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Mass Tourism and Urban System: Some Suggestions to Manage the Impacts on the City

Tourism is an ambiguous phenomenon: it is both an economic resource and a factor of congestion. The intrusion of mass tourism in the daily routine of urban life causes congestion (chaos, air pollution and noise) in some specific urban places (i.e. historic center) where most of the urban activities are often located. This study focuses on the present need of city planners to dispose adequate strategies, actions and town plans to manage tourist demand that concentrates in the cities.

Keywords: mass tourism, urban system, urban transformations

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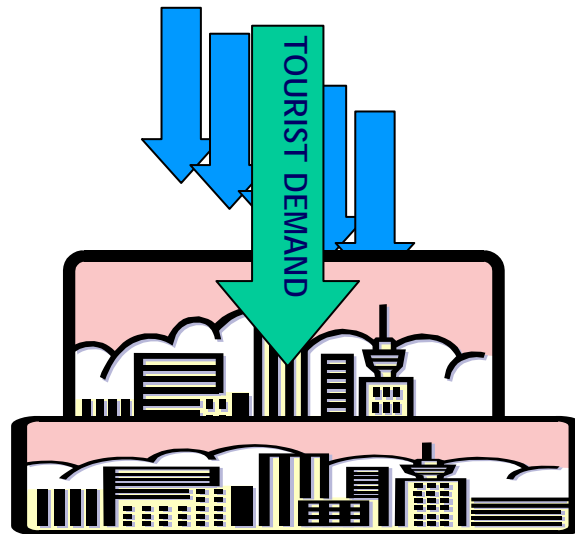
1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to consider tourism as an *urban activity* that can transform urban organization. The diffusion of tourist activity has translated into a “mass phenomenon”; this rapid transformation can be attributed, on one hand, to the increase of available free-time and on the other hand, to an increase in pro-capita income. Furthermore the city has become one of the favorite tourist destinations. Tourist flows, in fact, are more and more concentrated in the cities that need adequate infrastructure and facilities to meet this new demand. In fact, if tourist demand overcomes the urban supply of facilities and infrastructure, the city will collapse and will become “unlivable” both for residents and tourists.

With these premises, this study argues that town planning has to face the introduction of a new urban activity (tourism) that has the dimension of a phenomenon (mass tourism) that involves all the social ranks. The final goal of this study is to propose some suggestions to manage this new urban phenomenon.

The methodological reference for this study is the systemic approach that allows to consider the city as a dynamic and complex system whose balance can be compromise by an external force (such as mass tourism could be) (fig.1).

Figure 1 The charge of tourist demand on the city



2. AN INTRUSIVE ACTIVITY

Within this study, mass tourism has been defined an “*intrusive activity*”. Such a definition particularly refers to the spread of tourism that has interested both large and small cities. Its uncontrolled development sometimes has not been adequate to the *carrying capacity* of the city. Exceeding the carrying capacity of the city is one of the main negative impacts due to tourist development. Mass tourism can be considered the real expression of this effect that especially influences social context, being a real inconvenience for residents, for instance in terms of overcrowding.

Some tourist cities, for instance, are congested due to the overlap of daily activities of residents and those of tourists. Areas particularly vulnerable are those one where tourist attractive factors (artistic and historical monuments, museums, palaces, etc.) are located.

In these areas, both the main urban functions and public services are concentrated too. In Italy often public services seats in historic palaces with a mixed use of the space. This is an example

of two different way of using the same space and this could causes some problems in managing two flows of peoples (residents and tourists) with different needs and goals.

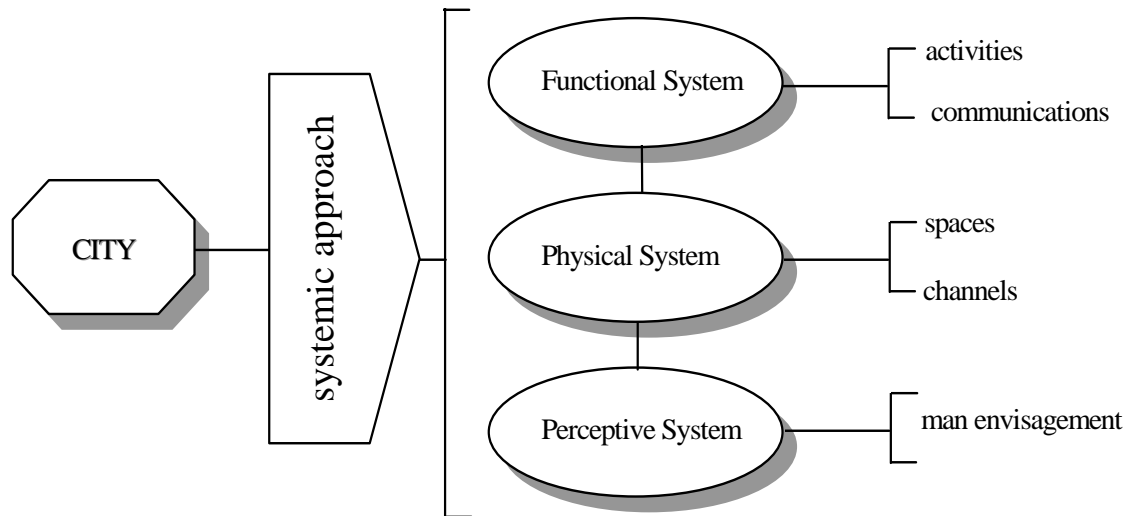
In this sense, the rationalization of urban supply (of public services and facilities) and the planning adequate spaces and infrastructures could alleviate the problem of congestion due to this overlapping of demand.

3. MASS TOURISM AND URBAN SYSTEM

In this study tourism has been considered a complex phenomenon weighing upon the organization of the urban spaces. This study argues that to meet tourism demand without compromising the daily routine of urban life it is necessary to plan the urban supply of facilities and infrastructures.

To analyze (physical and functional) transformations due to the introduction of mass tourism into an urban system it has been adopted a systemic approach that allows to consider to tourism as one of the components of the *urban system*. In other words, this methodological approach permits to identify interrelations between tourism and the urban system organization. According to the systemic approach, a city can be considered a complex system. By this assumption and considering system properties, it is possible to divide a city into three different *subsystems*: a physical subsystem, a functional subsystem, and a perceptive subsystem (fig. 2). The first one is made of material elements (streets, houses, buildings, etc.), the second one is made of immaterial elements (communications and activities) and the third one is made of the individual perception of a city.

Figure 2 The urban interpretative pattern: the city as a system



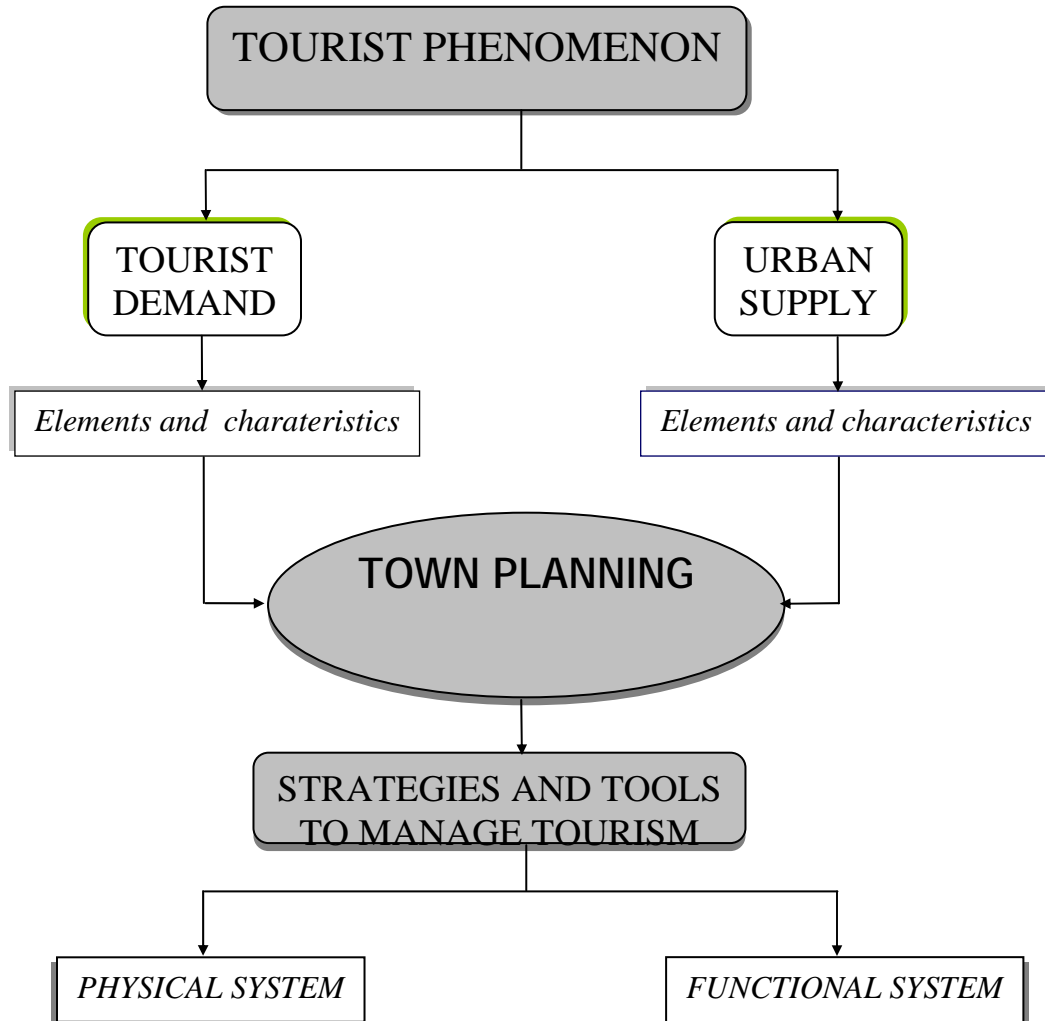
The figure illustrates the conceptual scheme referred to the systemic interpretative pattern. In particular, it shows the components of the three subsystems: activities and communications for the functional system; spaces and mobility channels for the physical system and the individual perception of the city for the perceptive system.

The search for the harmonious balance among these three subsystems could be the basis of the optimal order of the city, it could ensure a good level of the city-life and efficiency of urban system. In this global vision, tourism can be considered as one of the urban activities (part of the functional system) needing adequate spaces and channels (physical system) to permit an optimal perception of the city (tourist experience).

In this sense, it is possible to affirm that tourist needs (i.e. tourist demand) and town planning (in terms of supply of structures, services and facilities) are connected.

City planner have to face the new dimension of tourism as *mass phenomenon* by disposing adequate plan, strategies and actions to manage this new urban demand (fig.3).

Figure 3 The scheme to approach the study of tourist phenomenon



4. RAZIONALIZATION OF URBAN SUPPLY TO MANAGE TOURIST DEMAND

As a matter of fact, tourism has been seldom considered as an activity needing to be planned and managed. So far, its characteristic of being an economic resource has prevailed over the requirement of safeguarding cultural, historical and natural heritage. In fact, tourism has many positive economic effects (new employment, capital improvement, revenues, public and private investments, etc.), nevertheless its ungoverned spread has been the cause of negative impacts on

urban and natural environment (overcrowding, pollution, overlapping of urban space use, etc.). Town planning should contribute to ameliorate the urban quality of life by disposing plans of action to manage the urban transformations due to introduction of new urban demand (as that one expressed by tourists).

In other word, tourism can be considered an urban activity needing adequate spaces and measures to manage the requests expressed by tourists (tab. 1).

According to this premises, this study tries to indicate some suggestions that could help in reducing the negative effects of mass tourism on urban system.

The first group of suggestions refers to measures to decrease the impacts due to tourist displacements inside the city.

So, town planning should includes:

- project of adequate tourist parking areas for coaches and cars, located in strategic access points of the city;
- prevision of areas for the location of reception centers to give to tourists all the information they need to visit the city;
- measures to improve the supply of public transport and to promote collective forms of transport instead of individual ones (i.e. car-pool, collective-taxi, etc.).

Table 1 Tourist needs and physical structures

TOURIST NEEDS	URBAN STRUCTURES
Eating	Restaurants Trattorias Fast foods Pizza-restaurant
Sleeping	Hotels Campsites Rooms
Drinking	Bar Pubs
Reaching	Airports Motorways Railways stations
Moving	Subway stations Bus stations Car hire agency Taxi ranks
Information	Information bureau Tourist office
Visiting	Museum Monuments Art gallery Exhibition structures
Amusing	Amusement parks Discotheques Casinos Theaters Cinemas
Shopping	General stores Souvenirs shops Bureau de change
Meeting	Congress center University Trade fair buildings

Tourism requires also some specific physical structures to satisfy its specific needs.

The second group of suggestions refers to the need to arrange specific measures to safeguard residents that do not benefit economically from tourist activities. An example could be the application of different prices for residents and tourists in using public services (public transports, public museum, parking, etc.).

The third group of suggestions refers to the need for reducing functional overlapping in the use of public spaces. The planning of time to use public services for the residents and for tourists for example could alleviate congestion due to the mixed use of the same space.

To optimize the time, both for tourists and for residents, it could be useful to locate variable messengers displays in some strategic point of the city (railway stations, airports, underground stations, bus stations, cross roads, etc.) to get information about traffic, visiting time of museums and monuments, and so on. Finally, these suggestions intend to point out the need to dispose adequate measures for managing tourist phenomenon before than its negative impacts would be irreversible.

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