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Special Issue Roots Tourism

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Sommario

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The Sacred Value of the Root's Journey[2]

Introduction

Despite the frequently recurring thought that in 2030 global homogenization will prevail over local identity, some social scientists underline that humans will remain rooted in their own identity, which manifests itself by placing creativity, ethics, collaboration at its centre and critical thinking.[3] Therefore, if that is the case, the value of one's own identity will continue, as it has always been, to be resolutely relevant in the history of mankind.

It is evident that for the purpose of analysing the meaning of identity in the social sciences, the theme of the process of creating the identity of people will remain central in relation with the social, cultural, physical, relational spaces connected with the value of the sacred, which the perception of the "Self" has today.

Based on these considerations, the area of reflection chosen for this work was the one in which people believe their identity origin resides. By this we mean the formative process of the individual related to values, behaviours, knowledge, feelings, memories and representations that concern the individual and their own history. In this study we have kept in mind the fact that, "identity is not something stable and lasting over time, but a structural effect produced and reproduced discontinuously in the different ritualistic ballets of everyday life" (Gigliotti, 1969: XVI). The interest in the above-mentioned subject of analysis is the result of the research carried out in recent years that have allowed to observe that the value assigned to the search for one's own identity, is remarkable in a person who searches it through a relationship with the places where it originates their own history and their families'. Those places are full of meaning, where "on one side, it is the person who attributes a meaning to them through the relationships that they establish with it, on the other hand, the places themselves confer identity to the people" (Corbisiero, 2017: 5).

Basically, what we will try to highlight in this work is how the roots tourist, mainly emigrants or children of emigrants, evaluates and perceives the physical and cultural place of their origins, and the sacred worth he ascribes to the journey to these places.

As a preliminary point, it should be emphasized that the concept of "sacral", to which we refer in this work, is the value that the traveller of the roots gives to the journey to their place of origin, for the purpose of rebuilding their personal and family identity, where there are important the rites and rituals, which underline the belonging to a defined sacred order. In that "sacral" sense, it is something that is not judged based on utilitarian and rational criteria, but which evokes emotions and feelings.

This topic deserves a great deal of attention, also because, for all modernity era, today included, it produced an extensive scientific literature which predominantly highlighted the so-called "banality" of the tourism experience (for example: Morin, 1965; Ezensberger, 1962; Boorstin, 1962; Turner, Ash, 1975). A vision that has been widely justified in the social and economic contexts managed by the organized tourism industry. However, some researchers have recognized the existence of tourism forms, sometimes even partial, identified as not trivial. Among these, the most relevant examples are those of religious tourism and pilgrimages.

In this paper, we will propose an approach that will allow us to think about the sacred value that tourism can have for other types of travellers. More specifically, the one developed in the context of research activities which concerned a particular form of tourism, such as, precisely, "roots tourism".

In fact, the present work originates in a general dissatisfaction about the way the tourist experience has been analyzed which, throughout modernity, has recognized a "sacred" value almost exclusively to the types of travel mentioned above (pilgrimage and religious tourism).

Therefore, precisely with the aim of deepening knowledge about the sacred value of travel, particularly in contemporary society, it was decided to propose this reflection which is the result of years of research dedicated to roots tourism, and to the sacred meaning that a particular typology of traveller, such as the roots tourist, assigns to this experience.

1. The Sacredness of the Travel Experience

As we know, during modern times, and during the second half of the twentieth century, a coherent production of tourism surveys was generated from the idea that tourists were essentially consumers of a mass product.

Following this idea and placing the tourist experience at the heart of the discussion, it has come to put in evidence the banality and the superficiality of it and the passive role of the tourist.

Indeed, as we have already had occasion to anticipate in the introduction, in these years a substantial proportion of researchers have shown their critical attitude towards tourism which, as a mass social phenomenon, imposes itself in society by offering individuals a ready-made experiential world, totally heterodirect, or a tourist experience subjected to manipulation and commodification by the tourism industry.

Among these studies a very well-known work is that of the American scholar Boorstin (1962) who, with his "Guide to pseudo-events in America", introduces two concepts that have been very successful and that are still widely used today: the concept of pseudo-events and environmental bubble. According to Boorstin, the tourism experience is not 'direct', but mediatised, and events are pseudo-events. The idea is that tourist attractions, made by the tourism industry, are not authentic, reproducing what the tourist, heterodirect and, consequently, naïve, expects. Indeed, because they must hit people's imagination, they are based on increasingly sensational scenarios, which produce bewilderment in the tourists.

In this context, the view-see theory is developing, to which the tourist goes not towards things, but only towards their image, reducing everything to the image. Mass tourism needs sight, and things to see, put in the window, lose their depth and authenticity (Burgelin, 1967). In the same period, apart from critical studies on tourism, there are many others which, sometimes even from critical hypotheses, open to other less critical conclusions and become important points of reference on tourism study and for the purposes of our work.

Such is the case with the famous study of Dean MacCannell (1976), which in tourism notes the presence of features deemed useful also for the formulation of a new theory of the wealthy class, in comparison with the one previously formulated by Veblen (1899).

Indeed, the element of MacCannell's studies that we point out for our purposes is that all people seek authenticity as a constant characteristic of social life, and tourism is nothing more than a case of the eternal search for the sacred, at the level of religious pilgrimage. It is evident the influence of Goffman's (1959) work on daily life, where it stands out between the stage and the backstage (the dramaturgical model of society).

In addition, Graburn (1977) frames the holiday as a modern emerging rite and explains tourism behaviour as guided by adherence to a collective ritual (at a celebration), emphasizing the sacredness of travel. The author sees the summer holiday as a feast of industrial society that sacralizes the secular time of the calendar that "describes the ordinary and the inevitable" (Costa, 1989: 102), has the regenerative purpose to put people in contact and intensify relationships, acquiring, therefore, a relational function.

Consequently, tourism takes a ritual sense within modern societies (Costa, 1989), and participating in a collective ritual typical of modernity, a holiday, would explain the typical behaviour of modern tourists: travel during periods of peak tourist concentration; attend hyper-crowded beaches where it is sometimes almost impossible to find space for your towel and umbrella; waiting long hours in a car queue on the motorways and at the airport check-ins; stay in tourist destinations that are often very noisy and disorganised, etc.. Situations that could often be prevented, by anticipating or delaying the holiday, a day or even a few hours, or by choosing a less crowded beach even in the same destination, or by negotiating a different vacation period, etc.

Cohen's studies also play an important role in our work. He conceives tourism as something that, in the life of a modern person, takes on a different meaning according to the image that one has of the world, which depends on the greater or lesser adherence to a cultural or symbolic 'centre' and on the location (inside or outside) of this centre compared to the society in which one lives (Cohen, 1979).

In this perspective, Cohen identifies five types of tourism based on the degree of "alienation" that tourists have with respect to their "centre" reference. These range from those who fully identify with their society, to those who choose a society or culture different from their own as a "spiritual centre". Amongst them, what interests us most is what he calls "existential tourism", that is the type of tourism in which tourists are fully identified with the "centre" belonging to the holiday community. It is an "elective spiritual centre", and "the only truly meaningful experience for them is to lead them to this "centre". It also supports them in their ordinary lives, passed "into exile" in their respective societies and cultures (Savelli, 2012: 246). It is a "place" to find refuge in need, precisely to obtain spiritual support from it, as in the case of pilgrimage.

When we talk of "sacred", we cannot not talk of pilgrimage. Indeed, the extensive literature available on religious pilgrimage (Jackowski, Smith, 1992; Simonicca, 1997; Shinde, 2008; Nyaupane & Budruk, 2009), considers the pilgrim as a person who goes to the sacred, i.e., to a spiritual centre, expecting an extraordinary and life-changing experience (Turner, 1973; Turner & Turner, 1978). The pilgrimage is considered a rite of passage (Turner & Turner, 1978), in which the pilgrim departs from daily life during the ritual, assuming a "particular social status" (Nocifora, 2010), and comes back transformed in the "centre" of it. Indeed, pilgrimage, as a departure from ordinary life, is often connected to spiritual matters, where the pilgrim goes in search of one's own spiritual realization.

In this context, it must be recalled that, in a society that guides cultural models and behaviours towards the search for a personalized spirituality, subjectively and independently of the precepts of ecclesiastical hierarchies (Zago, 2017), the former paradigm, which exclusively valued the religious elements of pilgrimage, leaves more and more room for studies in which secular travel models have been asserting (De Salvo, 2015).

However, the sacred is "the product of the realization of a ritual" (Fele, 2002: 16). In fact, rituals serve to give a sacred character to the object and have no utilitarian purposes, they do not take place for an instrumental purpose (Fele, 2002) unlike in the case of representative or commemorative rituals through which we pay tribute to the ancestors through narratives and ritual gestures that commemorate them (Durkheim, 1912).

Moreover, in contemporary societies the sacred "is represented by the "worship of the individual", by the recognition of their specific self" (Giglioli, 1969: XIV), indeed "the individual remains persistently a divinity of great importance" (Goffman, 1967: 104) where personal identity plays an important role and "is bound up with the hypothesis that the individual can differentiate themselves from all others" (Goffman, 1963: 74).

2. Working Assumption and Methodogical Framework

In contemporary society other forms of travel have also gained value, meaning not only the instrumental ones related to getting to a place where you have fun, that is vacation tourism, but also, those who value both the journey and the destination of arrival differently, that is those where travel and destination are one and of special significance.

This new form of meaning which is given to the experience of the journey, and hence also to the "tourist", is to attribute a sacred value, in the sense that the very purpose of the journey is not the vacation itself but the experience that is made and that has to do with the "self", with your ego, with your family history, with why "you're here", and your life purpose. Consequently, the same departure and arrival at some places acquires a global sacred value.

Included in this type of travel, in addition to those which, by definition, are made for religious and spiritual aims, are those who fall into roots tourism,[4] or the journeys of migrants and/or their descendants who temporarily return to the place where their roots are.

In this work, we use the journey of the roots as a tool to delve into the study of sacredness, not only on the tourist experience side but on the journey in its entirety. The focus of the research is characterized in the development processes of local communities, with particular attention to the forms of tourism, and the identity of places.

The main theoretical field of reference is what we referred to so far, albeit in part, also bearing in mind the sociological literature on the study of migration, especially the notion of transmigrant and their double membership (community of arrival and community of departure), and the symbolic bonds that link them to "memories and symbols that connect them to their history and tradition" (Scidà, 2002: 13).

This approach has also stimulated research activities that question the relevance of the journey and stay of the emigrant and their descendants, as well as on an identity and cultural level, also in the process of pushing towards direct contact with their places of origin.

The main hypothesis of this work is that the journey to the countries of origin is not only a physical journey in the strict sense, but also an inner journey, which engages with the identity of people, therefore assigning it a "sacred" value.

In addition, two other hypotheses have been formulated: maintaining the connection and relations with the community and the place of origin, restores a spiritual renewal to the roots tourist, as well as the pilgrim, through an eternal search, in an attempt to maintain the connection and relations with the "divine"; the visit to the place can strengthen or mitigate the sacred value that had been attributed to it by the tourist before completing the journey.

The hypotheses put forward here are, to a large extent, the result of many years of study and research into this phenomenon. (Romita & Perri, 2009; Perri, 2010, 2013, 2020, 2021; Carrera, Perri & Romita, 2020) and above all by conducting field research using a qualitative/interpretive methodological approach.

The main research activity was launched in 2012, with the aim of studying the behaviour of Italo-New Yorkers, with a specific reference to their touristic behaviour in relation to their place of origin. Specifically, the research activities carried out were structured as follow: - semi-structured interviews with Italo-New Yorkers with the support of the Foundation "The Italian Cultural Foundation at Casa Belvedere" in New York;[5] direct observation of the lifestyles of New Yorkers Italian American families (1st, 2nd and 3rd generation) in their day-to-day environment; study of doc-

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4 By roots tourism we mean «movement of people who spend holidays in places where they themselves, and/or their families, who were born and in whom they lived before emigrating to places that over time have become the places where they now live permanently". The roots tourists are "both the emigrants who were born and lived a part of their life in the place of origin, such as their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and family members, who were born and raised elsewhere, but who feel, however, a solid bond with this land where are the roots of their own family» (Perri, 2010: 147).

5 The Foundation also provided the list of interviewees, identified in accordance with the criteria set out by the research group.

uments provided by Italian-New Yorker families, as well by the Foundation itself. The fieldwork was completed in three months.

The interview was divided into eight sections: reasons for emigration, family and social origin, career development in the United States, general satisfaction, life in the U.S., relations with the country of origin, changes and perspectives, basic information. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted, 27 in Italian and one in English, 16 with first-generation Italian-New Yorkers and 12 with second-generation Italian-New Yorkers. Interviews were conducted mainly at the interviewee's home.

The direct approach with the "observation of the participants" consisted of living in homes with a few Italian-New York families, from December 2012 to March 2013, sharing important aspects of day-to-day life, including participation in their events. This experience has been recorded by writing field notes, a field journal and a photographic report.

Moreover, the study of four Italian-New York families continued over time, and continues today, through periodic contacts (mainly video calls, but also telephone calls, every two months) where information about their connection to their place of origin continues to be gathered.

3. Results and Research

The research activities carried out have largely confirmed the conceptual system adopted regarding the "sacred" value of the trips undertaken by the roots tourists.

As the results of the research have shown, these journeys are, for those who make them, a spiritual renewal, and in some cases a sort of spiritual "redemption", providing the roots tourists with a feeling of one's own existence. It may be considered as a sort of philosophical journey, a "journey through time, a trip to the places of the origins whose cultural order made the philosopher traveller feel like a member [...] a search for roots and beginnings, a return to the points of space consecrated as places where the origins have a meaning" (Leed, 1992:163).

Among the people interviewed, especially among first-generation Italian-New Yorkers, there is a recurring desire to return to their home countries, as well as reviving the lifestyle left at the time of departure, also to find friends and/or relatives, their environment and property. This last aspect is relevant, as this is what they do on a regular basis upon their temporary return.

Hence, we clearly perceive a psychological need to be fulfilled, caused by the absence, remoteness or inaccessibility of these places, these people, these objects. This psychological condition makes these people move through time and space, and this movement, the so-called mobility, becomes a kind of "home" for these tourists (Baldassar, 2001). In fact, most interviewees indicate a suspended condition between two worlds, sometimes claiming to feel «strangers in the US, and at home in Italy, yet other times they feel aliens in Italy and at home in the USA» The journey thus represents a continual quest for one's own identity, an «ancient and original identity» (Pitto, 1988, p. 96).

Another important aspect which should be underlined is the stay in the house owned, inherited or purchased. This kind of holiday is very common among first generation Italians-New Yorkers. Indeed, this is a recurring feature in the relevant literature that analyses the tourism in private homes, also known as residential tourism (Romita, 1999, 2010, 2022; Romita, Perri & De Salvo, 2022; Mazon & Aledo, 2005; Huete, 2009; Hall & Müller, 2004; Karayiannis, Iakovidou & Tsartas, 2010; Roca, 2010; Colás & Cabrerizo, 2004; Mazon, 2018).

In Italy, residential tourism and local tourism have often developed in connection, generating flows of returnees as tourists to places where they were born. This happened during some periods of the year or more on a permanent basis at the end of their working life (Romita, 1999; Romita & Perri, 2009). Indeed, the property of a house located in the place of origin is used to keep alive relationships with the original community, and represents a fundamental stage for an

eventual return, which most emigrants dreamed of once they were forced to leave their home-lands. However, it's a very difficult objective to achieve (Fondazione Migrantes, 2011).

Thus, the house of origins is used as housing when returning temporarily for a short or long period of time, not only representing an important link to keep alive relationship with relatives, friends, local people but also, and above all, reliving the spiritual dimension associated with important moments in the life of the past. Living such environments, full of evocative force and memories, serves not only to satisfy the reconstruction of identity, but also to feel, in a certain sense, "close" to the people who, over the years, have lived there.

Eventually, those are the reasons why the main purpose of most emigrants was to renovate an inherited home or buying a home in the country of origin (Perri, 2020).

It is necessary to emphasize the role played by *nostalgia*, a distinctive feature of roots tourists specially of the first generation, in ascribing a sacred value to the journey of roots, and the "idyl-lic" image of the place of family origin that descendants have, especially 2nd and 3rd generation tourists (Perri, 2020). The descendants romanticize the original places, with their lifestyles, the people who live there and everything that revolves in those "worlds", considering them more "real" and more "authentic", up until the point of mythologizing them. In this regard, the route represents the discovery of their mythical world.

From the stories of the Italian-New Yorkers emerged life stories, memories of places, situations, emotions that favour a mythical reconstruction of the country of origin.

Another aspect studied is the ritual, or rather the rituals which the tourists of the roots practise when they go to the place of origin, and which, as we have said before, serve to confer the sa-credness of the object, and to attain the purpose for which they undertake the journey.

Indeed, the recorded stories describe the journey itinerary as a kind of spiritual itinerary, includ-ing travel stages such as visiting friends or relatives, visiting important places from their past, frequent socialisation places (square, bars, etc.), attend Mass and observe religious practices related to tradition, visit the cemetery, etc.

In conclusion, making this route is nothing but a ritual that contributes to sacralising the very existence of those who make them. What has been said above is confirmed from most of the video productions, which promote the tourism of the roots. Indeed, they portray visits to the land of origin as a form of pilgrimage, with very specific rituals, where the spiritual meaning is symbolized in concrete terms: genealogical research before leaving; visiting archives (municipal, state, parish, etc.) to research as much information as possible about their families; the compar-ison, through family photographs inherited from their ancestors, of the actual landscapes with those of the past; meeting with relatives in the place of origin; visiting the home of family origin; visiting cemeteries; immersion in traditions; and so on.

In addition, the recorded stories also highlight the importance of the rites that the Italian-New Yorkers practice in their daily environment and which have to do with family traditions hand-ed from generation to generation. Indeed, when such traditions take place in their country of residence, they are infused with rites and rituals. For example, preparing typical dishes at some point of the year, just as in the country of origin, is a ritual that sacralises the dish, as this "process "brings them closer" to the places of their roots and therefore their own identity.

The research also led to interesting results especially regarding the spiritual renewal of the per-son through the connection and relations with the community and the place of origin, which are especially important in the processes of identity search; identity which in the roots tourists is deterritorialized.

Staying in touch with the community of origin, to the individual, means renewing the union with the mythical origins of society and culture (Pitto, 1988), and becomes a bridge between both worlds, Communications are a way of transmitting community life, scenes of what happens in the country. In this sense, new technologies play a very important role that allow the emigrant, quickly, easily and at almost no cost, communication with friends and relatives living in the city of origin. Today, visual communications are quite diffused and bring people in touch with ease.

In fact, from the stories collected emerges a constant contact with the place of origin through the Internet, and communications with local people through phone calls, video calls, social chat and messages. The information requested are mainly about community life.

In addition, contact is also sought by taking part in cultural associations and events related to the country of origin. Emigrants' cultural associations represent a social and cultural space, and serve to reinforce their original individual and collective identity.

In the preface to the Statute of the San Fili[6] Fraternity Club of Westchester, an association of people originally from San Fili and living in Westchester Country, USA, confirmed the importance to feel connected to the country of origin for a renewal of spirit: "...the more we feel in our hearts the restless *nostalgia* of the faraway Homeland, the greater the desire to gather, to organize oneself to feel less discomfort and bitterness of detachment or to elevate, in a spiritual recovery, the soul of the migrant".

Finally, the research has highlighted how the visit to the place of origin can strengthen or mitigate the sacred value that had been attributed by the tourist before making the trip.

In fact, demoralising situations could arise when the search for authenticity, which is taken for granted guides the journey of the roots, ends in an artificial tourism experience (McCannel, 1976), or a discrepancy between the anticipated authenticity and subjective perception of the experience (Cohen, 1988), or, finally, by the way in which authenticity is manifested with reference to the way in which the individual recognition of one's identity takes place, put in relation to what is considered authentic expression of the culture of the community and the territory of one's origins (Wang, 1999).

In fact, during the discussions with the Italian-New York families that took place in their daily environments, they pointed out the differences found when visiting the place of origin, according to the memories and/or the image created in their mind. Indeed, there have been several criticisms, which concern not only the landscape, but especially the customs and lifestyles, sometimes challenging their authenticity.

They complain that they do not perceive the sense of "community" which accompanies their memories, really the most characteristic element of past life, which intensifies the feeling of belonging to that place. As for instance finding a few people in the 'piazza', or on the street, or at the bar, people to stop by to chat with, and re-establish a sense of community, not being alone and being able to rely on others.

Several criticisms also concern the fact that, especially young people, do not speak and/ or even no longer know the dialect, and the preparation of certain typical dishes. For example, certain ingredients not being used which are considered essential for them, because they characterise a dish; the preparation time for this dish is not as rigid as it used to be due to the fact that today there is no pasta or homemade desserts the way it used to be.

Conclusions

Studies and research over the years have demonstrated the transformation of the travel roots, a travel towards a place that has a very important identity.

In fact, this journey has been transformed from a journey that carefully avoided the "touristy" connotation, and that was seen only and exclusively as a generic form of travel, into a journey where the emigrant temporarily returns to the place where their roots reside and lives it in a tourist way to all intents and purposes (Romita & Perri, 2009), and which is not always perceived as such by the other actors involved in the phenomenon.

What we have tried to do with this work, is to highlight the different values that this type of travel has compared to conventional tourist travel.

6   San Fili is a town in the Calabrian hinterland that today has over 2,700 inhabitants and that in 1921 had more than 5,100, almost double.

In fact, we certainly see roots tourism as a form of tourism, but at the same time, we believe that this declaration deserves consideration.

Indeed, we see the danger of escaping the profoundly "sacred" sense of this journey that we underlined in this paper. The preparation of the journey, the transfer, the stay and the departure, are not moments separated from each other but are all connected. Roots journey can also have a consumer value, a technicality, a ready-made tourist product, but it is lived by those who carry it out in an all-encompassing way, to the point of giving it a "sacred" value, because, as underlined, it is a matter of valuing family history and one's own existence, an inner journey to discover and/or make the most of what one is.

More precisely, the roots journey is sacred, not only for the reasons MacCannell said and which we have already mentioned, but also because the tourist goes in search of their own identity, seeks the origin, the "elective spiritual centre", and travel to these destinations represents the desire for existential experience.

The emotional charge, the emotions, the feeling of comfort in being in a place that "belongs" to them, are elements that characterize this tourist experience which is thus made sacred through those rituals that serve, precisely, to strengthen the sense of travel.

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