

Special Issue Roots Tourism

FUORI LUOGO

Rivista di Sociologia
del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia

Guest Editors

Tullio Romita

Antonella Perri

Philippe Clairay



Direttore Fabio Corbisiero
Caporedattore Carmine Urciuoli

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Roots Tourism and Emotional and Sustainable Enhancement of Places. An Introduction

The “Roots tourism” is a very relevant social phenomenon at national and international level and has ample potential for development.

In the Italian case, for example, according to some recent estimates (2020) highlighted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, focused only on people of Italian origin living abroad, the potential tourist base would fluctuate around eighty million Italian-descendants. Furthermore, fifteen years ago there were already around six million roots travelers to our country with an economic impact estimated at several million euros (Italian National Tourist Board).

In the last decade there has been a renewed international interest in the study and analysis of the phenomenon, because it is connected to the international debate and reflection on the themes that characterize contemporary society, and for the important role it plays in the field of analysis of the recovery of local identity, of the enhancement of the history of places and of memory, of attachment to places and of living those places with renewed intensity and through experiential contacts.

However, the production of scientific activities, with in-depth studies and research, does not appear able to fully support the understanding of crucial issues such as, for example: the actual motivations that drive people to implement this type of travel; the perception of the roots tourist by the native host population; the type of relationship that is established as a result of the meeting between the tourist of the roots and the local community.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of roots tourism shows a limited presence of ad hoc products within the tourism industry, and the same happens in the context of public policies aimed at their reevaluation. With this goal in mind, it should be noted that for destinations that intend to compete in this tourist segment, at a national and international level, traditional actions, also those dedicated to the construction of what is usually called place branding, must necessarily be added. In other words, they must activate public governance mechanisms capable of bringing out the emotional and experiential qualities of places, which can be summarized in a system of values with an easily identifiable meaning. It does not seem meaningless to argue that this may, to a large extent, depend on the fact that the prevailing view is that this phenomenon is only a “form of travel” and not also a “form of tourism”.

Taking into account all that has been highlighted up to now, this publication aims to add knowledge that will help to fill, even if only partially, some of the deficiencies underlined, through mainly sociological contributions and insights that do not only concern the Italian case.

Romita’s work is part of the studies that address the theme of how host communities perceive the traveler of the roots. Romita addresses the question of the condition of belonging / non-belonging to the community of origin of the traveler of the roots. To the condition of extraneousness, which by definition belongs to all tourists, in the case of those of the roots, an identity is added which is the result of an uncertain and complex individuality, which sometimes manifests itself by exalting the prevalent belonging to the original culture and others times praising the one connected to the places where they habitually reside. For the roots tourist, the concept of “place” brings with it a constant redefinition of the concepts of attachment and belonging. Such situation has a significant repercussion on the perception that the host communities of origin have of this social figure, which as a result of the multiple identity that therefore characterizes the traveler of roots, cannot rationally understand the fact that the presence of these fellow

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countrymen has a predominantly touristic nature, and this generates cultural, economic and social problems for the host community itself.

In his contribution, Moreno Zago proposes a reflection on how ethnic and roots tourism can affect the protection and enhancement of ethnic-linguistic communities in border areas.

A thorny issue can jeopardize all this, namely "national identity. The issue is important because it highlights the nationalist pitfall and the risk of ethnicization of a tourism that cannot be reduced to a "self-reflective" community. But this risk can be overcome by working in synergy around an asset shared by two nations, such as vernacular language (for example the Istro-Veneto dialect, which is now on the list of the intangible heritages of humanity). The article focuses on what the Italian national communities of Slovenia and the Slovenian of Italy, through the various cross-border programmes, have achieved when promoting a roots tourism in terms of sustainability, recovery of traditions, renovation of the architectural heritage, involvement of ethnic-linguistic communities and the creation of multi-sensorial itineraries.

Antonella Perri, in her contribution, delves deeper into the theme concerning the sacred value of travel, especially in contemporary society. It is highlighted how the roots tourists evaluate and perceive the physical and cultural place of their origins, and the sacred value that they attribute to the journey towards these places, for the purpose of reconstructing their personal and family identity. In fact, the very purpose of the trip is not the holiday itself but the experience that one has and that has to do with oneself, with one's ego, with one's family history, with one's reason for existence.

Letizia Carrera and William Calvo-Quirós, in their work, propose a reflection on how religious rites can be a powerful lever for roots tourism where "churches and processions" are bearers of identity. The religious ritual is, therefore, a point in common between natives and emigrants, and this symbolic bond can, in itself, allow a return to the roots. Religion works, in many cases, as a glue that holds together the pieces of a life shattered and recomposed by the experience of migration. It acts as a suture to simultaneously imagine and "remember" the past, as well as to tie it to the community of origin. Roots tourism, unlike what is postulated by the "sightseeing" theory, makes the tourist experience palpable and sensitive, made up of scents, sounds, real experiences.

The contribution of José Oliveira, Zoran Roca, Maria de Nazaré Oliveira-Roca, highlights the link between tourism of the roots and the phenomenon of "second home tourism". As demonstrated by the analysis of the Portuguese case, the relationship between the two phenomena generates important consequences on the real estate market in the territorial areas involved. This relationship represents a relevant factor for the "temporary repopulation" of those areas (especially internal ones) that have experienced the emigration phenomenon more intensely. The intensity of repopulation is correlated with the geographical distance between the place of current residence and the place of origin. Among other things, these investments made by these "native foreigners" support and develop an economy linked to the revaluation of real estate which, however, generates a rise in house prices, creating difficulties for the native population to access property.

Stefania Mancuso's contribution aims to participate to the debate on the roots tourism and the ways through which it is possible to build a cultural offer for the development of this particular form of tourism. When it comes to tourism of the roots, the reference to the cultural heritage attachment, connected above all to the architectural one – churches, palaces, castles – is what is evoked and almost becomes the emotional and sentimental call for those who have left their own native village and, once returning, desire to re-immers themselves in the architectural context of which they kept the memory. From the point of view of enhancing the cultural heritage, this requires particular care and attention for the protection and conservation of the architecture and building characterizing the small centres. In the case of archaeological heritage, it is necessary to build adequate enhancement strategies, which take into account on the one hand the new methodology of "public archeology" and, on the other hand, create a "heritage communi-

ty" to which roots tourists could also belong to, becoming an active part of the local community which takes responsibility and actively participates in the promotion of archeology and its value. Philippe Clairay, in his work, underlines the relevance of the phenomenon of roots tourism and how, in some countries of the world, as in the case of France, is not addressed directly, despite the large potential pool of tourists. This contradiction is only apparent, as there is a form of tourism that somehow masks the true weight of roots tourism, which is in fact incorporated within cultural tourism. Be that as it may, in this country we may focus on the development of two types of roots tourism: an endogenous type, perhaps the most evident (linked to the rural exodus of the 19th century and the rediscovery, today, of the countryside for a return effect) and an exogenous type linked to France's longer history and its ties to Quebec and its former African colonies. Finally, Dimitri Fazito, in his contribution, highlights how roots tourism, linked to diasporic mobility, has become a fundamental mechanism of community integration in postmodernity. It has greatly contributed to the re-signification, and strengthening, of a sense of belonging that invigorates communities and their members. Roots tourism, as in the proposed case of the Italians in Brazil, is important not only for its direct economic effects both in Italy and in Brazil, but above all for the necessary contribution to the persistence of Italianness, to the conservation of affections that interconnect generations and distant places, to the possibility of an existential experience in the constitution of the Self and its positioning in the globalized world. Furthermore, this integrative and experiential mechanism is strongly associated with a moral economic logic of productive interdependence, which inspires people to enter a network of close relationships, consolidating social participation and involvement in activities that strengthen existential life.