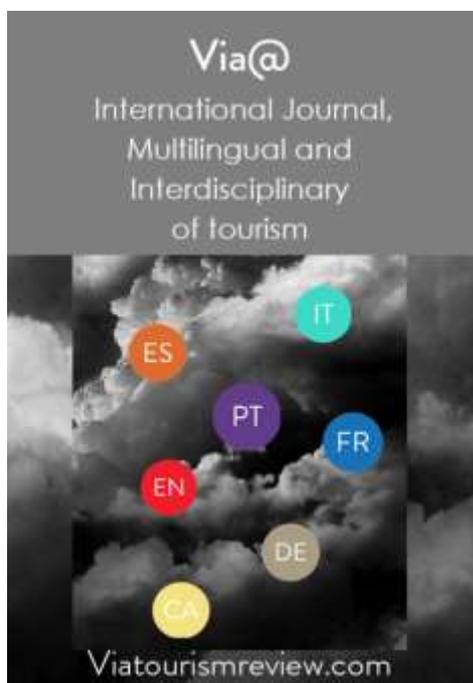


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Developing participatory tourism in Milan, Italy A critical analysis of two case studies

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Abstract

*This article explores the social and spatial implications of new itineraries, sites and services whose success rests on opportunities for residents and tourists to meet, and possibly hybridize. This encounter is considered in reference to the changing relationship between cities, culture and tourism. Two initiatives based in Milan serve as comparative case studies. *Piacere, Milano (Milano, nice to meet you)* was launched in 2015, while the city was hosting the Universal Exhibition position, and consists of coordinating Milanese residents willing to invite a tourist for dinner or to take them on a walk for free. *MygranTour* is part of a European network supporting intercultural dialogue by involving migrants in the development of tourist itineraries. This programme has been active in Milan since 2011. Both these initiatives contribute to fostering new sets of images of Milan, and to legitimising new urban geographies from the bottom up. They also stimulate a reversal of the traditional hierarchy between tourists and residents. Major critical aspects are expressed in reference to different levels of analysis, such as in relation to the capacity building scope of initiatives, or how they might reproduce cultural stereotypes. The paper concludes by calling for more extensive integration of tourism into urban policies, by considering implications of tourism beyond the economic.*

Keywords: *participatory tourism; urban policy; place branding; cultural stereotypes; Milan (Italy)*

Introduction

This article explores the social and spatial implications of new itineraries, sites and services whose success is based on the chance that residents and tourists might meet, and possibly interact. By referring to the city of Milan, this article considers the urban

sphere as delimited by culture and tourism. Two recently introduced initiatives, *MygranTour* and *Piacere, Milano* (Milan, Nice to meet you) are highlighted, to serve as case studies demonstrating “participatory tourism” in practice. This label includes a variety of experiences focused on fostering social and spatial interaction between residents and tourists; we consider how this occurs, no matter if merely perceived to by those involved.

MygranTour and *Piacere, Milano* can be considered innovative, albeit interstitial, initiatives for overcoming the more common negative dynamics that proceed from the triadic relationship among cities, culture and tourism, which marked the last decades of the 20th century. The analysis of *MygranTour* and *Piacere, Milano* allow a questioning of the most consolidated tourist practices and narratives, as will be exposed. This article assumes that everyday life and tourism are increasingly intermingled, since the “resident” or the “tourist” as subjectivities are gradually overlapping (Quaglieri Dominguez e Russo, 2010; Minca e Oakes, 2014). First, the “tourist gaze”, according to John Urry’s famous definition (1990), points to a scopic regime that today involves a broad typology of city inhabitants, included those living in cities only temporarily. Experiencing a site “touristically” is an urban practice (Stock, 2004) also performed by those who are not included in the formal category of the tourist, as defined by the UNWTO. Second, looking for “authentic” sites stimulates processes of “local” reinvention, which go beyond those that Dean MacCannel analysed as early as 1976, focusing on the creative industries and intangible cultural heritage (Richards, 2014). Third, digital technologies are promoting increasing disintermediation between tourist offering and tourist demand (Cozzi, 2010), making it easier for heterogeneous ranges of inhabitants and travellers communicate with one another (Russo and Richards, 2016).

Since the 1970s, local governments have tried to foster tourism, in order to make it a major economic engine for cities and regions through the aggregation of individual consumption (Amin and Thrift, 2002). Consequently, urban regeneration strategies have been enacted. These may foster the privatization of public spaces and increasing flows of public money devoted to introducing; and implementing tourism facilities may polarize in strategic urban areas to the detriment of redistributive social and spatial actions (Hoffman et al., 2003). As “the tourist city” (Judd and Fainstein, 1999) established, protests and resistance against tourism have grown in number, contesting the disfunctionalities mentioned above (Colomb and Novy, 2017). Meanwhile, tourism has emerged as a social, cultural, economic, and political sphere able to condition subjectivities (Minca and Oakes, 2006, 2012) and ways of practicing cities (Quaglieri Dominguez and Russo, 2010).

As a result of the above changes, the relationship between tourists and residents is becoming a major urban policy issue. To respond to the negative dynamics that might concern tourism in the city, a number of initiatives blending tourism and culture in innovative ways have recently been raised, as in the case of “participatory tourism” addressed in this paper. This paper is structured in five sections. Following this introduction, the next section focuses on how creative and social relationships are embracing a new role in urban tourism. In particular, new initiatives based on the co-production of the tourist/culture experience by the joint action of tourists and residents will be presented. The third section introduces the cases of *MygranTour* and *Piacere, Milano*. The fourth section discusses their positive potentialities and associated critical issues. The conclusions explain that these case study initiatives are merely one

aspect of a wider galaxy of initiatives marking a profound transformation in conceptions of urban regeneration. Some new practices and narratives, such as those associated with the initiatives discussed, might provide the stimulus for differently constructed urban policies, based on the integration of tourism and culture.

New spatial articulations among cities, culture and tourism

The notion of culture has a double meaning; one is associated with what is produced by cultural industries, and the second refers to the wider set of symbols that emerges from different social groups, according to anthropological meaning of the term. Indeed, its double meaning implicitly conveys the suggestion, “culture is, arguably, what cities ‘do’ best” (Zukin, 1995: 264). The junction of culture and creativity has been a mantra for urban development and regeneration during the last 30 years. What Richard Florida or Charles Landry enunciated has since become policy, and as such it continues to give rise to a variety of further critiques (Vanolo, 2008; Lysegård, 2013; d’Ovidio, 2016). More recently, the cultural economy of cities has been shifting its territorial anchors from built heritage and tangible cultural resources to more symbolic and intangible cultural forms, subject to creative reinterpretations (Sacco, 2011). Once creativity was considered a cultural feature, but emphasis has moved away from individual skills to the development of more collective forms of knowledge, such as those that can be accessed through direct interaction (Potts et al., 2008).

The increased mutual entanglement of culture and creativity described calls for new interactive forms among those who live permanently in cities, as well as those who just inhabit them temporarily, such as tourists and visitors. Thus, cities’ “creative and relational capital” (Richards, 2014: 135) is beginning to play a significant role in establishing tourist taste and choice alongside cultural capital. In so doing, cities’ creative and relational capital further nourishes the ‘experience economy’ (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) that has marked tourist development over the last decade (Urieli, 2005). Experiences both go beyond and differ from goods and services. They qualify as valuable because of their uniqueness, and their ability to be place-based and to accrue worth and meaning in specific sites. Experiences are also highly subjective, personal and performative. This transformation has important implications for the spatial articulation of tourism, because the content of experience also becomes less tangible and more mobile, enabling creative and cultural combinations within a variety of contexts. For instance, the hegemony of museums and other institutional sites decreases, while public spaces, cafés and restaurants become attractive “urban scenes” (Faccioli, 2015) off the path that has been traditionally exploited by tourism (Maitland and Newman, 2009).

Many labels have recently emerged in attempts to describe newer forms of tourism that are overcoming mainstream¹ cultural tourism. These are “experiential tourism”, “creative tourism”, “off-the-beaten-tracks tourism”, and “slow tourism”, to name just a few. These forms of tourism differ in relation to the choice of destinations,

¹ Under the (debatable) “cultural tourism” label, a wide range of activities is generally listed, including events and festivals, visits to museums or art exhibitions, historical and archaeological sites, whether these are the main purpose of a tourist trip or appended activities (Richards, 2001).

facilities, aesthetic forms, and interaction with the context visited. A galaxy of different practices is associated with these forms of tourism, as are a variety of initiatives, which have been characterised for the co-production of the tourist experience (Everett, 2012), as enacted by a set of actors. These include different sorts of urban groups, tourism professionals, and suppliers of intermediate services, among others. All are engaged in the co-production of the tourist experience in different ways, and not always directly. Simultaneous processes of “production” and “consumption” (or prosumption²) of events, experiences, places are often activated by sets of actors whose profile is difficult to delimit. The co-production (stressing production than consumption) of tourist experiences can be seen as a performance that shapes urban landscapes (Rabbiosi, 2016). Audiences do not only play a contemplative function. They contribute to the creativity that characterises this kind of show; being inescapable components of a sort of theatrical ritual. In a similar way, “the gazer builds the landscape as a figurative expression of a territoriality” (Turco, 2012: 58; see also Turri, 1998).

This paper focuses on some initiatives in which the possibility of interaction between residents and tourists configures the co-production of the tourist experience in a certain place. “Participatory tourism” (see *Revue Espace* 2008 and 2014 for a review) is increasingly supported by innovative technological tools, such as web portals or apps, which enable direct interaction among various actors. The common denominator of many participatory tourism experiences is the transformation of the “urban banal”, i.e. those mundane habits and sites often considered common features in the cities in which they appear³, into the object of new forms of cultural consumption, based on the valorisation of social interaction between a set of inhabitants and visitors.

Tourists and residents seem to mirror one another in situ; they become more similar, but they also move from one side of the mirror to the other, exchanging roles. In doing so, they open an intersection, where new tourist/cultural initiatives addressing heterogeneous urban groups are activated. Some of these initiatives are rooted in the concrete possibility of fostering new tourist/cultural paths that would avoid the unravelling of social-spatial exclusion processes often associated with cities’ touristification, such as gentrification (Graziano, 2013; Semi, 2015), public space privatization (Sorkin, 1992), economic, and natural resources allocation to tourist facilities at the expense of residents services (Blázquez Salom, 2014), especially affecting the weakest social strata. In fact, participatory tourism is often defined as contrary and opposite to tourism-related initiatives that generate negative dynamics. Participatory tourism would ideally stimulate more inclusive patterns of urban diversity than socio-economic, cultural and spatial perspectives allow.

² Introduced by Alvin Toffler (1980), the term became popular when the so-called sharing economy appeared (see for instance Rifkin, 2014).

³ It is interesting to note the etymology of the word “banal”. The term originally pointed to a place, a building or a tool, belonging to a feudatory, whose use was granted to the whole community under their control. By extension, it started meaning anything that was in common use by all those belonging to a village (such as an aqueduct or a mill). What was common, was then banal. By extension, the term started to pinpoint what is obvious, not original, trivial, as is its current use (cfr. De Mauro, *Grande Dizionario Italiano dell’Uso*, 2000; Utet; Devoto Oli, *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, 2004).

Within participatory tourism initiatives, urban walking tours under the guidance of residents are gaining success as alternatives to more traditional guided tours. Walking tours comprising itineraries passing through different sites of interest are a common tourism practice. Urban walks through areas yet to be touristified have recently become the subject of new experiences addressing both tourists and residents. Walking as an urban explorative practice has been conceived of as an aesthetic tool for knowledge and physical transformation of a place that might transform into spatial intervention (Careri, 2006). Walking can also be considered a research instrument, a means of getting to know places by mixing visual and embodied experience (Ingold e Vergunst, 2008). Moreover, urban walks might also be listed as “light” events that contribute to the regeneration of public life through playful initiatives (Citroni, 2012).

Methodological note

The next paragraph introduces two participatory tourism projects, the spatial implications of which are analysed commencing with the discussion raised in the previous section. The purpose of embarking on an analysis of these two case studies is not strictly to introduce and describe the features of participatory tourism, with the aim of giving operational guidance, but rather to use tourism as a mode of analytics (Minca and Oakes, 2014) and produce debate regarding urban regeneration. The ambition is then to question those narratives and practices that link city, culture and tourism. The article shows the first results from a research started in 2014 and are still in progress.⁴ As is typical of exploratory research, this study has employed triangulation of methods and sources (Stebbins, 2001). In particular, the two case studies have been reconstructed from interviews with their project managers to understand the development path for each, and to ascertain corresponding goals and visions. The items of information collected were compared and integrated with those arising from other sources, such as already published scientific articles, discussions with researchers who had studied these cases previously, and press articles regarding the two case studies.⁵ Official materials issued by the two project promoters were also analysed; e.g. guidebooks, catalogues and web sites. This analysis allowed us to deconstruct the narratives behind both projects. In addition, the Author participated in an exploratory way, in some of the initiatives promoted by the two projects.

Urban regeneration through walks and storytelling: two case studies

MygranTour (<http://www.mygrantour.org>) is an initiative first launched by an NGO in Turin in 2010. The NGO had received monetary support from the European Union to create an urban network including proposed intercultural urban walks to be led by citizens of migrant origin. The target of the initiative were residents, tourists, students and anyone who was curious “to discover places with different eyes” (Vietti,

⁴ Research concerning *MygranTour* took place in November and December 2014; research concerning *Piacere, Milano* took place in March and April 2016.

⁵ I wish to thank Melissa Moralli, whose insightful contributions have been cited many times in this article.

2015: 5). The same project was extended to Milan in 2011, thanks to two tour operators specializing in “responsible tourism” trips and one NGO known to be active in the field of international cooperation. The “multicultural walks”, as they were called according to the official website, took place in three areas of Milan: via Padova, via Paolo Sarpi and Porta Venezia. All of the roads and their surroundings are densely inhabited by migrants (fig. 1). As Moralli and Vietti (2016) stress, one of the peculiar characteristics of this tourist proposal is that it can assign a new role to tourists as protagonists for otherwise marginalised subjects. Moreover, the “tourist gaze” is then re-invented, fostering a spatial and symbolic de-hierarchization of the classic resident/tourist gaze. The “Other” subject (the migrant) takes on a leading role; s/he has the opportunity to trace an itinerary based on her/his urban geography, and then to show it to those tourists attending the tour (Moralli, 2015). An overturning of the tourist and resident roles has also occurred, since the guide to the tour is often a delegitimized, socially stigmatized resident, because of her/his status of migrant. The tourist on a *MygranTour* is an autochthonous citizen, becoming the Other during the walk, since she/he ultimately ignores some aspects of their own city (despite being willing to experience them). The migrant becomes the city-expert, someone who can develop a story arising from a specific urban feature according to her/his own experience and perspective (Moralli and Vietti, 2016: 282).



Figure 1. A MygranTour urban walk through via Padova, in Milan
Souce: Chiara Rabbiosi, 2014.

Piacere, Milano (<http://www.piaceremilano.it>) was launched in 2015 in Milan at the time of the World Expo. Similar to *Mygrantour*, *Piacere, Milano* called upon city inhabitants to take their off the beaten track route to tourists. As one of the initiative proposers underlines, *Piacere, Milano* can be likened to a “multilayered cake, carrying many dimensions: city storytelling, hospitality, sharing economy, social cohesion” (Volpe, 2015). However, the initiative is mainly centred around urban walks

proposals and dinner invitations offered by Milan residents.⁶ These are aimed at encouraging the coming together of tourists and residents in locations and situations that are otherwise not yet established in tourist terms. Different from *MygranTour*, where a tour operator mediates the connection between tourists and residents, *Piacere, Milano* allows for contact that is disintermediated. Residents and tourists alike register on a website, stating their interests; use of the platform implies consent to direct matching between the two sets of individuals (fig. 2). However, unlike the most common offers included in “with the local” tours or home restaurants, tourists cannot choose the urban walk or dinner according to their tastes. This freedom is given only to the residents. In this way, *Piacere, Milano* enables a further de-hierarchization of the tourist-resident relation. Generally, the tourist is in a better position to bargain for the tourist experience, as they choose a certain guided tour or restaurant. Here this power of choice is subsequently transferred to the residents.



Figure 2. *Piacere, Milano* digital platform, 2016

<http://www.piaceremilano.it>

Another element common to *MygranTour* and *Piacere, Milano* is the narrative selection of places that they enable. Both projects foster forms of urban branding that are at some distance from well-known Milanese imagery. Branding is a technique intended to promote one (or more) images of a certain place; these should be coherent and reflect certain global successful trends. Indeed, branding is mainly to be understood as a symbolic urban development strategy (Aime and Papotti, 2012; Vanolo, 2008). As a process, place branding consists of a progressive accumulation of repetitions of the same message, wherein only some stories, individuals, elements, sites and activities find a place. That is, urban branding is a technique intended to develop a selective narration of a place (Sandercock, 2003). In other words, place branding

⁶ The initiative is formally composed in three working packages: *Indovina chi invito a cena* (Guess who I invite for dinner); *Milano siamo Noi* (Milan is Us), focussing on the chance for residents to become storyteller of their cities for one day; and *La Mappa*, a map of the stories and walking tours collected through the initiative.

“territorialises” and redesigns imaginaries of place through complex strategies involving processes of naming and reification (Turco, 2012). Both *Piacere, Milano* and *MygranTour* produce selective narrations of Milan, recoding some of the geographical imaginaries associated with the city. Both projects trust the power of storytelling as a technique to stimulate imageries of place. Storytelling by nature has an immediate narrative structure, and so what is enunciated is perceived of as authentic. For these reasons, storytelling can also convey emotional threads (see van Laer et al., 2012).

Piacere, Milano and *MygranTour* produce counter-narratives about Milan, a city largely known as a fashion, finance or football city. Tourism is generally a powerful factor in strengthening cultural stereotypes, since it is a major producer of place-based images, which then circulate through a variety of media (Aime and Papotti, 2012). *MygranTour* and *Piacere, Milano* overturn the most common territorial stereotypes about the city, particularly its marginal neighbourhoods. This is the case of via Padova, the site of one of the *MygranTour* urban walks. The road and its surroundings are commonly believed to be dangerous, poor and peripheral. Migrant inhabitants are Via Padova’s most stereotyped inhabitants. A new image of this road as a cosmopolitan and culturally diverse place, associated with the enhancement of poorly known urban built heritage, assumes a positive meaning in the *MygranTour* promotional materials as well as in the discursive, embodied and material performances brought to life during the urban walk. The walk lingers in the area’s very diverse commercial tissue, its community facilities (gardens, schools, churches), and other components of the urban infrastructure. This is the case with Trotter Park, which is enhanced as an urban common in Rosa’s storytelling; she is a *MygranTour* guide of Bolivian origin. Rosa not only leads tourists in visiting this space; she also points out how the different inhabitants use it. Trotter Park can be portrayed as a migrant community’s meeting place, as a jogger’s court yard, or as a children’s leisure space, or as a site for undertaking illegal activities. The walk becomes a subtle tool, denouncing the miserable physical conditions in which the public site languishes through long term institutional neglect. The narrative selection enacted by Rosa redeems Trotter Park and fosters its image as Milanese urban heritage.

The role of storytelling is even stronger in *Piacere, Milano*. The initiative was launched by two long established Milanese cooperatives, active in the provision of hospitality, health and wellbeing, and educational services to marginal groups. The project is also partnered by two communication agencies and an exceptional media partner, *Radio Popolare*, an independent and “alternative” radio station, active in the city for more than 40 years. The role played by communication media is increasingly important to the success of social projects, which borrow techniques from the promotional techniques used by businesses for profit (Vicari Haddock and Moulart, 2009). On one hand, *Piacere, Milano* stimulates the overturning of the classic separation and hierarchical relationship between tourists and residents, by allowing them not to match intermediaries and giving residents the power to select those tourists they want to deal with. In parallel, *Piacere, Milano* also stimulates a more inclusive way of narrating the city through storytelling, as is one of the specific working packages of the initiative. The storytelling enacted by *Piacere, Milano* is not featured by marketing and branding professionals, but by residents. In addition, it addresses off the beaten track parts of the city, that are generally not the object of tourism promotion. *Piacere, Milano* does not stimulate only one alternative narrative selection of Milan; rather it fosters a multiplicity of counter-narratives, returning the many voices of the city and

its neighbourhoods. This shift is however always partial. Examining the map of urban walks made available on the *Piacere, Milano* website, it is possible to note that not all areas of the city have been the object of a story. Suburban areas are generally the object of just one story, and undoubtedly cannot sustain a polyphonic narration. However, the principle at the basis of the project is innovative. Narratives about urban walks are produced by either ordinary or more well known residents, typically active in the cultural field (such as writers or theatre actors) who have been involved to issue testimonials. These narratives have converged to create an on-line map accessible to anyone. This map can be considered the legacy of the initiative, a shared tool about urban heritage.⁷ Storytelling from below is widely exploited by so web platforms based on a capitalist form of the sharing economy (Schor, 2014; Ritzer, 2015). In contrast, in *Piacere, Milano*, storytelling is conceived of as a common good by the initiative's proponents.⁸

Critical aspects

Piacere, Milano and *MygranTour* are fledgling initiatives and evaluating their efficacy is still untimely. Measuring the success of these initiatives according to quantitative approaches is also very difficult, because they do not come under the usual tools employed to quantify tourism and culture phenomena. With reference to the aims of this paper, some of the main emerging aspects common to the two initiatives can be questioned, such as the urban implications of the narratives and the practices they entail.

Cooptation of the initiatives

As has been illustrated, *Piacere, Milano* and *MygranTour* involve both the imagined city, suggesting new interpretations; and the practiced city, through the development of urban walks offered to a wider audience of visitors. However, we ask how far these projects are able to stimulate a real overture towards the urban Other? Can they be subsumed within the vague cosmopolitan imaginary that is easily co-opted by economic and political actors interested in finding new tools and legitimate discourses that concern regenerating and re-branding the city? With reference to similar initiatives in Paris (see Bros, 2015), it has been observed that participatory tourism is considered positively by local governments because it spreads images of cosmopolitan diversity that are at the same time tamed, depurated by those conflicts that hyper-diversity can stimulate in everyday practice (Pecorelli and Rabbiosi, 2016). That is, these initiatives help broaden a positive, albeit multiple, narrative selection of places that might invite tourists to return to Paris repeatedly after a first, traditional, visit. Thus, participatory tourism functions as an add-on element to the portfolio of

⁷ Interview to the project Manager of *Piacere, Milano* (04/03/2016).

⁸ This is true for Airbnb and Tripadvisor, where the users' reviews draw new urban geographies still to be deconstructed. Zukin et al. (2015) have showed how the reviews on Yelp! follow common selective urban spatial patterns in Brooklyn, NY, and therefore stimulate forms of cultural economy that are highly selective and exclusive.

activities that Paris can offer to compete with other world tourist cities, according to the most typical urban marketing logics, which are strictly based on competition mechanisms (Aime and Papotti, 2012). It is not by chance that *Piacere, Milano* was also supported by the City of Milan. Brand Milano is a biannual bid, that was launched to economically incentivise new city marketing actions in 2012.⁹ The Director of the Tourism Policies and Territorial Marketing Sector of the City underlines that *Piacere, Milano* has been funded within this scheme because:

[I]t brings directly in touch [the tourists] with any Milanese who wants to be, so to speak, a tourist guide, according to her/his likings, availability, language skills, and so forth; s/he could become a guide to show not only the city's downtown but also a neighbourhood that is not included in the traditional tourist trip, in order to make tourists breathe a bit of the "Milanesehood".... let's call it that.¹⁰

When examining the tourist flows for Expo 2015, *Piacere, Milano* was important, as partly sponsored by the City of Milan in the framework of the Brand Milano campaign, aiming to stimulate a customized storytelling of the city as witnessed by the residents themselves: "Our concern was the relationship between the hosted population, i.e. the tourists, and the hosting population, the Milanese; we wouldn't like it to be an unpleasant relationship".¹¹ On one hand, *Piacere, Milano* was considered by the representative of the City of Milan as fighting a common imaginary regarding the city inhabitants; whereas, on the other, it was thought to be possible to implement the number of images relating to Milan. A third issue also concerned the need to implement "tourist" imaginaries of the city in front of the residents themselves, since "one of Milan's problems is that its heaviest detractor is the Milanese himself. Therefore we worked a lot to develop a form of inner tourism, that's to say let the Milanese know Milan".

The reproduction of a simplifier gaze

Another feature that can be questioned concerns the sort of gaze that initiatives such as *MygranTour* and *Piacere, Milano* spur; as they risk unconsciously replicating an "Orientalist" gaze towards those of their fellow citizens who are still being considered disadvantaged and subordinate (Hannam and Knox, 2010). Sophie Corbillé (2009), who analysed the practices of a charity based in Paris offering urban walks similar to those of *MygranTour*, underlined how participatory tourism initiatives

⁹ Translation of a quotation from the call for projects to be sponsored under the "Brand Milano" scheme, Comune di Milano, 2014. Available at: <https://www.comune.milano.it/dseserver/webcity/garecontratti.nsf/WEBAll/F4BA86962C645B02C1257D88004AE01C?opendocument>; last accessed 22/07/2016.

¹⁰ Interview with the Director of the Tourism Policies and Territorial Marketing Sector of the City of Milan (25/05/2016).

¹¹ Interview with the Director of the Tourism Policies and Territorial Marketing Sector of the City of Milan (25/05/2016).

in ethnic neighbourhoods are likely to favour visits to shops and other facilities that include only certain categories of migrants.¹² In Corbillé's case, when asked, the project managers justified their choice by stressing the greater or lesser sociability present in some cultures. Due to this sociability, some migrants' shops were more able to meet the objective of encounter and authenticity expressed by tourists. As seen, *MygranTour* originates from NGOs engaged in intercultural dialogue, in order to staunch the stereotyping exclusive drift that often followed the ethnic touristification of neighbourhoods during the 20th century (Rath, 2007). Further enquiry is needed to understand whether there are forms of exploitation and control associated with the Other emerging from the interaction practices connected with participatory tourism. A second point concerns if, and in which way, these initiatives reproduce former and new kinds of Orientalism based on cultural and territorial stereotypes. Moralli and Vietti, who studied the *MygranTours*, considered that urban walks tends to provide a relatively romanticized vision of "ethnic" districts and the personal, social and working condition of migrants. Moreover, the two researchers noted that tourists' interest in urban walks mostly addressed clear-cut characteristics, such as "smashing colours, less known ethnic products and so on" (Moralli and Vietti, 2016: 294).

Capacity building

In order to understand whether *Piacere, Milano* and *MygranTour* are able to overcome the rules that generally dominate the relationship created by the association of culture and tourism in the city, it is useful to reflect upon whether they are able to carry a critical mass audience, that can enlarge the space that the initiatives are trying to open. Moralli and Vietti (2016) observe that most *MygranTour* participants are students, curious individuals, tourists, and groups. Schools make use of *MygranTour* as an educational tool. In my experience as a participant in *MygranTour*, I found that tourist groups were mostly comprised of curious Milanese already active in charities and cultural projects, or at least already sensible to the intercultural themes that the initiative raises. As far as *Piacere, Milano* is concerned; the limited available data pinpoints a higher response in the initiative from those citizens living within the city limits than those in the hinterland.¹³

Another point is the capacity of the two initiatives to build place-based networks composed by transcalar actors. *MygranTour* works through partnerships between cultural associations, NGOs and responsible tourism tour operators. It succeeds in involving educational or associative tourism, and only partially a wider audience of tourists. *Piacere, Milano* cooperates with the Erasmus Student Network, identifying international students as a synthesis between tourists and residents. International students spending some time abroad have already been studied as powerful cultural mediators, fostering the touristification of public spaces, cafés and other ordinary

¹² *Un peu plus loin, dans le 10e arrondissement, ce sont les commerces dits « chinois » qui sont fustigés, perçus cette fois comme « trop chinois », une appréciation négative de l'ethnicité qui tient parfois à peu de choses : une vitrine sale, un commerçant qui ne parle pas le français, des étiquettes exclusivement en chinois, ou encore la succession de plusieurs commerces de ce type dans un périmètre restreint* (Corbillé 2009: 48).

¹³ Interview to the project Manager of *Piacere, Milano* (04/03/2016).

urban sites (Quaglieri Dominguez and Russo, 2010). *Piacere, Milano* also cooperates with other Milanese initiatives, such as *Sentieri Metropolitan* (based on trekking itineraries in the city). They jointly organized *Maratona*, an event connected to *Piacere, Milano*. The network enacted by *Piacere, Milano* seems more inclusive of social and cultural civic networks than of tourism and interculturally-related actors.

Finally, the urban regeneration that these projects stimulate passes through symbolic stages such as are connected with the creation of narratives about place. Similarly, the ability to engage in networking appears to serve to broaden the scope of the storytelling that the two projects stimulate. Tourist promotion itself can be considered a form of collectively constructed storytelling (Turco, 2012). The capacity building of *Piacere, Milano* is also grounded on the ability to foster a critical mass around alternative narratives.

Conclusions

We asked whose benefits are stimulated by the sphere delimited by city, culture and tourism? This question remains a fundamental and critical issue. This paper claimed that any answer based on the dichotomy between tourists and residents would be overly simplistic. Secondly, accepting tourism as merely an economic sector is misleading. Tourism should be considered instead as a situated practice negotiated systematically as it develops, according to socio-cultural context. Only then will it be possible to highlight urban issues intersecting tourism and culture through the complexity and power geometries that this tripartite relationship entails. In this paper, some claims were introduced, based on the role that new patterns of urban cultural consumption are assuming, and not just to the benefit of tourists. Participatory tourism can represent a starting, interstitial point towards an innovative way of questioning the usual tourist vs. resident dichotomy.

While “participatory”, “diffused” and “inclusive” tourism forms, based on intangible culture and creativity are increasing, tourism addressing consumerist sites or mega events is still developing. It is therefore even more urgent to understand and analyse the relationship between cities, tourism and culture starting from an inter- and trans-disciplinary perspective. It is urgent that governments, policy makers, as well as scholars, consider tourism not only as a goal, but rather as a means to observe contemporary urban dynamics in depth, and plan effective integrated politics accordingly; thus not only tourist or economic, but eminently social, and cultural policies. Such an acceptance of tourism within urban policy may enable virtuous synergies to enhance urban quality of life, beyond mere support of tourist business.

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