perhaps aimed at the (re)discovery of less known and less crowded destinations. For both the tourist and the operator, creativity will be stimulated by the identification of unusual ways of developing tourism. In this perspective, the extension of the season could be an implicit consequence, for three reasons: the commitment to work in the summer months, the availability of operators who will not be engaged in traditional maintenance or the usual holidays, and the preference of tourists for non-crowded times and places, this time for health reasons. Certainly, we will have an abundant occupation of second homes and apartments for rent, a trend that is the opposite of the one that has characterized the last few years; already now the prices of rented houses are reported to be increasing significantly. The price factor will become a decisive variable, but it is difficult to say at what level it will be compared to the past; it will probably depend on the type of business. On the one hand, in fact, the strong competition resulting from the scarcity of demand will push

towards a deflationary trend, with prices decreasing; but the additional cost resulting from the precautionary measures imposed on all accommodation facilities, and especially the reduction of space occupation levels, certainly impose higher prices. The luxury market will probably be able to express itself with high quality guarantees and consequently with prices definitely on the rise.

All Tourism Trade Associations assume a high mortality rate of tourism businesses; companies considered at risk of closure would reach 30%. In order to avoid this, capitalisation interventions are indispensable; where it is impossible to do so autonomously, especially in the sector of small and very small companies, it could be done with public intervention, but the overall conditions of the Italian economy seem to prevent this; it would seem that the European Union is committed to this perspective, with reference, however, to the whole productive activity (Fubini, 2020, p. 13), but it is not easy to imagine that the intervention could reach the very small tourism companies. A high mortality in tourism businesses would involve a significant change in the physiognomy of our tourism system; mortality would in fact affect the smallest and most obsolete businesses, those already destined to leave the market in future years; crisis situations, as already occurred for tour operators and airlines in previous stressful situations (2001, for example), naturally affect already precarious businesses, due to excessive debt and poor market prospects. On a territorial level this could lead to a weakening of the less attractive destinations; in the mountains many small towns that today are based on small tourist economies could suffer further depopulation. It is realistic to believe that in many cases the more solid companies could take over from the more precarious ones; in this case the role and penetration of hotel chains, as well as franchising systems in the catering sector, could be strengthened. All this could also have the effect of strengthening the framework of the Italian accommodation system, as other crises have shown (Waiermair, 2011). In this perspective also the level of productivity, today rather low at average level, could grow; the productivity expressed by tourism companies is structurally lower than that of other productive

sectors (Baumol, 1991) and the Italian one, given its characteristics, even lower than that of other countries. An increase in productivity would mean an improvement in the management efficiency of the firms, to which three main channels will be mobilised:

- *innovation*; it is one of the great resources of Italian entrepreneurship and it will also be one of the main variables of the possibility for businesses to hold on to a different model of tourism;
- *the aggregation and integration between companies*; what until now has represented a wish and appealed to the voluntary initiative of companies and institutions, after the crisis will tend to become more and more an imperative. The strengthening of a fragile and fragmented system also involves forms of business cooperation and integration that strengthen the productive capacity on a managerial and above all economic level. It would certainly be useful if incentives to companies were given also taking this purpose into account;
- *training*; the "self-made man" model that still characterizes a large part of our tourism, cannot disregard consideration a specific training action, addressed not only to the new generations, who can now take advantage of many opportunities, but especially to the entrepreneurial and managerial level. Without this, there will be no shift towards a more efficient model.

4. Conclusions

It is realistic to believe that, regardless of the evolution of the crisis and the stability of the system, the future of tourism will, for a not short period, be different from the one we have left. Faced with the change imposed by exogenous factors, the Italian tourism system has always shown that it knows how to take up the challenge and, even with different territorial varieties and temporal conditions, to come out of it transformed and competitive. The conditions of flexibility that are typical of a diversified and fragmented system have, more than once, allowed for a greater capacity for adaptation than that found in more efficient systems. Tourist destinations are inhabited, lived in, and supported by living communities that look to sustainability

because it is in their interest to ensure the profitability of tourism for future generations. If the resources put in place are sufficient to support businesses, the capacity for resilience will be expressed in capacity for innovation, in sufficient creativity to face a different future.

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