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## Possible Sustainable Measures to Recover the Tourism Sector after the COVID-19 Crisis

### Abstract

*Objectives:* The objective of the present contribution is to identify and propose measures that could constitute a starting point for the governance of many tourist destinations, making it possible to revive the tourism sector, which is in a deep crisis due to the spread of COVID-19.

*Research Design & Methods:* The paper includes both local and global analysis, and pays special attention to important Italian tourist destinations. The destinations chosen for case studies are: Lake Como, Langhe Roero Monferrato, and Amalfi Coast. The study starts with the history of the Italian tourism and then focuses on the recent trends, the best practices around the globe, and the opinions of different stakeholders of three selected territories. The analysis and evaluation of the best practices aims at identifying and proposing some replicable models and strategies that would further improve the tourism sector.

*Findings:* Tourism is an already well-consolidated sector and consists of the exchanges and consumption of goods and services. For this reason, it is also susceptible to various changes. In some countries, the organisation of the tourism supply chain had always been fraught with many difficulties. Since the arrival of the pandemic, it has been challenged even more. It is estimated that the real damages will be quantifiable in a few years, when, hopefully, COVID-19 will no longer be a threat.

*Implications / Recommendations:* The research shows that the academic sector and public governance should act quickly in order to seek appropriate and useful solutions and concrete proposals for safe travel, as well as help recover the tourism industry after the crisis. In this regard, a collaboration between different stakeholders in the tourism sector could be particularly helpful.

*Contribution / Value Added:* In order to mitigate the disastrous effects of COVID-19 in the tourism sector, some measures have been proposed. The research is based on a multidisciplinary approach focusing on planning, business management, tourism governance, and the sociological impact.

*Article classification:* research article

*Keywords:* Tourism governance, tourism post-COVID-19, sustainable tourism development models, recovery of tourism, best practices in the tourism sector

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## Introduction

It is well-known and inevitable that the crisis connected with the spread of COVID-19 has impacted and continues to impact every single area of life. The present contribution focuses predominantly on the tourism industry and on the visible acceleration of change processes aimed at the development of sustainable tourism.

Tourism is an already well-consolidated sector and consists of the exchanges and consumption of goods and services. For this reason, it is also susceptible to various changes. The tourism industry has an intense potential to grow and generate revenues. Before COVID-19, travel and tourism had become one of the most important sectors in the world economy, accounting for 10% of global GDP and more than 320 million jobs worldwide. Tourism-dependent countries such as Italy will likely feel the negative impacts of the crisis for much longer than other economies will. Services which are key to tourism and travel have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and will continue to struggle until people feel safe to travel *en-masse* again.

The present paper focuses on the effects that the (COVID-19) crisis produced in the tourism sector, leading to the immediate shock with a sensitive decline (United Nations, 2020) of international tourism and the economy related to tourism. According to the OECD Report (2020), the decline in question in 2020 is estimated at 60–80%. This paper elaborates on both the solutions which could mitigate the disastrous effects of the pandemic and the proposition of strategies for improving the efficiency of the tourism sector as a whole by means of responding to the needs of the ‘new tourist’.

The presented strategies constitute a starting point for structuring a revival of the tourism sector. Therefore, some possible solutions would involve adopting certain characteristics of particular territories. To expand on this topic, a case study was conducted with regard to ‘virtuous’ Italian destinations, which could represent current models

of balanced development, based on analysing different visions, strategies, and actions both before and after the pandemic. The investigated locations include: *Lake Como*, *Langhe Roero e Monferrato*, and *The Amalfi Coast*.

The analysis was conducted primarily with the use of numerous interviews with different stakeholders, including public and private stakeholders of the selected destinations. The three destinations considered as a model are among the ‘strongest’ Italian tourism brands on the international market. They are realities with a well-defined and recognised vision and strategies. Later in the process, surveys were analysed and evaluated with the aim of identifying and proposing some replicable models and strategies to improve the tourism sector.

## The current trends in Tourism

After six decades of consistent development, tourism has become an important driver of economic growth. On average, the sector directly contributes 4.4% of GDP, 6.9% of employment, and 21.5% of service exports in OECD countries. It is of vital economic, social, and cultural importance, and offers real prospects for sustainable and inclusive development. Globally, in 2019 it represented an increase of 3.8% year-on-year for the first time (UNWTO). Tourism continues to make an important contribution to the Italian economy. Including indirect effects, in 2017 it accounted for 13.0% of GDP and employed 14.7% of the workforce. Tourism industries employed 2 million people in 2018, accounting for 8.3% of employment. It is estimated that 216.100 businesses were operating in the accommodation sector in 2018, while travel exports represented 39.9% of total service exports in 2018.

In Italy, data for 2018 shows a steady and positive growth. According to accommodation statistics, the number of inbound visitors increased to 63.2 million (increase by 4.4%). The top inbound markets included Germany (19.3% of tourists), United States (9.0%), France (7.5%), the United

Kingdom (6.0%), and China, with the United States exhibiting strong growth, up to 15.7% over the year 2017. On the other hand, the number of German visitors was flat over the same period. Almost 60% of international arrivals seemed to head for just four regions: Veneto, Lombardy, Lazio, and Tuscany.

Unfortunately, such a situation has unexpectedly and rapidly changed with the arrival of the pandemic in 2020. Countries around the world started with imposing bans or 14-day self-isolation periods for travellers from certain countries with high COVID-19 infection rates, such as China and other Asian countries. Later, these bans were extended to other countries, such as Italy and Spain. By April 28, 100% of global destinations had introduced travel restrictions. This had a devastating impact on the tourism industry.

According to the latest issue of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) fell by 72% in January–October 2020 over the same period last year. The decline in the first ten months of the year represents 900 million fewer international tourist arrivals compared to the same period in 2019, and as such translates into a loss of US\$ 935 billion in export revenues from international tourism, which is a loss of more than 10 times in 2009 under the impact of the global economic crisis. International arrivals in both Europe and the Americas declined by 68%. While the demand for international travel remains subdued, domestic tourism continues to grow in several large markets such as China and Russia, where the domestic air travel demand has mostly returned to pre-COVID-19 levels<sup>1</sup>.

Nowadays, the tourism industry is very complex and involves both private and public stakeholders, with different goals in many instances. Moreover, this sector is made up of an articulated and unstructured context where a collaboration is considered as an added value by the different players involved. The interests of online marketing

platforms, airline companies, and others are the result of their business models, without ignoring the needs of local operators.

The dynamic imbalances in the continuous evolution, driven by an unlimited growth, are creating the conditions and the outcome of an unsuitable model of tourism (Franch & Perretta, 2020). This situation is inevitably detrimental not only to the private stakeholders and to their purely economic purposes, but also to the inhabitants of the cities. In some areas, the damages have led to a paradoxical situation in which it is residents who are forced to use services designed for visitors rather than the other way round (D'Eramo, 2017).

A return of the tourism flow is estimated for 2023/2024<sup>2</sup>. However, it is most likely that there will be a different market by then, and the differentiation of the offer will play an even more important role. The territories, today more than ever, should appropriately structure themselves in order to manage tourism rather than become its victim.

In this particular period, the most successful destinations are the ones with a clear and medium- to long-term vision in terms of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This means the destinations that have constantly directed their offer towards the 'conscious' tourist and undertaken actions for visitor management would be shared among different stakeholders in a particular area. Sustainability and reliability are currently two factors which appear to be of vital relevance to the tourism sector. They can constitute a key element of attracting tourists, who will increasingly turn to well-known tourist brands as well as reliable service providers and destinations.

The economic, social, and environmental balance of the territory should be restored as soon as possible. This could be achieved through the appropriate balance of power that goes beyond the economic forces put in place. Only a system which applies a sustainable strategical approach

<sup>1</sup> The data reflects the end of the year 2020, i.e. the moment of the conclusion of the present contribution.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-and-tourism-2020>.

in all areas – and which enhances its resilience capacity – can succeed.

## The propositions

The academia often has a theoretical formula and visions that are very different from theories of the stakeholders following tourist destinations on a daily basis; the latter act based on their practical experiences and sentiments. In some countries, the academic sector tends to imagine certain solutions in an idyllic context, underestimating (or ignoring) the political implications and the ‘dispersive resistances’ created by bureaucratic processes. Specific relevant courses at universities were only introduced in the 1980s. A visible acceleration occurred in the 1990s, especially in the United States and in Europe; in some European countries, however, the changes were only applied at the end of the 1990s (Gilli & Scamuzzi, 2020). As mentioned before, the tourism sector very often suffers from an excessive fragmentation and a lack of coordination and integration among its stakeholders (Gilli & Scamuzzi, 2020). Therefore, it would be advisable to develop more structured and widespread solutions that would involve universities and other institutions, with the aim of making them collaborate. For this reason, we propose a different structure of Universities, i.e. one which would be able to build solid and permanent support to public stakeholders involved in promotional activities and the policy of both big and small territories.

Quality and a sense of responsibility are among the key components. In order to have an active tourism sector, a territory should provide and guarantee appropriate public services, and ‘build an infrastructure’ on which the entrepreneur might create their own product for the final consumers. Moreover, the public management too often relies on staff who are not adequately and specifically trained in the tourism sector.

In order to identify the interconnection between tourism, consumption, and places, it is necessary to build a collaboration among territorial policies

that try in various ways to stimulate tourism and the social imagination of places. Practices, policies, and representations are the result of interactive processes that interest both the suppliers and the consumers of tourist products. In fact, tourism is made up of different networks and circuits that are connected to each other and that operate in a continuous dialectic between production and consumption, where these two aspects are in mutual hybridisation (Ateljevic, 2000).

The following ideas have been developed by means of assuming the perspectives of tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, and politicians. Some of them are inspirations which come from industries different than tourism, but which use techniques or tools that are available but not employed (at least not on a large scale) in the tourism sector. Other ideas would prove particularly important in terms of resource deployment, because the current situation requires extraordinary interventions. As Daniel Burnham, an architect from Chicago, said: “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work” (cited in Moore, 1921, p. 147).

## Possible sustainable measures for a tourism recovery plan after the pandemic:

It should be noted that each destination should possess the following information and ‘field knowledge’:

- which markets are the most prepared for their own reality in order to prevent the dispersion of energy and marking resources;
- what the most relevant and peculiar expenses of tourists in a particular place are<sup>3</sup>;
- the percentage of expenditure *per capita*, considering the tourist’s country of origin in a given sector;

<sup>3</sup> Accommodation, entertainment, restaurants, purchases of goods/services, etc.

- whether there are some accommodation preferences among tourists (both national and international), i.e. hotel category, tourist villages, camping, independent apartments, etc.<sup>4</sup>;
- tourists' preferences and choice trends in particular locations and cultural sectors as well as within business travel, etc.;
- the importance of a correct adaptation of infrastructure, which can also make it possible to direct many strategies and marketing activities by using updated statistical data;
- the constant monitoring of social trends, because the consumers, their lifestyles and the tourist demand are all in continuous development<sup>5</sup>;
- a sufficient Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in a given destination, which would oversee the promotion of territories, including the smallest one. The reason is that every destination has its own history and particularities to appreciate and valorise. Even a small number of staff members could be enough to carry out a commercial promotion in some small territories which, in turn, might collaborate and support the tasks of larger DMOs. Their work should be effective, efficient, and able to deliver measurable results. Below is a breakdown of the proposed measures.

## 1. Improving Network

Sharing and networking appear to be the antidote that allows the system to improve capacity and solve problems more efficiently. Trans-regional synergies can be the forerunner towards a shared management of tourism. Each territory has its

<sup>4</sup> Knowing in advance what kind of accommodation will be in the highest demand in the next few years could be highly relevant not only for the accommodation facilities, but also for public governance.

<sup>5</sup> This information could help to create a more contextualised offer. Knowing that nowadays there is an ever-increasing number of 'megacities', single-parent families, and elderly people (at least in some countries) inevitably directs the practice of spending which is more focused on services such as health assistance, education, and travel (ENIT, 2020).

own peculiarities to be exploited, but at the same time they all have a common basic and regulatory language to facilitate the exchange and applicability of the best practices. The intention is to create a relational context that is suitable for defining, promoting, and facilitating the implementation of the identified actions in order to address issues in the COVID-19 era. The following behaviours are considered appropriate:

- Permanent synergies between territories:  
It is about the encouragement of the creation of partnerships between territories with similar peculiarities as well as enhancing and promoting them in order to reduce promotion costs, increase the sharing of know-how, and boost attractiveness. Territories would then be able to have an even greater power of attraction, leveraging on established 'musts' and well-recognised characteristics<sup>6</sup>.
- Temporary synergies between territories:  
Encouraging the creation of collaborations between territories united by a *fil rouge*, and reconstructing itineraries between lands – even of different regions or nations – that are united by the same common denominator. The author is referring to celebrations or historical traditions, sports, and famous individuals<sup>7</sup> who can be attractive to certain target groups of associations, enthusiasts, or those who are curious.

<sup>6</sup> Such a tourism reality can overall be successful as a sum of offered values. This success can also depend on secondary factors such as family holidays or groups interested in different components, e.g. culture, mountains, etc. A case in point is the agreement to create a network for the Langhe Roero, Monferrato, Val d'Orcia, and Valdichiana wine-and-food routes. More information is available at: <https://marketingdeltoritorio.info/index.php/it/notizie/3652-patto-tra-toscana-e-piemonte-per-promuovere-tartufi-e-vini-nobili>. Therefore, the attractiveness results from the combination of different territories united by their high-quality food and wine; they also offer complementary added values, e.g. urban art or a mountain component.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. the centenaries of the birth or death of historical figures: Christopher Columbus, Dante Alighieri, Leonardo da Vinci, Federico Fellini, etc. The niches of motor lovers: Ferrari, Ducati, etc.

- **Support between territories:**  
Sharing managerial, promotional, and production know-how between ‘territories’ through a bonding-networking function that helps some territories with a lower-vocation-and-less-history-for-tourism to be supported and helped by other territories;
  - bordering territories, which – although they are close to each other – have a different history and tourist know-how, or a different target group. However, an improvement in this case of the ‘less-developed’ reality would bring an advantage to the area’s business. It would most likely contribute to the improvement of local services (transport and supplies), making the area more attractive to an international audience<sup>8</sup>;
  - distant territories, e.g. when some territories support others, i.e. those located in different regions<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Improvement in educational methods

### Academia:

In addition, the tourism sector needs a wide range of professionals so that it can operate at its best, with the resultant complexity (and need) to develop new and interdisciplinary educational offers. It would therefore be desirable to have:

- a stronger interdisciplinary cooperation and increased educational offers, with different specialisations useful for each specific segment (i.e. tourism engineering, management, languages).

<sup>8</sup> In Italy, it is about the cases of the Como region with the Lecco area, or, again, the Langhe-Roero area with Monferrato.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. in the case of winning a prestigious international recognition, such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). A city supports and advises another city in the same country, and has the potential to join the network, but first needs to fill a gap and improve in order to deserve the recognition. The constructive approach makes the two cities ‘allies’ rather than competitors, e.g. in a national event such as a gastronomic tour of the country.

The aim is to reduce the training gap in tourism and bureaucracy in general;

- a more effective and incentive-based (also economically) orientation of students towards new hybrids in line with the (future) needs of the job market, owing to collaboration with organisations able to forecast the evolution of tourism in the next few years as well as markets in which a greater appeal is expected. This requires a cooperation between the government, universities, and institutions such as the national employment agency and the national tourism agency<sup>10</sup>.

### Professional courses:

Support in mitigating the historical educational gap caused by prejudices, delays in developing a training offer, and the lack of dynamism in the current offer.

### Chambers of commerce:

They can help with the IT transformation through one of the few certainties already ‘standardised’ at the national level in almost all countries. Their support could be essential in education and training, especially in the digital transformation, while their ability to play a leading role in the creation of networks for achieving shared goals that are useful to all local stakeholders could also be enhanced (these stakeholders include citizens who are not being heard, with repercussions in terms of conflict, which impoverish society and the tourist offer)<sup>11</sup>.

## 3. Upgrading the Web service for tourism promotion

It is desirable to improve the efficiency and shared management of tourism promotion aimed at the conscious target tourist.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. by incentivising the study of languages which, according to current estimates, will be needed in the tourism industry in 5–10 years. In other words, it is about training tomorrow’s professionals by providing support now.

<sup>11</sup> For an example of a tourism promotion video in which the Chamber of Commerce involved stakeholders from the area, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AeISZ2YTiTo>.

A country's official website for tourism is often underpowered and little used by tourists themselves. An innovative user experience and user interface design would improve its appeal. In addition, organising the website around the structure of a geographical map which can be filtered through specific searches would encourage interest in using the site and, as a result, would ensure a more efficient promotion of the territories (with greater advantage for less famous tourist brands). A further advantage of such a graphic design would be a feature to display on the map all the official sites of those destinations which are not easily identifiable by a foreigner.

A service like this should make life easier for those who have to advise tourists on a daily basis (e.g. hoteliers). Destination Management Organisations should encourage shared participation in drawing up a calendar of events, to which all stakeholders in the area should contribute; it should be drafted by the DMO and redistributed back to the stakeholders so that they can become the main promoters.

#### 4. Enhancing the efficiency of the national statistical service

It is of crucial importance to enable as many stakeholders as possible to use these services. To do this, statistical data should be collected, processed, and distributed as quickly as possible<sup>12</sup>. Advanced approaches and systems are also needed in all three phases of the process. A comparison of data between statistical systems in other EU countries would help to refine the data and reduce errors<sup>13</sup>. Data should also be easily accessible and explorable, with user-friendly interfaces for an easier use by all types of stakeholders in the tourism chain<sup>14</sup>. The aim is to rapidly raise and spread

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.econopoly.ilsole24ore.com/2020/09/23/turisti-big-data/>.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. the numbers of Polish tourists in Italy should be the same in both Italian and Polish surveys, which will help to explore the cause of the discrepancies.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. hoteliers who do not have a statistical *formamentis*.

the awareness of trends among all stakeholders, thus improving the competitiveness of the entire national system.

#### 5. Planning the medium- and long-term development and management

To be implemented, these strategies require some greater involvement of public and private stakeholders, as well as the integration of data on movements with information on preferences and behaviours, with the networking and sharing of big data. To this end, it is proposed that medium- to long-term tourism development and management plans should be created and shared with all the stakeholders (including the residents). This should involve:

- developing urban plans that take into account the needs of tourists and the residents, as well as consider the flora and fauna;
- an adequate regulation of new critical issues, giving a break to 'easy' entrepreneurship that devours the authenticity of the places by removing 'the soul' of the local place, making it unsustainable<sup>15</sup>;
- new investments to improve basic resources, e.g. the community, human resources, the environment, the landscape, and local particularities. It is desirable that this happens in a more proactive manner so that these

<sup>15</sup> For instance, some limitations could be placed (where necessary) on the use of short-term rental apartments, such as those on the Airbnb platform. When adopting suitable measures for specific cases, some possible solutions are reported: (i) to establish a maximum percentage of accommodation activities (including Airbnb) on the number of the resident population; (ii) to implement an obligation of minimum services related to the overnight offer (check-in in person, living together in the apartment); (iii) to introduce a maximum number of days in a year for which the apartment can be rented (e.g. in Vienna). In any case, it would be desirable for the taxation derived from these activities to be used in the urban tourism sector or in general for investments aimed at balancing any imbalances deriving from the activities themselves, also assuming discounts on municipal taxes (refunds) to residents for inconveniences and less efficient services.

measures can generate new economic opportunities, either complementary or alternative to the current industrial model (which, in its current transition of global competition into industrial-manufacturing, is facing a decline);

- developing targeted systems capable of grouping data and tools which advise and encourage residents and tourists to behave responsibly, preventing the ‘system’ from going into a logistical crisis. City cards or/and mobile apps (transport, museums, main attractions) aim also at:

(1) improving services and public transport by means of conveying the use of more sustainable solutions with tourist profiles and passes;

(2) providing data and tools for the territories in order to manage critical situations in a better way. These integrated systems can also be useful for assessing the impact of events on the territory, allowing administrative organs to optimise their investments;

- encouraging behaviour (of both residents and visitors) that meets the requirements of sustainable development (including tourism):
  - encouraging the involvement of the residents themselves as primary promoters of their territory;
  - encouraging the organisation of workshops for school and university students as well as courses for the elderly in order to train and inform them about the changing territory<sup>16</sup>;
  - encouraging the involvement of residents as tourists (e.g. with reduced rates for tourist attractions), thus encouraging their spirit of belonging, as they are the first promoters both within social networks and among their

relatives and friends in the territory in which they live. It is an attitude that might seem obvious, but it is not always the case. In this, the public stakeholders apparently do not play a role, as they have repeatedly highlighted. Take the case of a reality where residents have come to the point of being intolerant of tourists; what if they were rewarded, as some would have it? Instead, let us imagine a tourist voucher for making the resident associate the word ‘tourist’ with a prize, as it really should be.

## 6. Stemming depopulation in inland areas

For the recovery and reinterpretation of territories in the phase of the abandonment of activities, and in order to avoid the resultant decay of territories and the respective cultural loss of unique and different peculiarities (even between neighbouring places), some useful tools can be implemented in the form of local projects, with the collaboration of institutions and with their management. For this purpose, experts in different sectors are required (Task-Force) who can collaborate on different projects distributed across a region, sharing training, experiences, and solutions to be adapted by local bodies. Among the possible initiatives to be taught and encouraged, there could be:

- initiatives aimed at making the territory attractive for Workstation<sup>17</sup>;
- participation in calls for funding;
- the promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives by residents while meeting the requirements of sustainable development; this can be done through the creation of platforms on which

<sup>16</sup> E.g. the training that was provided by the Olympic Games organisation for Turin 2006 Volunteers. In the years prior to the event, young people had been trained and owing to that they were able to make their contribution as volunteers during the Olympic Games. They also acquired knowledge of the practicable sports disciplines and generally developed a proactive and welcoming approach towards tourists.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the proposal made in the Italian municipality of Santa Fiora: <https://www.comune.santafiora.gr.it/index.php/2-non-categorizzato/1087-santa-fiora-lancia-lo-smart-working-village-incentivi-sull-affitto-per-i-lavoratori-che-desiderano-trasferirsi-nel-borgo-amiatino>.



local commercial activities (e-commerce, e-business) can be enhanced<sup>18</sup>;

- incentives to enhance local traditions through hotels, food and wine, etc., as well as teaching about these;
- support for the enhancement and dissemination of the narrative of places as a tool for the recovery of the cultural repertoire, the creation of a network of literary and artistic itineraries, as well as the reinterpretations of places<sup>19</sup>.

## 7. Valuing the reality with partially unexpressed potential

It is necessary to announce national and European projects<sup>20</sup> aimed at exchanging good practices and promoting international tourism marketing, with the aim of focusing attention on the diversity of European destinations and enhancing the emerging ones, where new sustainable tourism and various initiatives are being developed. It is also needed to encourage different categories banned every year through the ‘prize system’. Examples of possible incentives include:

- the exchange systems of hospitality projects between administrative organs belonging to the project or network;
- tutoring territories (seen as start-ups to be incubated), where the officials are joined by expert technicians who provide support in various thematic areas relating to tourism (tutors who move between the territories and play a role in sharing know-how and stimulating collaboration between territories)<sup>21</sup>;

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<sup>18</sup> E.g. eBay project that raises the awareness regarding Italian excellence in the world. See: <https://pages.ebay.it/borghi-italiani-imprese/>.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., the urban regeneration process in the municipality of Favara, which started from the Farm Cultural Park: <https://www.farmculturalpark.com>.

<sup>20</sup> For a useful starting point, see the EDEN project: [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/eden\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/eden_en).

<sup>21</sup> Thus complying with previously elaborated point 1.

- awards, prizes, media visibility, partnerships with ‘promoters’ such as direct influencers, documentary programmes, or television programmes on national networks<sup>22</sup>.

It would also be advisable to make more use of the attractive power of food and wine, with cooking schools for tourists organised by institutions and consortiums in order to provide the typical experience. It is important to merge the experience of trying to prepare foods typical of the host country (with local ingredients) with the full wrap-around experience in order to leave a memory that encourages the purchase of local products (even if the tourist has returned home). This can be done through:

- taking advantage of the ‘mergers’ of multiple offers and different activities in order to attract more groups with multiple targets<sup>23</sup>;
- the promotion of – and continuous investment in – positioning through storytelling that helps to keep the ‘fables’ and legends belonging to the territory (the *genius loci*) alive.

## 8. Sustainability – over-tourism and gatherings in the era of COVID-19

It is already well-known that globalisation has contributed to some critical issues and breaking points, most of which have been highlighted and accelerated by the global pandemic. The effects of over-tourism and the COVID-19 contagion in the tourism sector can be read as two sides of the same coin, which are represented by the intrinsic fragility of many territories and tourist destinations (Franch & Perretta, 2020).

It is expected that in the coming months tourists will pay greater attention to safety and hygiene. To facilitate and improve this, some preventive

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<sup>22</sup> E.g. “Il Borgo dei Borghi”, broadcast on Italian public television and available at: <https://www.rai.it/borgodeiborghi/>.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. cycling and landscape tours (also accessible to non-sportsmen) that provide a different point of view and combine experience and physical activity with the possibility to discover the landscape, culture, and gastronomy.

measures should be taken in both public and private sectors. Consequently, it is necessary to prepare security measures in holiday resorts, although they should also apply to staff behaviour and various services provided (Destinations & Tourism Rivista di Destination Management e Marketing, 2020).

Here are some of the measures that can be adopted in the case of problems regarding gatherings:

- ‘educational trainings’ for tourists, which could take place through information and warnings provided before and after their arrival at the destination via the Internet, apps, and reminders posted at strategic points;
- various trainings and coordination courses organised for stakeholders, through which the issues of tourism and hospitality in times of COVID-19 are presented and explained, supporting the coordination and the exchange of feedback in the territory;
- a low-budget solution (created through the combination of the two previous measures) consisting of information activities (e.g. the creation and subsequent distribution of short videos), which would involve many tourist-services providers. This way, the dual purpose of involvement from stakeholders and the creation of a unique image of a territory could be achieved<sup>24</sup>;
- expanding the services of public transport in order to take tourists to major (or secondary) attractions via alternative or newly established routes (which could be even more comfortable because of a lower rate);
- information on gatherings provided in real time by webcams, sensors, or apps. This way, arrival of other visitors to some places could be prevented by means of suggesting alternative places in the most crucial moment;
- reducing the waiting time for visiting a place (indoor attraction):

- reducing queues through a special booking system that is efficient and incentivising (which psychologically leverages pricing policies and allows the accumulation of prizes, games, etc.);
- introducing fast tickets or quick visits (with a shortened route or with a limited time so that only some of the available attractions can be seen);
- implementing specific tools that take the following into account: prices, peak hours, the combination of visits to different attractions (especially those less known);
- providing a virtual visit before the real one.

## Conclusion

As could be seen, sudden changes of pace are the result of globalisation, trends, and technological and cultural advances, all of which inevitably create repercussions on slow systems. It is easy to imagine that a system with delayed reorganisation creates significant imbalances that lead to failures and losses of traditions. Cultural heritage is rich in content and is highly appreciated by tourists, even if some elements are underestimated through inadequate offer preparation (e.g. omitting the cuisine or the authenticity and excellence of the territory).

Authenticity should be preserved, because it is becoming increasingly rare to belong to only some resilient realities. These realities constitute small systems and live within larger systems which are partly protected by them. Authenticity survives in these ‘*matryoshka*’ systems, and in some unexpected and potentially dangerous cases it is up to us to increase their number.

For this reason, the authors have attempted to evidence that the right solutions already exist in other industries; they just need to be extrapolated and adapted to the tourism sector. One has to keep in mind that tourism has a strategic importance for the economy of various countries<sup>25</sup>; therefore, it

<sup>24</sup> As an example, see a suggestive video of Lake Como available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AelSZ2YTiTo>.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/126/tourism>.

should be taken into account similarly to how other ‘trades’ are considered. In this regard, the recent trends need to be analysed and stakeholders consulted in order to study these particular changes and to create some models of corrective measures for improvement. The difficulties are intrinsic in any system and grow according to the pace of its changes, but it should not be discouraging.

The post-COVID-19 time could represent a long-awaited political maturation. This serious crisis has highlighted structural gaps even more. Many States can receive extra funds in order to recover their economies and, consequently, also the tourism sector. These funds should be used in a right manner with the aim of creating a plan for development in the medium- and long-term perspective through a greater training, collaboration among various stakeholders, more sustainable exploitation of cultural and natural resources, and a better use of the available tools.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the more the proposed solutions will be integrated and connected to each other and to the system, the more effective they will become.

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