

## THE IMPACTS OF NEW TOURIST FLOWS AT GLOBAL SCALE

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### **Abstract**

*The present globalization tends to assume in a lot of areas of our world – in particular in Mediterranean countries - some common geographical, social and cultural features.*

*While it assists in this homologation, there is a rediscovery of the different local value through the enforcement of the “subsidiarity principle” for determining a stronger cohesion in the local community.*

*Mass tourism, in a lot of traditional destinations, comes up against the limits that reduce the wellness of costumers, that lead to require new types of tourist services and aim to discover local resources and value.*

*In this direction, the tourists become a vehicle or tool of multicultural dialogue with residents and both communities absorb the cultural feature.*

*On account of this, new forms of personal relationships between tourist and resident are being established with economic, environmental and social consequences of utmost importance for the support of tourist development.*

*This behaviour of tourists tends to follow the innovative structures “horizontal networks”, which, in this paper, are analyzed by original instruments characterized by a high level of multidisciplinary.*

### **1- Definition of integrated relational tourism**

In the present international framework, the expansion of consumption and opulence has produced an ever increasing segmentation of demand especially for some luxury goods, among which tourism.

The variation of tourism activities, if on one hand has multiplied the possibilities of resource fruition, on the other hand started a new way of use. In short, it has produced an upstanding cycle since from a compound demand arose an innovation on the supply of tourism services, aiming more and more to the personalization of service (tailor-made).

Among the forms of tourism spread out today with these characteristics, integrated relational tourism is certainly the one where we can find the original aspects and at the same time factors that fully satisfy the needs of every tourist. In fact, integrated relational tourism, is that particular type of tourism based on human relations held by the tourist during the stay on the hosting territory.

Integration between traveller and the local community creates a close tie in such a way that it is possible to have an approach, a coming together and even a “clash” with the open territorial system. To be successful, this type of tourism supply must develop strong interlinks between environment and cultural resources with the wine-and-food, sport, naturalist and social resources of the territory.

This type of tourism gives the possibility not to fall in the vicious cycle of the tourism product marked by “everything and right away” and by “all for all”, since the local community should have an acting role thanks to “bottom up” actions (from the bottom to the top) in every phase of planning, creating and carrying out the “tourism package”.

Since human relations have a main role in this tourism, they convey to guests the conscious use of the resources present in the territory: the cultural and human exchange should determine that competitive advantage useful for local growth, since it would be based on the irreproducibility of the context and the relation with the local community. Every territory, every local community express different values which, being the fusion of the natural, environmental, historical, cultural, and social elements characterize the tourist’s experience. Therefore, the scoring of “good experience” is determined by the satisfaction from the tourist of having taken that type of trip and by the loyalty marketing to that type of human experience.

This form of tourism, based on human relations, allows a re-territorialisation of economy, i.e., a new valorisation of “social capital” and of the mass of relations through which subjects taking part in it can pursue interests precluded from them or reachable at higher costs if they had not been part of the network or the trip. An important and useful role is given by the social responsibility of local businesses, which cooperate with the network “trustees” both to increase local production appreciated by this type of tourists and to involve more local participants is the main reason for the success of the trip. In fact, if this type of experience has good results, it’s automatically repeated.

Involving all local participants, both public and private, is certainly positive since it determines a strengthening and constitution of a cultural identity which in time obviously it flakes off for the continuous external impulses received from the territorial system. If this upstanding circle takes place, relational tourism becomes a tourism “guided” by the local population, which welcomes the tourist in an environment particularly careful to the single person and for whom it is not possible to apply a “do-it-yourself tourism”, i.e., an intrusive and aggressive tourism. Therefore, integrated relational tourism, needs special care from the offer.

In fact, the latter can totally satisfy the needs of the demand, since it is well aware of the necessities thanks to the relations exchanged before the trip. This awareness is very useful since the demand automatically is segmented and therefore the territory is specialized in the use of resources specific for that kind of tourism.

All components of the tourist offer can actually carry out a strategic role in the organization of resources for activities of this kind of tourists, since every element of the offer, besides the economic benefit, represents also that part of the local community that involved tourists in the trip experience.

This relation (tourists- tourist offer – local community) constitutes essentially a form of participation of tourists to the local community decision on the choice of natural, environmental, cultural and social resources to use in the course of the trip. The constant contact in the trip, not only among tourist, but also with the local community, allows a positive relation between tourists and residents bringing about a form of tourism that digresses from an aggressive approach, typical of “do-it-yourself tourism” towards locals. The confluence between tourists and the local community should generate mutual respect of the different cultures. If these two communities (residents and tourists) converge in a synergic approach, it’s obvious that external economic sources can facilitate not only tourists, but also the local community and relate with the surrounding territory. These benefits can be reached when the destination and the surrounding tourist area is prepared and organized to welcome tourists. Therefore, the territory is transformed into a local tourist system. In fact, the latter is possible when there are at least three conditions: if it does not compromise the eco-system balance, the harmonic development of suburban and central areas and the continuity of the lifestyle of the local community.

The tourist that enters into such a system, is no longer a simple outsider, but becomes a traveller that meets other realities and new values without prearranged schemes and therefore ready to relate with the social reality.

## **2- Integrated relational tourism demand: the development of networks**

In order to speak of relational tourism, good relations between tourists and residents are important. This cannot take place just from the trip itself, but the need to share mutual interests brings tourists in touch with residents before the trip. The development of social networks and networks as a virtual meeting place are a natural way to meet and be able to share and welcome with one another mutual interests. In such a context relational tourism can develop, preceded first by a virtual meeting and then the actual one to carry out activities and interests that brought them in contact with one another. This is how human relational networks are formed which are not tied just with the emotions and the tourism experience but that grow thanks to interests and not the territory, which becomes a frame. At times, the latter can become “uncomfortable” in a sense that it’s difficult to model for the interests of network partners, while at other times it can be a necessary resource for the network to succeed.

Recognizing the uniqueness of human relations, in this type of journey, represents the winning card to continue this type of trip always in search of new contacts. At first the network can be formed by two or three people that enter a contact page on social networks, perhaps arising from actually

meeting another or from an event. Then the network becomes larger by having friends of friends and so on. The reasons why a network expands in the whole world are different, but there are certainly two main ones: the first one consists in the natural privacy guaranteed by the fact that one can only access indirectly. In fact, people access and register to the network easily, not just because of the many interests – sport, music, art, cuisine, etc...- but also because they are more open to “meeting” someone new precisely because virtually reached.

The second arises from the total lack of information on the social role of each single member of the network. Therefore, there is no “reverential fear”, but only knowing the role within the network. After a few months or a year from the existence of the network on the web, some members, not necessarily the founders, write on the site a notice of an event where they ask members of the network to join. In the meantime, the one who put the notice organizes the event in the place. When there are even a few confirmations, the event can take place.

Therefore, a network tourist is one with exact and specific needs for whom it’s necessary to build a “fixed journey”. In fact, this type of tourist directs his travel expectations in practicing and experiencing interests of that sort. But if we were to create this type of travel we would certainly offer a unique experience, but we would make of this tourist a person with no ties in the territory, we would create a “touch and go” trip with almost nothing left for the traveller and the hosting community.

An important role for the territory to become a quality destination for these networks, is held by the network member who becomes a “spokesman” in the local community, that welcomes the needs. Such a person, or group of people, represents the need of the network within the community and thus a collaboration is established among network users, who become tourists, and the residents. The ones who propose the event and the network members, besides organizing a tourist offer with attractions tied to the network, activate the needed synergies with the local community, as well as public and private authorities, for the “governance” of this type of tourism, creating shows and events related to both local traditions as well as specific network activities.

This new method of being acquainted with and creating network is becoming widespread, as it can be seen, for example, in the large and small sports and religious events, related to dance, gambling, architecture....

Among the many examples, perhaps the most evident is religious tourism: for their sojourn, pilgrims prefer being hosted in a “home” in the local community which not only shares faith, but which they have already met, even if only virtually.

Same thing applies to bridge players who are hosted in places often exclusively dedicated to playing bridge. In short, small events where a part of the local community is very involved since it deals with organizing the territory so that bridge players can fulfil their leisure activities and develop proper relations for others and future bridge matches. Even architects, in order to easily access to the dynamics of the cultural landscape, are often directed to networks where someone “alike” hosts them.

In conclusion, more private networks are being created, where every kind of hierarchy and bureaucracy disappears, while the immediacy of human relations is dominant. For this reason, the trip does not end with the simple “event” organized by the network, but what’s more important is the human experience that the tourist had in contact with the hosting community.

### **3- Territorial, environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts of network tourism**

At first network tourism may appear as not having environmental impacts since we think more of the virtual sphere from where it’s created. But, that’s not the case, since at the moment that network members create the event or give the opportunity to start a constant network meeting in the territory, such network tourism may have negative environmental impacts. In fact, if this type of tourism should involve a great number of tourists concentrating the flow in a defined area, then there could be environmental imbalance in the use of resources and would strengthen conflicts in the use of resources, exceeding the capacity load of tourism.

Moreover, there could be positive environmental impacts such as: enhancing environmental, cultural and social resources, well taken care landscape thanks to the minimization of infrastructure growth. In fact, in this type of tourism accommodation structures could be in existing places, such as homes of network members, or existing buildings and hotels, that would be deliberately involved

to host tourists.

Further environmental benefits deriving from this type of tourism are both involving the local people to directly manage resources, which should take place with efficiency and skill, since precisely from those resources comes the local wealth and establishing external welfare deriving from a better organization of resources from which even the local community can benefit (external economies).

Moreover, economic impacts are positive when it's possible to register: growth of local productions, which tourists should not only appreciate, but request in large quantity and perhaps take home with them. Fundamentally, if these tourists are foreigners and spend in goods produced locally, export would increase and the added value would be distributed in the entire economy of the region, at least in the average period.

The demand for local products, in this view of integrated network tourism, should encourage producers not to increase prices, as it usually happens, but to find new ways to produce goods in a more competitive way. This innovative push arises especially when the "social capital" formed by the local community creates a feeling of trust with the network and therefore, it's not possible to raise prices, but only improve the quality of products. When a tourist sees innovation as a new tourist product and finds it useful also for the uniqueness and irreproducibility, he would be willing to pay a higher price, giving up part of his "income" of the consumer. In fact, a tourist is willing to spend and consume when innovation is seen as improving the quality of his comfort. Obviously, the elite tourist feels more attracted by innovations that tend to differentiate and segment tourist demand. The more a tourist feels satisfied for a highly personalized service, the more he would be willing to spend. For this reason innovation can become that attraction factor for the network that gladly operates in territories recognizing that value of participation to local economy growth. Subordinate areas will also benefit from this growth since it would create peripheral market and new professions that inevitably can be distributed in a more standard way for the whole touristic area.

Another important factor that enables the network to perform an economic role at a local level is the seasonal adjustment: the local community, wishing to keep the trust gained during the network formation, does not offer its area during high season and when services, especially touristic ones, are fully in use, therefore unwelcoming and degrading. Instead, it chooses the more appropriate period of the year to give the network the opportunity to come into real contact with them. Therefore, a network tourist feels protected and attended taking part in the local lifestyle.

Seasonal adjustment of touristic flow is from the environmental, but especially economic profile, a great opportunity to strengthen the system, which is then able to insource the relative diseconomies that could come about.

Integrated relational network tourism, therefore becomes a form of tourism that does not need large capital investments, but ideas which, if on one hand are easy to imitate since they are inexpensive and not particularly risky, on the other hand they cannot be reproduced since they are related to the cultural and environmental context where they were created. As a matter of fact, in tourism, innovation does not produce a new tangible product, but a new activity that changes the method of resource fruition and the service offered.

At last, but not the least important, we find the social effect that this type of tourism has on the local community. Indeed, in the short and average period the local community could lose its own cultural identity due to the contact with tourists without intermediaries. At first, the exhilarated and enthusiastic increase of flows could create an all-absorbing opening of the local community to tourists. Instead, in the long run such a close relationship between tourist and resident could generate a hospitality denial and therefore the creation of "enclave" from residents who are no longer welcoming tourists, losing considerable shares in the market.

In short, this type of tourism could activate two different social consequences: the first is the strengthening of the local identity, with results entirely negative for this type of tourism based on relations between tourist and the community. Whereas, the second derives from the total openness to new cultures that replace the traditional ones, hence removing the local culture – i.e. cultural genocide.

From the social standpoint, another negative aspect could be the strengthening of elite, especially in developing countries. As a matter of fact, the elite that belongs to the network, by managing resources and network tourism, tend to keep away the remaining part of the local population, since

it would be considered more and more distant and far away from the needs of the touristic network. This situation could get worse causing a conflict of use of resources since the local population, being poor, sees network and tourists as the ones that take the little resources they have without giving anything in return.

#### **4- The role of the offer: creation of external economies to develop tourism and networks**

In order for networks to successfully create their activity, they should activate local stakeholders to organize an offer related as much as possible to local products and values (mountain communities, municipalities, and small and average local firms). Activating this kind of cooperation could be useful not only to increase local firms revenues and to increase local employment, but to develop the whole touristic area.

In fact, the ones that belong to the network should have a role of “*primum movens*” to then involve not only stakeholders, but the entire community. This participation is simply the realization of the subsidiary principle, that principle so dear to our European system, with which the local community is in the front line to organize and manage resources, since it holds the culture and the skills needed. This process, starting from the bottom up, allows the integration and sharing of objectives not only from those that have been part of the local community for some time, but especially among immigrants, resident foreigners and locals since, for example, there is a need to inform network members in several languages, or to know their customs, their needs... (see table 1) It's not easy to offer a touristic product as designed, therefore an actual “touristic district” must be organized, capable of satisfying the needs of network tourists and locals. The more the local community is able to make an interesting offer for that type of network and the greater are the opportunities of growth and continuous trade with the network and afterwards involve more and more networks differentiating the offer according to the network, even if the organization stays more or less the same.

Thus, external economies will be created, i.e., a system of receptive services very visible and beneficial, first of all to locals who should manage the private networks of tourists.

This new fruition of tourist services becomes a real innovation, beneficial to the whole territory. Moreover, this improvement should be felt by the resident community which, on the contrary, often sees innovation as a greater pressure on resources, reducing the possibility of their use. This new form of tourism can constitute a product innovation since new resources, originally excluded from the production of tourism services, increase their value and their management and organization involve the whole touristic area. On the contrary, process innovation only rationalizes what is not efficient in each single touristic structure.

For example, if on one hand “low cost” increased considerably touristic flow, on the other hand started a negative impact on the territory. This effect is caused by the increase of the anthropic pressure of some resources, especially the frail ones, which without an estimated protection, have deteriorated and downgraded. This phenomenon has occurred in the large European capitals and in seaside destinations where the lowering of prices, since the demand is very elastic, has permitted a larger flow of tourists, causing the overcoming of the “touristic load”, especially in the main areas of the above destinations and consequently the deterioration of resources and the conflict on the use of resources.

In short, the tourist services offer dedicated to the network can change the pre-existent tourist product, especially when it becomes a market competition element both for the venture and the territory, i.e., there are no conflict of interests between venture and the local community. In fact, to be accepted as a new touristic product, an innovation must be identified as such, not only in the single tourist service structures – where it often arises – but also within the destination touristic system, since both stakeholders and residents take part actively in providing tourist facilities of new resources. In fact, it's important that innovations are spread from an area of the economy to another to report the significant growth in the territory.

The localization choice for certain areas becomes strategic for operating the network and for the success of the touristic initiative. In the chosen areas, cooperation among institutions and interpersonal relations get into action to integrate tourism to the life of residents. For this kind of tourism, the best destinations are those with small and medium businesses. In fact, there is a greater number of the latter where there are strong relations with the territory and their traditional culture.

This situation tends to privilege those areas where, besides being physically close, one may access and easily benefit, in a direct and transparent manner, of all the needed information to organize events.

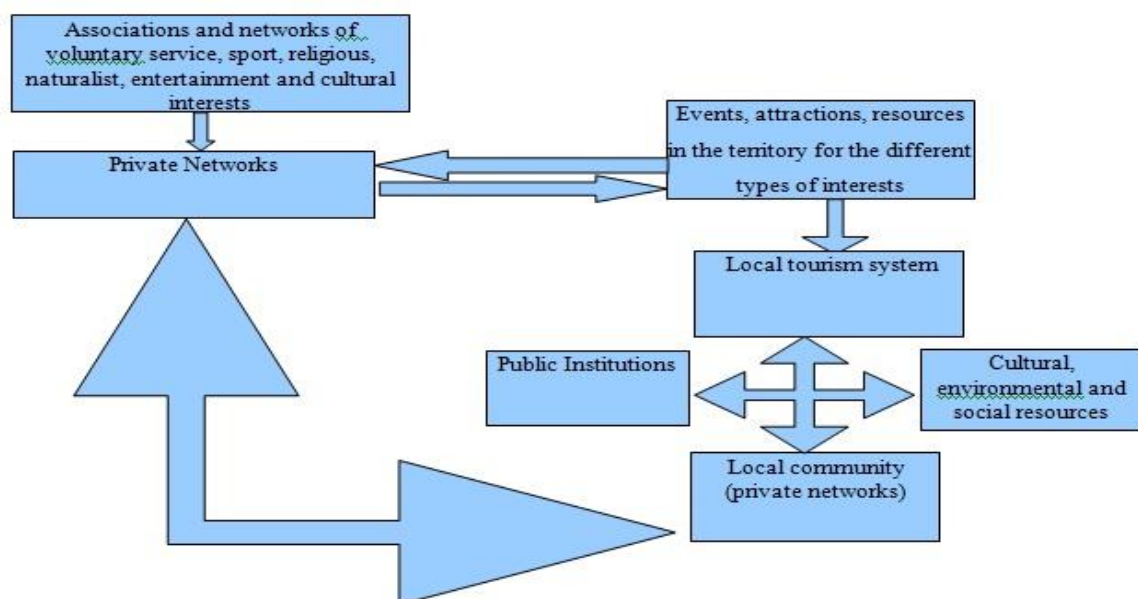
In these areas any type of innovation (both technologic and social) spreads out, thanks also to the activation of horizontal (between tourism ventures) and vertical (between ventures and local community) networks, especially when the territory has a “vocational” potential of high intensity natural resources tourism. Moreover, the choice of location for touristic events is made on the basis of two main requisites that the territory holds: relation between the local community and ventures, and therefore the existence of an organized and collaborative territorial context. For this reason the choice of venture location is directed to “suburban” areas where the repetition of knowledge is immediate and consequently some external economies are easily attended, such as contact with suppliers and public and private bodies.

Moreover, such characteristics are spread in the various contexts of the tourist region, where, in order to establish important economies of accumulation and external effects for reducing company costs, stakeholders check on the possibility to adapt this type of tourism to the local characteristics (cultural, social, environmental). This characteristic is the reason why often an event organized by the network becomes a progressive tourist product. The latter one is just a different service of welcome made up of a series of elements that together create the uniqueness of the progressive service. Therefore, a progressive tourism product can be developed in all cycles of production and directly in the area, but at the same time the present standardization of services offered, and especially those offered by the large tourism ventures, have often misguided tourists in considering the services received as an industrial product.

The availability and possibility to access to information, as well as technological networking, established between ventures and the territory, create an inclination to extend the sector and space of innovation and consequently of quality – especially of the qualified highly skilled work – within the economic system.

If, in fact, it is true that in the past the territory centrality helped the tourist flow with a high purchasing power, today, thanks to technologies and the development of transportation, the same type of tourists discover the suburban area for the opportunity of finding spaces of “free time” and services differentiated and segmented to their own needs

**Table 1: The process of networks “tourist governance”**



## Conclusions

Network integrated relational tourism seems a new way to generate touristic flows with great growth perspectives, though remaining a niche. This new type of tourism expands and diversifies the present touristic demand acquiring a global dimension, since it refers to networks that know no boundaries.

A network integrated relational tourist, being someone who constantly establishes social relations in the locality he visits, is not closed in its “enclave”, contrary to what generally mass tourism proposes with holiday villages. Therefore, the main background given by a network relational tourist is the cultural openness needed to arouse integration with the local reality and subsequently acknowledging the new local reality as a wealth both for the tourist and the locals. Relational trade between tourist and locals takes place both on the network before the trip and also during the stay. Naturally, during the stay in the locality, the network relational tourist deepens and compares the cultural aspects previously examined on the web and for this reason the stay has a slower time frame than “mass tourism”. For this reason, network integrated relational tourism becomes sort of a “niche tourism” with different characteristics of “hit and run” tourism, which in the present historical time prevails.

Therefore, from the demand point of view, network integrated relational tourism can be defined as affordable. This aspect can also be found in the type of offer required by such tourism.

In fact, the destination welcomes tourists in the community without large infrastructures, in a “friendly” manner, so that environmental costs supported by the local community can be minimized. This peculiarity is certainly a positive factor for the territory since tourism as started off can become a dynamic economic sector and as such does not change in time in terms of profitability for the entire economic system.

Network integrated relational tourism constitutes an important activity for the local economy, particularly when the confidence between tourists and locals is proven so that the latter are willing to spend in local goods to the point that it is possible, thanks to the multiplying aspect, that the trust is reflected in the economic system for future investment. Moreover, participation of small and medium businesses guarantees both tourists shopping for these products with the subsequent increase of added value for the entire community, but especially the creation of a differentiated economy without a touristic monoculture.

From the social standpoint, this type of tourism, strongly based on human relations, has two totally contradictory consequences: the first, positive, is represented by strengthening the local identity that allows the community to be closer and rooted in the territory; while the second can appear as negative since it increases conflicts and social gaps both between tourists and residents, as well as between residents of the same community – i.e. between the poor and the rich and immigrants and residents – flaking the social unity, especially in those areas where there are already strong conflicts between the rich and the poor.

Therefore, this kind of tourism most probably will expand since it arises from the cooperation of the different public and private stakeholders for welcoming tourists. Consequently, there will be more efficiency in the territorial system and an attentive use of resources, thanks also to the creation of positive external effects created precisely by this tourism.

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