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AN URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY APPROACH TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN FAST-GROWING, TOURISM-SPECIALIZED COASTAL CITIES

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Cities everywhere, and especially those located in coastal areas, grow and change rapidly, reconfiguring in many cases through successful urban development strategies. Tourism specialization is considered a driver of urban transformation and environmental change. A key challenge facing cities for years to come will be understanding the critical role that tourism plays in urban policies and planning process. Our study focuses on Urban Political Ecology (UPE) as an emerging framework for analysis of socio-environmental change in metropolitan areas. Specifically, it allows to examine political, social, and ecological processes together with interests, power and relations shaping patterns and processes of urban change. After providing a brief review of UPE and how it expands toward tourism issues, the article examines Benidorm (Spain), Venice (Italy) and Mykonos (Greece) as representative examples of fast-growing, tourism-specialized Mediterranean urban areas. The case studies illustrate how tourism specialization has been for a long time a driver of change closely linked to urban processes. We conclude that UPE allows a comprehensive analysis of tourism's role, problems and potentials in the context of complex socioeconomic dynamics, contributing to identify effective policies governing future urbanization processes in coastal cities.

Keywords: *Local development, Urban growth, Southern Europe, Venice, Benidorm, Mykonos.*

INTRODUCTION

Cities, irrespective of their size, are constantly changing (UN-Habitat, 2012). Inner cities and neighborhoods or peri-urban areas are built, transformed and used for several functions, and grow in complex ways as far as population, socioeconomic patterns and geopolitical settings are concerned (Hall, 1998; Batty and Marshall, 2012; Salvati et al., 2013; Gavalas et al., 2014). Considered as the most complex, dynamic and never-ending artifact created by humans (UN-Habitat, 2010; Portugali et al., 2012; Zamenopoulos and Alexiou, 2012; Salvati and Serra, 2016) cities reflect the interactions among biophysical, social, environmental and economic processes at local, regional and global scales (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Salvati, 2013; Di Feliciantonio and Salvati, 2015; Rontos et al., 2016; Cuadrado-Ciuraneta et al., 2017). Responding to

increasing processes of globalization, urbanization and socioeconomic change, the world has moved towards an urban era (Kötter, 2004; Cerccarelli et al., 2014; Salvati, 2015). In the last decades, tourism has emerged as an important sector influencing urban environments at different physical, social, cultural and political levels (Ashworth and Page, 2011).

Tourism is considered one of the fastest-growing industry in the world, with the largest increase concentrated in coastal cities, where processes of urban change are particularly rapid and unpredictable. Tourism represents a major economic activity in Europe, supporting continuously local development since decades (European Travel Commission, 2015). The Mediterranean region is the most important destination in Europe and the most visited site in the world (Zitti et al., 2015). Southern European tourism-specialized coastal cities act as engines of growth in regional economic systems, influencing urban morphology and functions (Mullins, 1994; Russo, 2002; Ivars Baidal et al., 2013; Salvati and Gargiulo Morelli, 2014; Carlucci et al., 2017).

Over the last decades, researchers, practitioners and policy makers have started assuming that tourism is an instrument of economic development that generates (usually negative) consequences on urban areas, landscapes and natural resources. However, these studies fall providing a critical understanding of how cities are evolving through internal and external processes at local and global scales in which tourism dynamics are embedded. This is partially due to the fact that analysis of the relationship between tourism and urban environment lacks appropriate concepts for conducting empirical research understanding socio-environmental problems and identifying possible policy solutions. As a consequence, although tourism contributes considerably to the local economy of several cities world-wide, scholars engaged in critical debates on urbanization and socio-environmental dynamics, ignored sometimes tourism-induced patterns and processes of metropolitan change (Ashworth and Page, 2011).

The present study explores and discusses such issues in the light of the Urban Political Ecology (UPE) framework. UPE is considered a suitable theoretical framework contributing to 'disentangle the interconnected economic, political, social and ecological processes that shape urban landscapes' (Cook and Swyngedouw, 2012) and providing positive and normative concepts for analysis of urban contexts. As such, the Mediterranean region is an interesting field of investigation and three important tourist destinations have been identify and analyzed in light of the aforementioned issue (European Environment Agency, 2002).

Specifically, Venice (Italy) has been and remains one of the world-class cities with a distinctive cultural heritage. Benidorm (Spain) has become one of the most well known mass tourism resorts in Spain and Europe. Finally, Mykonos (Greece) was experiencing an explosive tourism boom which is rather peculiar among Greek tourist destinations. All cities are characterized by increasing influx of tourists and rapid processes of urban change, influencing social, economic, political and environmental local contexts (Zambon et al., 2018).

This paper composed of three sections. The first section reviews the UPE approach and describes the key concepts and methods through which processes of urban change may be analyzed, represented and understood. The second section provides a description of the main processes of urbanization observed in tourism-specialized Mediterranean cities. The third section analyzes the three cases mentioned above. The analysis allows exploring the extent to which tourism shapes cities and how tourism-specialized cities are producing new urban landscapes.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Understanding causes of urban growth and the related socio-environmental consequences have become one of the new domains of critical thinking based on the premises of political ecology (Cook

and Swyngedouw, 2012; Zambon et al., 2017; Duvernoy et al., 2018). Political ecology is an approach oriented towards the understanding of the complex interactions between society and environment in which issues of class, gender, race, power and hegemony acquire a special relevance (Robbins, 2004). As urbanization has gained remarkable prominence in recent years, the interconnection between human and natural processes has been appropriately extended to the foreground of 'urban' dimensions through the so-called Urban Political Ecology discipline (De Rosa and Salvati, 2016). UPE thinking promotes critical urban political–environmental research (Heynen et al., 2006b) grounded on the intimate transformation of nature-social relations connected with urbanization processes. More specifically, UPE provides a theoretical, methodological and empirical platform for untangling how socio-environmental processes shape urban landscapes.

Starting from the assumption that nature and society do not exist independently as distinct entities, UPE scholars argue that 'urban' dimensions are mediated by socio-ecological flows. In other words, nature has become urbanized through social interactions, and used in the process of urban development (Cook and Swyngedouw, 2012) Socio-ecological flows including water, CO_2, food, and materials, are linked to (i) the specific historical, geographical, social, cultural, political and economic conditions, practices and relations, (ii) the formal and informal governing institutions that accompany them, (iii) the action of groups of actors, stakeholders and social power relations, (iv) the interaction among local, regional and global scales, and (v) the relationship between urban capitalism and environmental injustices produced through exploitation, commodification and degradation of places (Salvati et al., 2012). All these factors finally result in a continuous "urban metabolism" (a fundamental concept in the UPE theory, e.g. Gandy, 2004) configuring new and complex urban landscapes (Swyngedouw, 2004). From this perspective, 'urbanization' is considered a process produced through particular forms of socio-physical metabolism,

and "cities are conceptualized as metabolic vehicles constituted in and through metabolic circulatory socio-ecological flows" (Swyngedouw, 2006). Therefore, according to urban political ecology scholars, socio-environmental changes result in the continuous production of new urban (social and physical) configurations (Salvati and Serra, 2016).

On the basis of these theoretical premises, UPE has elaborated some central concepts such as, for instance, the relationship between society and nature, social power and interests, capitalism and circulation of capital, urbanization, networks, groups of actors, local/global scale, environmental commodification and urban metabolism (Cook and Swyngedouw, 2012). UPE scholars argue that these concepts contribute in shaping the formation of urban environments (Cronon, 1991), evidencing how comparative studies may help understanding changes in contemporary urban landscapes (Davis, 2002; Gandy, 2003; Desfor and Kail, 2004; Heynen et al., 2006a).

Over the past few years tourism has become one of the more recent political ecology themes. Studies carried out by Stonich (1998) in Honduras, and by Gossling (2001) in Zanzibar have contributed "to understand how environmental and political forces interact to affect social and environmental changes through the actions of various social actors at different scales'' (Stonich, 1998, p. 28). Following these evidence, other scholars have focused on tourism and related aspects linked to globalization and uneven distribution of natural resources - including water (Sharpley, 2000; Gossling, 2001; Cole, 2012) in both developed and the developing countries. The latent interplay among international, national, regional and local actors, agencies, institutions and policies at the interface of socio-environmental change was also extensively addressed (Swyngedouw, 2004). Moreover, research questions have emerged when discussing on issues such as 'who initiates and controls tourism development, for whom, for what purpose, at what cost, to what end; who has the power to create and control the narratives related to development issues; and, depending on the

context, how are the resources affected by development processes' (Beahm, 2009). Through these and other case studies, political ecology has introduced a new thinking to the ways in which tourism is studied, by broadening its scope and scale (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2000). If Political Ecology of tourism is gaining more and more attention, as Douglas (2014) explains in his work "What's political ecology got to do with tourism?", studies on tourism from a Urban Political Ecology are scarce, despite the increasing importance "of planetary urbanization" as the main driver of environmental change (Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2014). As Cook and Swyngedouw (2012) suggest, the UPE framework 'is an important step towards beginning to disentangle the interwoven knots of social process, material metabolism and spatial form that go into the formation of contemporary urban socio-natural landscapes'. Its relevance for tourism studies should be, however, demonstrated with specific examples. According to the UPE framework adopted in this paper, the next chapters examine the increasing importance of the nexus between tourism and urban change and by focusing more specifically on selected case studies.

CHANGES IN TOURISM-SPECIALIZED CITIES FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL SCALES

Cities, especially those located in coastal areas, are considered among the major urban hotspots globally (Sekovski et al., 2012). In 2008, the world's urban population exceeded the world's rural population and approximately a quarter of this population concentrated along or near coasts (Tibbetts, 2002). Although human population has been growing mainly in coastal megacities (Sekovski et al., 2012), recent studies have shown that the concurrent movement of population to coastal areas worldwide, also occur in medium and smaller cities (UN-Habitat, 2012; Salvati and Zitti, 2005; Munafò et al., 2013). Coastline locations have offered advantages and opportunities for human settings. As strategic

meeting points between land and sea, coasts have experienced a long commodification of landscapes and natural resources such as water, land and other environmental amenities suited to human activities. This has led to rapid population growth and socioeconomic development, as the result of a combination of geographical location, rural-to-urban migration, infrastructure development and other political, social and economic forces, including globalization (see Colantoni et al., 2016 and references therein). These processes of change, associated with global capital, have proved to be major forces in the emerging landscapes of both developed and less developed cities. Additionally, as urban development has accelerated, the major economic, political, social, cultural and ecological processes of change have gained space very quickly (Biasi et al., 2015).

Cities have always been labeled as engines of economic growth (Salvati, 2015). Through a diversity of processes they have become complex places of accumulation and concentration of economic and political power, organizations, activity, infrastructure and resources, acting as magnets of development (Collet, 2010). Ultimately, cities have configured themselves as nodal points for business, competitiveness and creativity as well as consumption and leisure within global networks (Salvati et al., 2013). Through these particular conditions, some urban economies have shaped new geographies of consumption and production. This is particularly the case of the tourism sector which has been one of the most highly developed and dynamic industry of the world economy in recent years. Tourism has grown at such a pace and scale that, in 2012 the total international arrivals were expected to reach one billion people for the first time (UNWTO, 2012). According to the World Tourism Organization new destinations are emerging worldwide, new markets are expanding and international tourist arrivals in emerging economy destinations are expected to grow in double digits by 2030 (UNWTO, 2012: 9-15). Influencing the movements of a relevant number of people and the urban development, tourism represents today a fundamental strategy of economic development for many

coastal cities. This is attributable mainly to new socioeconomic processes producing transformations in traditional landscapes (Ashworth and Page, 2011). As Ashworth and Page have observed, new urban geographies arise from these processes and result in different patterns and complex forms with their own specific characteristics, practices and modes of consumption in time and space. They also noted that, while some urban forms influenced by tourism have developed over time, other forms do not pass through a series of phases of growth and development, and are emerging as new landscapes for tourism (Ashworth and Page, 2011: 3). Additionally, these new tourist destinations require infrastructures, facilities and amenities, adding further pressures on existing social and natural environments.

Indeed, coastal cities - especially those specialized in tourism activities - are already under heavy pressure from human activities, and result as critical areas of global environmental change (Small and Nicholls, 2003; Gössling and Hall, 2006; Collet, 2010). Occupying just 10 percent of the earth's land surface, coastal zones are heavily urbanized with 65 per cent of their inhabitants residing in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2010). Despite the fact that the most urbanized coastal cities today tend to be situated in less developed countries, such as Asia and Africa, the process of rapid urbanization started first in today's more developed regions, gradually spreading from Southeast Europe across the whole European continent (Antrop, 2004: 9). In Europe 76 percent of the population lives in urban regions and 43 percent live in coastal regions (European Environment Agency, 2006a). Between 1990 and 2000 urbanization in Europe grew 30% faster in coastal areas than in inland areas, and this difference continues to grow (UNEP/MAP-Plan Bleu, 2009).

The Mediterranean coastal regions well illustrate long-term processes of urbanization and socio-environmental change. Considered by Cuadrado-Ciuraneta et al. (2007) one of the most celebrated and threatened in the world, the Mediterranean coasts have always been attractive areas for development. Mediterranean

cities are the result of the close interplay between natural characteristics and the equally diverse human activities, both past and present (Carlucci et al., 2017). This phenomenon refers to a great variety of conditions, depending on the more or less strategic locations, natural features (climate, water, landscape, ecosystems, terrestrial and marine biodiversity) and cultural (historic and cultural heritage) resources, on the nature of the activities, as well as on the urban dynamics capable to confront all these issues (Rontos et al., 2016). In the last decades, the interplay between processes of development and human-environment relations have intensified and dense urban tissues of several Mediterranean cities has been exposed to socioeconomic changes and substantial landscape transformations (Trumbic, 2005).

Out of a total 46,000 km of coastline, more than half are urbanized, and urbanization rate is expected to grow up to 72 percent in 2025. According to recent studies, the Western Mediterranean area shows the highest increase in artificial surfaces (UNEP/MAP, 2012). In Italy, France and Spain the coverage of built-up areas in the first kilometer of the coastal strip exceeds 45 per cent (European Environment Agency, 2006a). Coastal urbanization has been often attributed to the growth of the tourism sector. The Mediterranean is now considered the first destination in the world attracting 30 per cent of global international tourism arrivals. France, Spain and Italy, are among the ten strongest tourist destinations in the world (UNWTO, 2012). Responding to waves of population increase, rapid urbanization and emerging economic sectors like tourism, the Mediterranean coastal cities have grown outward from small dense cores and acquired new forms, dimensions, functions and centralities (Cuadrado-Ciuraneta et al., 2017). In this connection, it can be argued that by moving the analysis from the global scale to the regional scale, coastal cities are nowadays the places where processes of urban change appear more evident depending on several interconnected factors.

URBAN CHANGE AND TOURISM: MAIN ISSUES FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN CITIES

In southern European coastal regions, urban change processes and their socio-environmental impacts have been illustrated widely (e.g. Muñoz, 2001; Antrop, 2004; Serra et al., 2014). Mediterranean cities have been traditionally characterized by urban compactness and high population densities, complex morphologies, social diversity and economic polarization in industrial and service areas. However, in the last two decades new morphologies have emerged (Colantoni et al., 2015). Sprawl can be considered as one of the most salient features of the recent urbanization process in the region (European Environment Agency, 2006b). According to Muñoz (2003) sprawl generates a new type of city with important changes in the socioeconomic relationship between urban and rural areas, reflecting simplified morphologies and homogeneous design in cities with vastly different socioeconomic contexts (Salvati and Gargiulo Morelli, 2014). The loss in morphological and social diversity represents a significant change from the features that characterized the traditional Mediterranean compact city (Leontidou, 1990).

Taken as an emerging urban form in Mediterranean Europe, dispersed cities are considered urban landscapes designed and produced as a commodity, induced by mobility, including voluntary mobility such as that associated with leisure (Zambon et al., 2017). The process of commodification produces wider environmental impacts compared to what was generated by the compact cities, for instance, higher consumptions of land, energy and water as well as larger amounts of waste and pollution (Mullins, 1991; Hoffman et al., 2003; Rico-Amoros et al., 2009). Additionally, a proliferation of intermediate urban forms has emerged. Tourism is considered the main driver of these new urban forms. In many places of the Mediterranean region activities have taken place, involving the development of tourism capacity (campsites, hotels, holiday resorts,

second homes and villas) and support infrastructure (ports, marinas, and other new facilities, swimming pools, golf courses). These capacities can be identified in two main types of tourist patterns: landscapes and cities of mass tourism, associated with concentration of facilities, vertical growth of buildings and high population density, and the new type of resort tourism characterized by settlement dispersion, horizontal growth, land consumption and low population density, detached residential houses with private gardens and swimming pools, together with amenities such as golf courses, leisure parks and health centers (Hoffman et al., 2003).

As outlined by Gossling (2006) tourism is embedded in the process of urbanization mainly in two ways. First, as the main driver behind urbanization in places oriented to (and suitable for) tourism and leisure, or what Mullins (1991) calls 'tourism urbanization' and second, as an element of leisure production in urban place where a part of the city is oriented to satisfy tourist demands, even though the city's economy is not dominated by tourism and leisure production (Page and Hall, 2003). As it has been observed recently, different forms and types of tourism produce diverging socio-environmental impacts. In particular, some studies show that the consumption of water, the most important resource for urban settlements, population and tourism amenities in the Mediterranean, may differ substantially according to the predominant type of tourism and second-home settlement, and the water requirements of future expansions of tourism will probably depend on the specific land-use selected for development (Mullins, 1991, 1994; Hoffman et al., 2003).

Several factors contribute to explain the changing urban patterns found in the Mediterranean region. Besides biophysical and territorial conditions, the development of tourism along the Mediterranean coasts has reflected specific socioeconomic and political characteristics. For example, economic restructuring has been a driver for infrastructure development achieved through tourism and the burst construction phase mainly observed in Spain and Greece in the 2000s. Factors such as local community interests,

health and security conditions, real estate speculation, and traditional models of tourism exploitation have contributed to shape urban forms in tourism-specialized urban areas (Pili et al., 2017. Again, policies and programs initiated and implemented by the tourism industry have also contributed to new patterns, processes and directions of change in Mediterranean coastal cities (Mullins, 1991; Hoffman et al., 2003; UNEP/MAP, 2012). Competitiveness and creativity appear as new contemporary elements in the specific dynamics of Mediterranean economic urban strategies and actions driven by globalization (Salvati, 2015). Finally, the recent economic crisis influencing the Mediterranean countries constitutes an important driver of urban change strongly interlinked to factors just mentioned (De Rosa and Salvati, 2016).

As a result, all these factors are embedded in the configuration of the urban form and in its processes of change. Edwards et al. (2008: 1038) state that tourism is 'one among many social and economic forces in the urban environment'. Page and Hall (2003) argued that what characterizes these new urban configurations where tourism assume an important part, is the scale, complexity and diversify of consumption. In this connection, Wall and Mathieson (2005) have addressed the issue how much urban change can be attributed to tourism. By considering the complex processes that are taking place in contemporary cities, Ashworth and Page (2011) claim that the major urban changes should be sought in the phenomena of globalization of urban networks, complex interactions between local and global scales, rise of the city as the centre of cultural production and consumption, the commodification of cities as competitive marketable brands and other identifiable trends. According to these authors, they are the basis for the explanation of the current urban changes and transformations and to understand the direction of future urban configurations. Ashworth and Page also argue that what is happening to urban environments depend on the understanding of what is happening to cities, in which tourism is inextricably embedded.

URBAN GROWTH AND TOURISM: CASE STUDIES

BENIDORM

Benidorm and the Costa Blanca are the most important seaside resorts in the Mediterranean coast and Europe. In the mid-20th century Benidorm was a small fishing village of nearly 2,000 people. In the early 1950s the fishing industry went into decline, and the village was regenerated through tourism as a short-cut to economic prosperity. In 1956 an urban plan targeting tourist development was approved (the first of its kind in Spain), and Benidorm turned into a tourist destination experiencing significant urban growth. Since the late 1960s population has increased tenfold and now stands at 80,000 inhabitants, 40% of whom approximately are foreigners (Benidorm en cifras, 2012). Since the first tourist hostel was built in the Playa de Levante in 1925, Benidorm represents a concentrated form of tourism settlements characterized by 142 hotels with more than 3,000 swimming pools, 330 skyscrapers including the 52 floor Gran Hotel Bali, 6.266 apartments, 10 campsites with some 11.275 places, providing more than 68,000 beds, and 18,000 second homes, as well as resorts villas, and extensive recreational facilities (Benidorm en cifras, 2012).

Several factors may explain these changes. The coastal environment, characterized by white sand, palm trees, crystal-clear waters and a favorable microclimate all year round, has contributed to its attractiveness. As said, this sun and sand destination emerged along the Mediterranean coast in the 1960s as a high-density urban development and high-rise buildings, which conforms Benidorm's distinctive vertical skyline. By no means this was an uncontrolled process. Benidorm is instead the result of a long process of land-use transformations and local planning based on mixed public-private initiatives.

The Alicante airport, which opened in 1967, was perhaps the biggest contributing factor to Benidorm success as a holiday resort. In 2011 1.748.564 people visited Benidorm and hotels alone annually registered approximately 10 million overnight stays (Benidorm en cifras, 2012). Foreign tourists, primarily British, followed by French and Northern Europeans, account for half of these visits. Current projections suggest increasing numbers in hotel occupancy in Benidorm.

As it has been recently observed by Ivars i Baidal et al. (2013), the interaction of local factors and global forces substantially influenced the development model of Benidorm, and the relationship between urban configuration and tourism dynamics during four critical phases: (i) the international recession and supply-demand imbalances (1988-1993); (ii) the expansive phase (1994-2001); (iii) the stabilization stage (2002-2007) and (iv) the effects of the international economic crisis (2007-nowadays). Among economic factors, the crisis of the traditional sun and sand model was identified, as well as the national and local tourism crisis in adapting to changes in the tourism market (Phase 1), the local tourism recovery of Benidorm that contemporary caused the reduction of attractiveness of other tourist destinations such as Greece and Turkey (Phase 2); the fluctuation of currencies; the favourable economic national situation and consolidation of the tourism industry (Phase 3), the world economy recession and the repercussions on the local tourism demand, and the dependence on the British market (Phase 4). Planning and policy factors contributed to environmental quality improvement, with a strategic marketing plan (1991) for the town; the creation of a water park and a large green urban space (Phase 1) the renovation of beach seafront promenades (Phase 1 and 4) and the new terminal of the Alicante airport, associated with growth of low-cost airlines and the increase of Internet purchases (Phase 4). Regional tourism policies also supported the major Theme park (2000) located outside the town and associated with beaches and built-up spaces that contributed to

urban growth with new activities, such as golf courses, the construction of hotel and residential accommodation, a new leisure area and residential homes (Phase 2). While the real estate market boom produced many non-hotel beds due to the growth of residential tourism, a considerable renovation of existing establishments was carried out (Phase 3). Moreover, new strategic infrastructures of tourism linked to culture and business were promoted (Phase 4).

Competitiveness factors related to rival sun and sand destinations (Phase 1), or growing rival destinations (phase 4) offering alternative tourism models to the Spanish traditional model were also observed. This has led Benidorm to promote the creation of the Tourism Training, first in a network of regional centres (Phase 1), urban, recreational and leisure facilities, including the hotel growth with high-range categories, as a product brand from the Benidorm and the Tourism Marketing Plan (phase 3 and 4), and currently the promotion of a new model of tourism for more sophisticated and independent travellers, while maintaining the traditional focus on families, young people and elderly. This indicates that new urban forms and facilities will change according this new model of tourism, since settlement patterns influence and are in turn influenced by the profiles of tourists (Rico-Amoros et al., 2009).

Moreover, local and international interest groups or stakeholders played a critical role in the decision making for the town development and the renovation of urban public spaces (Phase 4). Exogenous factors such as international wars and other conflicts (Phase 1 and 3) also contributed significantly to the tourist movement reductions and local development. Moreover, social factors such as new consumption habits or property speculations were the responses to the ongoing situations. All these factors result intrinsically linked to the environmental and sustainability factors, as the processes of urban configuration of Benidorm have occurred through a long commodification of its coastal environment, hinterland and natural resources. A remarkable example is the water

issue in Benidorm, which in part describe such commodification process.

After the 1978 drought crisis, which coincided with the sharp increase of tourist arrivals and that severely affected the German market by the prospects of insufficient water, the water supply system of the city was renovated and enhanced in order to ensure water supply for the new urban facilities, tourists and local people. Since then, sustainable measures such as obtaining water from farmers in exchange of electricity and other goods also were activated (Rico and Olcina, 2004). Although its vertical urban form changed the traditional one, Benidorm such as Manhattan are both considered sustainable "intelligent terrains" and a future model for holiday hubs which is expected to expand globally by 2030 (Thomson Holidays, 2010; Webster, 2011).

This model appears to be more environmentally efficient, in regard to energy, water and land-use, and less dependent on private mobility (Iribas, 2000; Ivars i Baidal et al., 2013; Rico-Amoros et al., 2009), than other tourism models based on urban sprawl located in Mediterranean coastal areas (European Environment Agency, 2006). However different land management strategies have recently used Benidorm as an anchor for urban sprawl (Bellot et al., 2007). As a result, the proliferation of new urban forms, such as housing development with green gardens and private swimming pools, and recreational sites such as water parks and golf courses are generating new processes of landscape change.

VENICE

The historic city of Venice, located in a wide lagoon between mainland and the Adriatic Sea, is an internationally renowned tourism destination. Although Venice is unique compared to other realities, it is considered a perfect case of a large heritage city allowing for the study of long modifications of land-use, the effects of tourism, and other contemporary processes of change (Zanetto

and Calzavara, 1991; Zannini et al., 2008). Originally Venice developed over 118 small islands and was inhabited by few people subsisting on fishing and salt extraction. Over 15 centuries ago, refugees from the Italian mainland, fleeing from Northern invaders, populated the coastal strip, while noblemen, owners and people settled on these islands to find protection. Location helped propel Venice to its place of wealth and political dominance. It grew in size and autonomy and, in the fifteenth century, became the center of world trade and the largest port city in the Mediterranean and in the world with more than 200,000 inhabitants. Although tourism seems a relatively new phenomenon in the city, it holds a long tradition since it was a destination for pilgrims during the preindustrial period, the grand tour and the European society of the 1700s for tourism elites during the industrial revolution and, finally, the transformations of the holiday in the era of mass consumption with the development of Lido, the global tourism and the Disneyfication of the city (Costantini, 1997; Leonardi, 2003; Tissot, 1996; Zannini, 2002).

As Venice became a travel destination of many wealthy strangers, tourism influenced its conurbation. Certain parts of the city were chose to be built with a view to advertising its economic grandeur and to welcoming foreigners such as the waterfronts and St. Mark's central square (Zannini et al., 2008). After the deviation of the main rivers which flowed into the Lagoon between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries and that avoided the risk of its silting, the city kept evolving through a complex combination of natural processes and human interventions.

In the early twentieth century urban transformations centered in the areas around the historic city: the new bourgeoisie chosen the Lido littoral in the lagoon as a seaside resort among the most interesting of the period, some communities of the mainland regrouped in Mestre, beginning its slow transformation from town to suburb. The process of urban sprawl began after World War II as a consequence of the replacement of industrial activities with services. As industries needed to find new areas outside the city centre,

Marghera developed as the most important industrial settlement, while services were prevalently located in the centre generating higher revenues linked to real estate.

Higher real estate prices caused the population to migrate outside the city leading to the depopulation of the historical center. Since then, tourism has strongly influenced the evolution of Venice and its historical city centre in particular. According to Zannini et al. (2008), Venice has than gained strength with the advent of mass tourism driven by better socioeconomic conditions and new ways to travel. Two main transformations emerged over the last thirty years: the first refers to the upgrading of the area around St Mark's, triggered by the increase of second-home acquisition (Lando and Zanetto, 1978; Costa et al., 1980) while the second involves the increasing number of houses that have been refurbished and dedicated to extra-hotel services (Barbiani and Zanon, 2004). The process of growth refers in particular to the second largest building cycle (1993-2007) and the mechanisms that determined the formation of urban income, representing a decisive element in the transformation of the city.

These factors influenced the structure of the city which today encompasses historical districts and more peripheral areas transformed for both local interests and tourism purposes. Venice is characterized by both under-exploited and over-exploited cultural areas (Russo, 2002) and new areas (or the refurbishment of abandoned areas) are created to improve its image; the transformation of the commercial structure also adapted to satisfy the tourist demand. After the 2008 crisis, the positive trend of tourism arrivals in 2010 seems to be continuous in the subsequent years. In 1951, around 1.1 million tourists per year visited the city and in 2011 there were 22,080,717 of which 6.221.821 stayed overnight in the historical city centre. In 2012 80 percent were foreigners, especially from the United States, followed by the traditional European markets of France, United Kingdom and Germany, while emerging markets such as Russian, Brazil and

China also increased substantially (Annual Tourism Report, 2012). Art, culture, the lagoon environment and the current 14 business exhibitions per year and international events that the city is constantly improving, are the main events in the historic city which attracts more than 60 per cent of its visitors in peaks during spring and autumn.

The major transport infrastructure, the port and airport, are expanding both in term of size and tourist arrival. Today, the city concentrates around 418 hotels and 2.314 other accommodations which include bed and breakfast activities. Moreover, the visible increase in the number of restaurants and stores is a direct result of the need to address the demand of both tourists and work-commuters. Demand for housing in Venice is consequently very high in particular regarding second homes, and it has become the most expensive urban real estate market in Italy. For this reason, the population has decreased from 102,269 residents in 1976 to 59,080 in 2011 and continues to lose regularly about 60 people per month (according to the Venice municipality statistical data). This process of depopulation of the historic city is generating conflicts between tourists and resident population over the use of urban landscapes (Van der Borg and Russo, 2001: 167).

MYKONOS

The island of Mykonos (Greece) constitutes a well-known holiday destination in Europe. Traditionally it was a very poor fishing village characterized by local activities based on fishing, farming, and cattle breeding on harsh lands as well as ship construction which represented the major industry. Tourism has modified entirely the local economy over since it started in the 1950s. Despite the natural environment of the island, typical of the archipelago of Kyklades, characterized by low vegetation due to the dry climate, lack of fresh water and poor soil conditions, the “sun and sand” tourism model has been favored by its coasts, long

sunshine duration and little rainfall. As it is mostly visited during the summer months, tourism has a highly seasonal character.

Tourist numbers have increased substantially from around 5150 arrivals (at hotels) in 1965 to 60.000 in 1995 and currently are experiencing an explosive rise, unknown in the other Greek islands. In 2015 1 million visitors are expected and more than 4000, 1-day transfer visitors per day, use the island as an intermediate stops on ferry routes or as a day trip destinations. Tourists visiting Mykonos come from Germany and United Kingdom, and from other emerging markets such as China, Turkey and Russia. The island has thus become more cosmopolitan and expensive than other Greek islands sustaining the country which competes internationally with other tourist markets (SETE, 2012).

From the mini-resorts built back in the 1960s, new tourism developments have grown up on a quarter of the island between 1971 and 1991. Afterwards, the accommodation stock has risen considerably. The island's population has also increased in size, in contrast to other Greek islands that have lost population over the last decades. Population doubled between 1961 and 1991 from 3,700 to around 8,500, and now stands above 10,000 people. Population growth was followed by the expansion of the infrastructures and investments that have further boosted the island's capacity to accommodate tourists.

The case of Mykonos is a paradigmatic example of the process of urban sprawl occurring spatially far away from (and functionally outside the direct influence of) an urban region and mainly linked to tourism and second-home development sometimes under informal housing and real estate speculation (Salvati, 2013). Until the 1970s, the island of Mykonos was characterized by a dense spatial organization with adjacent settlements concentrated within the area of the main city and harbor. Such a settlement model was similar to that observed in several other Greek islands and reflected the traditional compactness observed in several Mediterranean coastal towns. In the following years, however, an impressive growth of

dispersed settlements (especially one-floor houses with small gardens and swimming pools or two-floor residential housing estates) was observed, due to the urban planning directives that permitted the construction of multi-floor buildings only in the main settlements of the island. Thus, rapid urbanization altered the socioeconomic structure and local culture (Coccossis and Parpairis, 1995). During the first phase rapid and uncontrolled tourism development has transformed in scale, volume of built-up areas, character and environmental quality (Özgen, 2003).

The island experienced impressive changes in land-use and in the urban landscape of the main center (Chora) due to urban expansion. Moreover, tourism and second-home development in suburban areas surrounding Chora have caused concentration of people and buildings especially along the coastal rim forming a fragmented, entropic and diffused peri-urban landscape with poor aesthetic quality and implications for environmental degradation. Water and soil pollution occur especially during the peak summer season. Although water resources in Mykonos are naturally limited, the reliance on tourism has prompted the development of new water flows. Thus, two dams have been built to collect surface water, while a central wastewater treatment plant, a desalination plant and the network projects made for water and sanitation are currently under construction, according to the information provided by the local municipality of Mykonos.

The conversion of agricultural and pasture land located in the suburbs of the main city observed since the 1980s was primarily driven by socioeconomic changes due to tourism development and real estate speculation (Leontidou and Marmaras, 2001). The limited effectiveness of urban planning as well as poor controls against land appropriation and illegal buildings were the main causes of landscape changes in the 1980s and 1990s, with a pattern similar to other Greek islands. As discussed by Andriotis (2004) ‘the planning process of tourism development is controlled by external actors, mainly the central government’. On the contrary, these dynamics are now diverging, at least partially, from those observed in Kyklades

due to the quite different settlement patterns, landscape composition and tourism pressure found in the neighboring islands (Salvati, 2013).

Other relevant factors have affected the processes of environmental change. The economic crisis has played a big role in the tourism sector of Mykonos, and other Greek islands which now have been re-launched in tourist exhibitions around the world in order to compete internationally as tourist destinations moving away from the old "sun and sand" tourism based-model. Although the municipality of Mykonos is currently developing a 'quality tourism' model, the attempt to break with the old stereotype has frequently been thwarted by corruption and social power interests. Moreover, new public investments focusing on the creation of new strategic infrastructures (the enlargement of the port and airport, the Cultural Center, the water infrastructures mentioned above, etc.) are currently under construction. These contribute to change the urban landscape to respond to new interests linked to tourism demand. However, the weak role of the State and the lack of autonomy in the decision-making of the island's future impedes the accomplishment of an integrated policy approach (Salvati, 2013).

DISCUSSION

Cities and landscapes are on the international and local political agenda today. They receive increasing attention from researchers, geographers, planners and policy makers (UN-Habitat, 2010, 2012). The main reason is the general observation of the speed of the changes, urbanization effects, environment impacts and transformations, globalization and networks considered important driving forces of these changes and the emergence of new landscapes. Despite the number of approaches to understand such change, urban processes and their relations occur in complex and are difficult to understand. Even more when new elements like tourism add complexity and new challenges to the highly dynamic urban

picture. Using a urban political approach this article has tried to examine how tourism shapes cities and to what extent tourism interacts with socioeconomic and environmental change.

In order to provide a big picture of these new urban dynamics the Mediterranean context was used as field of investigation since it represents the European destination more influenced by tourism processes, particularly in many coastal cities as in the cases of Benidorm, Venice and Mykonos, illustrated in this article. Even though studies dealing with tourism in these cities exist, they mainly focus on the economic influence and environmental impacts of tourism, and do not consider the complexity of processes that are taking place in these contexts in which tourism is profoundly and intimately embedded to urban form, and how such processes will continue to produce and reconfigure these places.

The article argued that landscape changes resulting from the complex political, economic, social, cultural and ecological processes that form certain types of urban contexts in coastal tourism-specialized cities are permeating the intimate relationship between tourism and urban form. More than other approaches, Urban Political Ecology allowed to understand how these processes are interconnected and produce a particular socio-environmental metabolism that materializes through new urban forms. From this perspective, as it has been shown in this study, the construction of the skyscrapers (in the Benidorm case), or the water infrastructures (in the case of Mykonos), testify the particular social, power, cultural relations through which socio-natural metabolisms are organized. Tourism constitutes therefore an important component within the urban metabolism, but not the only one responsible of the changing urban form.

In more fundamental ways, the three examples provide different avenues to socio-environmental change through international tourism and its relations with the circuits of global capital accumulation. Benidorm keeps improving its role of a mass tourism resort adding new products and services to an already well established destination without many changes in its current socio-

environmental configuration. Venice, on its part, has succumbed to the dual threat of rampant real estate speculation for a global elite clientele and the overcrowding of the city by thousands of visitors each day with an additional environmental problem created by the navigation of mammoth cruise ships in the lagoon. Finally, Mykonos is vulnerable to real estate speculation under difficult environmental conditions (water, soil and energy access especially) that could undermine the interests for future investments and jeopardize the viability of the island as a tourist destination.

CONCLUSION REMARKS

The present study, grounded on a UPE framework, represents a tool for in-depth understanding of the intimate relationship among tourism development, contemporary processes of urbanization and landscape changes. Although we recognize that these cases would need a more extensive conceptualization in a broader framework of international tourism, the UPE vision proved to represent an operational approach for future investigation, toward a broader understanding of tourism intended together as a local and global phenomenon. These research efforts should definitely inform appropriate policies and planning for future cities specialized in tourism.

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