

DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AS CHOICE FOR THE FUTURE: THE CITY OF VENICE

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability of development expressly covers the guide principles of the European Union and represents a ground to find solutions to deal with the complexity of the current socio-economical scenery. This principle is also valid for tourism, which itself becomes one of the key sectors to set up a strategy, leading to a sustainable development of the land. Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism which involves being conscious of the potential environmental, economic, and cultural impacts of tourism. Tourism finds in environmental, artistic and cultural factors of attractiveness the lever of its main competitiveness; the sustainability of its use can represent an extraordinary challenge for the general upgrading of the natural and urban environments on which tourism finds a fertile ground for its development. To reach this target, the correlation between the carrying capacity, which is the natural ability of an ecosystem to produce in a stable manner the necessary resources for the species that inhabit it, and the critical natural capital, which is the minimum necessary level for the biological reproducibility of the ecosystem, the amount of pollution and waste that the planet is able to withstand, should not be neglected. This paper sets as objective the analysis of the most critical aspects related to these topics and the proposal of a concrete model of a sustainable tourism consumption, competitive and upgrading for the territory, assessing the application to a concrete case: the city of Venice.

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, sustainable development, competitiveness, green economy, carrying capacity, strategic plan, Venice, urban implications.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability derives from the scientific and natural literature, which defines sustainable management of a resource if, once its ability to regenerate is known, its exploitation does not exceed beyond a certain threshold (Lanza, 2006). Being sustainable, therefore, means being able to

live within the carrying capacity of the system which you are part of, i.e. not breaking the dynamic balances that maintain the life. In the literature, the theme of sustainability usually refers to the renewable natural resources; for exhaustible resources, rather than sustainability, it would be correct to talk about the times and conditions of the resource's optimal exploitation (Spangenberg & Valentin, 1999). To set up sustainable development strategies, it is necessary to decide what should be the level of protection afforded to the natural resources and whether there might be a form of compensation between the different types of capital. From the economical point of view, we progressively became aware of the fact that the global development considered in a classical sense (i.e. linked exclusively with the economic growth) would soon cause the collapse of the natural systems and has led to the conclusion that the development is real if only the quality of life improves in the long term, so it is not only about economy and environment, but also about social development. (Lindberg and Johnson, 1997). Therefore, a wider concept of sustainability arises, which implies the ability of a development process to sustain over time the reproduction of global capital composed of the environmental, economic and human/social capital (Lombardi, 2011).

For tourism, a sector of primary importance in our country, the debate about sustainability is recent, but if properly set, may account for the close relationship between the strategies for the sustainable development and the governance of complexity. In relation to the socio-environmental limits of a certain tourist resort, we identify the carrying capacity, which involves pervasively different aspects: economic, infrastructural, social, environmental, which can in turn give rise to different impacts.

Tourism should undertake the path of sustainability in a strong way, in order to safeguard these natural, environmental, artistic and cultural factors that form the basis of its prospects development. This applies particularly for Italy, which should do a sustainable tourism the main competitive levers of its country's system. Venice is a city that has, in addition to a large number of tourists, ecosystems and habitats of a certain fragility and where there is, at the same time, an artistic-cultural heritage of great cultural value. It should be able to promote processes of retraining and modernization which enables it to deal with the contradiction that the tourism, inevitably, brings with itself. The goal of this paper is to understand if the city is dealing with the phenomenon in a effective and sustainable way, assessing whether the actions taken so far can be considered truly effective and valid for purpose to pursuit of a sustainable tourism development. The considerations will be made by presenting the main features of the tourism demand and a focus on some aspects related to the carrying capacity and the pressure exerted by the tourism on the City

SUSTAINABILITY, A MULTIFACETED CONCEPT.

The first definition in temporal order of sustainable development was the one contained in the Brundtland report in 1987 and later retaken from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), according to which: "The development is sustainable if it meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the possibility of the future generations to meet their needs." The central element of this definition is the need to search a equity of an intergenerational type: the future generations have the same rights of the present ones. In the second analysis, can be also seen a infragenerational equity, i.e. people belonging to different political, economic, social and geographical realities within the same generation have the same rights. This statement introduces the theme of sustainability between production factors. The production of goods and services of a country is made possible by the use of physical (capital represented by machines), human (labour force) and environmental production factors. The proportions of these factors depend on many aspects: the availability of certain technology, the development level of the country, the costs of various factors. Within this optical the concept of substitutability takes place, about which we can consider four positions:

- Very weak sustainability (VWS) (position of abundance)
- Weak sustainability (WS) (accommodating position)
- Strong sustainability (SS) (community position)
- Very strong sustainability (VSS) (radical position)

If for the proponents of the weak sustainability a growth without limits is admissible weak and in general the growth itself is considered as a positive factor, for the supporters of the strong sustainability the economic growth is seen as an element to curb and control. There is a point beyond which the industrial activities, pollution and other human activities, if carried out in a non-responsible way, can cause not remediable damage not only to the environment that surrounds us, but to the entire ecosystem (carrying capacity). The policies oriented to an environmental and territorial improvement have been done by man for man, in a long term vision. Here is, therefore, the need to guarantee conditions of human welfare (security, health, education, etc.)

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The tourism development often takes us in front of a paradox: on one hand can contribute to achieve socio-economic and cultural goals, economically justifying the conservation of natural and historical-cultural resources and make a place unique, on the other hand it can lead to their degradation and loss of attractiveness, if the use of resources is not adequately managed. The carrying capacity of a location was defined as: "the number of people bearable for an ecosystem, which is a set resources naturally presented in particular locations, before it deteriorates" (Gland, 1991). To achieve a point where you do not exceed the carrying capacity, we must come to a compromise between the intention to minimise the environmental damage and maximizing the use of the environment, therefore, as a resource. By analysing the tourism bearable capacity, it is possible to focus on different aspects: economic (potentiality and strategies to develop tourism market), the infrastructural (constraints to development connected to reduced receptivity or offer other services), social (compatibility of the tourism presence with the local population), environmental (resource consumption and pressure on land) (Spangenberg, J. H., 2000). Development policies oriented towards demand segments considered preferential for the offer should be defined, which try to promote a conscious behaviour from the tourists. To analyse the effects of tourism development on the social relationship between the visitors and residents, a scholar, G.V. Doxey (1975), offers an interesting contribution; he identifies a first phase (called euphoria phase), in which the few lucky tourists have peacefully entered the host society sharing lifestyle, a second one (apathy phase) in which there is already the conflict, the number of tourists grows and the two groups (tourists and residents) are dividing the existing infrastructures, despite, however, there is still a contact between them. Then there is a situation of separation (irritation phase) characterized by a local community numerically now lower than the one of the tourists. The latter get their own infrastructures and have contact with the residents through established channels only. In fourth time (phase antagonism) we see a reversal of roles as it ends up that the interests of the tourists dominate on those of the residents, who becomes at the service of tourists without no more than an own tradition. Some propose a situation that goes beyond the fifth phase, where there is no host society, nor it has ever existed. The reference, in this case, is the forms of "artificial tourism". The tourism system, presenting as a complex and cross phenomenon, does not make sufficient self-regulating market, so that the dynamics are controlled, but it requires a public intervention and a system of policies that controls the complexity and manages the equities. The different components presented in the destination must act in a logic of the system, identifying common goals to pursue, albeit there are a series of conditions and constraints of exogenous nature, which can heavily influence the construction and operation of the system itself. It is difficult to propose concrete models of sustainable tourism, which agrees the different actors of the supply and

the demand avoiding as much as possible the undermined interest of the parties. It is well known, in fact, that supply and demand tend to perpetuate actions aimed at the satisfaction of their own goals, but the important is to find a balance, a meeting point, which allows both parties to reach their own purposes, in mutual respect.

VENICE , THE STRATEGIC PLAN AND A MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The economic growth, translated also in a higher income per capita, has meant that a more and more increasing number of people have the possibility to spend a portion of their time and their income available in tourist activities. This fact has in fact placed under pressure several areas of the world and Italy, as Venice. The city, therefore, has accrued the awareness of the importance to develop a strategic plan that promotes processes of retraining and modernization in favour of a stronger and more adequate positioning of the Venetian system in the economic, social and territory processes of the North East and Europe. The purpose is to make a city characterized by high quality of life of its inhabitants (in its various aspects, relational, cultural, etc.) and its structure economic and environmental, but also to create a shared and participated process, whose purpose is to design, through a meeting point between public and private actors, future shared choices. The Veneto Region recognizes Venice and the lagoon as a tourist thematic and territorial system as territorial homogeneous terms of tourist types and specialized in terms of presence tourist resources, capable of standing the development and the promotion of an integrated range of large and consistent tourism products (Regional law development and sustainability of tourism in Veneto, 2013). The difficulty in creating a model of sustainable development for Venice lies in the complexity of the territory and in the correlation between its variables. A choice that can bring benefits and solve certain situations can rise to new problems or aggravate others already existing.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the present goal, the official statistics have been analysed to assess the main actions and policies taken so far for the management of sustainable tourism in the city to determine whether they can be considered really effective and valid for the pursuit of a sustainable tourism development. The increase or decrease of the tourist flow (*stock*) and their distribution throughout the year will be evaluated, as well as the strategic plan that the city of Venice has prepared.

The city of Venice has, in fact, drawn up a strategic plan, "Strategic Plan Of Venice 2004-2014", i.e. a process of a programmatic elaboration oriented to generate those decisions and those actions that are crucial to realize the vision of the desired future from the main social and economic factors of the city.

It promotes processes of retraining and modernization in favour of a stronger and more adequate positioning of the Venetian system in the economic, social and territory processes of the North East and Europe. In its final form, the document is divided into three parts:

- Reading Guide: it presents the document highlighting the additions and changes made to the document after the update of some analysis, of the outcome of meetings with privileged actors of the local system and, more particularly, of the outcome of the Project Committees.
- Introduction: it includes the content of the project and draws all the characteristic points. In particular, it recalls the local experience about the strategic approach to the development issues, states the methodology adopted by relating it to the current complexity of the structure management of the local Venetian system, illustrates the points characterizing the project and the audit trails of the choices made.

The Strategic Plan of Venice 2004-2014: develops contents of the structural Conditions and the strategic Lines and the contents of the strategies and policies related to them.

Valentin and Spangenberg (1999) have formulated a framework formed by four dimensions thanks to which it is possible to organize the sustainability indicators of a given territory. As indices, in addition to the 3 Ps (people, profit, planet), the institutional perspective as focal vision has been included. The prism allows to establish some indicators of sustainability and standards for the planning and management of the local community (Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006; Cottrell & Vaske, 2006; Cottrell, Vaske, & Shen, 2007; Cottrell, Vaske, Shen, & Ritter, 2007). The indicators are biophysical, social, management, as well as for the other conditions of general interest in relation to the issue reported (Miller, 2001).

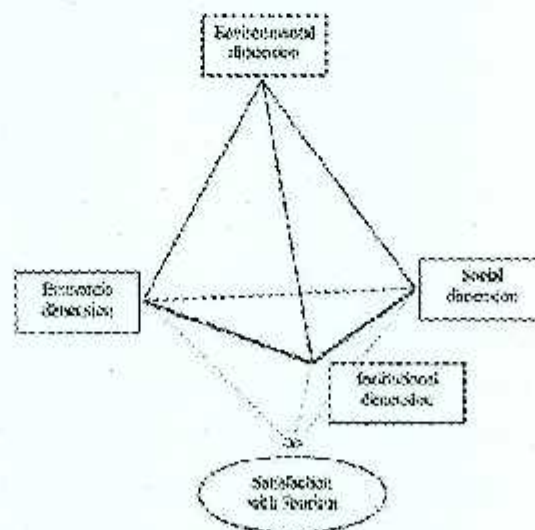


Figure 11. THE SUSTAINABILITY'S PRISM - Spangenberg & Valentin, 1999

RESULTS

After World War II the tourism phenomenon in Venice's historic centre has grown considerably:

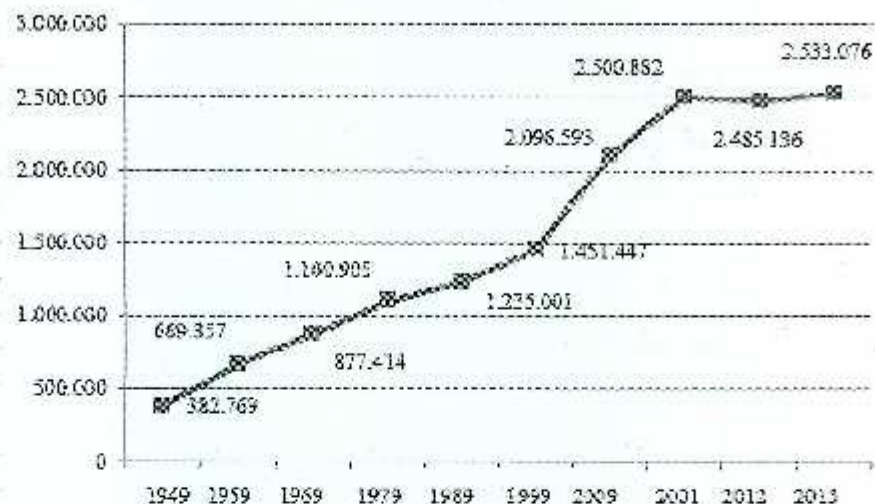


Figure 12. Tourist arrivals in the historical center of Venice from 1949 to date

Data Source: Web Site www.comune.venezia.it, Statistics and Research Section

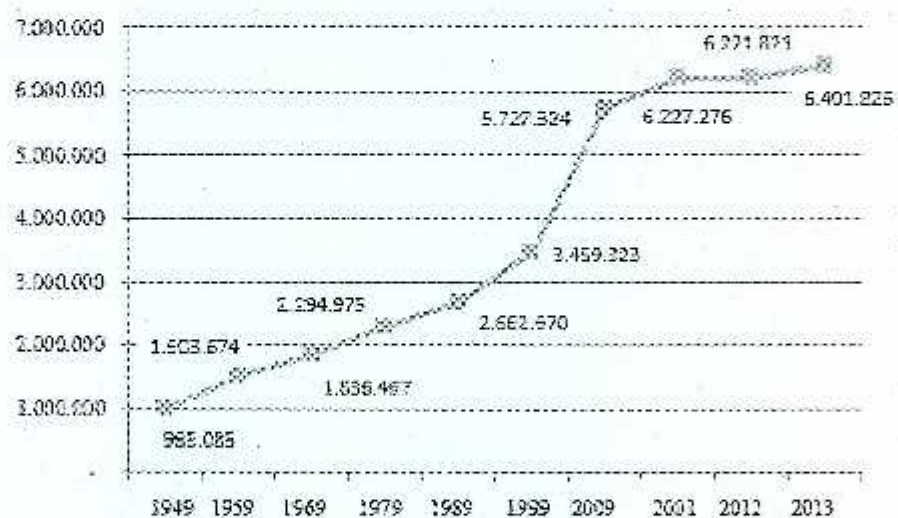


Figure 13. Tourist attendance record in the historical center of Venice from 1949 to date

Data Source: Web Site www.comune.venezia.it, Statistics and Research Section

The origin of the tourists coming to Veneto Region can count on 64.8% of foreigners (Statistical Report, 2013), while each 85% of foreigners visit Venice and only 15% of Italians (Tourism in the City of Venice, 2011), as reported in Table 1.

This means that the capital of the lagoon has an attraction capacity in the foreign market that is certainly superior to that perceived at a national level.

Americans	498963	1051088
Italian	469035	1082744
French	314053	915769
English	246915	664332
Germans	201486	564936
Japanese	178681	270287
Chinese	162088	233898
Spanish	159008	363129
Brazilians	123210	232465
Australians	122937	284840
Russians	81698	190552
Indians	29177	58305

Table 7. Elaborations Department Tourism on Api Data, 2012

The first foreign market in Venice was formed by U.S. tourists, who represent approximately 12.7% of tourists, followed by the French (11.1% of presences in 2012), the English and German (8.7% of presence in 2012) and by the Spanish (4.4% of presences in 2012). Compared to 2011, in 2012 a significant increase of arrivals from China, Russia and the UK (respectively 17.8%, 12.5% and 11.3%), while there has been a sharp decline in arrivals from Spain and Italy (respectively 20% and 11.6 %).

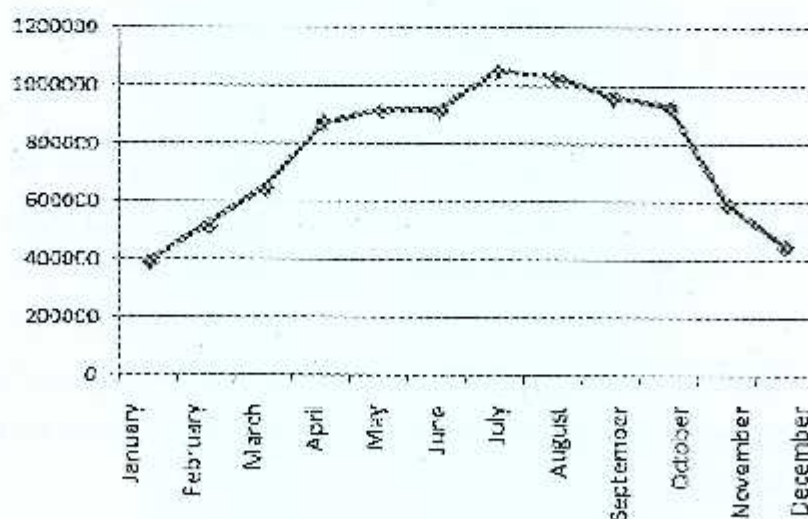


Figure 14. Elaborations Department of Tourism on Api Data, 2012

In the solar year tourist flows appear to be very high in the spring and summer. The months in the year 2012 that have registered the increased number of tourists, were July and August, while the months with a smaller number of tourist presences were in the winter, especially in January and December.

The main effects that these tourism inflows cause to the City can be summarized as:

- Decrease of the ratio quality/price of the main products and services;
- Increase in the cost of living for residents;
- Concentration of the accommodation structures in the historic centre;
- Congestion of the area and public transportations.

The City has developed some tools to try to limit the phenomenon, for example, it is attempting to distribute events of particular tourism call throughout the year (to limit the overlap in the months of high season), and has created an ad hoc instrument: through the municipal portal *venice connected* you can book the means for public transport, parking lots, visits to museums, access to the Casino and taking advantage of several good discounts if you decide to book in a date considered "low affluence", as indicated by attached calendar.

Some other Italian cities (for eg Milan), provide the obligation to use this type of instrument to visit several attractions of particular art appeal, such as the Cenacolo Vinciano.

CONCLUSIONS

The city of Venice is a confirmed pole of tourist attraction internationally recognized. As shown, the high tourist flows throughout the year makes the land "consumption" extremely elevated. Therefore it is necessary to plan about sustainable policies in order the long period competitiveness, otherwise an over exploitation could cause environmental damages that can never be repaired.

However this setting cannot ignore that the tourism is a key economic sector for Italy and for Venice, not only from the point of view of the turnover *four cost* but, given the particular Italian economic situation, especially in the field of employment. Within this process, it is important to remind the need to combine housing and tourism, so as to ensure the liveability of the inhabitants of the city.

The tourism in Venice will develop and will be more sustainable at the same time only if a systemic view of the sector will be accrued and private intervention and entrepreneurship will operate in synergy with the public administration.

In particular, it would be desirable that the city increasingly develops measures that would allow a better distribution of tourism flows throughout the year, in order to reduce the excessive congestion in the centre of the City, especially during the summer months.

Finally, should not be underestimated that tourists arriving in Venice could also be potential visitors of the near local realities rich in history and culture (for example, the Venetian villas).

In recent years Venice, recognizing the level of pressure that the tourism causing to the territory and to its inhabitants, has attempted to invest in interventions that would allow a better management of the arrivals in town; anyway this does not seem to be sufficient to restore the balance. Sustainable tourism, if considered concrete cornerstone of policies and strategic choices of the City, will be an asset, particularly in the medium-long period.

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