

Mediterranean Association for the Sociology of Tourism (1987-2012)

Over the 1970s and the 80s some economic, political and environmental events weakened the expectations of continuity in the tourist development, at the national and international level. Crisis was particularly evident in the seaside holiday, the “heart” of mass tourism. After the “boom” in the 1950s and 1960s, there is a link between changes in tourist behavior and the ones in the social meaning of tourism: new motivations were emerging, and new approaches are required to understand them. Here the role of sociology emerged. After some international debate, the similarity between Italian and Mediterranean problems was recognized and connected to changes in economic production and to the everyday life of European societies. If we consider the transition from industrial to post-industrial society, local phenomena had to be seen in relation to wider trends in the Mediterranean region. At the end of the 1980s, as a result, the foundation of the Mediterranean Association for the Sociology of Tourism was a try to study these new trends. All the congresses of the Association constantly compared the development of cities and areas interested in tourism in the Mediterranean region, trying to connect them to wider trends of social life, the globalization of economy, culture, and the tourist market.

This Association was born in 1987 after the first Mediterranean Conference in Bologna (*Tourism and Cultural Communication, For An Active Role of Local Communities: New Services and New Professions*). The formal creation, with a statute and a managing board, occurred in a general meeting at the second Mediterranean Conference (*Groups and Local Intermediate Structures, For a Change of Image in the Tourist System*, Cervia 1991). From the papers and communications presented on these two occasions (Guidicini & Savelli, 1988, 1992) it was clear that, after many years in which local communities in mass tourism had been essentially marginal, being merely a source of service personnel, their role was changing. The vitality and the potential communication of these communities were beginning to emerge, being finally viewed as resources in their own right. The topics discussed at these two conferences considered the impact of tourism on the local communities of the Mediterranean area highlighting the values, meanings and opportunities that were emerging. In the second Conference, in particular, the attention has been focused on new forms of territorial organization and tourist activities capable of mediating between the local groups and operators on the one hand, and to the consumer and large-scale tour operators on the other.

The Third Mediterranean Conference (*Tourism and the Environment*, Estoril 1995) examined again the environment in which the local community lived, highlighting the different effects, whether negative or positive, arising from the impact of tourism. It was pointed out that the term “environment” was to be understood as referring not only to natural resources, but also to cultural heritage which contained the symbols expressing the memory and identity of the local community (Savelli, 1997).

In 1999 the Association published *Strategie di Comunità nel Turismo Mediterraneo* (Community Strategies in Mediterranean Tourism); the most significant studies of the first three conferences were collected, linking them to some issues which were important for the Association like local communities and tourism, tourism and the construction of social relations, the ambivalence of memory and cultural heritage, nature and rural space in new tourist relations, differentiation processes (Guidicini & Savelli, 1999).

In the Fourth Mediterranean Conference (*Local and Global in Tourism: Forms of Aggregation and Communication Networks*, Ravenna 2001), the place differences – ethnic, cultural or geographical – were considered. Participants discussed those dynamics of society that were leading to the creation of a global tourist market and they showed that any place difference is at risk to be reduced, obscured, or even cancelled completely by the diffusion of the dominating models. Particular attention was given to territorial and entrepreneurial aggregations that were aiming at using the specific aspect of local supply in order to penetrate the large infrastructural networks on global scale more efficiently (Savelli, 2004a, 2004b).

In the Fifth Mediterranean Conference – *Mediterranean Tourism beyond the Coastline: New Trends in Tourism and the Social Organization of Space* (Thessaloniki 2005) – some possible forms of alternative tourism were debated: rural tourism, environmental tourism, sporting tourism, cultural tourism, etc. The need for other solutions beyond the coastline was stressed: these solutions had to be connected one another, in order to gain a new concept of holiday where sea and hinterland resources are part of a new and wider meaning of tourist region (Iakovidou, 2007; Savelli, 2008).

In the Sixth Mediterranean Conference (*Tourism as Development and Cohesion in the Mediterranean Region*, Granada 2008), the importance of the social context in international tourism was stressed. Globalization implies challenges and opportunities at the same time; offering new products is more and more important in order to survive or access the tourist market. Several issues were debated. First, tourist products with particular attention to the relation between tourist and local population, and the recent changes in the tourist labor market. Also sustainability was taken into consideration; the concept of “responsible tourism” was a key-topic of the debate, through many case-studies which stressed the importance of environment in local tourism development. Culture was frequently mentioned as well; it was considered not only as paying attention to local heritage, but also as a process in which tourists influenced its perception and changes. With regard to the organization of tourist space, it emerged as a strategic point for several tourist regions; the importance of public-private cooperation was stressed, and also the need to involve all the local actors in the promotion of tourist resources (Latesia Rodriguez, Puertas Cañaverall, Paniza Prados, 2009).

The Seventh Mediterranean Conference was held in Sassari and Alghero in 2011, with the title “Tourist mobility between crisis and change. Mediterranean cities and contexts”. The congress works were coordinated by Antonietta Mazzette and Antonio Fadda and it focused on the following topics: the connection between tourism and urban change, with particular attention to risks and opportunities; sustainability and un-sustainability of tourism; tourism and the development of networks, with particular attention to cooperation opportunities; perspectives of inter-coastal tourism in the Mediterranean region; the subjective representation of tourist space, both in demand and supply’s point of view. The conference proceedings have been printed in two volumes, *Contesti mediterranei in transizione* (edited by Camillo Tidore and Antonietta Mazzette) and *Città mediterranee nello spazio globale* (edited by Antonio Fadda and Romina Deriu). Both volumes are published by FrancoAngeli in 2013.

In conclusion, over the last twenty-seven years the Mediterranean Association for the Sociology of Tourism has become more and more important for the circulation of scientific information, and it has stimulated research on the problems generated for local communities and social groups by tourist development. During this period, the sociology of tourism has been changing as it begins to assume a Mediterranean perspective; such change is gradual but significant. At the beginnings, it was concentrated on the impact of mass tourism on the people who practiced it and the local communities of holiday destinations. Then it adopted a defensive attitude towards individuals and groups in the face of the de-structuring induced by international tourist organizations, as it denounced the emerging contradictions and defended the peculiarities of local cultures. Subsequently, after years of entrepreneurial uncertainty and a weakening of collective behaviour models, it turned towards the analysis of motivations and local aggregative forms which would promote the tourist economy. Today, sociology of tourism is trying to capture the opportunities of globalization in order to underpin a broader range of activity of local community and the entrepreneurial system. It encompasses new wide regional dimensions; the sea itself has gone beyond its frontier function between social and cultural systems, and it is going to assume a connection role, tracing new images of territory. The network among the several resources of hinterland, coast and sea gives back to the Mediterranean area its own skill of attraction, in a period which is characterized by a global but highly articulated tourism.

The general meeting of the Mediterranean Association in Alghero elected the following members:

Honorary President: *Marc Boyer*, University of Lyon II “Lumière”.

President: *Asterio Savelli*, University of Bologna.

Board of Directors: *Gilda Catalano*, University of Calabria; *Ali Elloumi*, University of Sfax; *Antonio Fadda*, University of Sassari; *Joseph Inguanez*, University of Malta; *Marie-Françoise Lanfant*, Uresti-Cnrs of Paris; *Olga Iakovidou*, University of Thessaloniki; *Margarita Latiesa*, University of Granada.

Secretary: *Gabriele Manella*, University di Bologna.

Bibliography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Il turismo in una società che cambia</i>, Angeli, Milano, 1988;• <i>Il Mediterraneo come sistema turistico complesso</i>, in “Sociologia Urbana e Rurale”, Angeli, Milano, n. 26, 1988;• <i>Gruppi e strutture intermedie locali per una reimmaginazione del sistema turistico</i>, in “Sociologia Urbana e Rurale”, Angeli, Milano, n. 38, 1992;• <i>Turismo e Ambiente</i>, in “Sociologia Urbana e Rurale”, Angeli, Milano, n. 52/53, 1997;• <i>Strategie di comunità nel turismo mediterraneo</i>, Angeli, Milano 1999;• <i>Città, turismo e comunicazione globale</i>, Angeli, Milano, 2004;• <i>Turismo, territorio, identità. Ricerche ed esperienze nell’area mediterranea</i>, Angeli, Milano, 2004;• <i>Mediterranean Tourism Beyond the Coastline: New Trends in Tourism and the Social Organisation of Space</i>, Ziti Publications, Thessaloniki, 2007;• <i>Spazio turistico e società globale</i>, Angeli, Milano, 2008;• <i>El Turismo en el Mediterráneo. Posibilidades de Desarrollo y Cohesion</i>, Editorial Universitaria Ramón Areces, Madrid, 2009;• <i>Contesti mediterranei in transizione. Mobilità turistica tra crisi e mutamento</i>, Angeli, Milano, 2013;• <i>Città mediterranee nello spazio globale. Mobilità turistica tra crisi e mutamento</i>, Angeli, Milano, 2013.
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