

Edited by
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New Narratives and Communication Strategies in Tourism, Culture, and Creative Industries

Studi
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This research has been carried out within the PNRR research activities of the consortium iNEST (Interconnected North-East Innovation Ecosystem) funded by the European Union Next-GenerationEU (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR) Missione 4 Componente 2, Investimento 1.5 D.D. 1058 23/06/2022, ECS_00000043–Spoke6, RT4, CUP I43C22000250006). This manuscript reflects only the Authors views and opinions, neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be considered responsible for them.

DOI: 10.3280/oa-1627

Free Digital Edition Isbn: 9788835192688

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research has been carried out within the PNRR research activities of the consortium iNEST (Interconnected North-East Innovation Ecosystem) funded by the European Union Next-GenerationEU (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR) Missione 4 Componente 2, Investimento 1.5 D.D. 1058 23/06/2022, ECS_00000043 – Spoke6, RT4, CUP I43C22000250006). This manuscript reflects only the Authors views and opinions, neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be considered responsible for them.

The research team of the Free University of Bozen worked under the institutional umbrella of the Competence Centre for Mountain Innovation Ecosystems, whose mission is to foster a tourism ecosystem in which culture acts as a central driver of strategic innovation. We are grateful to the staff of the Centre for their support throughout the project.

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INTRODUCTION

Serena Volo, Giulia Grillini, Fabrizio Panozzo

This edited volume documents the main outcomes of the research conducted by an interdisciplinary group of scholars working in the fields of tourism, culture and creative industries and belonging to the Innovation Ecosystems iNEST – Interconnected Nord-Est Innovation Ecosystem – funded by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) under the framework of the Next Generation EU programme.

The NextGeneration EU programme funded the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) with the aim of strengthening the country's social and economic fabric and favour a resilient, green and digital transition. Within the PNRR, the Innovation Ecosystems constituted an Italian national initiative designed to foster innovation, strengthen technology transfer, and support sustainable economic development. Each ecosystem brought together universities, public research institutions, territorial bodies, and private businesses facilitating, through a structured network, the enhancement of competencies, strengths and innovation that reflect values and visions of local economies, industrial districts, and research centres. To ensure strategic coherence while engaging with diverse stakeholders and domains of excellence, all ecosystems adopted a hub-and-spoke organizational model, in which a leading institution (the Hub) coordinated activities across a network of regional partners (the Spokes), combining central guidance with place-based action.

The iNEST Project, the Innovation Ecosystem of North-Eastern Italy, was dedicated to accelerating digital and ecological transitions across Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano. This macro-area plays a pivotal role in the Italian economy and is characterized by strong territorial identities and a wide range of productive specializations. These features were reflected in iNEST's nine

Spokes, which brought together universities, public research institutions, and private actors under the coordination of the University of Padua as the Hub. Beyond its role as a funding framework, iNEST has functioned as a strategic platform for regional transformation, promoting innovation that is place-sensitive, socially embedded, and based on intersectoral collaboration.

Within this ecosystem, the Tourism, Culture, and Creative Industries network (Spoke 6) has contributed to the overall objectives of the iNEST project tackling an economic and social area of high relevance for the north east of Italy. Led by Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Spoke 6 involved faculty members from the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, the University of Trento, and the University of Verona. It adopted a multidisciplinary perspective integrating economics, management, marketing, STEM disciplines, the arts, and the humanities to examine tourism, culture, and creative industries through an ecosystem lens. Its work has focused on strengthening collaborations among these sectors, reducing systemic fragmentation, and supporting the development of a differentiated, culturally enriching, and sustainable innovation landscape.

The activities of the spoke were structured around four coordinated research tasks (RTs), conceived as an integrated learning and innovation system. Digital Technologies (RT1), led by Ca' Foscari University of Venice, explored the integration of tourism, culture, and creative industries with advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, the Internet of Things, and Extended Reality. Data Analytics (RT2), led by the University of Verona, examined big datasets to support more sustainable public policies and destination marketing strategies. Sustainable Business Models (RT3), led by the University of Trento, investigated pathways for transforming business models in tourism, cultural, and creative sectors toward sustainability. New Narratives and Communication Strategies (RT4), led by the Free University of Bozen, addressed the role of narratives in shaping perceptions of places, cultures, and industries, developed new tools to challenge traditional stereotypes and to reframe tourism communication through inclusivity and sustainability.

This volume concludes the iNEST journey of the research group working on New Narratives and Communication Strategies (RT4). The contributions included critically examine, at theoretical and empirical level, stereotypical destination representations and demonstrates how collective imagination can be mobilised to generate new, creative narratives capable of repositioning destinations through culture and creativity. In addition, the volume raises critical awareness, exploring the influence of marketing communication beyond economic performance, highlighting the need for

inclusive and accessible communication and offering directions for re-imagining, re-constructing and re-experiencing destinations narratives, communication strategies and practices alike.

The highly diverse background of the scholars working on this volume is reflected in the inspiring contributions presented in three separate but interconnected parts. Part I, coordinated by Roberto Gigliotti, deals with the identification of strategies aimed at dismantling stereotypical tourist imagery and promoting more sustainable forms of tourism. Part II, coordinated by Serena Volo, traces a trajectory that moves from symbolic narrative production to structural territorial dynamics; it uses different lenses including literary representations of landscapes, semiotic interpretation of online reviews and marketing analysis of storytelling. Part III, coordinated by Nicoletta Pesaro, shifts to the issues of accessibility, inclusion, and mediation in multicultural contexts as, particularly in these cases, communicating and translating require intertextual, psychological, and narrative competences. Together, the contributions highlight the central role of narratives and marketing communication in supporting transformation across tourism, culture, and creative industries.

The book advances methodological and conceptual knowledge on the creation, shaping and effects of textual and visual narratives in tourism, culture, and creative industries. We are thankful for the knowledge and insights the authors shared in this volume and for the valuable and inspiring debates we had during the three years of collaboration.

SECTION I

SHAPING AND RESHAPING NARRATIVES
AND VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DESTINATIONS
*IF THERE IS NOT ENOUGH SNOW
FOR AN ENCHANTED LANDSCAPE*

Roberto Gigliotti

This text is written in the days preceding the opening of the 2026 Winter Olympic Games. There is little doubt that this global event will trigger substantial flows of tourists towards the host territory, encompassing the extended region between Milan, northern Italy's principal metropolitan centre, and the north-eastern Alpine area represented by Cortina, a historic destination for winter sports tourism. Corresponding to the physical movement of thousands of visitors towards this region, an opposing movement of idealised representations of the Alpine landscape will circulate widely. These images, however, do not necessarily correspond to reality – at least not entirely – given that critical issues such as global warming significantly undermine the stereotypical imagery upon which the narrative of the Games is constructed.

Evidence in support of this claim can be found through an examination of the official Olympic website. The locations designated to host the various sporting disciplines are presented through images of snow-covered landscapes that align perfectly with the conventional imaginaries associated with winter mountain environments. Yet, in reality, snowfall arrived late this year, as it has in recent winter seasons. In line with the broader trends of climate change, only the most recent snowfalls will allow the images broadcast worldwide to approximate what audiences expect to see. In practice, however, slope preparation began well in advance, employing the technological apparatus mobilised to counter these climatic conditions. Snow cannons have been operating for weeks to produce artificial snow, ensuring that athletes can compete on surfaces deemed technically adequate for their disciplines.

This situation raises an inevitable question: when were these images captured? The snowy landscapes depicted on the website appear to belong to a past that no longer corresponds to present conditions. Available data

consistently confirm a persistent reduction in snowfall and ongoing glacial retreat, with no countervailing trends recorded in recent years.

The promotional videos dedicated to Anterselva (the venue for the biathlon competition) feature two local representatives – a hotel owner and a craftsperson – walking through fairy-tale snow-covered landscapes, with falling snow evoking a Nordic legend. They respond to questions concerning the reasons why visitors should choose their Alpine district as a destination. Undoubtedly, large-scale events such as the Olympic Games are closely intertwined with tourism. The Olympics constitute a major opportunity for host regions to boost tourism and reap associated economic benefits. Investments in sporting infrastructure, in particular, often transform sites into destinations deemed worthy of visitation. The hotel owner proudly notes that, although her valley has a population of approximately three thousand inhabitants, its hosting capacity will increase to more than twenty thousands during the Games. Notably, across the promotional materials for the various Olympic venues, references to tourism are ubiquitous and unavoidable.

At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge that while sport is increasingly affected by global warming, it also bears a degree of responsibility for it – most notably through processes such as artificial snow production. The volume of snow required to ensure the proper conduct of the Games is enormous and cannot be supplied solely through natural snowfall. This necessitates a careful assessment of the balance between the economic benefits associated with the Games and their environmental costs. In the absence of sufficient natural snow, artificial production becomes indispensable, entailing substantial electricity consumption. Although the Olympic bid dossier guarantees that this energy will be sourced exclusively from renewables, the feasibility of this claim remains open to question. Should this commitment not be fully realised, emissions would increase disproportionately. Moreover, artificial snow production inevitably requires significant quantities of water, primarily drawn from local sources such as Alpine streams. The volumes involved correspond to the annual water consumption of a medium-sized Alpine town, comparable to those hosting organising teams, sponsors, athletes, and tourists during the month-long event. The environmental impact on local ecosystems is therefore undeniable, particularly given that the balance between water extraction and its restitution in the form of snow is not always neutral.

Central to this discussion is the question of the actual sustainability of international mega-events of this nature. Their carbon footprint must account not only for direct impacts – such as artificial snow production

– but also for indirect effects, including the mobility of athletes and spectators, infrastructure development, and waste management practices.

Within tourism studies, such large-scale events are often framed as opportunities to rethink tourism through a sustainability lens. This includes the possibility of promoting alternative itineraries and destinations beyond those already overwhelmed by overtourism and consequently stripped of their authentic character. However, this approach raises a critical issue: given the acknowledged fragility of many of these sites, media exposure may itself jeopardise the very authenticity that renders them attractive as alternative destinations in the first place.

Moving from the issue of exposure to the one protection, the Olympic Games represent only one of the possible analytical starting point for the issues addressed in the following section of this book. Also protective mechanisms – such as the inscription of fragile environments, like those briefly outlined above, on the UNESCO World Heritage List – may likewise become sources of controversy.

In 2009, the Dolomites region of the Italian Alps was inscribed on the List. This designation conferred international recognition upon the area's material and cultural value, while simultaneously activating complex dynamics at the intersection of conservation imperatives and human pressure. Inscription on the List entails heightened international visibility and often leads to the rapid transformation of sites into highly desirable tourist destinations. While World Heritage status acknowledges the global uniqueness of a place, it simultaneously exposes that uniqueness to global consumption, positioning the site as a premium product within the tourism market. Moreover, by enhancing the profile and attractiveness of a territory, UNESCO recognition – much like the Olympic Games – is widely perceived as a generator of economic returns, rendering it a highly coveted designation, including among public institutions.

While inscription often brings economic and symbolic benefits, it may also produce unintended consequences that undermine the very heritage it seeks to protect. Tourism, long regarded as a driver of local development, increasingly reveals its negative impacts where excessive visitor numbers disrupt ecological systems, social balances, and cultural integrity, particularly in fragile natural environments. The case of the Dolomites illustrates this tension clearly. Already among the world's most visited destinations prior to their inscription, the region experienced a further increase in tourism pressure thereafter, notably in areas that had already reached or exceeded their sustainable carrying capacity. This intensification has contributed to environmental degradation, declining

quality of visitor experiences, and growing discontent among local communities, alongside a progressive loss of territorial distinctiveness.

More broadly, these dynamics reflect structural issues identified within tourism studies, particularly concerning the role of visual culture in shaping destination imaginaries. Contemporary tourism operates through the production and circulation of images that not only guide expectations but actively transform places into consumable representations. In this extractive cycle, destinations risk being reduced to standardised and replicable images, leading ultimately to the exhaustion of local resources and the erosion of their social, cultural, and environmental foundations.

In response to this critical scenario, it becomes urgent to imagine alternative perspectives grounded in sustainability and in the development of critical visual narratives capable of restoring the complexity of places, fostering alternative ways of seeing, and cultivating renewed awareness of tourism practices.

The three contributions that follow are the outcome of an in-depth transdisciplinary research process on the transmedial narration of tourist destinations. Their shared objective is the identification of strategies aimed at dismantling stereotypical tourist imagery and promoting more sustainable forms of tourism in north-eastern Italy. The research led to the development of a methodology grounded in speculative design and creativity-based practices, intended to reimagine multidimensional narratives of tourism destinations. The topics addressed are examined from the perspectives of spatial practices, comparative literature, and tourism studies.

Roberto Gigliotti and Eliana Saracino's contribution explores different applications of transmediality in the construction of alternative narratives for sustainable tourism. Their work advocates a model of tourism oriented towards emancipated travellers – individuals capable of engaging critically with transmedial opportunities and willing to confront reality and authenticity rather than stereotypes. Through an in-depth analysis of case studies, the authors develop interpretative tools for understanding the impacts of transmedial experiences within the interplay between media, geo-cultural characteristics, and tourism practices. Three key themes emerge: provocation and simulation as means of fostering awareness of authenticity; the involvement of local communities as a strategy to counter the alienation induced by overtourism; and curated territorial experiences in which visitors become active participants rather than passive consumers. The analysed cases propose alternative trajectories that redefine the roles of tourism actors, positioning visitors not as extractors of value but as caretakers of tourism resources. Alessandro Cinquegrani's contribution examines representations of Venice in literature,

art, and film that challenge its dominant stereotypical imagery. Positioned between two opposing poles – the decadent, abstract city and the city of collective celebration epitomised by Carnival – the analysis unfolds across three historical periods from the 1980s to the present. Through a wide range of textual and visual examples, the author demonstrates that, despite the dominance of stereotypes, alternative narratives persist that portray Venice as a living, evolving city. These representations guide the reader through multiple Venices, from Tiziano Scarpa’s pulp-inspired city to Sorrentino’s world city in *The Young Pope*, and through popular culture artefacts such as Annie Lennox’s *The Gift*, which documents the democratisation of luxury and the early signs of Venice’s overtourism-driven transformation. In his contribution, Fabrizio Panozzo argues that tourism does not merely operate within spatial realities but actively contributes to their symbolic construction. He situates tourism narratives within broader cultural, communicative, and economic frameworks that shape tourism imaginaries. Echoing Cinquegrani’s emphasis on territorial dynamism, Panozzo highlights how shifting imaginaries can give rise to counter-narratives capable of subverting stereotypes. The concept of the “typical” is examined as a powerful vehicle for place representation, while its transformation into stereotype is contextualised within tourism discourse. By introducing storytelling as a central analytical category, the author elucidates how narratives contribute to either the overexposure or the erasure of places within the tourism landscape.

To date, the identification of new target groups and new forms of tourism not driven by a purely extractive logic has not succeeded in relieving pressure on overtourism destinations. Instead, these initiatives have merely expanded the existing offer, pushing territories further beyond a threshold of no return that should not be crossed. After having started from the macro scale of global events such as the Olympic Games, I want to conclude this discussion mentioning a micro-scale intervention – an almost acupuncture-like contribution – aimed at redefining tourism imaginaries beyond stereotypes and in dialogue with a transforming Alpine territory. This territory is not inherently bound to the lifestyles promoted by territorial marketing, nor to traditions artificially preserved to meet tourist expectations. In this context, the project *Hotel Amazonas* at the Aspmayrhof farm in Langen - Bozen Bolzano, founded in 2012 by artist and farmer Margareth Kaserer, offers a compelling alternative. Intersecting art, agriculture, and hospitality, the project redefines the relationship between tourism and the Alpine landscape. Through artist residencies, events, and practices of commoning, Kaserer has transformed the family farm into a critical laboratory that operates outside institutional

cultural circuits and mass tourism. She personally oversees all aspects of the project, from artist selection to agricultural work, from cooking to cultural programming and guest hospitality. Aspmayr Hof thus emerges as a destination for the emancipated tourist: simultaneously embedded within a tourism-driven economy and positioned at its margins, beyond stereotypical representations.

1.

IMAGES, IMAGERY, AND BEHAVIOUR IN CONTEMPORARY ALPINE TOURISM

Roberto Gigliotti, Eliana Saracino*

Transmediality, tourism, sustainability

Transmediality constitutes a defining paradigm of contemporary culture and society, enhancing understanding and experience through the convergence of different media (Jenkins, 2006). The growing typological diversity of communication technologies and their extensive diffusion across all spheres of everyday life increasingly expand the possibilities of interaction between humans and the environment, while enabling rapid access to an almost infinite quantity of information (Helles, 2013). This development opens up new fields of enquiry through the integration of the material and the immaterial, space and time, places and communication.

In the specific frame of tourism experiences, the advancement of these processes also enables new possibilities for defining the tourist space (Månsson *et al.*, 2020). The different available devices offer alternative ways of knowing, discovering, interpreting and engaging with destinations, contributing to the progressive construction of an imaginary heritage – cultural and geographical – that becomes part of a local identity (Reijnders, 2020) and overcomes the mere promotion of tourist attractions. Transmedial storytelling makes it possible to weave a profound interlacing of tangible and intangible dimensions, returning a rich and articulated perspective on the destination. This perspective is shaped in heterogeneous ways by different media¹, each of which reaches distinct

* The essay is the result of the joint work of the two authors. In particular, the paragraphs “Transmediality, tourism, sustainability” and “Many ways, three stories” was written by Roberto Gigliotti, the paragraphs “Will we die of tourism?” and “New tourist, new narratives” by Eliana Saracino, the redaction of the paragraph “Others possible worlds” is common to both authors.

¹ The concept of “media” encompasses a wide range of tools and platforms through which information is communicated and shared. Technological evolution has further

audiences, entails specific temporalities of consumption, and conveys particular messages and values. By combining real actions with virtual content, the visitors can be guided through a multidimensional, immersive and persuasive journey, capable of revealing alternative points of view out of the mainstream logics and of redirecting the choices of tourist-consumers towards other trajectories.

From this perspective, transmediality offers unique opportunities both for the education and the active involvement of the visitors, and for the safeguarding of natural and cultural resources. When oriented towards the promotion of sustainable tourism models², it provides a fertile operational ground for creating meaningful connections between people, places and stories understood as integral components of the cultural landscape; for conveying the values and authentic dimensions of a society and its culture; and for fostering visitor awareness of the impact that human action and tourism exert on a given territory. The combination of different media supports, both physical and virtual, allows these values to be disseminated not only in theoretical terms, as ethical principles, but also concretely, through the practice of direct experiences (Mannell and Seppo, 1987). Such experiences become a crucial vehicle for fostering a deep and personal understanding of place, with which an enduring and long-lasting connection can be established.

Will we die of tourism?

In order to verify these assumptions, the Alpine context was selected as the field of application, with particular reference to the area of Alto Adige-Südtirol, with the aim of developing a methodology that, starting from the critical issues identified in the current situation, identifies potential pathways towards sustainable development scenarios to be

expanded this spectrum, including both traditional and digital media. These therefore include video and audio, augmented reality, virtual reality, interactive storytelling, mobile apps, websites, blogs and vlogs, social networks and sharing platforms, podcasts, QR codes and NFC, as well as multimedia installations, interactive maps, gamification experiences, and much more.

² According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism is responsible tourism that is aware of its environmental, social and economic impacts, both present and future. It is a way of travelling that is attentive to the safeguarding and development of the environment, understood as a cultural landscape – that is, as the combination of the work of nature and humankind – and therefore as the ensemble of local communities, artistic and cultural heritage, and the natural landscape.

achieved through the construction of new, non-stereotypical narrations, based on the opportunities offered by transmedial practices. The reference territory, as widely confirmed by data and statistics, is among the most frequented destinations in Italy and worldwide³. It is a territory that today stands at the edge of a critical threshold, facing significant tourism-related challenges, particularly concerning climate instability and the unsustainable tourist pressure.

Climate change represents an evident risk for the region. Rising temperatures, together with the consequent melting of glaciers and the alteration of hydrological regimes⁴, are transforming both the landscape and the functioning of the Alpine ecosystem, which has always relied on the regulation of delicate balances and exchanges between the environment and human activities. The territory thus becomes increasingly unstable and unsafe, affected by ever more frequent extreme events. Mass tourism, for its part, attracts large numbers of inexperienced and unprepared visitors, often lacking awareness of the contextual conditions of the places they are visiting and unable to cope with the risks that the mountain environment has always entailed, and that are intensified under these conditions.

Beyond concerns related to ecosystem stability and the safety of visitors and local communities, the profound environmental transformations resulting from climate change raise questions about the future scenarios of mountain, and winter tourism in particular, which has been a driving force since the mid-twentieth century. Although the development of the tourism market has brought undeniable economic benefits to mountain areas, the pandemic exposed the fragility of tourism monoculture and the weakness of quantitative growth based on the replication of urban dynamics. Destinations that rely exclusively on winter tourism⁵, neglecting other opportunities for diversification, tend to resort to short-sighted solutions, such as artificial snowmaking or the unsustainable exploitation

³ With 120 million visitors per year, the Alpine chain is among the world's leading tourist destinations. In 2024, the Alto Adige-Südtirol region welcomed approximately 8.7 million tourists. The impact of such a high number of arrivals becomes evident when compared with the around 540,000 inhabitants living in Alto Adige-Südtirol.

⁴ Over the twentieth century, the glacial mass of the Alpine chain has been reduced by approximately fifty per cent. Scientific studies, including the reports *Climate Change 2023: AR6* (IPCC – Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control), *Global Climate Report 2024* (Copernicus), and *Carovana dei Ghiacciai 2024* (Legambiente), estimate a temperature increase of 1.5 °C between 2030 and 2050.

⁵ Climate change directly affects the region's tourist appeal, as seasonal activities such as skiing and mountaineering experience changes in accessibility and quality due to reduced snow cover and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events.

of resources⁶, driven by short-term consumption logics and by substantial yet sterile public subsidies (Varotto, 2020). In doing so, they render the resilience of the local economy dependent on external factors that are difficult to manage, and risk a short lifespan, passively enduring the consequences of a rapidly changing climate.

Another major risk factor lies in overtourism, namely the excessive and concentrated presence of visitors that leads to the exceeding of destinations' carrying capacity. This phenomenon occurs especially during peak tourist seasons and in places promoted as "sightseeing" sites by mainstream narratives, generating significant pressure on the environment and on local communities and, as a consequence, negatively affecting the overall quality of the tourist experience.

Overtourism and the functional specialisation of destinations according to their touristic vocation lead to a progressive process of *touristification* (Judd and Fainstein, 1999), that is the homogenisation of places through the erosion of traditional practices, the transformation of cultures into products for tourist consumption, and the gradual loss of a sense of belonging among local communities. Productive and artisanal activities are replaced by restaurants and tourist-oriented shops, accommodation facilities and second homes, resulting in a rise in the cost of living and a reduction in purchasing power and housing affordability. Services for permanent residents disappear; towns and villages are emptied of inhabitants and of the social relations that once sustained them. Employment becomes increasingly precarious and seasonal, with local economies tending to depend almost exclusively on tourism, whose profits are often externalised, leaving few benefits within the territory. Forms of privatisation of public space emerge, congestion increases – particularly in certain hotspots – and traffic intensifies. The growing tourist attractiveness of destinations often leads to a decline in the quality of both the offer and the tourist experience itself, while also calling into question acceptance by local communities, which increasingly develop forms of dissent and *tourismphobia* (Milano *et al.*, 2021), that is, fear or hostility towards tourists⁷.

⁶ The estimated increase in temperatures – 1.5 °C by 2050 – will make even the operation of artificial snowmaking systems impossible. These systems already guarantee snow coverage on 95% of Alpine ski slopes. If these scenarios are confirmed, by 2050 skiing will no longer be possible in 68% of Italian Alpine destinations.

⁷ In recent years, such forms of dissent have manifested through movements and symbolic acts of protest in numerous European tourist cities; for example, the slogans "tourists go home" that frequently appear in the public spaces of cities such as Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam and Palma de Mallorca; the mobilisation of residents against the pressure of short-term rentals and the touristification of historic centres; and even episodes of direct contestation during events and seasonal peaks, which make visible the conflict between dominant tourist practices and the right to the city.

This is a mechanism that triggers a vicious circle carrying within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Touristification produces exactly what the tourist-consumer expects to find. Destinations are shaped according to the preconceived images of their visitors through now well-established processes and techniques. Oriented towards satisfying the expectations of the global tourist, places lose their uniqueness and are transformed into standardised scenarios based on stereotypes, simplified interpretations and universally recognisable codes (Minca, 1996). Travel itself becomes a risk-free adventure, resolved within a production-consumption exchange that expels residents from places and, with them, the everyday life and ordinary practices that once gave them meaning.

In mountain environments, even more than in urban contexts, the displacement of resident populations or the interruption of traditional activities due to their economic unsustainability has severe repercussions on the preservation of the original asset, namely, that for which the tourist destination itself exists. The Alpine ecosystem has always been based on finely calibrated balances between production, consumption and the amount of population, which have enabled the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of ecological stability (Viazzo, 1990), through a form of compensation between nature and agro-forestry-pastoral activities. On the one hand, the absence – or substantial reduction – of a rooted community leads to the disappearance of practices, culture and local traditions that made possible the establishment and maintenance of that specific habitat in all its characteristics; on the other hand, vulnerable natural resources can be easily damaged by an excessive influx of people. The stereotyping of destination narratives produced by the mainstream cultural system reinforces logics of concentration through the definition of indispensable “markers” and “sightseeing” sites (MacCannell, 1976), generating the paradox whereby those aspects for which a place is considered attractive are destroyed precisely by being defined as such.

Overtourism thus plays a decisive role in disrupting the environmental, social and cultural balance of territories, placing at risk the integrity of ecosystems and the very existence of the resource on which the tourist experience is based. A resource that, particularly in natural contexts, is generally non-reproducible. Here, in addition to the aforementioned implications of overtourism, one must also consider the consequences of deforestation, trail erosion, water and energy consumption, air, water and soil pollution, the loss of natural areas in favour of tourism-related buildings and infrastructure, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and the difficulties associated with waste management. Many natural sites lack the infrastructure necessary to support high visitor loads, especially during peak

moments concentrated on specific days or seasons. Promoting mass tourism often entails simplifying and facilitating access to destinations: congestion and traffic jams, noise, pollution and land-use changes, the construction of new infrastructure, and, consequently, visual intrusion and landscape devastation.

At present, the efforts to control overtourism is often addressed through taxation policies or limitations on tourist flows (Scuttari *et al.*, 2020), measures that generate new forms of exclusion and are insufficient on their own to respond to the identified issues. Tackling these challenges instead requires a strategic and multiscalar approach, envisaging the reduction of visitor density in a limited number of lumped centres through the promotion of lesser-known destinations, the diversification of the tourism offer in order to spread visitor flows over a longer time span, and the active involvement of local communities in tourism development. Such an approach can generate new forms of value that ensure diversification and long-term durability, while at the same time preserving the integrity of the original good.

New tourists, new narratives

It is therefore necessary to define the limits within which sustainable growth is possible, seeking a balance between the development of the tourism industry, the evolution of territories, and the role of local communities. This entails, on the one hand, proposing new narratives capable of diversifying and decentralising tourist flows, distributing them spatially in a more diffuse manner and promoting networks of alternative routes and experiences; and, on the other, working towards the cultural construction of a tourist awareness, in which the tourist is conceived as an active and responsible subject, conscious of the impact of their presence on the territory and capable of adopting sustainable behaviours in relation to both natural and anthropized environments. New narratives that are necessary to dissipate the excessive concentration generated by mass tourism, but also to move away from a stereotyped imaginary – one that tourists expect to find even before arriving at their destination – by describing the “real nature” of places. New narratives that are able to foster deeper awareness among guests and, at the same time, to be recognised and shared by host communities.

Several recent studies highlight a shift in tourist choices⁸, particularly among younger generations; a shift towards an increasing

⁸ These include the report of the 118th session of the UNWTO Executive Council held in May 2023 and the study *Niche Tourism, 2025 – Thematic Research* by GlobalData.

interest in the experiential value of the travel (Tussyadiah, 2014; Basaraba *et al.*, 2019).

Consumer society has promoted a tourism imaginary that associates travel with pleasure and success, as a tool of distinction (Bourdieu, 1983) and an indicator of one's position within the evolving social hierarchy (Rojek, 1985). Elites, who shape the model, will constantly seek new destinations untouched by the masses, places that convey a high level of symbolic capital, thereby sustaining the development of an expansive economy that continually appropriates new places and new experiences (Coleman and Crang, 2002). Within this ongoing process, the authentic and unspoiled place is perpetually displaced further in space and time (Enzensberger, 1998), transforming the world into an immense – albeit finite – commercial catalogue.

Strengthening alternative, more ethical and sustainable narratives means aligning with the very logics of the system, while consciously exploiting them in order to steer outcomes towards long-term objectives. The need for social distinction itself can thus become the lever for a necessary shift in perspective. The hyper-fragmentation of contemporary society generates multiple small elites, transversal and no longer strictly tied to income or social class, each expressing new and differentiated demands in consumption. Within this scenario, new tourist profiles are emerging: many are more mature, discerning and well-informed (Costa, 2005), often motivated – whether by ethical conviction or by fashionable consumption patterns – by a certain ecological sensitivity and a strong engagement with social issues, alongside interests more directly related to specific leisure activities. This type of tourist chooses eco-friendly and zero-waste accommodation, favours nearby destinations, travels in the low season and adopts sustainable modes of mobility, prefers the discovery of local products and flavours, and engages with local customs and practices. They show interest in social issues – such as women's empowerment, community development, gender equality, and others – as well as in niche leisure activities that may include adventure and sport – for instance, walking tourism, cycle tourism, equestrian tourism and river tourism – but also gastronomy, wellbeing, and related fields.

This type of tourist seeks to engage with the most authentic dimensions of the places they visit, favouring highly personalised moments over standardised experiences, and aspiring to be an active protagonist rather than a mere consumer. As unspoiled places become exhausted – or are inevitably destined to be so – the desire for authenticity and distinction shifts towards direct participation in real experiences. Adherence to the values of a given niche becomes the means through which *homo turisticus* self-represents (Goffman, 1959) within

the segmentation of society, recognising and displaying themselves, often through narratives conveyed via digital media (Jansson, 2020), which play a decisive role in shaping both narratives and interest in specific destinations and relevant questions. Capturing the emergence of this new demand thus represents a strategic opportunity to orient travel choices and behaviours towards slower forms of tourism, capable of enabling a genuine and profound understanding of the cultural landscape through direct experience of places and everyday practices.

The tourist experience is produced in space – real and virtual – and is distributed across different media platforms according to the perspectives of the different subjects, both active and passive, involved in the tourism industry – hosts, guests, tourism professionals, administrations, inhabitants, producers, and local realities – becoming increasingly extended in both space and time. A form of “never-ending tourism” emerges, going beyond the traditional boundaries of physical travel by leveraging digital technologies and media to construct a continuous and direct engagement with the destination. Through different communication channels, before, during and after the journey, a reciprocal exchange is established and kept open between destinations, visitors, tourism professionals and local communities. Within the ongoing fusion of online and offline, on the one hand, users are directly involved, immersed and in constant interaction with the territory and its actors, producing or reprocessing content; on the other hand, residents and local operators are encouraged to develop – or strengthen – more or less formal networks of collaboration, which often generate new forms of economy, activities and professional profiles, producing positive impacts whose benefits remain within the territory itself, thereby fostering processes of repopulation and generational renewal. The implementation of these processes expands the duration of the tourist experience and deepens the relationship between guests, places and hosts: in the pre-trip phase, corresponding to the search for information about the destination and its offer; during the trip, by providing information, initiatives and proposals; and in the post-trip phase, through the sharing and narration of the experience, which becomes both a promotional tool and a means of creating attachment and rootedness to the place.

The tourist thus becomes an active part of a process in which, from a passive consumer, they turn into a co-producer of contents (Hancox, 2017) and an integral part of the destination’s narrative, rendering the relationship between visitor and visited place tangible and generating value through exchange – undoubtedly economic, but above all cultural – with local communities.

Many ways, three stories

The conducted investigation examined a range of experiences that employ transmediality in different ways to construct new narratives aimed at promoting sustainable tourism. These practices were analysed according to specific benchmarks and reorganised into a taxonomy that enables the comparison of projects, actions and outcomes⁹. The defined classification – necessarily “open” due to the dynamic nature of the examined phenomena – serves to provide interpretative tools for understanding the impacts associated with transmedial experiences, within the triangulation between media, geo-cultural characteristics and tourism practices. The analysis focuses in particular on the types of implemented practices, on the effects they generate, on the relationships they establish with and among the actors involved, and between these actors and the spaces in which such practices unfold. It is important to note that no experience is based on a single, exclusive practice; rather, they often operate in a transversal manner. Nevertheless, in each examined case a prevailing character emerges, which functions as the foundation for the construction of the experience itself, oriented towards the achievement of specific objectives.

Some practices recur more frequently than others. Three cases are outlined below, as they are particularly significant for the processes of reappropriation they activate and for the substantial effects they have produced within the urban and social fabric.

Building awareness through provocation and/or simulation

One particularly effective practice that derives considerable benefit from transmediality is based on provocation and simulation, employed as tools to raise public awareness of crucial issues. Through communication strategies and forms of guerrilla marketing, these projects demonstrate how, for example, the proposal of a dystopian scenario can stimulate meaningful reflection and debate within the community. This approach brings issues to the fore, fostering awareness about them, and potentially influencing social behaviour.

An emblematic example in this regard is the *Intacta Ltd.* project¹⁰, which explored the potentialities of spreading environmental fake news to stimulate

⁹ Approximately one hundred case studies were analysed, all located in mountain contexts, inner areas or otherwise fragile environments, and compared through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

¹⁰ Conceived and developed by the *Brave New Alps* collective as a final thesis at the Faculty of Design and Art of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano.

South Tyrolean public opinion to question critical issues concerning the privatisation of nature and the ethical and social implications of such practices. The project revolves around the creation of a fictitious tourism company, *Intacta Ltd. – Alpine Nature Resorts*, promoting an absurd yet plausible idea: enclosing the last remaining areas of unspoilt Alpine nature behind five-metre-high concrete walls and reserving exclusive access for an elite of wealthy tourists.

To make the news credible, a series of concrete actions were implemented. First of all, the company's corporate identity was meticulously developed and real contact details were activated¹¹. The imaginary founder of the company appeared as author in a book on the future of the region¹², and, to further enhance credibility, some real figures acknowledged by the community were involved as accomplices¹³. Eventually, a fax was sent to local newspapers containing a copy of a fictitious correspondence between the *Intacta Ltd.* president and an institutional developer, detailing secret negotiations for the construction of the first resort within a South Tyrolean natural park. Unsurprisingly, the story immediately bounced on the front pages of local newspapers. Following the outbreak of the scandal, a press conference was organised in which the hoax was revealed and, with the support of some experts in tourism-related issues, the underlying message was discussed, triggering a public debate on the topic that continued in the weeks following the end of the event.

Involvement of local communities in the tourism experience and industry

The use of transmedial tools significantly facilitates the active involvement of host communities in the production of place narratives and in the tourist experience itself. By integrating narration and technology, it becomes possible to create immersive and participatory experiences in which the local community assumes an active, leading role, while tourists

¹¹ A professional website was created, complete with all descriptive content, news, mission statement, press kit, and so forth, as well as real contact details (telephone number and physical address).

¹² Marco Eggerz, the imaginary founder of the fictitious company, complete with a fake curriculum vitae, is the author of an essay describing the philosophy of *Intacta Ltd.*, included in the book *Pre visioni del giovane Sudtirolo/Unerhört. Visionen des jungen Südtirol*, edited by Thomas Kager and Angelika Burtscher, which brings together utopian proposals and concrete projects for the development of the South Tyrolean territory.

¹³ For example, a local green politician, accomplice in the fake project since the beginning, discussed the resort project on his personal website and, when contacted by journalists, confirmed the authenticity of the news.

are welcomed as aware and respectful participants. This approach not only seeks to improve relations between guests and residents, thereby preventing forms of hostility towards visitors, but often also generates economic benefits that remain within the concerned territory.

This is the case of *FLICS: Memorie da esplorare*¹⁴, an application that enables users to engage with the city, the surrounding territory and its inhabitants through game and exploration. In the local dialect, *flics* refers to *offcuts*, small scraps of fabric left over from other work and subsequently reused in various ways. Within the application, tourists can deepen their knowledge of the community and the territory through a narrative composed of such “scraps” of memory. Through the eyes and words of the inhabitants themselves, visitors can relive traditions and can access fragments of collective memory. The application contains thirty stories – memories, traditions, curiosities and small anecdotes – donated by the inhabitants, edited by a writer, interpreted by an actor and recorded as audio tracks. These thirty narratives are the result of more than sixty hours of interviews conducted with around fifty people aged between eleven and one hundred, introducing visitors into the life of the community. The stories, to be read or listened to, are accessible via QR codes printed on small supports and hidden throughout the village and its surroundings, to be discovered with the help of a geo-localised map and additional clues that guide the tourist-player through streets, paths and woodland. Particular attention was paid to the accessibility of each stop, preferring, where possible, locations reachable by all and providing useful information such as the type of terrain and the presence of any obstacles.

FLICS takes the form of a treasure hunt that engages tourists in the exploration of places, starting from the digital realm and materialising within the real space. Thanks to a non-linear narrative structure, the participants construct their own path during the game, both within the narrative space of the application and in the physical space of the territory, becoming immersed in a personal, creative and engaging experience. The invitation is to listen, look around and come into contact with local residents themselves. Each story corresponds to a score and, once all the narratives have been found and listened to, participants receive a small reward¹⁵ and become honorary citizens of these places,

¹⁴ A project conceived by *Puntozero*, a multidisciplinary non-profit organisation for cultural promotion and cooperation, initiated by a local *albergo diffuso* association in the village of Sutrio, a small municipality in the Carnia region.

¹⁵ The game places players within a shared ranking system, and the prize consists of a key ring with the “keys to the city”.

since having come to know the people, habits and anecdotes around which the community is cemented.

Understanding the territory through spatial experiences

Many of the examined case studies are based on participation in a collective or individual action to be performed in space, often designed for and with a specific interest group. Among the different cases assessed, one particularly widespread and effective kind of experience is related to the act of walking, understood as an aesthetic practice (Careri, 2006) of knowledge, narration and sharing. The collective action of walking enables a slow perception of and interaction with the territory, allowing it to be deciphered and thus understood in its deeper – and often invisible – aspects related to the cultural landscapes.

A virtuous example among these is *Walk the Line*¹⁶, an explorative-narrative project whose aim is to enhance the historical and ethnographic heritage of the border area between Italy, Slovenia and Austria – a boundary characterized by a strong cultural, historic and political significance – through the production of a new collective narration to be developed walking through the territory.

In each edition, an international group of Italian, Slovenian and Austrian university students is selected, accompanied by a multidisciplinary team of experts – anthropologists, writers, nature guides, architects, photographers, and others – to walk fifteen to twenty kilometres every day, stopping in villages, towns, bivouacs and mountain refuges located on both sides of the border. Along the route, meetings are organised and local inhabitants and experts join the group, offering multidisciplinary points of view on the crossed territories, enriching both the travel experience and its transcultural dimension.

Once back, the students translate the stimuli and impressions gathered during the walk into a collective work, which is then made publicly accessible on an online platform. The final output may take different narrative forms, for instance, in one edition, a series of texts and images, and in another, through video narratives. In this way, a new collective narration of the borderline is constructed, composed of memories, stories and landscapes, elaborated by the new generation of European citizens, in which the personal gaze of each participant is stimulated and encouraged within the shared dimension of the experience.

¹⁶ A project by the cultural association *Altrememorie*, now in its fourth edition.

Other possible worlds

The undertaken research has made it possible to outline an integrated framework for understanding how narrative transmission and the consumption/production of content across multiple channels can amplify visitors' awareness, improve the engagement and participation of host communities, and generate positive impacts within the tourism industry on an economic, environmental and socio-cultural level. Transmediality represents a meaningful educational opportunity to orient the travel choices and the tourist behaviours, particularly by inducing younger consumers to adopt responsible and ethical travel practices. The numerous cases analysed highlight alternative development possibilities and allow, on the one hand, for the codification of strategies, practices, effects and obstacles, and on the other, for an understanding of the needs and requirements of the different actors involved. These are episodes that point to other possible trajectories.

The productive logics of mass tourism are evidently unstoppable, just as it is necessary to adapt to the irreversible environmental changes generated by climate change. To mitigate the effects of these trends and to imagine a future perspective for mountain destinations, it has become imperative to create alternatives founded on an understanding of sustainability as a form of development compatible with the nature of places and capable of producing lasting benefits over time. Alternatives that are not based exclusively on prohibition and limitation, but that instead experiment with active forms of territorial stewardship. Alternatives that, in the short term, make it possible to dissipate anthropic pressure concentrated in certain hotspots and at certain times of the year, and to generate enduring forms of productivity aligned with local culture and with the specific territorial and social conditions of mountain contexts.

However, in order to achieve structural benefits in the long term, it is necessary to trigger a deeper, cultural shift. A shift that transforms behaviours and habits, both of visitors and of all the actors involved in the tourism industry. A shift that contributes to defining a new *tourism consciousness* and a renewed sense of limits, indispensable for safeguarding the delicate mountain equilibria. A shift that can be conveyed through the proposal of *others* narratives, capable of describing a different way of perceiving and inhabiting the natural environment, and thus of activating a deeper sense of responsibility while simultaneously offering a new, ethical and conscious form of social distinction.

The tourist space is, first and foremost, an image (Miossec, 1977). Even before it is experienced, it is constructed, imagined and communicated.

Visual representations do not merely document places; they define their meanings, select their elements and orient their modes of use (Sontag, 1977), effectively determining what is deemed worthy of being seen. The image precedes experience and conditions its perception, suggesting what to look at, how to behave and which emotions to feel. Tourists, in turn, produce images. Immersed in this visual and symbolic horizon, yet at the same time stereotyped, their gaze is often guided by imitative logics, tending to reproduce what has already been internalised through the images proposed by dominant models. In doing so, they reinforce their centrality, fuelling the vicious circle of representation (Urry and Larsen, 2011) and rendering the tourist experience increasingly self-referential.

The representation of the mountain has always played a crucial role in the collective imagination, nourished by images that depict it as an emblem of majesty and inaccessible purity, as a place in which to confront one's limits, or as an authentic counterpoint to urban life. These visions have contributed to the construction of a myth – composed of images, imaginaries and behaviours – that fails to reflect the complexity of contemporary challenges.

With greater critical awareness, it becomes possible to envisage other narratives, other ways of seeing. Narratives not guided by market logics, capable of moving beyond mainstream visual stereotypes and of restoring a different perception of the mountain environment. A different kind of imagery that tells of subtler and deeper relationships between human beings and landscape, that reveals invisible and marginal dimensions, or that highlights conflicts and contradictions. Images that portray the reality of a fragile environment, profoundly compromised by human action.

The opportunities offered by transmedial practices can be harnessed to develop a multi-platform editorial project that adopts an inclusive and participatory approach, involving all actors within the tourism industry – including local residents – through which new narratives can be constructed in which the user assumes an active role in the process. From this perspective, visual production becomes an active and critical tool: no longer a mere confirmation of the dominant gaze, but a practice of interrogation and re-signification of the territory. By offering an open and non-linear narrative (Ryan, 2002), and by foregrounding humanity's aspirations, failures and uncertainties, the multi-platform editorial product can contribute to the construction of a different form of awareness, more lucid and more closely connected to reality. By drawing upon deep archetypes of collective consciousness, it raises alertness and encourages the adoption of more mindful behaviours, respectful of the environment and of host territories.

In this way, tourists are invited to make an active effort: first by developing a deep understanding of the meaning and condition of places, and then by reconstructing the overall significance of the territory through the production of a personal synthesis, assembling stimuli coming from different media. Tourists can thus define their own individual imaginary, outside stereotypical narratives. The platform can connect tourists with operators, producers, artists and local initiatives that adhere to a shared ethical code, embodying specific cultural values and offering opportunities for real experiences that are closely tied to the territory and to local identities.

When the tourist experience is rooted in reality, it transforms not only the landscape being visited, but also the perspective of those who move through it. It is by immersing oneself in the territory – in the “reality of the territory” – that the tourist once again becomes a traveller, a conscious actor who understands the impact of their presence on the environment and, through the emotional perception of the fragility of what is being lost, awakens a sense of responsibility towards a vulnerable and endangered environment. Upon returning to everyday life, the traveller will then consciously choose different forms of behaviour, not experienced as constraints but as distinctive choices that identify them within a specific community. Thus, while tourism on the one hand leaves an imprint on the world it visits, on the other it can contribute to shaping the traveller into a more aware and responsible global citizen.

Working on the promotion of experiences therefore becomes a model of sustainable development, as it can be renewed over time and, in most cases, without major structural interventions. This makes it possible to expand or refresh the image of destinations without compromising their essence, preserving existing resources and the intrinsic characteristics of places and cultural landscapes, while simultaneously creating new forms of long-lasting value that do not consume the original asset.

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2.

GLAUCUS'S JOURNEY.

THE LITERARY VISION OF VENICE (1980-2025)

Alessandro Cinquegrani

Stereotypes

Credo che Venezia dovrebbe chiedere i danni agli eredi di Thomas Mann, scrittore che amo molto, ma che è uno dei maggiori responsabili dell'immagine più scontata e noiosa di Venezia, quella della decadenza, del tramonto, dell'infinita fine. A me Venezia è sempre sembrata una città straordinariamente viva, molto giocosa per parecchi aspetti, piena di movimento. (Ferrucci, 2025, 128-129)

With his characteristic understated yet incisive irony, Daniele Del Giudice – an eminent writer and influential cultural protagonist in Venice through the *Fondamenta: Città di lettori* festival – critically addresses a long-standing, ossified perception of the city. In a dialogue with Roberto Ferrucci, Del Giudice highlights how this sedimented image immobilizes Venice in a representation that, while detached from contemporary reality, remains remarkably resilient. This phenomenon was captured as early as 1985 by Francesco De Gregori in the opening lines of *Miracolo a Venezia*: «Venezia sta sull'acqua, manda cattivo odore / La radio e i giornalisti dicono sempre "Venezia muore"».

Venice exists through its own stereotypes; its image tends toward abstraction and archetype. At the opposite pole of this “decadent city” trope lies the Carnival. Having reached its zenith in the eighteenth century, the Carnival persists today, intrinsically linked to the semantic spheres of festivity and vitalistic explosion – diametrically opposed to the somber imagery famously constructed by Thomas Mann. During the 1700s, Venice functioned as a resplendent European capital where the Carnival symbolized liberty and the dissolution of social boundaries. It was a city in perpetual ferment, where Gozzi's traditional masks clashed with Goldoni's theatrical reforms, and where nobles and the burgeoning bourgeoisie

flocked from across Europe. These modern libertines sought to immerse themselves in an explosive festive atmosphere, pursuing an ephemeral, alternative existence in the vein of Casanova.

Within this polarization between death and festivity, the dimension of daily life appears to vanish. The lived experience of the *calli* and *campielli* – where children play, the elderly seek shade on benches, and laundry hangs between houses – is often obscured. Nevertheless, given its cosmopolitan scale and eccentric nature, Venice cannot be disentangled from the literary and artistic works that both document and dictate its very existence. The city remains perpetually suspended between its role as a global tourist attraction – tending toward a museological state – and its identity as a living urban center.

However, even the archetypal dimension of the city undergoes temporal evolution. Its image is not static; over the decades, new nuances, tones, and facets emerge and consolidate, altering, if not its core identity, then certainly its public perception. This study will examine approximately the last forty years of this evolution, focusing on how the city's image aligns with broader socio-cultural conditions within the Italian and Western contexts.

Dionysus in Venice (1980-2000)

The Dionysian myth is characterized by profound complexity; it has been subject to diverse interpretations by critics and philosophers worldwide, revealing multifaceted meanings and nuances. In his 1988 work, *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia*, Roberto Calasso recounts the death of Dionysus's lover, Ampelus – thrown from a bull in the forest – and the subsequent despair of the god. The narrative, however, concludes with these words:

Lessero l'immagine: Ampelo sarebbe diventato la vite. Colui che aveva portato il pianto al dio che non piange avrebbe portato delizia al mondo. Allora Dioniso si riebbe. Quando l'uva nata dal corpo di Ampelo fu matura, staccò i primi grappoli, li spremette con dolcezza fra le mani, con un gesto che sembrava conoscere da sempre, e si guardò le dita macchiate di rosso. Poi le leccò. Pensava: Ampelo, la tua fine prova lo splendore del tuo corpo. Anche morto, non hai perso il tuo colore rosato. Nessun altro dio, non certo Atena col suo sobrio ulivo, e neppure Demetra col suo pane corroborante, avevano in loro qualcosa che si avvicinasse a quel liquore. Era appunto ciò che mancava alla vita, che la vita aspettava: l'ebbrezza. (Calasso, 1988, 51)

Inebriation – encompassing wine, pleasure, and euphoria – becomes the defining characteristic of Dionysus. In this light, the Dionysian myth may

be seen as the embodiment of an era: specifically, the period marked by the ascendancy of late-stage capitalism, Reaganomics, and Thatcherism. It was the era of the so-called “*Milano da bere*” and the relentless social climbing of the yuppie generation. In 1987, Gordon Gekko – the unscrupulous financier created by Oliver Stone for the film *Wall Street* – codified this ethos with a mandate that has since become proverbial:

I am not a destroyer of companies, I am a liberator of them. The point is, ladies and gentlemen, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good, greed is right, greed works, greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of evolutionary spirit. Greed in all of its forms: greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked an upward surge of mankind, and greed – you mark my words – will not only save Teldar paper but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA. Thank you very much.

The “greed” articulated by Gekko expands its semantic scope, transitioning from a merely ruthless capitalist logic to an unbridled desire for life – one to be seized and conquered in all its forms. This pursuit follows elemental yet potent impulses that bypass ethical considerations and rational calculation alike.

It is precisely these primordial drives that animate the art and culture of this era. Through this realm of primal, visceral impulses, one can interpret Jeff Koons’s *Puppy*, his *Balloon* sculptures, or the entirety of the *Celebration* series; such a perspective clarifies how and why Koons emerged as the preeminent artist of his generation. Similarly, this framework explains how a revolutionary film like *Pulp Fiction* – characterized by its interplay of dialogue, close-ups, horror, and dark comedy – could secure the *Palme d’Or* at Cannes and inaugurate a new narrative paradigm, lending its name to a defining cultural movement: pulp cinema and literature.

Venice – frequently depicted as a city suspended beyond time and confined within its own iconography – inevitably reflects this broader cultural climate, as its image aligns with these prevailing socio-cultural trends: the Dionysian frenzy thus sweeps across the lagoon as well. Specifically, it is Tiziano Scarpa’s *Occhi sulla graticola* (1996) that introduces the “pulp” or “cannibal” literary ethos into the Venetian context. Published by Einaudi, the novel strives to inject a universe of raw, instinctual drives into a city that is seemingly rigid and stifled by its own stereotype, as if to deliberately tarnish its somewhat stagnant perfection. These two poles – the realm of primordial impulses and the weight of tradition – clash and converge from opposing perspectives; it is within this very contradiction that a new representation of the city emerges.

The incipit is set within a library: «Giorni fa stavo dando gli ultimi ritocchi al quinto capitolo della mia tesi sulle brutte figure nella narrativa di Fëdor Dostoevskij. Seduto in biblioteca, non riuscivo a combinare un bel niente. All'ombra dei libroni guardavo la pioggia fuori dalla finestra, ristagnavo in una pozzanghera bibliografica a piè di pagina» (Scarpa, 1996, ebook). The opening thus evokes a familiar, almost stereotypical Venice – the city of libraries, high culture, and academia. This representation, however, fails to satisfy the protagonist, who, gripped by a bored inertia, appears to yearn for something else. Even the lexicon employed alludes to a cultural weight that seems to stifle life, found in terms such as «libroni» or «pozzanghera bibliografica,» and shortly thereafter, in the resonant names of «Šestov, Bachtin, Freud e Steiner.» This difficult, almost apathetic search for motivation finds its resolution in an aspiration toward «euforia» – a term quintessential to this Dionysian era: «Devo dire però che avere questi mostri sacri come interlocutori mi mette (nei momenti migliori) in uno stato di euforia: situazione tipica delle tesi di laurea, e che difficilmente (credo) si ripeterà nella mia vita» (Scarpa, 1996, ebook). «Credo» (I believe), the narrator remarks, because from that point forward, the novel essentially exists in this constant state of euphoria.

Shortly thereafter, while returning from the library, the narrator encounters a tragicomic scene aboard a *vaporetto*: a young woman, suffering from an embarrassing and uncontrollable gastrointestinal crisis, disposes of a poodle that persists in barking at her before plunging into the Grand Canal, followed and aided by the protagonist himself. This conflict – and the postmodern overlap of “high” and “low” culture, of literary theory and pulp narrative – finds its objective correlative in Venice, a city both noble and emaciated, erudite and decadent. The entire novel is structured upon this polarity, employing not only the “abject” but also the scandalous nature of sex – divested of any romantic sentiment – to delineate the city’s identity.

This represents a distinct departure from the libertinism previously mentioned, a tradition quintessential to Venice and revitalized by Fellini’s 1976 *Casanova*. Here, the subject’s agency is virtually nullified, eclipsed by a neutral surge of raw drives that the protagonist, and more significantly the reader, passively endure, focused solely on neutralizing the provocative scandal of the narrative. Indeed, a hallmark of pulp literature is the perception of indifference or stasis, which continually pushes its own boundaries to encompass the most extreme circumstances. This drive-oriented disposition is characteristic of this era; it progressively erodes ethical reflection (as exemplified, preeminently, by Gordon Gekko), ultimately dehumanizing the subject in favor of an immobile, overarching temporality.

Iosif Brodskij articulates this masterfully in *Watermark*:

I pictured the majordomo entertaining his choice in this chamber: a writhing island of naked flesh amid a sea of linen, under the scrutiny of the dust covered gypsum masterpiece. Oddly enough, I felt no repulsion. On the contrary, I felt that from time's point of view such entertainment here could only seem appropriate, as it generated nothing. After all, for three centuries, nothing here reigned supreme. Wars, revolutions, great discoveries, geniuses, plagues never entered here due to a legal problem. (Brodskij, 1992, 57-58)

In this passage, several elements converge: the scene's lustfulness, the presence of decaying art shrouded in dust, and a form of emotional and sentimental indifference. This detachment becomes conducive to a conception of static time – or what Brodskij terms «time-alias-water» – that gravitates toward nothingness, despite the luxurious euphoria that permeates it. Both luxury and lust, quintessential to the Dionysian paradigm, manifest in Venice as a pervasive everyday reality: an exception normalized by an excess of instinctual drives.

In the music video for *The Gift* (1992), set in Venice, Annie Lennox depicts a protagonist who escapes her “gilded cage of pain”. Enveloped in an opulent mask, she finds in Venice a dimension of atypical normalcy. Despite her flamboyant attire, the city normalizes a situation that would be deemed absurd elsewhere, placing the extravagant luxury of the singer alongside the mass tourists then beginning to emerge in St. Mark's Square – many arriving from the surrounding Venetian hinterland. This period also saw the rise of Philippe Starck's concept of «democratic luxury», an aesthetic accessible to a broader public. The images of Lennox, dressed in such garments while posing for photographs with tourists, reconcile this apparent contradiction. Indeed, Venice during these years is defined precisely by this duality: mass tourism on one hand, and the mask – with its connotations of luxury and lust – on the other. It is no coincidence that in 1999, when Stanley Kubrick required costumes for the infamous party of New York's shameless elite in *Eyes Wide Shut*, he turned to Venice to select its unmistakable masks.

Narcissus in Venice (2000-2020)

In 2013, David Bowie returned to Venice to film the music video for *I'd Rather Be High* as part of Louis Vuitton's *L'invitation au voyage* campaign, a project that garnered tens of millions of views. The narrative

begins with a large red hot-air balloon departing from the Louvre and landing directly in St. Mark's Square. From it emerges a strikingly beautiful woman – portrayed by model Arizona Muse – who makes her way to a masquerade ball. The scene is replete with luxurious Baroque costumes, suggestive glances, and, most notably, David Bowie himself seated at a harpsichord. As the girl sits beside him, they are surrounded by an array of eccentric figures in ornate attire, their bodies painted and meticulously made up, amidst intricate lace, grand chandeliers, and magnificent frescoes. Here, we find ourselves within the most overt and pervasive stereotype of the Dionysian Venice.

However, we have entered the 2000s, and the social zeitgeist has shifted; socio-cultural interests have pivoted toward new themes, and Dionysus is no longer the undisputed lord of the revels. Consequently, the video increasingly reveals the fictional and anti-realistic dimension of this atmosphere of luxury and festivity. As soon as the protagonist alights from the balloon, the camera following her is momentarily visible; throughout the party, the diegetic images are interspersed with making-of footage, showing actors undergoing lengthy makeup sessions. The rationale for this artifice becomes clear only at the conclusion: the festivities are neutralized, revealed to be merely a dream or an illusion. The woman then wanders through the Venetian *calli* like an ordinary tourist, seeking secluded spots to enjoy the city in tranquility. In the final seconds, we see David Bowie in entirely informal, domestic attire, washing his hands – as if he, too, had returned to the unremarkable normalcy of daily life.

The binomial of luxury and lust as given way to the experience of the everyday real, wherein the Dionysian surge of inebriation is replaced by a quest for an ostensibly authentic and unique experience, centered solely on the unrepeatable self. Indeed, a fundamental social paradigm shift has occurred. The rise of social networks represents the triumph of the “I”; television programs such as *Big Brother* have transposed (presumed) daily reality into the muffled, enchanted realm of the screen; and the attack on the Twin Towers prompted intellectuals and writers to reconsider the necessity of a new commitment – a revised ethics and a narrative returning to the investigation of reality.

Furthermore, the advent of the smartphone has created what is almost an excrescence of the self – a digital mirror in which one narcissistically drowns. The new icons of the younger generation celebrate this inward turn, an introspective withdrawal performed amidst overwhelming applause. A quintessential example of this is Steve Jobs's highly celebrated and influential commencement speech at Stanford University on June 12, 2005: Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone

else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice.

And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

The speech establishes a binary opposition between “the others”, who represent a cacophony of background noise, and a utopian, romanticized concept of the “heart” and “intuition”. Within this perceived dichotomy, Jobs – already a seminal figure for multiple generations – unquestionably prioritizes the subjective experience, positioning the external world (including academic instruction) as a mere impediment to personal realization.

Similarly, Gordon Gekko – returning to the screen in 2010 in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* following his release from prison – revisits the concept of greed. He acknowledges that greed precipitated the Great Recession, yet notes that «the beauty of the deal, no one is responsible, because everybody's drinking the same Kool-Aid». This “Kool-Aid” is the construct of the collective “we”. His invitation remains a rejection of faith in others or in a potential community, advocating instead for a return to the individual, who must once again assume sole ethical responsibility for their own choices.

As a result, the image of Venice undergoes a transformation: David Bowie now embodies the authentic self rather than serving as the catalyst for a collective surge of inebriation and lust. Whereas previously Annie Lennox was surrounded by tourists drawn as if by a magnet to the seductive allure of Baroque masks, the mask must now be discarded. Contemporary tourists seek unique, hidden, and unseen experiences – ideally in locations devoid of other travelers. One need only browse any major international travel search engine offering Venetian itineraries to observe that the most pervasive descriptors are now «hidden», «unseen», «exclusive», and «off the beaten track».

In 2000, Silvio Soldini released *Pane e tulipani*, a film primarily lauded for its representation of an unprecedented Venice. It depicted a city detached from traditional stereotypes – an “authentic” Venice – long before it was anticipated that this very authenticity would become the most widespread stereotype of this narcissistic era. That same year, Tiziano Scarpa published *Venezia è un pesce. Una guida*, a work that functions as a transitional bridge between the epochs defined here as Dionysian and Narcissistic. From the former, it retains a focus on sensoriality and corporeality (each chapter is dedicated to a specific part of the body through which the city is perceived); from the latter, it adopts an emphasis on private experience, addressing an unidentified “you”: «Stai camminando

sopra una sterminata foresta capovolta, stai passeggiando sopra un incredibile bosco alla rovescia. Sembra l'invenzione di un mediocre scrittore di fantascienza, invece è vero. Ti descrivo cosa succede al tuo corpo a Venezia, a cominciare dai piedi» (Scarpa, 2000, 10).

This private and unconventional image of Venice remains a persistent theme throughout this period. These two elements – the focus on the personal and the rejection of the traditional – are clearly identifiable, for example, in Diogo Mainardi's *La caduta. I ricordi di un padre in 424 passi*, when he writes:

Mi trasferii a Venezia nel 1987. Avevo ventiquattro anni. La cosa migliore di Venezia, per me, era il suo carattere regressista. La cosa migliore di Venezia, per me, era il suo reazionismo nonconformista. Viverci era come vivere in un villaggio amish. Vedevo Venezia come un villaggio amish per intellettuali. Aveva il potere di contrastare, con la sua prepotente razionalità, il populismo illuminista della mia epoca. (Mainardi 2013, ebook)

Venice's very uniqueness, positioned at a distance from the prevailing cultural climate, constitutes the defining characteristic of this period; to this is added the narrator-protagonist's own singular and private experience.

Yet, despite being written at the height of the Narcissus era, *La caduta* contains certain passages that anticipate the final epoch to be discussed. It possesses the capacity to establish connections between individuals distant in both time and space, as if the unique experience were to become a universal experience, beginning with the very incipit:

1

Tito ha una paralisi cerebrale.

2

Imputo la paralisi cerebrale di Tito a Pietro Lombardo.

Nel 1489, Pietro Lombardo progettò la Scuola Grande di San Marco. Fu la Scuola Grande di San Marco, progettata dall'architetto Pietro Lombardo, a causare la paralisi cerebrale di Tito. (Mainardi, 2013, ebook)

Immediately following this, the book presents an image of a painting by Canaletto, featuring an arrow pointing to two small figures in the lower right and the caption: «Anna e io, uniti l'un l'altro, come due gemelli siamesi, all'altezza della statua di Bartolomeo Colleoni, in direzione della Scuola Grande di San Marco, porta d'ingresso dell'ospedale di Venezia, dove si sarebbe verificato il parto di Tito». (Mainardi, 2013, ebook).

The narrative then continues:

Come sono finito in un quadro di Canaletto?

Ero lì da sempre, Sarò sempre lì. Il quadro di Canaletto è la mia natività personale. Cattura l'istante in cui il mio destino fu rivelato. Con la nascita di Tito, il 30 settembre 2000, io mi trasformai in un uomo in miniatura, senza volto né identità, come nel quadro di Canaletto. Ciò che mi caratterizza è la paternità. Sono soltanto un uomo che accompagna eternamente sua moglie al parto di suo figlio. (Mainardi, 2013, ebook)

While the individual narrative and the alternative vision of Venice – portrayed as an “Amish village” – are characteristic of the Narcissus era, these elements of moving beyond the self and uniting with individuals across all time anticipate the emergence of Glaucus.

Glaucus in Venice (2020-Today)

In the sixth book of the *Iliad*, the Greek warrior Diomedes routs his opponents in a bloody battle. He appears invincible, creating a void around him. Suddenly, however, he is confronted by Glaucus, a Lycian warrior allied with Troy; the ensuing exchange between the two remains one of the poet's most celebrated passages. Diomedes, emboldened by his own prowess, addresses him with disdain: «What art thou, strong'st of mortal men? / [...] / Come near, that thou mayst soon arrive on that life-bounding shore, / To which I see thee hoise such sail». Yet Glaucus's response is unexpectedly disorienting: «“Why dost thou so explore”, / [...] “of what race I am, when like the race of leaves / The race of man is, that deserves no question; nor receives / My being any other breath?» Glaucus refuses to provide his personal credentials; for him, individual identity is secondary to the fact of being human – to belonging to the human race.

This passage has been invoked to mark a paradigm shift in the conception of humanity and the self. While the individual was previously the locus of attention, the focus now appears to have shifted toward the human species as a whole. This transformation has been driven primarily by two events: the pandemic, which affects everyone and must be combated collectively, and the climate crisis – a formidable hyperobject, as defined by Timothy Morton – which must be addressed through a broad logic in which all of humanity assumes responsibility for the entire planet. This shift in paradigm, occurring in an era where the narcissistic “I” still dominates society, is fraught with difficulty and resistance; alternative and private ethics

emerge – denialism, anti-vaccine sentiments, indifference to environmental change – and yet, this new mode of self-understanding is permeating society, leaving traces and appearing as the only viable path forward.

The literary sphere reflects this change, engaging specifically with Glaucus's remark in the *Iliad*. In 2011, at the height of the Narcissus era, Guido Mazzoni, in his *Theory of the Novel (Teoria del romanzo)*, dismissed the possibility that a species-level perspective could enter the bourgeois novel – traditionally centered on the experience of the individual self-writing:

Per chi adotta uno sguardo di questo tipo, la sede della verità, del senso e del valore, se esiste, è soltanto la storia della specie, concepita come una sequenza di esseri sempre uguali che si succedono secondo la logica della ripetizione. Chi prendesse alla lettera l'ontologia che la similitudine delle foglie espone non riuscirebbe a narrare: ai suoi occhi non esisterebbero azioni degne di racconto: le differenze tra gli individui risulterebbero indifferenti. (Mazzoni, 2011, 47)

In 2021 – during the early years of the Glaucus era – Carla Benedetti, reflecting specifically on the consequences of climate change for literature, revisits this metaphor to radically shift its perspective. She asserts the effectiveness, and indeed the necessity, of this new paradigm: «Eppure l'orizzonte di specie non impedisce affatto a Omero, e ad altri scrittori del passato e moderni, di narrare vite particolari; semmai proprio questo orizzonte conferisce a quelle vicende individuali una cassa di risonanza potente, un senso tragico della vita». (Benedetti, 2021, 91).

The convergence of the individual perspective with that of humanity is precisely the essence and value of the tragic hero, as conceptualized by Nietzsche. Is it possible for this paradigm – at once novel and ancient – to once again inform the pages of the novel? This is a question posed by several writers, such as Amitav Ghosh, who in *The Great Derangement* explores how the bourgeois novel might evolve in this direction.

In this context, Venice plays a pivotal role: shifting from the city of luxury and lust (Dionysus) and the city of secret, hidden experiences (Narcissus), Venice now seeks to redefine its image. It presents itself as the “Capitale Mondiale della Sostenibilità” – as defined by the Fondazione Venezia – or as “Intelligent Venice: The oldest city of the future”, the title of an exhibition at the Architecture Biennale. Venice no longer aims to underscore its own uniqueness or individuality; instead, it strives to become a catalyst for humanity in the broadest possible sense, across both space and time. It adopts, in effect, a species-level perspective that confronts the transition of generations and the uncertainties of the future, beginning with the ongoing climate crisis that threatens its very survival.

In 2016, with his characteristic visionary force, Paolo Sorrentino released the television series *The Young Pope*, the story of a youthful, revolutionary pontiff who redefines the Church's self-understanding. Despite encountering fierce institutional resistance, he ultimately gains the profound devotion of the faithful. While the series is predominantly set – as logic dictates – within Rome and Vatican City, the director unexpectedly shifts the focus to Venice for the final episode, as if this city were the only suitable backdrop for the powerful denouement.

From the balcony of St. Mark's Basilica, the Pope addresses a crowd that fills the square. At the conclusion of his speech, he expresses a desire to embrace all of humanity. At that moment, he is overcome by a sudden collapse and loses consciousness. The camera tightens into a close-up of his face before rapidly ascending toward the sky, framing the group of cardinals assisting him. In a single long take, the lens encompasses the Basilica, the crowded square, and then rises further to reveal all of Venice, the entire Lagoon, the Veneto region, Italy, and finally the whole world – presented, one might say, from a God's-eye view. It is through Venice, therefore, that one accesses a transcendent, universal dimension that surpasses the individual. Venice serves as the *mundus*, the “world-city”; only in this elevated state can the Pope experience an infinite empathy for all humanity and truly feel his belonging to the human species.

The series concludes here, yet the Young Pope does not die. In 2020, *The New Pope* was released as the second season. Lenny Belardo has survived, but upon waking, he finds a new Pope has been elected; to avoid scandal, he is forced into hiding with a Venetian family. The couple's son suffers from a severe illness; the mother is bowed by grief, and her relationship with her husband seems void of joy. One evening, with the Pope's blessing, the couple dresses elegantly and frequents a “romantic” Venice in an attempt to rediscover their bond. Meanwhile, Lenny remains at home with the child. Urged by the woman – who is convinced of his thaumaturgic powers – he beseeches God to heal the boy.

This scene possesses a profound tragic quality reminiscent of Greek tragedy, invoking the divine while grappling with themes of infirmity, mortality, and faith. Yet, the miracle does not occur. The woman returns home in trepidation, only to confront the failure of her hope. Enveloped in an unspeakable yet dignified sorrow, she cradles her son and takes him into the bathtub. As she sits there, holding the frail child – condemned by his incurable condition – the framing is strictly frontal. Fade to black. In the same position, with the same framing and dramatic intensity, the scene dissolves into Michelangelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's Basilica: the ultimate

archetype of human tragedy, representing the suffering of the world as one's own and the archetypal opening of the self toward the collective.

The archetype that finds its natural locus in Venice forms the basis of what Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology termed the collective unconscious. As such, it represents the most significant manifestation of the Glaucus paradigm – a state that transcends individuality to become «like the leaves». In a 2023 volume published by the dynamic Venetian press Wetlands and suggestively titled *Il giaguaro nel canale. Venezia come appare a chi la sogna*, the psychoanalyst Costanza Jesurum employs Jungian theory to examine dreams set against the backdrop of the lagoon city:

In questo libro si ipotizza che Venezia sia a sua volta una delle capitali dell'inconscio culturale. La sua storia e la sua struttura, nonché il potente impatto che ha sull'immaginazione l'idea di una città storica sull'acqua, la rendono una candidata ideale. Le cartoline di Venezia – la laguna, i ponti, l'acqua alta, i pozzi, i palazzi sontuosi, le maschere – costituiscono un arsenale allegorico potentissimo che le persone trattengono, e portano con sé. Il loro inconscio se ne appropria e ne fa un uso personale, per dire qualcosa della loro vita privata. (Jesurum, 2023, 10-11)

From this perspective, a city emerges in which physical space abdicates in favor of a deeper contact with a submerged, archetypal self – an experience that belongs to everyone.

According to Amitav Ghosh, one of the hallmarks of the modern novel the expulsion of the collective from the territory of the narrative imagination, resulting in an inability to represent the shared experience of humanity – a necessity in an era of profound climate crisis. Yet in Venice – in this recent Venice, the Venice of Glaucus – it is precisely this collective dimension that reclaims its space. This is evident in the epilogue of *The Young Pope*, as well as in Emanuela Canepa's 2023 novel, *Resta con me, sorella*. In one of the novel's central scenes, set during the Great War when women remained to safeguard the cities while men perished at the front, the coffin of an Unknown Soldier arrives in the city. That soldier is at once an individual and a multitude: he represents all the husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers of the women left behind, who now throng the *calli* to pay him their respects:

Il morto chiuso nel sarcofago e ricoperto di corone al binario numero uno della stazione ferroviaria di Venezia è il primo soldato che Anita vede da vicino tra quanti hanno combattuto la guerra con onore. I decorati immobili intorno alla salma di un cadavere anonimo e caricato dalla somma dei destini della nazione sono i primi combattenti. [...] Nella stretta di quel supplizio, Anita comprende

fino in fondo la portata di ciò che è stato. Sfiora da vicino lo spirito della guerra, e in mezzo al mare di vedove e madri, figlie e sorelle legate dal lutto, riesce finalmente a piangere un dolore che solo adesso è anche suo. (Canepa, 2023, 239-240)

The species horizon, as Carla Benedetti noted in her discussion of Glauco, «conferisce a quelle vicende individuali una cassa di risonanza potente, un senso tragico della vita» (Benedetti, 2021, 91). The wisdom of the tragic hero, Nietzsche wrote, «turns its unmoved gaze on the total image of the world, and in this image it seeks to embrace eternal suffering with sympathetic feelings of love, acknowledging that suffering to be its own» (Nietzsche, 1999, 87-88). This scene perfectly embodies this tragic spirit, forging a connection between the self and the collective, and between individual experience and the destiny of the world.

In a novel from the same year, *La sindrome di Røbenhavn* by Giuseppe Quaranta – the central theme of which is the dissolution of individuality, examined primarily through its pathological risks – there is a single scene set in Venice. In this sequence, the protagonist travels to the city in an attempt to recover his own blurred memories concerning a mysterious woman:

Venezia non aveva mai avuto posto nella sua vita, eppure in mezzo a quella folla di turisti-pellegrini adoranti i palazzi e le chiese, che si facevano trasportare per molti denari da gondolieri annoiati da un lato all'altro dei canali, ammirando tutto quello che c'era da ammirare [...]; in mezzo a quella girandola di maschere, riuscì a riconoscere una voce; forse una sua concittadina, una collega. Al contrario di lui, poteva essere a Venezia senza cercarvi un significato. (Quaranta, 2023, 45-46)

The crowd, the tourists, and the masks serve as a foil to individual recognition. At the very conclusion of the chapter set in Venice – in what appears to be a nonsensical appendix detached from the preceding narrative – the protagonist reflects on the famous 1953 artwork *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, in which Robert Rauschenberg physically and meticulously erased a drawing gifted to him by the celebrated artist for that specific purpose. Regarding this work, he recalls two interpretations. In the first, «nel Libro del riso e dell'oblio, Kundera parla di una morte dolcemente azzurra come il non essere, insinuando che il non essere sia una condizione affatto simile al nulla, all'annientamento individuale». In the second, «Robert Krulwich sottolinea l'importanza di concepire i vuoti. Siamo circondati da cose che ignoriamo; ovunque andiamo, scrive, noi non abbiamo idea di quello che non stiamo vedendo» (Quaranta, 2023, 49).

Venice simultaneously undergoes and provokes two distinct impulses: on one hand, a depletion – if not the outright annihilation – of the

individual, and on the other, an aspiration toward absence, toward that which is non-existent or which transcends the contingency of the tangible present. This duality, moreover, was already inherent in the very concept of the mask and the Carnival – the most stereotypical elements of the city. Here, Carnival is understood in its most ancient and purest sense, in its universal significance. As Bakhtin argued: «Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people [...] Carnival has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part» (Bakhtin, 1995, 7). Furthermore, «First of all, it [carnival laughter] belongs to all the people... everyone laughs; it is “general”. Secondly, it is universal; it contains all things and all the people» (11-12); and again: «This is one of the main differences between the laughter of the popular festive type and the purely satirical laughter of the modern era. [...] The ambivalent laughter of the people, on the other hand, expresses the opinion of the entire world in becoming, a world in which the laugher himself is included» (12).

It is precisely by virtue of the Carnavalesque, following the narcissistic drift of recent decades, that Glaucus can return to inhabit Venice and walk once more through its *calli*.

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3.

NARRATIVES, IMAGINARIES, AND TOURISM

Fabrizio Panozzo

Narratives, imaginaries and tourism

Tourism does not merely operate in space; it performs through symbols. Narratives and imaginaries are among the most powerful symbolic tools in this performance. They provide a shared repertoire of signs, metaphors, and scripts through which places are known, remembered, and consumed. These devices frame how territories are interpreted, valued, and differentiated. In tourism communication, they offer both orientation and seduction, guiding visitors' expectations and perceptions while simultaneously reshaping how locals understand their own spaces (Salazar, 2010; 2020; Bruner, 1991).

The term imaginary refers to the network of meanings and representations that precede and frame experience. These representations are never neutral. They are culturally coded, historically layered, and shaped by power relations. In tourism, imaginaries help produce the very reality they claim to describe. Places become known not only through their material presence but through the images, descriptions, and expectations circulating in discourse (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The imaginary thus serves as narrative infrastructure, making certain aspects of a territory visible and meaningful while obscuring others.

The identity communicated about a territory is often the result of selective framing. Communication strategies draw from a reservoir of already available signs, privileging those that are emotionally resonant, visually iconic, or easily narratable. This selection process simplifies complexity, translating the heterogeneous fabric of everyday life into a coherent and affective story. This dynamic is reinforced by the need for legibility in global circuits of tourism, where images and messages must travel quickly and recognisably across media (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009).

As tourism becomes more integrated into the symbolic economy, territories are reconfigured not only as geographic spaces but as narrative platforms. In this context, the value of a place is increasingly tied to its communicative capital, its ability to signify identity, authenticity, and desire within the dominant codes of visual culture. The result is a proliferation of carefully curated, stylised, and emotionally charged place-images (Costa, 2001; Brevini, 2017). From this perspective, narratives do not simply represent space, they territorialise it. They inscribe meaning onto landscapes, naturalising certain versions of the past, present, and future while erasing others (Herbert, 2001; Cresswell, 2015).

Tourism imaginaries often rely on essentialised representations. They privilege tropes of tradition, continuity, and cultural uniqueness, constructing territories as coherent cultural units frozen in time. This tendency resonates with older ideological practices of national and regional myth-making, where symbolic coherence is achieved through simplification and exclusion (Villa, 2010). While these narratives are often experienced as authentic, they are the product of representational strategies that edit out ambiguity, hybridity, or conflict (Ceccarini, 2014; Fontana, 2009).

At the same time, imaginaries are not static. They evolve through circulation and appropriation, and they can be contested. Local actors, creative industries, and critical practitioners may re-signify dominant representations or introduce alternative narratives that disrupt hegemonic framings. These counter-narratives may emerge from the margins, whether spatial, social, or symbolic, and offer more plural, dynamic, or subversive visions of place (Savino, 2014).

Digital media have accelerated both the reproduction and the reconfiguration of tourism imaginaries. On one hand, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Airbnb amplify the visibility of stereotyped or overrepresented places, reinforcing narrative clichés. On the other, they also provide space for bottom-up storytelling, ironic appropriations, and micro-narratives that can challenge dominant scripts. In this evolving context, the imaginary becomes a site of negotiation between institutional branding and vernacular creativity (Rabbiosi, 2025; Piancazzo *et al.*, 2024).

Understanding the role of narratives and imaginaries in territorial construction allows us to grasp how tourism shapes not only movement and infrastructure but also belonging and recognition. These symbolic structures influence investment decisions, development trajectories, and everyday spatial practices. They define what is seen, what is valued, and what is remembered, as well as what is silenced or excluded.

The typical as narrative construct

The typical operates as a fundamental device in the narrative construction of place. In tourism communication, it functions as a stabilising framework that produces recognisable and affective meanings. The typical condenses and simplifies, offering a coherent set of images, symbols, and practices that seem to embody a place's essence. It translates the unfamiliar into the familiar, and the heterogeneous into the communicable (Pareyson, 2002; Smircich, 1983).

Typification is not an innocent operation. It draws on selective memory and visual conventions to propose a version of identity that is legible to outsiders and marketable to promoters. The typical operates through reiteration, where certain signs are repeated across different media formats until they sediment as common sense. In this way, typification becomes a powerful semiotic mechanism for producing authenticity, even when it distorts or omits significant aspects of lived experience (Ceccarini, 2014; Brevini, 2017).

Studies on Italianness in fashion branding, for example, demonstrate how elements such as rustic countryside, artisan objects, and family rituals are repeatedly mobilised to suggest a stable, timeless identity (Piancazzo *et al.*, 2024). These elements circulate not because they are comprehensive but because they are affectively charged and visually effective. In this sense, the typical is not a descriptor of reality but a producer of cultural legibility (Costa, 2001).

Tourism communication tends to reward coherence and recognisability, which further incentivises typification. This process often reduces the narrative field, privileging a small subset of icons, landscapes, and cultural practices that come to stand in for the territory as a whole. Over time, these choices can crystallise into expectations, shaping how visitors perceive places and how locals come to perform their own identities (Franco, 2016; Croci, 2009).

However, the typical is not inherently conservative or reductive. It can also serve as a space of negotiation, where communities articulate, reject, or reinvent the signs that define them. The process of typification is always subject to reinterpretation and contestation. Participatory storytelling, reflexive branding, and creative tourism practices offer ways to engage with the typical without reducing it to a caricature (Fullagar *et al.*, 2019; Richards, 2021).

To critically analyse the typical in tourism discourse is to examine how meaning is made, circulated, and stabilised. It invites attention to processes of selection, repetition, and exclusion that underpin seemingly natural representations of place. In doing so, it opens a space for more plural and situated engagements with territorial identity.

From the typical to the stereotypical

The boundary between the typical and the stereotypical is porous and ideologically loaded. While the typical simplifies and gives symbolic shape to identity, the stereotypical turns that simplification into a rigid, overdetermined narrative. In tourism discourse, this passage occurs through repetition, external codification, and media amplification. Over time, what began as a selected but plausible representation of place becomes a fixed image, often detached from lived experience and incapable of accommodating complexity (Salazar, 2020; Urry and Larsen, 2011).

Stereotypes are not simply inaccurate. They are powerful because they are affectively resonant, visually striking, and narratively efficient. They operate within a broader system of cultural codes that reward coherence and familiarity. In the context of destination branding, stereotypes serve as short-cuts to recognition, enabling consumers to categorise places quickly and emotionally. However, this efficiency comes at the cost of nuance and agency (Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2022; Sonnleitner, 2011).

What is at stake in this shift is not merely aesthetic. Stereotypes structure visibility and value. They contribute to the spatial and symbolic marginalisation of territories that do not fit dominant narrative templates. The picturesque, the traditional, and the festive are rewarded, while the modern, the contested, or the ambiguous are excluded. Stereotypes impose a semiotic hierarchy that determines which places are seen, celebrated, and invested in (MacLeod and Carrier, 2020; Savino, 2014).

Tourism communication often reinforces stereotypes through visual repetition. Iconic representations of Mediterranean coastlines, Tuscan villas, or Alpine villages circulate across brochures, websites, films, and social media. These images are highly stylised and emotionally suggestive, but they also flatten cultural diversity and conceal social contradictions. The danger is that these representations become normative, guiding not only visitor expectations but also local development strategies (Herbert, 2001).

Stereotypes also affect how people inhabit and perform their identities. Residents may feel compelled to conform to dominant scripts to attract tourism revenue, or may experience alienation when official representations conflict with lived reality. At the same time, these representations can be re-appropriated and subverted. Local actors may engage in practices of counter-narration, parody, or cultural remixing that expose the limits and contradictions of stereotypical imagery (Qualizza, 2009).

Recognising stereotyping as a transformation of the typical enables a more critical and reflexive engagement with tourism discourse. It

requires attention to authorship, power, and circulation. Stereotypes are not inevitable outcomes but the product of aesthetic, institutional, and economic choices that can be interrogated and reoriented. A responsible tourism narrative does not deny the need for recognisability but seeks to construct it through multiplicity, dialogue, and situated knowledge.

The narrative construction of territorial identity

Territorial identity emerges through discourse. It is not a pre-existing authentic essence waiting to be uncovered, but a symbolic artefact assembled through communication, performance, and selective memory. In tourism, this identity is crafted and circulated through storytelling, visual regimes, branding strategies, and everyday interactions that present the territory as coherent, meaningful, and distinctive (Paasi, 2002; Cresswell, 2015).

The construction of identity involves framing: choosing which elements to emphasise and which to omit. Architecture, landscape, cuisine, festivals, and historical episodes are marshalled into cohesive narratives that render the territory recognisable and emotionally resonant. These elements do not reflect a total or balanced picture of local life. They function metonymically, standing in for the whole and acquiring symbolic power through repetition and affective investment (Calderon, 2002; Fontana, 2009).

Territorial identity in tourism performs a dual function. It serves economic goals by enabling destination marketing and product differentiation, and it fulfils symbolic needs by offering a sense of belonging and cultural continuity. However, this dual role generates tensions. The requirements of coherence and market appeal may marginalise ambiguous, contested, or less photogenic aspects of identity. The result is often a sanitised, idealised version of a place that privileges legibility over complexity (Ciappei, 2006; Croci, 2009; Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009).

Critical geography and cultural studies have emphasised the relational and processual nature of identity. It is not fixed but negotiated through interactions between people, institutions, media, and spaces (Massey, 2005). From this perspective, tourism narratives are not merely descriptive but constitutive. They shape how territories are lived, governed, and imagined. Communication plays a central role in this process, functioning as both a mechanism of production and a mechanism of control.

Yet territorial identity is not passively imposed. It can be challenged, redefined, and pluralised through alternative forms of storytelling. Participatory and community-based tourism projects increasingly emphasise narrative agency, allowing diverse voices to contribute to how

the place is represented and understood (Panozzo, 2019). These practices disrupt the logic of top-down branding and enable the co-production of identity as an open and situated process.

Understanding territorial identity as a narrative construction reveals the politics embedded in representation. It exposes how tourism communication shapes not only visitor perceptions but also the lived experiences of those who inhabit the territory. It invites more accountable and inclusive forms of storytelling that do not reduce place to a marketing object but recognise its layered, evolving, and contested character.

Storytelling plays a central role in how territories are imagined, framed, and experienced in tourism. More than a communicative technique, it functions as an epistemological framework that organises spatial experience into narrative form. Through storytelling, tourism actors transform fragmented landscapes and historical contingencies into legible and emotionally resonant wholes. Stories provide coherence, causality, and meaning, enabling visitors to navigate unfamiliar spaces while offering locals a symbolic anchor for identity and belonging (Bruner, 1991; Cresswell, 2015).

In tourism communication, stories do not simply recount what a territory is; they perform what it should be. They select events, characters, and motifs that resonate with existing imaginaries and aesthetic conventions. These selections are neither arbitrary nor neutral. They reflect institutional agendas, branding strategies, and cultural ideologies that prioritise some narratives while excluding or marginalising others (Ciappei, 2006).

The narrative construction of place relies on classic storytelling devices: heroes and founders, threats and redemptions, traditions and transformations. These devices are often condensed into promotional formats such as slogans, itineraries, themed routes, and multimedia content. Consequently, territories are redefined as narrative environments that are meant to be read, performed, and consumed. (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Rabbiosi, 2025).

Storytelling also contributes to the aestheticization of space. Landscapes become scenic backdrops for narrative arcs; monuments are framed as narrative nodes; everyday life is translated into folkloric vignettes. This process transforms the spatial into the symbolic, generating place identities that are as much about emotion and memory as about geography (Calderon, 2002; Franco, 2016).

Recent research has shown how storytelling can reinforce essentialist or nostalgic visions of place, particularly when it privileges coherence over complexity (Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2022; MacLeod and Carrier, 2020). In such cases, storytelling risks becoming an exercise in cultural closure, offering comforting myths rather than critical engagements with territory. This is especially evident in discourses that frame places as

timeless, authentic, or unspoiled, aligning with romantic imaginaries of heritage and tradition (Villa, 2010).

Yet storytelling is not inherently conservative. It is also a field of possibility. Stories can serve as tools of resistance, recovery, and redefinition. They can give voice to marginalised groups, foreground erased histories or imagine alternative futures. Participatory storytelling projects in tourism have explored how local actors can reframe dominant narratives and assert more situated forms of territorial knowledge (Fullagar *et al.*, 2019).

The proliferation of digital platforms has diversified the agents and formats of storytelling. Visitors themselves become narrators, posting experiences and images that circulate globally and contribute to the collective narrative of place. These user-generated stories may reinforce dominant scripts or disrupt them through irony, critique, or vernacular creativity (Piancazzo *et al.*, 2024).

Understanding storytelling as a device of territorial construction means recognising its performative and political dimensions. It means asking who tells the stories, what stories are told, through which media, and for whose benefit. This approach allows tourism studies to move beyond functionalist views of communication and to engage with the symbolic struggles that shape how places are known, remembered, and desired.

Telling the Place

The symbolic transformation of space into place is often achieved narratively. In tourism, this transformation is neither accidental nor spontaneous; it is crafted through a dense interplay of stories, affects, and communicative strategies that render places both legible and desirable. Storytelling operates not merely as a marketing tool but as a central epistemological and ontological mechanism through which places come into being for the visitor.

Narratives in tourism perform several overlapping functions: they offer coherence, produce recognisability, and induce emotional engagement. This narrative scaffolding is often built around codified templates such as the myth of origins, the heroic host, or the promise of transformation, structures that are affectively effective but ideologically selective, often concealing contradictions or tensions within the territory (Corsale, 2022).

A critical taxonomy of storyteller roles has been proposed, distinguishing between institutional authorship, digital co-authorship, and narrative spectatorship, which highlights the uneven distribution of narrative authority

despite the rhetoric of co-creation. While digital platforms theoretically enable participatory narration, the stories that dominate tend to reinforce established imaginaries and commercial logics (Moreira *et al.*, 2024).

The process of narrative crafting has been analysed as a method through which destinations are framed not simply as places but as narrative environments. This framing operates across textual, spatial, and affective dimensions, making storytelling a spatial practice as much as a representational one (Corsale, 2022).

Storytelling has also been conceptualised as a design practice with ethical and political implications. The act of selecting what stories to tell, and how to tell them, shapes the experience of place for both visitors and residents. A narrative approach to tourism grounded in affect, temporality, and authorship allows for a more situated understanding of how meaning is produced and mobilised (Calvi and Hover, 2021).

Stories often rely on strategic silencing, foregrounding values such as authenticity, charm, or natural purity, while marginalising inconvenient or dissonant elements. This selective visibility is a structural feature of narrative construction in tourism contexts (Bassano *et al.*, 2019; Moreira *et al.*, 2024).

At the same time, affective proximity and empathy may give rise to counter-narratives that resist dominant representations. Participatory storytelling projects show the potential for plural and inclusive narrations, particularly when they critically address narrative legitimacy and reception (Moreira *et al.*, 2024).

To tell the place is to frame it, and to frame it is to govern its meaning. Storytelling in tourism functions as a mechanism of both representation and control, producing the symbolic order through which space is experienced, inhabited, and remembered.

The discursive construction of the territory

Tourist destinations are not discovered; they are narrated into being. Territory is not a pre-existing spatial container waiting to be visited, but a product of discursive and symbolic practices that render space visible, legible, and emotionally resonant for tourism consumption. These practices, spanning promotional texts, policy documents, digital platforms, and cultural media, assign meaning, value, and narrative structure to places. What becomes a destination is not simply what exists geographically, but what can be made to signify within the cultural and economic circuits of tourism (González-Reverté and Soliguer-Guix, 2022; Corsale, 2022; Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2022).

Tourism communication operates through strategies of condensation, selection, and repetition. A village, a landscape, a tradition may be extracted from its social context and reframed as a symbolic shorthand for an entire region. This use of territorial synecdoche produces familiarity and recognisability, often at the cost of complexity. As shown in analyses of spatial representations in heritage tourism, recurring motifs such as stone alleys, local markets, and traditional gestures circulate as semiotic anchors, detaching themselves from lived practices and acquiring a life of their own within tourism imaginaries (Franco 2016; Vaccaro and Beltran, 2022). The effect is not only aesthetic but epistemological: it reshapes what a territory is thought to be.

Territorial discourse also produces spatial hierarchies. Certain places receive heightened visibility through communicative saturation, while others are silenced or rendered illegible. This unequal geography of representation reflects and reproduces broader inequalities – economic, infrastructural, algorithmic. As shown in studies on platformised tourism and overtourism, visibility becomes a form of territorial privilege, concentrated in spaces already connected to dominant imaginaries, and reinforced by recommendation algorithms and user engagement metrics (Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2021; Piancazzo *et al.*, 2024; Munar, 2021).

These discursive operations have material consequences. Communication does not merely describe what is already there; it frames how space can be inhabited, interpreted, and consumed. Narratives organise territory into functional zones – romantic, experiential, historical, gastronomic – each associated with affective scripts and behavioural expectations. Tourists are encouraged to move, feel, and remember in accordance with pre-scripted storylines that guide perception and emotion (Corsale, 2022; Calvi and Hover, 2021). The tourism landscape thus becomes a performative text, one that invites reading but also constrains improvisation.

Emerging narrative regimes have increasingly aligned with what has been described as the transformative turn in tourism. Places are framed not only as destinations but as stages for personal renewal, mindfulness, and ethical engagement. Yet even these alternative framings often rely on the same symbolic mechanisms of simplification and appeal. The promise of transformation does not inherently challenge the logic of commodification; it frequently retools it in more emotionally sophisticated ways (González-Reverté and Soliguer-Guix, 2022).

To critically examine how territory is constructed through discourse is to understand that tourism does not just occupy space but also actively shapes it through signs, emotions, and political influences. It influences

what is perceived, how it is experienced emotionally, and which aspects of reality are considered significant.

Tourism imaginaries and spatial inequalities

Tourism operates through selective attention. Its imaginaries, while projecting openness and mobility, rely on mechanisms of symbolic exclusion that reinforce spatial hierarchies. Not all places are equally narratable, nor are all granted visibility within the global circuits of desire. These disparities are embedded in both historical inequalities and the communicative infrastructure of tourism, which privileges coherence, recognisability, and affective resonance over complexity or contradiction (Frenzel, Giddy and Frisch, 2022; González-Reverté and Soliguer-Guix, 2022; Salazar, 2020).

Contemporary tourism discourse is structured by a double movement of overexposure and invisibility. While a narrow set of destinations becomes saturated with visual and narrative material, vast spatial and cultural zones remain outside dominant frameworks of representation. This concentration of symbolic capital is often sustained by digital technologies that amplify the visibility of already-known places, reinforcing the algorithmic advantages of the hyper-visible and the already-legitimised (Piancazzo *et al.*, 2024; Frenzel and Frisch, 2020).

Such asymmetries are not confined to global North–South binaries. They are also evident within national and urban contexts, where certain neighbourhoods or regions are either spectacularised through gentrification-driven narratives or erased altogether from tourism’s symbolic map. As observed in recent analyses of tourism-led urban transformation, imaginaries often serve to justify selective investment, spatial reordering, and the displacement of local life in favour of idealised visitor experiences (Jover and Díaz-Parra, 2022; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2021).

Even efforts to democratise tourism narratives through storytelling and participatory content production can reproduce existing exclusions. The mobilisation of local voices is frequently conditioned by pre-established scripts of authenticity, hospitality, or resilience. As noted in recent critical literature, the diversity of lived experiences is filtered through affective norms that determine which stories can be told and by whom (Moreira *et al.*, 2024; Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2022). Subaltern or racialised voices are often relegated to the margins or made legible only when conforming to audience expectations of cultural difference. Geographies of inequality are thus sustained not only through material unevenness but also

through representational regimes. The power to define what constitutes a destination, what is worthy of attention, and what is emotionally resonant is unequally distributed. As Frenzel, Giddy and Frisch (2022) argue, digitalisation has not necessarily decentralised the production of tourism knowledge. Instead, it has often reinforced the authority of global platforms and the aesthetic preferences of dominant traveller segments

Challenging these asymmetries requires more than diversifying content. It involves questioning the political economy of representation itself: how symbolic capital is distributed, which narratives are monetised, and how spatial desirability is constructed and commodified. A critical approach to tourism imaginaries must recognise that every inclusion implies an exclusion, and that visibility itself is a form of power.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that tourism does not merely operate within spatial realities but actively contributes to their symbolic construction. Through narrative, imagery, and communicative framing, tourism reconfigures territories as destinations, assigning them coherence, visibility, and affective resonance. These processes are not neutral. They involve selection, condensation, and the repetition of specific motifs, often reducing complexity in favour of legibility and appeal. The result is the production of symbolic geographies that privilege certain places while marginalising others.

Imaginaries function as semiotic systems that enable recognition but also constrain meaning. Their effectiveness lies in their familiarity. As Barthes (1957) demonstrated in his analysis of modern mythologies, cultural symbols acquire power precisely when they appear natural, self-evident, and emotionally resonant. Tourism draws heavily on this logic, mobilising images, stories, and sensory codes that reduce the unfamiliar to the recognisable, transforming spatial difference into consumable spectacle

This symbolic work extends into the temporal register. As Hobsbawm (1983) shows, many of the traditions and cultural forms presented as authentic within tourism are in fact strategic constructions crafted to serve contemporary narratives of identity, belonging, and continuity. Tourism does not merely represent space; it invents tradition, curating the past to serve present desires.

Digital mediation has further intensified these dynamics. Despite the participatory promise of platforms and user-generated content, tourism communication remains structurally asymmetrical. Algorithmic systems

and branding frameworks prioritise certain narratives while marginalising others, often reinforcing aesthetic norms and epistemic hierarchies (Frenzel, Giddy and Frisch, 2022; Moreira *et al.*, 2024)

Future research could examine how these symbolic regimes evolve within shifting media ecologies, including the role of automated curation in shaping affective geographies. There is also value in investigating counter-narratives: those that disrupt dominant framings, foreground marginal voices, or reveal the constructed nature of what is often presented as natural. Methodologically, greater attention might be paid to how research itself participates in representation, and how more situated, plural, and reflexive approaches might reconfigure the study of tourism imaginaries (Stors, 2022; Brouder, 2020)

A critical engagement with tourism communication requires an understanding of representation as both an expressive and a political act. It means interrogating the systems through which space becomes meaningful, desirable, or forgettable. Tourism, in this light, is not simply a vector of movement but a regime of meaning-making, whose narratives deserve ongoing and rigorous critique

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SECTION II

DESTINATIONS AND ATTRACTIONS AS CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION: IMAGINARIES, IDENTITIES, AND MEANINGS

Serena Volo

This section explores the evolving relationship between culture, creativity and narratives in tourism, focusing on how places are imagined, represented, experienced, and transformed through symbolic and material practices. Across different disciplinary lenses – literary studies, marketing and communication, semiotics, and regional economics – the contributions share a common concern: understanding how meanings attached to places shape tourism dynamics, and how tourism in turn influences cultural production, territorial identity, and socio-economic development.

At the core of the contributions lies a key assumption: destinations are not merely geographical entities or aggregations of attractions, but dynamic realities. They are built through stories, images, stereotypes. Mountains, rural destinations, historical cities, and creative districts are all interpreted through symbolic frameworks that affect how they are perceived, valued, and visited. In this chapters, tourism is seen not as a matter of mobility and consumption, but as shaped and narrated imaginary, as represented and interpreted identity, and as representational and cultural meaning. The four chapters approach this broad theme from complementary perspectives; tracing a trajectory from symbolic construction (literary and cultural narratives of mountain landscapes) to digital storytelling practices (agritourism communication), to semiotic interpretations of perceived destination image (cross-cultural analysis of online reviews), and finally to structural territorial dynamics (relationship between cultural and creative industries and tourism attractiveness).

The contribution by Francesca Pangallo *Rethinking Mountain Landscapes: Literary and Cultural Perspectives for Sustainable Upland Tourism*, situates mountain territories within a long cultural and literary tradition. By reconstructing how mountains have been represented – from sacred and mythological spaces to Romantic sublime landscapes,

from wartime refuges to contemporary “playgrounds” and “last-chance” destinations – the chapter demonstrates that mountain tourism is deeply rooted in narrative archetypes and symbolic tensions. Attraction and repulsion, conquest and vulnerability, wilderness and infrastructure coexist within mountain imaginaries. By examining contemporary literary works and cultural initiatives rooted in trauma and memory (such as the Vajont disaster or ritualized community practices), the chapter proposes alternative narrative models that resist stereotypical, commodified representations of upland areas. It argues that sustainable tourism requires not only environmental policies but shifting from treating the mountain as an object for consumption to acknowledging its fragility and rather seeing it as a place for collective memory and responsibility.

The chapter written by Grillini and Lonardi “*Summer in the mountains*”: *Insights on slow storytelling in agritourism* focuses on traditions and cultural memory shared through narratives and contemporary digital communication practices. It examines how agritourism businesses in South Tyrol construct their identity through visual and textual storytelling on Instagram and official websites. Drawing on the concept of slow storytelling, the chapter highlights how agritourism narratives emphasize cyclical time, family values and continuity, heritage, sustainability, and the embeddedness of farm life within seasonal rhythms. Unlike mass tourism communication, which often privileges spectacularity and instant consumption, agritourism storytelling is shown to revolve around organizational identity, lived heritage, and everyday practices. The centrality of family narratives and environmental consciousness suggests a communicative strategy aligned with slow tourism values. By analyzing both text and visual storytelling, the chapter contributes to understanding how digital narratives shape pre-travel expectations and destination branding, while also reflecting deeper socio-cultural transformations in rural and mountain tourism.

The chapter entitled *Cultures and stereotypes in perceived destination image: A semiotic approach* authored by Mariné-Roig, Volo and Lonardi further expands the investigation of meaning-making processes by examining how destination image is constructed and interpreted across cultural and linguistic groups. Focusing on South Tyrol as a bilingual and bicultural region, the chapter applies a semiotic model to online travel reviews written by Italian- and German-speaking domestic tourists. Through the analysis of the designative, appraisive, and prescriptive dimensions of language, it reveals how collective perceptions, cultural affiliations, and stereotypes influence the construction of destination image. By treating reviews as sign systems rather than mere tourists’ evaluations, the chapter demonstrates how tourism communication operates

through symbolic codes that reflect deeper cultural narratives. The findings show that perceived destination image is not homogeneous but relational, comparative, and shaped by historical and linguistic contexts. This contribution enriches tourism studies by integrating semiotic theory with big-data analysis of user-generated content, and by offering tools to decode the cultural underpinnings of tourism destination perception.

The contribution by Viganò, Tavano Blessi and Lallo *The role of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) in fostering tourism attraction: An empirical analysis in the Italian context*, shifts the focus from symbolic representations to structural territorial dynamics. While acknowledging the narrative and cultural dimensions of tourism, the chapter examines the empirical relationship between the diffusion of cultural and creative industries and tourism attractiveness across Italian provinces. Using relative indices of tourist attractiveness and cultural capital, it shows that the association between CCIs and tourism flows is positive but non-linear and context dependent. Thus, indicating that cultural and creative industries can strengthen tourism attractiveness particularly in territories characterized by intermediate levels of cultural capital, where cultural and creative dimensions interact in a balanced way. In contrast, in areas dominated by strong traditional heritage attractors, the marginal contribution of CCIs appears weaker. This nuanced interpretation challenges deterministic assumptions and emphasizes the importance of territorial configurations and contextual factors in shaping tourism competitiveness.

From a structural point of view, the common thread across these contributions is the recognition that tourism image, identity and meaning cannot be fully understood through quantitative indicators alone, there is a clear need for other methods that allow nuanced understanding of multiple realities and that consider the value of tourism symbolic frames and contextual layers. At the same time, symbolic constructions, images and narratives, are not detached from material realities, influencing and shaping destinations' identity, communication and policies.

By moving across disciplines and methodological approaches, this section provides a comprehensive perspective on how destinations are imagined, communicated, experienced, and structured in contemporary contexts. Taken together, the chapters reveal multiple layers of interaction between tourism, culture and creative industries: (a) narrative and symbolic layer, where landscapes and territories are constructed through literary traditions, stereotypes, and collective memory; (b) tourism marketing communication and social media layer, where storytelling practices shape brand identity, expectations, and experiential imaginaries on traditional and

social media; (c) semiotic and cultural layer, where language, identity, and stereotypes influence perceived destination image; and (d) a structural and economic layer, whereby cultural and creative industries contribute – under specific conditions – to territorial attractiveness and competitiveness.

Ultimately, the contributions converge on a broader reflection: sustainable and responsible tourism futures depend on the capacity to integrate cultural depth, creative innovation, and critical awareness of stereotypes and narratives. Whether in mountain landscapes or urban creative systems, tourism thrives not only on attractions, but on meanings – and on the responsible negotiation of those meanings within communities and territories.

4.

RETHINKING MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPES: LITERARY AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE UPLAND TOURISM

Francesca Pangallo

Mountains as narrative elements: an overview

Mountains have long served as significant literary elements, functioning not merely as settings but as active narrative components in both traditional texts and modern storytelling. From the earliest forms of human communication – both oral and written – they have appeared as persistent and meaningful fictional features, shaping belief systems, plot structures, and symbolic frameworks. In religious and classic traditions, for example, mountains such as Mount Sinai or Mount Olympus served as sites of divine presence, where accounts of sacrifices and revelations anchor the narrative in a space that mediates between the human and the transcendent, providing both a barrier and a connecting point with mortal and immortal worlds (König, 2022a).

The centrality of mountains beyond religious and mythological frameworks is also evident in folklore and children’s literature, where highland landscapes are repeatedly constructed as spaces of enchantment and alterity. In European folk traditions, mountain regions are often associated with supernatural beings and hidden worlds – see, for example, the case of Alpine legends featuring dwarves as wild, magical creatures living in the woods, as in the tale¹ that explains the origin of the epithet *monti pallidi* for the Dolomites². Similarly, Northern European folktales frequently depict

¹ The story revolves around the meeting and falling in love between the prince of the Earth and the princess of the Moon – two worlds not meant to meet one another, that find a way together thanks to the help of magical creatures (the dwarves) living in the woods of the Dolomites. For the full text, see: Wolff, 2016 to investigate.

² The expression “*monti pallidi*” refers to the pale color of the Dolomites Alps.

mountains as the dwellings of trolls and other liminal creatures, reinforcing the idea of altitude as a threshold between the human and non-human dimensions. Children's literature and fairy tales further consolidate this association: in their collection [1815](2024), the Brothers Grimm frequently employ highland settings as spaces of trial and transformation – as in *Snow White*, where the forested mountain refuge becomes both a site of danger and protection, or again in *Hansel and Gretel*, where the mountainous woodland hosts enchantment, threat, and moral testing³.

In line with these features, the use of mountains as narrative devices in literary compositions appears quite early in the Western context, and it consolidates during the 18th-19th centuries. Despite the impossibility of accounting for the full abundance of examples across European and Western literature, it is helpful to briefly mention a few key moments in the Italian scene, as the chapter's primary goal is to focus on representations of Alpine and upland contexts in the North-east of Italy to investigate tourism practices and storytelling. Therefore, to provide readers with a better background based on previous scholarly work on this subject, I will shortly outline three major trends in mountain representations in the Italian literary scene, reflecting three essential steps in the development of mountains as literary devices and narrative settings.

During the 1300s, significant figures of Italian literature such as Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca employed mountains as central allegorical devices in their works: in the case of Dante's "Purgatory" (*Comedy*, II), or in the one of Petrarch's "Ascent of Mount Ventoux" (*Epistolae Familiares*, IV, 1), mountainous landscapes function as practical, structural, and symbolic element, articulating processes of ascent from a lower state toward higher levels of knowledge, moral awareness, and artistic understanding (Alessandri, 2018, pp. 29-40). At this initial stage, mountains serve primarily as a functional setting for the protagonist's personal journey towards acknowledging the truth and salvation. Although there is no full development of mountains as a driver of complexity yet, it is interesting to notice how individual and artistic growth, and of course life itself, metaphorically resemble a path of challenges to overcome that follows a vertical, bottom-up movement, where the aspiration to a better view – and understanding – of reality and contingency implies the effort to reach a perspective from a higher stand.

In later periods, the narrative use of mountains initially reflects a heightened sense of excess and fascination with classical traditions, as

³ For additional examples within the Italian context, see: Fei, 2019.

documented in Renaissance literary production (see references on Torquato Tasso's poems in Alessandri, 2014, p. 41 ff.). However, in the 17th century, this approach gave way to increasingly complex and ambivalent conceptions of nature in the arts and literature. Beginning with the Baroque period, and subsequently consolidating through the Enlightenment and Romanticism, scholars have identified the emergence of a distinctly modern sensibility toward mountains and their inherent «antinomies». This sensibility is characterized by what Silvia Segalla has described as «the coexistence of attraction and repulsion, almost like the systole and diastole of a new tension toward movement» (Segalla, 2024, p. 38)⁴, capturing the spectrum of dynamics evoked by mountain landscapes.

In this historical phase, mountains reinforce their narrative efficacy as spatial metaphors not only for intellectual, spiritual, and existential transformation, but also as sites of adventure and of sublime yet conflicting responses, including fear and intimidation in the face of natural elements and phenomena – or even delusional, as Giacomo Leopardi approached the “ungenerous” indifference of nature. Symbolically, mountains can evoke feelings of loneliness and distress in a Romantic literary perspective, due to their harsh topography, as in the case of the character Jacopo Ortis in Ugo Foscolo's (1802) eponymous novel.

It is, however, in the 1900s that mountain landscapes most clearly absorb and rearticulate this tension in both symbolic and material terms, becoming central settings in narratives of resistance and conflict shaped by the two world wars. Historical, fictional, and poetic accounts (see Ungaretti, for example) of trench warfare, together with memoirs of partisan and civilian resistance against Nazi and Fascist forces, came to dominate the publishing landscape between the 1940s and 1960s. These works reconfigured traditional mountain imagery once again, introducing more complex and multifaceted narrative declinations in which the landscape's irregular and hostile traits both mirror the characters' general agitation, and offer opportunities to hide and save their own lives. Some of the most influential and compelling 20th-century Italian authors who portray mountain landscapes in wartime and postwar contexts are Beppe Fenoglio, Luigi Meneghello, Primo Levi, Italo Calvino, and Mario Rigoni Stern, among others.

So far, mountain environment, when functioning as a narrative device, can fundamentally suspend ordinary social order, allowing on one side

⁴ My translation and adaptation from the author's original Italian expression: «antinomie del paesaggio alpino»; and of the passage: «compresenza di attrazione e repulsione, quasi sistole e diastole di una nuova tensione al movimento».

encounters with magic, monstrosity, and moral ambiguity, and on the other providing an opportunity for challenging one's self beliefs or committing to one's values and ambitions, discussing human relationship with nature and the way we can be inspired or get intimidated by her. Aside from their context, it is reasonable to claim that, whether as sacred summits, enchanted terrains, or challenging structures, mountains have consistently served as narrative devices that convey meaning and expand the imaginative possibilities of storytelling across time and traditions. In the next section, I will analyze to what extent mountain narrations engage with tourist discourse and identify similarities (or differences) to establish a dialogue between the two disciplines.

Mountain imagery at the intersection of tourism discourse

Historical dynamics and socio-economic transformations have equally contributed to shaping and evolving both upland territories and their function in human cultural imagery. Despite the general feeling – often encouraged by tourist promotional materials – that mountains are natural and uncontaminated sites, human activity and industrial intervention have significantly shaped upland landscapes (Salsa, 2019, 2007; Varotto, 2017, 2020), in particular after the Second Industrial Revolution. For instance, the North-East alpine area was involved in a broader process of territorial rationalization that has profoundly reshaped mountain ecosystems throughout the mountain regions, exemplified by Longhin with the expression «machine in the mountain» (2021): an extensive system of hydroelectric power plants and dams to collect water from mountain rivers, for energetic purposes.

It is because of such interventions that the physical and cultural shape of both the local environment and its cultural traditions have been permanently altered. For example, secular references and local mythologies once associated with the river Piave have been progressively supplanted by a materially transformed river, whose waters have been almost entirely diverted for energy production and irrigation (Bonan, 2020), resulting in a permanent reconfiguration of its symbolic and cultural significance (A. Marzo Magno, 2010). Such territorial rationalization also stands in contrast to the imaginative representations of mountains in early 20th-century Italian literature, such as in Primo Levi and Mario Rigoni Stern, where mountainous landscapes function as repositories of ancestral knowledge, preserving both authenticity and fascination for the rough yet beautiful natural setting.

In the same years marked by intense anthropic transformation, the notion of a virgin, unaltered environment as something to be sought out and experienced gained significant cultural traction. This idea was interpreted in different ways according to historical circumstances and the sensibilities of each period, shaping the tourist offer for audiences drawn to the myth of nature. The relationship between human intervention and tourism attitudes toward mountain landscapes can be further examined through cultural and literary representations, which serve as means of recording change and continuity in upland territories. In fact, the way we perceive mountains on a cultural basis has much to do with the way they can function within a narrative discourse: as professor Jason König noted while interviewed about his research work on mountain representations within Greek and Roman cultures and literatures (2022a), there is «a tension between two quite different ways of understanding mountain territory: on the one hand mountains as places of human and even urban control, and on the other hand mountains as places outside human civilization with the capacity to overwhelm human agency» (König, 2022b).

Tension is a fundamental element of storytelling: every story that successfully addresses conflict through plot construction and language structures engages the reader on both emotional and cognitive levels, resulting in a powerful narration⁵. According to Raphaël Baroni (2007), tension is especially a reading effect, not simply a plot feature: it is the reader who plays a predominant role in the psychological dynamics set and released by the text. Similarly, the tension mentioned by Prof. König reflects the relevance of human subjectivity in mountain accounts – being «human-environment relations» (König, 2022b) the core element that carries narrative tension in upland representations. Therefore, it is key to explore further historical perspectives and how human relationships with mountains have evolved, as today's tourist representations of upland territories seem to carry and reflect a similar dual strain.

As Silvia Segalla (2024) described, the concept of landscape is inherently tied to processes of representation that can reveal multiple layers of historical and social meaning. Because the notion of landscape presupposes the presence of a subject (Simmel, 1913) – one who perceives, frames, and delimits a portion of space through material or immaterial forms of representation – such representations can expose the cultural, generational, and social practices that shape how landscapes are perceived.

⁵ On narrative tension strategies and engagement within the field of narrative theory, see: Bermejo-Berros, J., López-Díez, J., Gil Martínez, M.A., 2022.

In this sense, landscape representation becomes a valuable source for understanding the relational and ethnographic dimensions within human communities (see Segalla, 2024, pp. 17-19) and, therefore, also the tourist industry's inclinations and habits.

In her work, Segalla addresses the conceptual rupture between what humans perceive and mark as “natural” or “wild” and what can no longer be considered such within the context of landscaping across Western culture. Drawing on Jakob (2009, p. 29), Segalla first interrogates the criteria by which humans designate a given space as “natural”, in opposition to domestic or urban environments (2024, p. 19). The author then examines how this notion of *natural* has generated fascination across different historical periods and cultural contexts, identifying the 18th century again as a pivotal moment in the emergence of this sensibility, with the consequence of repositioning mountain landscapes at the center of attention in different contexts, from artistic and literary to socioeconomic:

L'invenzione della natura selvaggia e la sua rivalutazione in positivo emerge in Europa tra la fine del Seicento e l'inizio del Settecento, nutrendosi dell'esperienza dei *Grand tour* e delle trasformazioni che, positivamente, investono la topografia fisica come quella sociale. Nella storia occidentale e, più in particolare, europea, il paesaggio alpino si presta a rappresentare la frontiera del selvaggio. (...) a partire dal Settecento, le montagne sono state rivalutate dagli studiosi come formidabile laboratorio scientifico, dagli artisti romantici come massima espressione del sublime, dalle classi agiate come suggestiva meta di viaggio e *playground* dell'Europa intera. (Segalla, 2024, p. 24)

Concerning this final sentence, the author cites, as a footnote reference, a work first published in 1871 by the British mountaineer Leslie Stephen, titled *The Playground of Europe*. The book, a collection of autobiographical essays, at the time enjoyed widespread appreciation for its content and narrative approach. If the canonical, modern imagery associated with mountain landscapes developed around the 17th-18th centuries, it was during the 19th century that this cultural and artistic interest turned highlands into an actual tourist attraction, as Stephen's line of work confirms. In particular, Andrea Leonardi (2022) pointed out how mountaineering and excursionism became for the first time specific activities to practice in a particular context – the Alpine arch – aligning with the spirit of those times in Europe:

Tanto la pratica alpinistica quanto l'escursionismo alpino [...] si consolidarono comunque nei decenni centrali del secolo XIX. Si trattava di attività che portavano a una vera e propria “invenzione della montagna”, concepita come una nuova sintonia tra spazio e piacere e codificata da una modalità innovativa di

percepire sia il paesaggio che l'esercizio sportivo. Era una pratica seguita da una ristretta élite di appassionati di scienze geologiche o di ardimentosi che, sull'onda di concezioni romantiche, intendevano esplorare regioni remote e accedere a picchi inviolati, sfidando percorsi assolutamente impervi, nonché seri pericoli, per conquistare non tanto i pascoli alpestri – come da secoli erano abituati a fare gli appartenenti alle comunità delle alte valli alpine –, bensì quelle parti delle montagne mai raggiunte, limitandosi a ciò che il grande scalatore francese Lionel Terray definì come “conquista dell'inutile”. L'alpinismo dunque per tutte le regioni alpine rappresentò un salto di qualità per l'affermazione del turismo. (Leonardi, 2022, p. 395)

Upper-class tourism begins in the Alps with a colonialist mindset and approach: wealthy white men conquering vertical spaces, seeking to reach the top of a mountain for its own sake – not to secure resources or other benefits, but for the enjoyment of overcoming natural limits, for the spirit of adventure itself. It is what Prof. König described earlier as the «capacity to overwhelm human agency» being one of two possible ways to see and understand upland territories, from our anthropic perspective. Furthermore, the figure of the mountaineer proves to be perfectly compatible with this interpretation, especially on a narratological level, if accustomed to the standard, Western literary figure of the *hero*, and the mythical quest he has to complete – the *hero's journey* (Campbell, 1949; Vogler, 2007) – in order to fulfill his destiny:

Quanto alla traslitterazione concettuale operata nella costruzione dell'immaginario alpino europeo, si può notare *en passant* come la pratica e la retorica dell'alpinismo, che tanto hanno contribuito alla costruzione simbolica e materiale del paesaggio di quota, si siano dimostrate ampiamente compatibili con questo mito della frontiera e dell'eroe (maschile, singolare) che la supera, arrogandosi così la possibilità di imporre il vessillo della propria appartenenza (Segalla, 2024, p. 25).

On the other side, Stephens's word-choice “playground” conveys exactly the meaning on how aristocratic and bourgeois esthetic perceived mountains at that same timeline discussed by Leonardi, in line with the positivist idea of both energetic and economic transformations, together with the concept of escalation to an higher upper class level – an idea that follows a vertical movement, again resembling in a way the hiking practice (see on this also Segalla 2024, pp. 38-39). In terms of mountain landscapes as playgrounds, Mario Varotto (2020) also emphasized the series of stereotypes associated with this idea, comparing the secular nature of the playground to the “holy” dimension of the wilderness: «stereotipi dello svuotamento e stereotipi del riempimento, in altre parole sacra *wilderness*

e profano *playground* della montagna contemporanea sono figli di una stessa cultura». (Varotto, 2020, p. 61).

Both these concepts, hiking as a *conquest* and mountains as a *playground*, align with current practices widespread in upland tourism, suggesting a continuity between first accounts of mountaineering experiences and contemporary trends. Despite Stephen's narratives recalling his hiking adventures with authentic marvel and genuine fascination, the attitude suggested towards the Alps mountain range in his title recalls closely the way upland tourism functions nowadays, especially in relation to winter sport activities: the *natural* environment is often destroyed to make space for skiing slides and other sports attractions, while residents are pushed away by gentrification dynamics, leaving space to luxurious resorts renting sport cars and noisy motorbikes that clog the narrow mountain streets over weekends, or holiday seasons, resulting in unsustainable living conditions for those who work and reside in mountain towns and villages.

The most recent example of those anomalies can be found in the construction and development of the many technical equipment and infrastructure needed for the Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics:

Non c'è simbologia più riuscita di una fiaccola alimentata a gas che vaga per vallate senza neve per rappresentare i Giochi Olimpici Invernali in tempo di crisi climatica. Il report "Olympics Torched" (traducibile in "Olimpiadi in fiamme") stilato da New Weather Institute in collaborazione con Scientists for Global Responsibility e Champions for Earth, mette in luce una contraddizione fondamentale di Milano-Cortina 2026: le Olimpiadi invernali, che risentono dell'aumento delle temperature e della mancanza di neve, sono ancora largamente sponsorizzate da aziende altamente inquinanti le quali, con la propria attività, sono responsabili in modo diretto della fusione di 5,5 km² di neve persa (equivalente a circa 3.000 piste da hockey olimpiche). (Argenta, 2026)

The amount of deforestation, pollution, and energy exploitation used to provide the resources for hosting each sports competition has raised deep concerns among residents, activists, and the scientific community⁶. Together with the large sums of money invested for projects that cannot be permanent (see the the case of the Olympic village in Cortina

⁶ On climate change issues related to this context, see: *A Cortina ci sono più cantieri che neve* (Last Access: Jan 23rd, 2022). On public opinion and criticism, consider the issue of viability in towns like Bormio (Lombardy) or Cortina D'Ampezzo (Veneto): *Un posto in cui le Olimpiadi invernali non sono benvenute* (Last Access: Jan 20th, 2026).

D'Ampezzo⁷), another consistent issue is climate change itself: scientists are claiming that in the future it will be impossible to hold the Games in a single location, and that it would take higher levels of altitude to host some competitions, missing both snow and cold weather⁸.

The melting of ice and the disappearance of snow for the most part, if not all, of the year will have dramatic consequences for alpine ecosystems, including human activities and sports practices. However, the tourism industry has already identified a business opportunity in the very landscape global warming is inevitably altering. The expression “last-tourism destination”, or “last-chance tourism”, first being used in the early 2000s, refers to travel practices oriented toward places perceived as *endpoints* (geographical, cultural, or temporal): sites framed as “vanishing” under ecological or economic pressure, such as island or fragile urban realities⁹. Before becoming a widespread trend, the expression was coined to meet the growing demand from the tourist market for visiting polar bear sites and melting glaciers in the Arctic (see Lemelin *et al.*, 2012).

These practices are driven by a desire to witness places before they irrevocably change or disappear, producing a paradox in which tourism responds to an emergency by accelerating the fragility of the target locations, first and foremost through carbon emissions from travelling long distances (Lemelin *et al.*, 2010, p. 488). Scholars noted that last-destination tourism is shaped by narratives of urgency, scarcity, and authenticity, which encourage intensified visitation while simultaneously aestheticizing loss (Lemelin *et al.*, 2012). As a result, such tourism often oscillates between conservationist rhetoric and extractive dynamics: it can raise awareness and funding for preservation, yet it may also strain local ecosystems, infrastructures, and communities.

One famous “last-chance tourism” destination within the Italian mountain context is represented by the Marmolada’s glacier, in the Dolomites, which has been defined as in «permanent coma»¹⁰ with official scientific data confirming that the glacier is disappearing «with an average

⁷ See Gianluca Cedolin’s investigation on Cortina d’Ampezzo Olympic & Paralympic Village | Olimpiadi Milano Cortina 2026 for the Post: www.instagram.com/reels/DT3JzfnjLCn/ (Last Access: Jan 24th, 2025).

⁸ Check the New York Times’ recent inquiry on temperature rising might affect present and future games: As Winter Warmers, Olympic Athletes, Organizers Hunt for Elusive Snow (Last Access: Jan 22nd, 2026).

⁹ Recently, also the city of Venice has been labeled as a possible last-chance tourism site. For more info, see: Pangallo, 2025, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰ Legambiente (2024): Ghiacciaio della Marmolada è in coma irreversibile – Legambiente (Last Access: Jan. 20th, 2026).

retreat of 7 meters at the measured frontal markers compared to the previous year [2024]»¹¹. Yet, the melting glacier, even more because of its dissolving process, has been attracting thousands of tourists every year, taking selfies while smiling and leaving behind disposable waste that contributes to the pollution and fragility of the mountain top¹². Cases like the Marmolada have been considered by writers and scholars as powerful examples for promoting public awareness of the fragility of Alpine territories (Varotto, 2025), a topic that deserves increased attention as tourist flows increase each year.

From a narrative standpoint, the concept of frailty applied to mountains clashes quite with the dynamics of both *conquest* and *playground* discussed above: uplands have become something to protect, rather than conquer, and to preserve, rather than explore in the quest for adventure. At present, along with every other species, mountains are at risk of extinction and collapse due to the effects of the Anthropocene. However, in this era of uncertainty, we observe increasing interest in visiting mountain sites and in mountain accounts and related products, such as TV shows and films, that engage the public with a survivalist taste for wilderness challenges and life's struggles.

While tourist flows are indeed increasing in Alpine regions – to the detriment of the isolation and depopulation that have been affecting these areas – the idealized projection of the mountain landscape from an urban perspective is asserting itself through a new series of stereotypes and cultural references (Melchiorre, 2018), from which the tourism industry inevitably also benefits. In much contemporary mountain-related writing, there is a strong tendency to portray highland regions as spaces of renewed purity, ideal for escapism from urban chaos – an image that, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, has once again been problematized in light of both social and economic contradictions in urban spaces (Gainsforth, 2025).

One of the most recent successful examples in the Italian context is the novel *Le otto montagne* by Paolo Cognetti (2016), in which the opposition between nature and culture dominates and strictly divides the urban dimension from the mountain ecosystem: «è la distinzione è cultura e natura (nelle sue varie declinazioni: antropico/selvaggio, città/montagna...)

¹¹ Campagna glaciologica partecipata sulla Marmolada | Università di Padova (Last Access: Jan 24th, 2026).

¹² «Sono circa 400 quelli trovati e raccolti sulla Marmolada dal team di Carovana dei ghiacciai e dai volontari che il 6 settembre, nel primo giorno di tappa, nell'attività di Clean up organizzata» Ghiacciaio della Marmolada è in coma irreversibile – Legambiente (Last Access: Jan. 20th, 2026).

a strutturare il mondo» (Segalla, 2024, p. 105). The idealization and polarization of the nature-culture duality inevitably harm the everyday reality that characterizes the lives of those who inhabit highland regions: an existence marked by complexity and inconvenience (Arnoldi, 2009), far removed from the simplifications of an urban perspective. Historian and writer Matteo Melchiorre raises an interesting question: if mountains are being represented and offered to the public as a surrogate, a way out from cities, what is then the way out for those who already live there, and still experience difficulties and frustrations (even though in different forms) from urban populations?

Quando si chiudono i sipari sulle Dolomiti che diventano viola al crepuscolo, cosa rimane della montagna? Chi nasce, vive e muore dentro questo Patrimonio Unesco pensa anch'egli di essere dentro un'alternativa al contemporaneo? O non si sente, piuttosto, tristemente ai margini del contemporaneo? (Melchiorre, 2018, p. 122)

Within this framework and open question, the following section introduces several perspectives that, in different ways, propose alternative narratives to those imagery discussed above, to outline approaches that adopt a more sustainable perspective on the representation of mountain landscapes and, subsequently, on their engagement by travelers.

Against stereotypes: contemporary narratives and cultural actions towards a sustainable tourism approach

In a context rich in historical backgrounds and cultural influences such as the mountain landscape, narratives can conflict with the actual habits and traditions of those territories, emphasizing a stereotypical way of life or a particular portrait of natural elements that oversimplifies complexity. In this case, it is easy for the tourism industry to directly take out of the scene those elements that are more functional to its business opportunities (Varotto, 2020, pp. 50-51), enforcing an idea of the mountain that does not match the reality of those who live or have lived in those areas:

Lo stereotipo alpino è stato paragonato a un imbuto, che inghiotte in un vorticoso mulinello ogni pensiero, oppure a una dolina di un paesaggio carsico, un posto comodo, protetto dal vento, chiuso alla fantasia di guardare oltre il bordo. (...) Gli stereotipi della montagna contemporanea, (...) hanno in comune almeno tre caratteri: *l'estraneità* al mondo montanaro, la *semplificazione* dello scenario, la *reiterazione generalizzata e pervasiva* di pochi caratteri identificativi. (Varotto, 2020, p. 52, original emphasis)

Mauro Varotto highlights how the root of stereotypical representations is often the estrangement of the point of view, which develops a certain idea into a crystallized, unified content that can easily become a mainstream product:

Il punto di partenza o l'origine dello stereotipo non è in genere legato agli abitanti della montagna, ma a chi su di essa posa uno sguardo da *outsider* che si fissa su una stagione, uno scorcio, una veduta, in maniera fortemente selettiva. Il secondo aspetto che ne deriva è il processo di semplificazione che da questo dettaglio prende forma, dando origine a una visione generalizzata che fa di tante montagne la montagna, aderente ai cliché del sublime o del pittoresco. (...) Lo stereotipo funziona così da potente sineddoche: prende una parte per il tutto, e questa parte, quella che «serve» al pubblico urbano, diventa un tutto pervasivo che orienta le aspettative del turista. (...) Il terzo aspetto, quello della reiterazione, fa sí che uno sguardo in origine aristocratico ed elitario – attraverso dipinti e raffigurazioni, resoconti di viaggio, testi letterari, manifesti pubblicitari, video virali – diventi immagine dominante, alimentato dai mass media e dai social network con il linguaggio tipico dell'advertising, fatto di messaggi semplici e slogan che trasformano le montagne in *commodity*, oggetto di consumo. (Varotto, 2020, p. 53)

As alternatives to the processes listed above, I will now conclude by presenting two case studies that offer a different outlook – as opposed to Varotto's *outsider* perspective – and a higher level of complexity that draws on sightseeing opportunities in unconventional spaces and times. For each thematic core, or case study, two elements will be examined: one rooted in literary writing, and the other drawn from a relatable cultural-tourist initiative, of a more explicitly artistic and cultural nature, which has engaged with the process of meaning-making towards spaces that are directly or indirectly addressed in each of the complementary narrative texts. This approach is intended to offer a dual, interconnected perspective on the selected theme, reaffirming the possibility of engaging with mountain discourse through a renewed lens that is neither banal, nor separated from the content it presents to readers and visitors alike.

Both examples are embedded in the traumatic memory of events that have profoundly affected the communities in which they took place. Both engage with natural elements: the first with water, the second with fire. Most importantly, both conceptualize the mountain as the site from which to reinitiate the attribution of meaning to trauma, and to communicate it to potential visitors through an artistic reworking that is both responsive to these events, and possible only through a shared, collective process of trauma elaboration within the involved communities.

Water

Antonio Bortoluzzi's latest novel, *Il saldatore del Vajont* (2023) begins by adopting a tourist perspective:

È stata la visita guidata alla centrale, alla diga, alla frana a farmi tornare indietro, ai tempi dei giochi nell'acqua e delle *anguàne*. Sono rimasto per tante ore dentro l'impianto, e dal profondo della montagna siamo saliti su fino in cima al coronamento della diga: gallerie, condotte, cunicoli, scale, ponti, tiranti, calcestruzzo, tanto calcestruzzo, e saldature, ben fatte. Tanto lavoro. Non ho mai visto una cosa del genere: la costruzione dell'impianto idroelettrico, il Grande Vajont, culminato con la diga che per qualche tempo fu la più alta del mondo, è stato il risultato di tanti piccoli gesti compiuti da uomini-formica, impegnati insieme, quasi fossero mossi da un'unica volontà, a edificare il paradiso dell'energia che invece sarebbe stato l'inferno della catastrofe. (Bortoluzzi, 2023, pp. 14-15).

Through the frame of a scanned, temporal structure – corresponding also to the book chapters – a homodiegetic, first person narrator recounts the experience of a guided visit, beginning inside the hydroelectric power plant of Soverzene (in the province of Belluno), and continuing all the way to the Vajont Dam, from which the surrounding valleys can be seen, including the site of Longarone: the town reconstructed after being completely destroyed by a flood caused by the collapse of a portion of Mount Toc into the artificial basin held by the Vajont stream dam, on October 9th, 1963 (Ruzzante & Martini, 2023; Armiero, 2023).

Bortoluzzi's account could be defined as a “resounding” novel, in the sense that works as a carrier of voices: the screams of the victims silenced by the water, and the water itself, that obliterates everything on its violent path (Bortoluzzi, 2023, p. 15), and the voices of those try to keep alive the memory of the disaster. The guided visit allows the narrator to travel back in time, giving the chance to reflect on the disaster and on the memory of this profound loss shared by all the Alpine communities in the Dolomite valleys, engaging with collective memory and the sense of living in the mountains in ways that are largely unconventional to tourist storytelling. As he approaches a bridge that hangs precipitously above the dam, the protagonist, suffering from vertigo, confesses that:

Un po' mi vergogno perché di qui passa una camminata chiamata Percorsi della memoria, che si svolge ogni anno, in settembre, e vede la partecipazione di migliaia di bambini che non hanno nessuna paura. (...) c'è una cosa che fa il vuoto, il precipizio, a chi soffre di vertigini: uno sente che potrebbe anche buttarsi di sotto; (...) Penso questo perché l'anno scorso dalle nostre parti ci sono stati

otto suicidi (...): il fatto è che, nelle nostre meravigliose montagne che aprono a panorami mozzafiato, vette aguzze, torrenti frizzanti e boschi pieni di ossigeno, alcune persone si buttano di sotto, per sempre. (Bortoluzzi, 2023, pp. 51-52)

In this case, the tourist route functions as a reflection on both the past and the present: it narrates one of the ways in which the communities of the valleys today carry the memory of the victims of October 9th, 1963, and how victims of other, private tragedies choose to become part of the crystallized landscape of the standard mountain imaginary – an aspect that would never be conceived as “natural” to recall from an urban perspective, which tends to mythologize and simplify the beauty of highland territories.

The guided visit recounted by Bortoluzzi in *Il saldatore del Vajont* is not merely a narrative device: the itinerary through the Soverzene plant and the Vajont Dam, to which author Bortoluzzi participated, was undertaken on the initiative of the project “mu.ri” – *Museo diffuso regionale dell’ingegneria* [Regional Distributed Museum of Engineering] – which since 2015 has aimed to develop cultural and tourist routes along the Piave basin, the only system extending from the Dolomites to the Venetian Lagoon, highlighting the engineering works that cross and connect the territory.

Ci troviamo spesso di fronte a scenari all’apparenza “naturali” dove in realtà l’intervento dell’uomo, benché determinante, non è istintivamente percepibile. Le opere di ingegneria e le grandi infrastrutture diventano infatti con il tempo “paesaggio” e con esso si confondono e si stratificano. Comprendere questo processo implica pertanto prestare una diversa attenzione a ciò che ci circonda, attenzione che si coniuga con la “lenta” esplorazione del territorio¹³.

Questioning the concepts of “natural” when applied to landscape, the ecomuseum *mu.ri* represents an ambitious and necessary initiative to visit and acknowledge the Veneto region uplands from a renewed, aware perspective, able to connect both present and past features of a landscape that is continuously changing, far from its crystallized, mainstream form.

Both examples, Bortoluzzi’s account and the ecomuseum, lay the groundwork for an active digression on memory that operates on the public and local communities retroactively – by recalling the past – as well as in a prospective sense, orienting their reflection toward the future of those who will preserve the memory of the victims of the remarkable engineering works that dared to challenge the architecture of nature itself.

¹³ Excerpt from the official website “Mu.ri – Museo regionale diffuso dell’ingegneria” > “Obiettivi e finalità” <https://murimuseodiffuso.it/it/obiettivi-e-finalita%C3%A0> (Last Access: Jan 25th, 2026).

Fire

The second, final example to conclude this analysis presents the idea of subtraction at the core of both storytelling involved, as a way to open and broaden the conversation with the public on how trauma becomes part of our existence, both if lived directly through it or if inherited as a memory from a generation to another.

Contenuto rimosso. Il fuoco nel Quadrato – literally, “removed, dismissed” content – is an «experiment in psychoanalysis applied to the environment. Dealing with collective memory, it addresses the issue of depopulation in mountain areas, experimenting with community-based art in Alpine communities» (Trivelli, 2023 – transl. by S. Martin). The project title refers to the reconstruction of the historic town center of Lorenzago di Cadore, province of Belluno, destroyed by a fire on the evening of July 30th, 1855. The process, known as “Rifabbrico” [reconstruction], was a popular form of reconstruction in the 1850s in the Cadore area, consisting of the heavy use of concrete and stones to replace burnt wooden structures, in order to minimize the risk of fire in the future. *Contenuto rimosso* identified in the “Rifabbrico” applied to the Quadrato neighborhood of Lorenzago (because of its squared geometry) a collective trauma: a denial that the community never had the chance to address and take back as part of their shared history.

Contenuto rimosso is a public-art based project that, since 2012, celebrates the recurring event of the fire, every 30th of July, by switching off electricity in the Quadrato neighborhood, and installing fires, torches, and candles. Chiara Trivelli, the artist and curator of the initiative, specifies that:

La riattualizzazione della memoria dell'incendio è pensata come innesco per attivare un processo di regressione che permetta alla comunità locale di rivivere simbolicamente il trauma nel contesto protetto del rito, così da elaborarlo. Nella ritualizzazione, infatti, la coazione a ripetere diventa interpretazione, atto performativo. Per questo *Contenuto Rimosso* non è un evento “commemorativo” propriamente detto, perché il progetto non celebra o perpetua la memoria di qualcosa (...). *Contenuto Rimosso* nasce con l'intenzione di attivare una “contro-immagine”, (...) far sì che la comunità locale si riappropri del suo passato utilizzando lo spazio pubblico come luogo per l'elaborazione di un'immagine di sé inversa a quella stereotipata. (Trivelli, 2023, p. 9)

Over the years, the recurring fire ritual in the Quadrato has achieved such success that it has become not only a new, deeply felt local tradition but also the town's main festival, attracting numerous

visitors from neighboring communities and beyond. By working against the stereotypical image of the Alpine village or the local fair, the artist and the Lorenzago community have created an initiative that intersects environmental memory, narrative practices, and participatory processes. This has been achieved through engagement with concepts such as subtraction and the dissociation that traumatic events produce in affected individuals, recognizing these not as limitations but as dynamics that encompass multiple possibilities and strategies for recovery and reworking.

A recent account that follows a narrative trajectory similar to Trivelli's is the 2025 novel titled *Inventario di quel che resta mentre la foresta brucia*, by Michele Ruol. A finalist in the 79th edition of the Premio Strega, the book functions essentially as an inventory of ninety-nine objects, organized according to the rooms of the house in which the story of a family unfolds – composed of four individuals with generic identities: Mother, Father, Older Child, and Younger Child [Madre, Padre, Maggiore e Minore]. Without providing the reader with specific details, it is known that the couple's two children, Older and Younger, die in a car accident, crashing into a tree. From this pivotal event originates the narrative of Mother and Father, who, through the metaphor of the burning forest – as with the grief that permeates them – reconstruct their family life by evoking anecdotes associated with the objects in their home.

In Ruol's work, the dynamic of subtraction occurs both in relation to the central event (the death of the couple's children, always recounted retrospectively) and in the depiction of the forest as an internalized space rather than as an external one. By transposing the external environment and employing it metaphorically as the setting for an inner state, the author allows the reader's imagination to reconstruct the site of trauma, the elements of the tree, the forest, and the deaths of the two children, without risking any reliance on descriptive stereotypes. At the same time, the memory embedded in the objects succeeds in evoking the family's story, disrupted in the present but preserved, as we understand, precisely through the objects that maintain and reactivate remembrance for the protagonists.

Conclusion

Across the literary works and the initiatives examined, we saw how memory, trauma, and space can intersect through narrative, artistic, and participatory practices. By engaging with past tragedies – from the Vajont disaster to collective and private losses – these projects foster reflection and shared remembrance while resisting conventional or stereotypical

representation. When applied to mountain storytelling, strategies such as subtraction (Ruol, 2025), dissociation (Trivelli, 2023), and metaphorical transposition (Bortoluzzi, 2023) allow grief and history to be expressed without simplification, with landscapes serving as carriers of memory. In doing so, storytelling and cultural engagement become tools for preserving and reactivating both collective and individual stories, to the benefit of both residents and visitors.

At the same time, these works underscore the ethical and practical stakes of tourism and urban fascination with highlands: the allure of adventure, escapism, or “last-chance” experiences often risk obscuring the social, ecological, and historical realities of mountain spaces. Eventually, a way of narrating mountains that also allows tourism to include more than *playground* and *quest* dimensions is possible when the *outsider* perspective (Varotto 2020) is dropped out in favor of a shared, insider effort to work on past traumas and real dynamics affecting mountain living. Ultimately, the literary and cultural examples provided suggest a renewed perspective on mountains as dynamic spaces where memory, human experience, and environmental awareness intersect, compelling us to rethink our relationship with mountains and the legacies they carry.

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5.

“SUMMER IN THE MOUNTAINS”: INSIGHTS ON SLOW STORYTELLING IN AGRITOURISM

Giulia Grillini, Serena Lonardi

Introduction

Narratives in tourism contribute to shaping visitors' attitudes (Pachucki *et al.*, 2022), brand perceptions (Can *et al.*, 2025), experiences (Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016) and behavioral intentions (Huang *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, playing a significant role in the pre-travel experience, narratives are fundamental for destination marketers in communicating destinations' value proposition and unique brand identity (Grillini & Volo, 2024; Hartman *et al.*, 2019).

In particular, visual narratives are fundamental in tourism, since the tourism experience has been long considered inherently visual (Urry, 1990). This importance has further increased with the rapid growth of visually oriented social media platforms such as Instagram (Volo & Irimias, 2021). Although scholars have extensively examined narratives in tourism context (Grillini & Volo, 2024), there are still some niches of tourism experiences that are underexplored. For instance, with growing demand for rural and nature-based tourism (Haukeland *et al.*, 2023; Richards, 2025), there is also the need to better understand how these types of experiences are narrated. This chapter specifically focuses on agritourism narratives. Agritourism provides the ideal context to study narratives, given tourists' interest in the stories associated with this lifestyle (Engeset & Heggem, 2015; Mei *et al.*, 2020). Given agritourism's focus on place identity, rural experiences and lived heritage (Mei *et al.*, 2020), the slow storytelling approach (Gasparin *et al.*, 2022) was deemed appropriate to examine agritourism narratives more in-depth.

This chapter aims to explore how narrative elements in the agritourism sector are structured. By focusing on South Tyrol (Italy) and through a

qualitative content analysis of selected Instagram accounts and official websites (Camprubí & Coromina, 2016; Wegerer & Volo, 2021), this research will explore the construction of narratives through the approach of slow storytelling (Gasparin *et al.*, 2022).

Literature review

Storytelling and visual narratives in tourism

Stories are engaging for tourists, since they evoke emotions, facilitate meaning-making processes, and enhance memorability of experiences (Ben Youssef *et al.*, 2019; Moscardo, 2020). Through storytelling, destinations and tourism providers can convey values that go beyond functional attributes, fostering emotional connections with potential visitors (Hartman *et al.*, 2019). Narratives allow tourists to imagine themselves in a place, supporting anticipation and desire during the pre-travel phase (Pachucki *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, narratives play a key role in destination branding, shaping destination image, strengthening place identity, and deepening consumer-brand connections (Pachucki *et al.*, 2022), while also influencing tourists' behavior (Moin *et al.*, 2020). Visual storytelling particularly enhances the story's effect, as it can capture intricate meanings and summarize different ideas (Volo & Irimias, 2021; Wegerer & Volo, 2021).

Previous research on visual narratives in nature-based tourism has mainly focused on visual attention, showing that natural elements, landscape composition, and the presence of human-nature interactions significantly influence tourists' gaze patterns and perceived attractiveness (Li *et al.*, 2023). Storytelling has also been examined in farm-based tourism contexts, particularly with reference to on-site experiences. For instance, Mei *et al.* (2020) highlight how storytelling practices during farm visits contribute to tourists' understanding of agricultural lifestyles, traditions, and values. Nonetheless, existing research has predominantly focused on face-to-face or experiential storytelling, leaving digital and visual narratives underexplored, especially in pre-visit communication channels such as social media and websites.

Agritourism experiences and slow storytelling

Agritourism has been defined as all those activities that occur on working farms and are directly connected to agricultural production

(Barbieri, 2016). Although some studies have shown that some farms focus on high-end amenities and comfort, blending luxury with rural settings (Streifeneder *et al.*, 2023), most studies emphasize how agritourism companies tend to emphasize simplicity and traditional farm life (Andehn *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, visitors choosing an agritourism experience are particularly interested in typical agritourism landscapes (Dat *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, those experiences are characterized by close interactions between hosts, visitors, and the rural environment, often emphasizing authenticity, sustainability, and local culture (Andehn *et al.*, 2021; Joyner *et al.*, 2018). Hands-on activities, such as interacting with animals or harvesting fruits and vegetables, are especially valued by visitors (Rong-Da Liang *et al.*, 2020).

A key element of agritourism's uniqueness lies in the history of the farm and the family behind it (Mei *et al.*, 2020). Narratives centred on generational continuity, traditions, and personal stories contribute to creating meaningful and distinctive experiences. Such narratives also reinforce a strong sense of place, as they anchor tourism experiences to specific landscapes, cultural practices, and local identities (Martinus *et al.*, 2024).

In this context, slow storytelling emerges as a useful analytical lens. By narrating the lived and sustainable history of products and privileging social, cultural and environmental values, slow storytelling allows for a nuanced representation of rural life and lived heritage, aligning with the values often associated with agritourism (Gasparin *et al.*, 2022).

Context of the study

South Tyrol is an Autonomous Province in Northern Italy characterized by a strong agricultural tradition, a distinctive alpine landscape, and a bilingual cultural identity. It was deemed an adequate context for this study due to the central role of agritourism within the regional tourism system and the strong integration between agriculture, hospitality, and destination branding. South Tyrol is the Italian region with the highest density of agritourism establishments and ranks second in terms of total number of agritourism facilities, after Tuscany (ISTAT, 2022). This highlights the structural relevance of agritourism for the local economy and its visibility within the national tourism landscape (Grillini *et al.*, 2023).

A central role in the development and promotion of agritourism in the region is played by *Gallo Rosso*, the official association representing farm-based accommodations. *Gallo Rosso* not only certifies agritourism farms but also actively shapes their communication strategies through

coordinated branding, storytelling guidelines, and digital platforms. This makes South Tyrol a meaningful case to explore how agritourism narratives are visually and textually constructed through slow storytelling across Instagram and official websites.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis to examine agritourism narratives. Content analysis allows for a systematic analysis of selected content to reveal underlying patterns, themes, meanings, and biases (Krippendorff, 2009) and is widely used in tourism studies (Camprubí & Coromina, 2016).

First, Instagram was chosen as the ideal platform to study agritourism narratives given its growing popularity (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020) and its role in storytelling (Lim & Childs, 2020), especially through visual content (Volo & Irimias, 2021; Wegerer & Volo, 2021). To limit the amount of data, the authors restricted the analysis to the Dolomites, as a visually iconic area. Moreover, agritourism structures affiliated with the *Gallo Rosso* association were chosen to ensure a consistent level of storytelling. To further ensure a steady narrative flow, only the Instagram accounts with at least 24 posts in 2024 were included in the final dataset. Those accounts were then randomly selected for the analysis to facilitate an in-depth manual analysis of the data and capture deeper meanings. Finally, the study examined 5 accounts, comprising a total of 114 posts, along with their 5 official webpages. Along with single agritourism accounts, the *Gallo Rosso* Instagram account (30 posts) and webpage were also included in the analysis.

Both the textual and visual content of the posts were then analyzed following the Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Through the software MaxQDA, first-order, themes and dimensions were identified. Captions were written in English, Italian, and German and were analyzed in their original languages, given the authors' proficiency in all three.

Results and discussion

What is narrated

Results show a strong prominence of agricultural and farm-related activities (Rong-Da Liang *et al.*, 2021), highlighting the natural environment, work activities related to farm daily life, including harvesting and farm animals, and Alpine heritage and living traditions. Stories include the

arrival of a young calf, e.g. “*Once again, there’s a new arrival in the pasture. Welcome small Kawasaki*”, and honey harvest, e.g. “*Our bees were very industrious again this year, and we can enjoy delicious honey*”. Heritage-related stories encompass both tangible and intangible elements, like architecture, dresses, gastronomy, living traditions and languages (Andehn *et al.*, 2021; Joyner *et al.*, 2018). Stories not specifically linked to farm life are, however, particularly linked to the South Tyrolean environment, for instance through the promotion of mountain outdoor sport activities, like “*cycling in South Tyrol*”. Indeed, sense of place (Martinus *et al.*, 2024) is also reflected in the hashtags or the continuous reference to place in the captions. Finally, a limited part of the stories is dedicated to what customers can expect from the agritourism by showing the rooms or wellness facilities of the structure. This contradicts previous research that highlights how farms prefer to communicate their luxury facilities, rather than farm-related activities (Streifeneder *et al.*, 2023).

Interestingly enough, the vast majority of the posts analyzed made a reference to the season or to times of the day, such as: “*summer in the mountains*”, “*autumn activities*”, “*evenings in the mountains*”. Visual and textual elements in this case are highly coherent, with textual elements reinforcing what is depicted in the picture, like one post, captioned “*Winter is back*”, portraying snow-covered blossoms, symbolizing the unexpected temporal overlap between spring and winter. The continuous reference to the cyclical nature of time highlights the importance of seasonal rhythms for farm life.

Overall, results show an alignment between the narratives of the agritourism structures and the agritourism association, *Gallo Rosso*.

How is it narrated

Beyond the analysis of what is narrated on agritourism Instagram posts, the study is also focused on the way agritourism narratives are structured. As the previous section already suggests, narratives in South Tyrolean agritourism can be organized following the slow agritourism approach (Gasparin *et al.*, 2022). The overarching element of slow storytelling in agritourism is the organization. On the websites, where companies have more space to communicate their organizational identity, the farms selected prominently highlight a family-oriented storytelling, thus showing that, in this context, organizational narratives largely overlap with family narratives (Mei *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, two main pillars underpin these organizational narratives: heritage and sustainability. Sustainability encompasses energy use, waste management, biological agriculture, other

farm work practices, food sourcing, and cultural preservation. Within these two pillars, more context-specific narratives emerge that are closely tied to the distinctive characteristics of agritourism, like slow food, reference to place, animals (Dat *et al.*, 2024). This study also shows how the different agritourism narratives encompass the cyclical nature of time, being a central element of agritourism life. Contrary to Gasparin *et al.*'s (2022) model, agritourism structures in South Tyrol seem to dedicate fewer stories to enrich the customer experience or to engage the customers.

Although texts play a role to identify meaning, this study emphasizes the prominence of visual narratives, with captions usually reinforcing the visual content. For example, a post depicting the apple harvest through highly professional photographs is captioned simply “*Autumn activities*”, thereby underscoring the seasonal rhythm of the activity rather than adding new narrative elements.

Finally, agritourism structures show different ways to use social media. Whereas some prefer to post very professional photos with engaging captions, others upload random, very spontaneous photos with short texts or just hashtags. This confirms that the agritourism structures included in this study employ different ways to communicate their identity.

Conclusions

This chapter shows how agritourism visual and textual narratives are organized around the storytelling approach (Gasparin *et al.*, 2022). Through the application of this approach to a specific context, with very defined characteristics, this chapter adapts it by providing a hierarchy and adding some concepts. Slow storytelling in agritourism is inherently linked to the narration of the family as a core element of organizational identity, with heritage and sustainability as core pillars that sustain this narration and other elements that fall within. Within these elements, the framework proposed highlights the centrality of time and cyclical nature of time for slow storytelling.

With the adaptation of the slow storytelling approach, this chapter theoretically contributes to both agritourism and destination marketing literature, by showing how agritourism narratives are organized through the slow storytelling approach (Gasparin *et al.*, 2022). Thus, it confirms the relevance of the slow storytelling approach for the tourism context, by adapting it to a specific tourism sector and to visual data.

Like every research, this chapter has some limitations that need to be explained. First, since the aim of this study was to study agritourism

narratives more in-depth, its analysis of slow storytelling was limited to a narrow set of data, with little understanding on how slow storytelling develops on a more general level. Future studies should analyze a larger set of data through big data analysis to systematically investigate the patterns and mechanisms underlying slow storytelling in agritourism narratives. Moreover, this study does not provide insights into the effectiveness of slow storytelling on tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Thus, future research should focus on slow storytelling from the tourists' perspective, through experimental studies, big data analysis or a netnography. Finally, South Tyrol's agritourism sector is characterized by fragmentation, with a provincial DMO that has a strong brand identity and a robust online presence, and *Gallo Rosso*, which is spreading narratives around agritourism. In addition to this, numerous small and medium-sized enterprises contribute to South Tyrol's narratives, each varying widely in their communication strategies, digital capabilities, and storytelling approaches. Therefore, it would be interesting to understand how these entities cooperate and coordinate to achieve a coherent destination narrative, an essential factor for attracting and engaging tourists.

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6.

CULTURES AND STEREOTYPES IN PERCEIVED DESTINATION IMAGE: A SEMIOTIC APPROACH

Estela Marine-Roig, Serena Volo, Serena Lonardi

Destination image and its symbolic nature

Tourism destination image (TDI) is a complex and multifaceted concept, not univocally seen by different agents, it is often formed by a diverse set of sources (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), resulting in distortions and incongruences among induced, autonomous and organic sources (Ferrer-Rosell & Marine-Roig, 2020). The image of a destination also varies across cultures, and it is subject to the distortive effects of stereotypes (Tung *et al.*, 2020). Although stereotypes are known to influence destination image formation (Chen *et al.*, 2013), more research is needed to understand how different social, cultural and ethnic groups create international tourism values and construct destination image amid stereotypes (Tressider, 2011).

Tourism has its specific language, with its myths, symbolisms, and interpretations; and destination image is a multi-layered concept with relevant semiotic power. Moreover, tourism communication has a distinct sign system, and tourists form destination image thanks to a combination of semiotic inputs, with text and pictures shared on social media reflecting the semiotic aspects of tourism (Echtner, 1999). Particularly, within social media, it is paramount to understand how shared signs and images are interpreted in a much wider social and cultural context. Indeed, tourism texts and images online can benefit from deeper interpretation of the symbolic meaning through the lens of semiotics. Signs and symbols are universally applicable (Morris, 1946) and are particularly relevant in marketing and tourism (Lourenção *et al.*, 2020). The symbolic nature of tourism experiences and the abundance of text and visuals elements of destination imagery (Echtner, 1999) facilitate the connection between destination image and semiotics (Zhang & Sheng, 2017).

Thus, this chapter uses semiotic analysis to examine how cultural differences and stereotypes influence domestic tourists' perceptions of destination images in a bilingual and bicultural region. Specifically, it aims at: (a) advancing the understanding of TDI from a semiotic perspective, (b) identifying the influence of cross-cultural differences and stereotypes on TDI, and (c) assessing the utility of online travel reviews in tracing cultural issues. The study focuses on two cultural groups by analyzing TripAdvisor reviews from Italian-speaking and German-speaking domestic tourists in South Tyrol (Italy). Online Travel Reviews (OTRs) are relevant for the creation of contemporary destination image as portrayed by its agents and as perceived by tourists (Marine-Roig & Mariné Gallisà, 2018).

Image, culture and stereotypes in tourism

Destination image: From individual thoughts to collective perceptions

Scholars agree on the subjectivity of TDIs, seen as image projected by marketers (Mayo, 1973) and as tourists' mental experience of a destination (Lai & Li, 2016). TDI can vary between different regional (Crompton, 1979) and cultural groups (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996). Indeed, when defining it, some authors have included group perceptions along the individual, while others consider it solely as a collective construction. The sum of all tourists individual perceptions about a destination, when maintained over time, collectively constitutes TDI (Marine-Roig, 2019). Destination image is a holistic construct, shaped by a dynamic interplay of different information sources with the socio-cultural context of both the destination and the traveler. Thus, when considering TDIs as a collective construction, cultural roots can influence destination perception attributes (Volo, 2004), linguistic and cultural diversity and ethnic stereotypes (Vaes & Paladino, 2010) can influence its construction.

Recently, projected TDI is shaped by social media (Zhan *et al.*, 2025) and OTRs are relevant for their abundance and their role as image-forming agent (Marine-Roig, 2024). Reviews reflect the TDI perceived by tourists and conveyed to other tourists, contributing to the image as a *gestalt*, represented by a hermeneutical circle of image formation through induced, autonomous and organic agents (Caton & Santos, 2008). Social media analytics offer insights on more diverse and specific aspects of TDI (Lin *et al.*, 2021) and can be used to explore cultural issues. OTRs have been used to examine cultural, multicultural and cross-cultural influences on consumer behavior in hospitality-oriented studies (D'Acunto *et al.*, 2021).

Scholars investigated the effect of culture on destination image using nationality as a proxy (Lee & Lee, 2009) and cultural differences were recently explored with a focus on online behavior (Mariani & Predvoditeleva, 2019). Collective cultural affiliations include nationality, ethnicity and language; however, the predominant reliance on nationality has been criticized for oversimplifying cultural complexity (Li, 2014). Although ethnicity- and language-based approaches may provide richer insights, such studies remain scarce and limited in scope. A broader range of cultural variables and the exploration of additional cultures and subcultures – including intercultural ties and frictions – are needed. Therefore, this study uses language to explore stereotypes.

Stereotypes, which are shared beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of specific groups, are formed based on simple and memorable traits, and play a crucial role in shaping destination images (Chen *et al.*, 2016). Stereotypes can also influence how tourists perceive and engage with different destinations, impacting on their travel decisions and experiences (Chen *et al.*, 2016, Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

Echtner and Ritchie (1991) established that destination image is inherently a stereotype, shaped by collective perceptions and preconceived notions. Since stereotypes can be used as mental representations of differences between groups, stereotypes can be useful to understand how different groups perceive each other. In tourism, destinations' perception is often shaped by preconceptions and mental representations about a country and its people (Li & Ma, 2023). Stereotypes in tourism have been examined also in European contexts, e.g. the stereotypical views of Germans and Portuguese with the former seen as more competent but less warm (Cuddy *et al.*, 2009; Vaes & Paladino, 2010). Particularly interesting are the areas where multilingual and multicultural communities reside (Bender *et al.*, 2013), as minority languages authenticate the destination with a positive impact on destination image (Lonardi *et al.*, 2024). With specific reference to South Tyrol, Capozza *et al.* (1982) highlighted a dichotomy between the German-speaking residents – seen with the following traits: self-control, efficiency, and methodicalness – and the Italian-speaking residents, related to traits like sweetness, kindness and impulsiveness.

Semiotics examines the relation between signs and their way of conveying meaning to individuals and masses and is central to understanding communication and behavior in our societies (Barthes, 1968; Morris, 1946). Morris (1946) defined semiotics as a general science that includes syntactics (sign-sign), semantics (sign-object) and pragmatics (sign-interpretant) and their relationships. Barthes (1968) extends semiotic to study cultures, by focusing on meanings emerging from each culture, in which language has a primary role. As some linguists argue, languages shape the way people see and experience the world, making it a key symbolic semiotic system (Echtner, 1999).

In tourism, specific items, like cultural elements, can be seen as semiotics signs, as they symbolize tourist attractions (Zhang & Sheng, 2017). A semiotic approach is fundamental to better understand tourism advertising language (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Lourenção *et al.*, 2020) and destination image construction (Hunter, 2016). Culture and semiotic are closely intertwined in tourism (Waterton, 2014), as cultural meanings are shaped through projected authenticity at attractions (Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2021), embedded in historic language as cultural heritage (Dai *et al.*, 2024; Lonardi *et al.*, 2024), and constructed through museum narratives (Zou *et al.*, 2022).

Marine-Roig (2024) proposes a semiotic model to analyze TDI that includes Morris' three types of signs (designative, appraisive, and prescriptive) and three types of use (informative, valuative, and incitive). This model is applied to OTRs to detect culture and stereotypes effects on TDI, since linguistic aspects of tourists' voices and their relationship with cultural traits can be successfully studied through the lens of semiotics. Applied to TDI, the model establishes a connection between TDI signs and dimensions and their constituent elements.

OTRs reveal insights into various aspects of culture and are used to study destination attributes, as a proxy for cultural traits (D'Acunto *et al.*, 2021). The underlying hypothesis suggests a connection between linguistic and cultural aspects reflected on TDI. A semiotic lens offers a useful framework, as tourists are the agents of semiotics, engaged in reading cities, landscapes and cultures as sign systems (Culler, 1981) and their OTRs contribute to building or reinforcing signs and symbols for other tourists. Semiotics provides a detailed understanding of the nuanced ways in which cultural and linguistic elements intertwine to shape the overall perception of a destination. Given the growing importance of OTR as a reliable source of information, its influence on the formation of destination

image is well established (Correia *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, the use of OTR data also ensures an unmediated perspective on tourists' TDI, enabling the identification of gaps between the destination image projected by the destination and the one really experienced by the tourists (Mirzamurodova Kizi *et al.*, 2025).

Methodology

Identification of the destination

South Tyrol (*Südtirol* to Germans and *Alto Adige* to Italians) is one of Italy's autonomous provinces. Given the bilingual population and bilingual identity – inheritance of the Habsburg Empire of the Italian lifestyle – the destination was deemed appropriate to study TDI from the perspective of domestic tourists and how stereotypes of Italian and German cultures impact on the construction of TDI.

This study uses TripAdvisor reviews about South Tyrol written in German and Italian by domestic tourists. TripAdvisor is considered one of the most suitable OTRs data sources by tourism scholars (León *et al.*, 2025). The analysis of OTR allows to disentangle the layers of meaning embedded in tourist interactions that contribute to the construction of TDI. This study compares two language groups to uncover the variations in TDI perception. TripAdvisor has value for TDI formation, since tourists increasingly consult it before and during their trips (Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2015). While these data might be not representative of all tourists, it certainly influences the perceived TDI of the platform's users. Table 1 presents an overview of the methodological steps adopted.

Table 1 - Overview of methodological steps and related decisions

Steps	Reasons / Outcome
Identification of the destination	Choosing South Tyrol (Italy) bilingual and bicultural region.
Data scraping	Scraping of OTRs reviews in German and Italian from 2011-2020 and pre-processed
Identification, selection, data scraping and pre-processing of dataset	Selecting “Things to do” section of TripAdvisor. Scraping OTRs in German and Italian. Filtering by reviewers' residence in South Tyrol.
Translation of text into English	Translation and double checking of selected snippets to ensure validity of the translated text.

Table 1 - continued

Steps	Reasons / Outcome
Selection of useful categories	Grouping tourist attractions and activities into categories according to the resources promoted by TripAdvisor.
Familiarizing with the content	Performing preliminary content analysis of selected reviews
Frequencies	Analyzing frequency of terms in the texts of both groups
Lexicon polarities and metrics	Constructing polarity lexicons to analyze the affective, behavioral and attitudinal dimensions of the conceptual model. Defining the necessary metrics to be able to measure and compare two datasets of different volumes.
Spatial and temporal exploration	Locating the resources and distribute the reviews by seasons
Popularity of resources	Sorting resources and categories from highest to lowest popularity by number of OTRs and cross both rankings with the two groups.
Verifying the components of the TDI model and identifying traces of stereotypes	Comparing the results of both groups of reviewers, in relation to the evaluative, affective, behavioral and attitudinal dimensions of the conceptual model and with respect to stereotypes.

From categorization to analysis of destination image

Tourist attractions and activities “To do and see” were grouped into categories according to the types of resources promoted by TripAdvisor. Categories consisted of key terms with similar meanings or connotations that were grouped together and were mutually exclusive.

The analysis of frequency of terms in the texts was done for both groups. Frequency tables of terms allowed deducing patterns of reviewers’ linguistic expressions. Since Italian and German datasets have different volumes, the frequencies were expressed in percentage. Data and metrics used in the analysis are presented in Table 2.

The designative sub-dimensions (resources and spatio-temporal) were investigated through the analysis of textual and paratextual elements. An average weighted score was calculated to assess resources at the appraisive-evaluative aspects, the weighted formula in Table 2 calculates the score weighting resources according to the assessment given by reviewers to resources promoted on TripAdvisor (from one to five bubbles ranging from 1 = terrible to 5 = excellent).

Table 2 - Summary data, metrics, details and examples

Dimensions & Type of use	Sub-dimensions	Data/Metrics	Details and examples
Designative Informative	Resources	TripAdvisor 'Things to do' textual/paratextual	Attractions by language, theme or type, review text, review score...
	Spatio-temporal	Paratextual elements	Date, geographical location
Appraisive Valuative	Evaluative	AvgScore Weighted Tripadvisor score	$((N5 * 10) + (N4 * 7.5) + (N3 * 5) + (N2 * 2.5) + (N1 * 0)) / N$ -where N= number of OTRs 5=excellent 1=terrible
	Affective	Lexicon polarities (Feeling+; Feeling-)	Beautiful, love not nice, disappointing
Prescriptive Incitive	Attitudinal	Lexicon polarities (WillBeBack+; WillBeBack-)	Come back, will return will not be back, never return
	Behavioral	Lexicon polarities (Behavior+; Behavior-)	Recommended, must visit not recommended, avoid

Sentiment analysis was used to assess the appraisive-affective and prescriptive aspects of the model, particularly to measure the polarity and intensity of feelings in the text and to infer the level of visitors' satisfaction. After calculating the words frequency then positive and negative feelings associated with text were intersected and identified. In addition, sentiment analysis can infer the level of visitors' satisfaction, and it has often been used in tourism to gather feelings and moods from online reviews of travelers, guests and diners. Finally, selected snippets were content analyzed to identify traces of stereotypes.

Results and discussion

Reviews that could be attributed to domestic tourists were 4,508 of which 898 of them written in German and 3,610 in Italian. Residents represent approximately 5% of tourists from both language groups, and OTRs in Italian quadruple those in German. In terms of language, 72% of the German-speaking residents use the two official names of cities/attractions, while 99% of the Italian speakers use only the Italian denomination. Table 3 shows the five most frequent terms on TripAdvisor used by German-speaking and Italian-speaking residents.

Table 3 - Top key terms translated into English

R.	Italian	%	German	%
1	beautiful	0.609	great	0.556
2	nice	0.289	nice	0.398
3	place	0.279	beautiful	0.365
4	bolzano	0.274	good	0.296
5	walk	0.241	area	0.234

Note: % = percentage of total words (including stop words); R. = Rank

Source: 4508 South Tyrol TripAdvisor OTRs posted by residents from 2011 to 2020

TDI dimensions according to semantic type of use

Designative or informative use (resources, spatio-temporal): The two sub-dimensions of the informative use of language (resources and spatio-temporal aspects) are here briefly discussed. As regards the temporal sub-dimension, both groups travel more in summer; however, Italian-speaking reviewers post more OTRs in the first part of the year while the German-speaking ones during the second. In relation to the spatial sub-dimension, major cities are mentioned by both groups, but museums are more common in German reviews.

Appraisive or valuative use (appraisal, assessment): The two sub-dimensions of the appraisive use of language (evaluative and affective aspects) are here briefly discussed. The average score of the most popular tourism resources relates to the evaluative sub-dimension; most valued by both groups are the Gardens of Trauttmansdorff Castle and the Tappeiner Promenade. In terms of historical inheritance and its effect, the Victory Monument which carries meanings to the Italians is one of the least popular and lowest-rated tourist resources among Germans (e.g. a tourist's snippet shows "*The Victory Monument (victory over what?) is a bombastic relic from fascist times. [...] It's not really appreciated by the local population*"), while it remains among the top ranked for Italians (e.g. with one commenting "*The Victory Monument is beautiful and imposing [...]. It's a pity not to be able to visit it*"). This monument was built to celebrate the Italian victory at the end of World War I, thus reminding the Germans of the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Table 4 shows the tourist resources grouped by category

Table 4 - Distribution and ranking of resources by categories and languages

	Italian			German		
	Percent	Rank	Score	Percent	Rank	Score
Culture (Cu)	9.42	5	7.85	11.69	4	8.52
Food & Drink (FD)	6.18	6	7.84	8.13	6	8.73
Game & Entertainment (GE)	0.75	8	8.95	2.56	8	8.88
Nature & Parks (NP)	21.19	2	8.46	20.27	2	8.91
Sport & Fitness (SF)	18.89	3	8.21	22.49	1	8.58
Shopping (Sh)	4.65	7	8.49	5.57	7	8.02
Sightseeing & Tours (ST)	21.25	1	8.54	16.82	3	8.99
Tangible Heritage (TH)	17.09	4	8.24	11.58	5	8.78
Transportation (Tr)	0.58	9	8.68	0.89	9	6.88

Source: 4508 South Tyrol TripAdvisor OTRs posted by residents from 2011 to 2020

Table 5 presents the overall average score in percentage, showing that the evaluative components score higher for German speakers. The affective sub-dimension shows that Germans use more positive terms than Italians. Overall, German-speaking domestic tourists seem more satisfied with the reported experiences than the Italians.

Prescriptive or incitive use (Attitudes- Action): The two sub-dimensions of the incitive use of language (attitudinal and behavioral aspects) are evident: a) The intention to revisit attractions or return to sites is more positive among German-speaking reviewers (Table 5). In contrast, recommendations are more frequent among Italian-speaking reviewers; b) Germans seem more loyal to the destination than Italians, because they have a higher positive polarity in the behavioral response and a lower negative polarity in both responses.

Table 5 - Appraisive and prescriptive aspects

Dimension	Metric (%)	Italian	German
Evaluative	AvgScore	82.66954	86.84420
Affective	Feeling+	3.74989	4.34446
Affective	Feeling-	0.45065	0.51528
Attitudinal	Recommend+	0.41876	0.35888
Attitudinal	Recommend-	0.05982	0.03128
Behavioral	WillBeBack+	0.01612	0.02140
Behavioral	WillBeBack-	0.00072	0.00000

Note: "+" = positive polarity; "-" = negative polarity

Signs of stereotypes in OTRs

The collective TDI perceived by both groups may be related to ethnic stereotypes and to the semantic value carried by these elements of TDI. Results show that German speakers are more interested in cultural activities than Italian speakers, partly confirming the stereotype. However, the valuative use of the language contradicts it, since the evaluative sub-dimension shows higher positive scores altogether, and the affective sub-dimension is noticeably more positive for Germans. The content analysis provides further evidence as some snippets show, e.g. a tourist mentions for example: *“In the Krippnemuseum [Nativity Scene Museum] [...], you’ll find a fantastic selection of beautiful nativity scenes from the Alpine region and beyond”*. Considering the valuative and incitive uses of the language, German-speaking tourists express greater satisfaction with language related to attractions and resources more positively connotated, since, in their OTRs, Germans show greater attachment to the historical heritage of South Tyrol.

The informational use of the designative aspect allowed to detect an inconsistency related to the delimitation of both linguistic groups, a plausible explanation for the large number of OTRs in Italian is that a considerable number of German speakers, being bilingual, use Italian when writing a review. This might reinforce the relationship between language as semiotic expression and TDI, to refer to essential aspects of the experience, e.g. food, services, etc.

To ensure validity a check was performed on the overall tourists’ data. This analysis was made to ensure that -with respect to South Tyrol destination image- the perceived cultural differences and stereotypes hold true when looking at the larger population of Italian and German speakers. The most popular categories in both groups are “Nature and Parks”, “Sport and Fitness”, and “Sightseeing and Tours”, with Italian speakers preferring the latter while German speakers favoring sport activities, confirming the stereotype.

Conclusions

This research compares German- and Italian-speaking domestic tourists in a bilingual and bicultural destination. Results contradict the European-level stereotypes about Italians and Germans (Vaes & Paladino, 2010), previously confirmed in South Tyrol (Capozza *et al.*, 1982). The semiotic value of OTRs emerges in revealing German speakers’ stronger attachment

to the past. Overall, the results confirm the relative, subjective, and comparative nature of perceived destination image (Marine-Roig & Mariné Gallisà, 2018).

This chapter contributes to the definition of TDI as a collective construction, linking individual thoughts to group perceptions, relating these to ethnic stereotypes. Treating texts as signs, symbols or icons and through the division of TDIs into three clearly different (but hierarchically interrelated) semantic aspects – designative, appraisive and prescriptive –, this application of Morris’s semiotic model enables the exploitation of OTRs to better understand their implicit meanings. The corresponding pragmatic uses – informative, valuative and incitive – of the semantic triad facilitate the measurement of three crucial variables in the field of tourism marketing – attractions’ popularity, and visitors’ satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, the proposed model supports the use of semiotics to exploit OTRs and proves useful in a complex cross-cultural setting. Results highlight differences in the collective perception of images between two groups of domestic visitors in a multilingual and multicultural region. Similar analysis can be done in similar contexts with dual identity – like Spain, Belgium or Switzerland (Bender *et al.*, 2013). Since each context has unique socio-cultural characteristics, investigating how other stereotypes are shaped in different multicultural settings can offer a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how domestic tourists construct TDI.

Although a balanced TDI that enhances destinations’ attributes while adapting to market preferences is ideal, some destinations hold a dual identity, offering a dual image. Through the identification of the semantic value behind OTRs, this study offers evidence of these multifaceted cross-cultural views, showing a connection between linguistic and cultural aspects of TDI. This can be useful to improve communication and marketing aimed at specific groups.

This study is not without limitations. TripAdvisor classifications might have hindered the analysis, other categorization can be explored to better unveil the semantic value of the reviews. Furthermore, using OTRs from other sources will avoid users’ assimilation effect. Future studies could also explore OTRs of restaurants and hotels in bilingual destinations evaluating related cultural impacts and stereotypical views. Finally, since stereotypes and culture form over a long period, future studies could look at changes in stereotypes, image and culture in a long-time horizon, including the pandemic and post-pandemic period.

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7.
THE ROLE OF CULTURAL
AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES (CCIs)
IN FOSTERING TOURISM ATTRACTION:
AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS IN THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, several academic fields have explored the ways in which cultural and creative industries (CCIs) contribute to the development of tourism. In this sense, tourism has shifted from prioritizing historical and cultural heritage as its main attraction to incorporating creative industries and practices as alternative sources of value for visitors and destinations. This transformation mirrors the evolution of tourist preferences, as highlighted by McKercher and Tolkach (2020). As a result, research has identified the rise of what is termed creative tourism (OECD 2014), a type of tourism that rather than treating culture as a set of discrete attractions (museums, monuments), highlights a broader shift toward knowledge- and skills-based experiences, in which visitors participate more actively and co-create value with local producers taking part in activities and experiential forms of learning tied to regional traditions like craft workshops, local cooking lessons, wine tasting experience and other (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Scholars have quantified the influence of creative-industry events on tourism, explored the power of iconic contemporary architecture to draw visitors (Scerri *et al.*, 2019), analyzed how destinations can benefit from tourism connected to writers and literary works (Hoppen *et al.*, 2014), and examined the contributions of the fashion sector to increasing territorial attractiveness (Lazzeretti *et al.*, 2017). All these changes clarify the increasing focus on cultural and especially creative tourism, which is transforming the visitor experience into participatory formats. The relationship between cultural and creative industries and tourism has thus become increasingly relevant, encouraging destinations to develop distinctive and dynamic identities to strengthen their position in the tourism landscape. Scholars acknowledge that cultural

and creative industries play a fundamental role in shaping the aesthetic and experiential qualities of tourism, heightening its appeal and helping destinations stand out in a crowded global environment (Long & Morpeth, 2016; Richards, 2020).

The literature suggests that CCIs may act as tourism attractors through multiple mechanisms – yet the strength and form of this “attractor effect” varies across contexts and sectors. A first mechanism concerns destination differentiation and branding. The OECD stresses that branding strategies linking creativity to place can increase destination visibility, connect creative activities to specific places through narratives, and support broader “live-work-visit-invest” strategies. This indicates that CCIs can operate as attractors not only by generating tourism “products”, but by strengthening the symbolic and narrative infrastructure through which destinations are recognised and chosen. Taken together, these studies show that the interplay between cultural and creative industries and tourism is reshaping the visitor experience, moving beyond conventional boundaries, encouraging the development of innovative tourist offerings, and inspiring new cultural initiatives and activities.

The multifaceted relationship between tourism and Cultural and Creative Industries

The relationship between tourism and CCIs has been widely discussed in the literature as a strategic complementarity capable of generating economic, social, and symbolic value at the territorial level. Beyond their contribution to destination attractiveness and tourism demand, CCIs interact with tourism through complex mechanisms involving innovation, production networks, branding processes, and employment dynamics (OECD, 2022). Within this framework, CCIs are increasingly considered a key component in the diversification of tourism products and in the construction of distinctive destination identities that respond to changing visitor expectations.

From a conceptual perspective, CCIs influence tourism through multiple and partly overlapping channels. On the demand side, creative industries contribute to reshaping tourism experiences by embedding cultural content, aesthetic value, and participatory practices into tourism consumption. The literature on creative tourism highlights how visitors increasingly seek experiential, learning-based, and co-creative activities that go beyond the passive consumption of cultural heritage (Richards & Wilson, 2007; Richards, 2011). These dynamics foster tourism products connected

to design, gastronomy, crafts, audiovisual production, fashion, and architecture, reinforcing the symbolic value of destinations and broadening their market appeal. On the supply side, CCIs support tourism by enhancing the quality and differentiation of services and infrastructures. Creative industries provide inputs that influence the design of hospitality spaces, the organization of cultural events, and the narrative construction of destinations. Empirical studies document how architecture and design shape hotel experiences and contribute to competitive advantage in tourism markets (Doğan *et al.*, 2013; Scerri *et al.*, 2019), while fashion and luxury brands increasingly engage with hospitality as part of broader cross-sectoral strategies (Dallabona, 2015). These interactions highlight how CCIs act not only as standalone attractions but also as enabling sectors that upgrade tourism-related value chains.

Technological innovation represents a further domain of interaction between CCIs and tourism. Digital creative industries – such as gaming, audiovisual production, and immersive media – have introduced new modes of engagement with cultural and natural heritage. Applications of augmented and virtual reality in museums, archaeological sites, and destinations demonstrate how creative technologies can expand accessibility, enhance interpretation, and reshape visitor experiences (Salmond & Salmond, 2016; Errichiello *et al.*, 2019). Such innovations illustrate how CCIs contribute to tourism development by generating novel forms of mediation between places, narratives, and visitors. Beyond experiential and technological dimensions, the literature also emphasizes the territorial and economic effects of the interaction between CCIs and tourism. Synergies between the two sectors may stimulate local labour markets, support the emergence of creative firms and start-ups, and reinforce regional production systems (Della Lucia & Segre, 2017). The growth of cultural and creative tourism has increased demand for specialized professional profiles, including cultural mediators, designers, and digital developers, linking tourism development to broader creative labour dynamics (Varotsis, 2022).

Another significant level of interaction between cultural and creative industries and tourism concerns the attractiveness of territories. As broadly acknowledged within tourism literature, cultural and creative industries considerably enhance the appeal of destinations and help generate tourist flows. This becomes clear from a simple review of the value propositions presented on tourism board websites across various countries and regions. Using Italy as a case in point, products and services linked to creativity and, more generally, to the “made in” dimension are prominently highlighted. These encompass areas such as gastronomic

culture (for example the UNESCO food destinations including the Colline del Prosecco in the Veneto Region or Val d'Orcia in the Tuscany Region), architecture (such as the Italian UNESCO cities of Rome, Florence and Venice), and design and fashion (Milan for design and fashion). It is evident that each industry plays a specific role in shaping territorial identity and increasing their attractiveness for many global visitors in several regions (Panozzo, 2023).

Finally, the literature also emphasizes how the relationship between tourism and creative industries extends to economic effects through social outcomes. In the social dimension, scholars emphasize how cultural and creative tourism may improve the quality of life of local residents and support community empowerment. Cultural and creative tourism focuses on authentic experiences, benefiting locals through renewed community pride, lively public spaces, and engagement in cultural activities, and in this perspective may contribute to enhancing residents' well-being (Wheeler & Laing, 2008). Regarding community empowerment, by valuing local culture, creative tourism enables communities to guide their own development, rather than being passive recipients of mass tourism, fostering social cohesion (Borseková & Vitálišová, 2024).

However, despite broad agreement on the existence of complementarities between CCIs and tourism, empirical evidence on the strength and nature of their relationship in specific territorial context remains mixed (Cacciatore and Panozzo 2024). While many studies document positive associations, the literature also points to important contextual factors that mediate this relationship. In our analysis (limited to the data collection in the periods 2011-2014 and 2015-2018), the presence of strong traditional cultural attractors – such as major historical cities or iconic heritage sites – appear to overshadow the contribution of creative industries, limiting their marginal effect on tourism flows. Overall, the literature suggests that the relationship between tourism and CCIs is neither automatic nor linear, but rather contingent on territorial characteristics, levels of cultural capital, and the balance between cultural and creative dimensions. This complexity calls for empirical approaches capable of capturing differentiated patterns of association across space and time, rather than assuming a uniform positive impact of CCIs on tourism performance.

The present contribution adopts a primarily methodological perspective, proposing a data-driven analysis that explores how tourism flows and the diffusion of CCIs are associated across Italian provinces. By combining administrative data on creative enterprises with tourism statistics, the study develops a set of relative indices that allow for a comparative assessment of territorial patterns of tourist attractiveness and creative-

industry concentration. The analytical framework is designed to capture how the association between CCIs and tourism varies depending on the level of cultural capital endowment, rather than assuming a uniform relationship across territories. In particular, the construction and use of composite and relative indicators make it possible to highlight differentiated configurations in which the presence of CCIs is strongly associated with tourism flows, and to identify contexts in which a very high stock of cultural capital may dominate tourism attractiveness, potentially reducing the marginal contribution of creative industries. In this sense, the paper contributes to the literature by offering a methodological tool for disentangling the complex and non-linear interactions between tourism, cultural capital, and creative industries, providing empirical evidence that supports a more nuanced interpretation of their territorial interdependencies.

Data and Methodology

This paper aims to explore the relationship between the diffusion of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) and the tourist attractiveness of Italian provinces. Administrative data from the Italian Chambers of Commerce (Camere di Commercio) were used to collect information on the number of CCIs at the provincial level (EU NUTS level 3). These data were combined with open administrative sources from ISTAT (the Italian National Institute of Statistics), the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers (SIAE), and the Central Institute for the Catalogue of Italian Libraries (ICCU) to estimate both tourist attractiveness and the cultural endowment of each province.

The definition and classification of CCIs at the provincial level follow the framework proposed by Viganò (2022). To ensure comparability across territories and to control for differences in size and population, the number of CCIs in each province was weighted by the total number of registered enterprises.

Tourist attractiveness was measured by calculating the annual number of non-resident visitors who stayed in the province for at least one night, weighted by the total provincial population. Cultural endowment was captured through the construction of a composite index that includes the number of libraries, museums, nature reserves, and archaeological parks, as well as the number of theatres, cinemas, and musical performances held annually in each province. This cultural offering index was also weighted by the resident population.

Following the methodological approach developed by Lallo (2022) and Lallo and Tavano Blessi (2022) for the analysis of the relationship between CCIs and social and human capital, both tourist attractiveness and cultural endowment were transformed into relative indices. Specifically, tourist attractiveness was expressed through the Relative Tourist Attractiveness Rating (RTAG), based on data from the Italian Chambers of Commerce, while cultural endowment was measured through the Relative Cultural Capital Index (RCuC), constructed using data from ISTAT, SIAE, and ICCU. With an average value of 100 representing the national mean across Italian provinces, RTAG values above 100 indicate relatively higher tourist attractiveness, whereas values below 100 indicate lower relative attractiveness. Both RTAG and RCuC were subsequently grouped into five categories – Very Low, Low, Medium, High, and Very High – based on their quintile distributions.

All indicators were computed as averages over two distinct time periods: 2011-2014 and 2015-2018.

To assess the association between the diffusion of CCIs and tourist attractiveness, the average dependency index (η^2) was calculated from the conditional distribution of CCIs across RTAG categories, separately for the two time periods. Values of η^2 below 0.10 were interpreted as indicating a non-significant association, values between 0.10 and 0.30 as a weak association, and values above 0.30 as indicating a moderate to strong association. To account for the potential mediating role of cultural capital, the dependency index was further computed separately for each of the five groups of provinces classified according to their RCuC level.

Results

Tables 6 and 7 show the top and bottom five provinces by tourist arrivals and the related number of CCIs for the first (2011-2014) and second (2015-2018) periods, respectively. The provinces in the top and bottom groups remain the same between the two periods and the group with the highest number of non-resident arrivals (in both absolute terms and per 100 residents) also had a higher number of CCIs per 100 enterprises, both in 2011-2014 and 2015-2018. In terms of arrivals, the average number of CCIs in the top tourist destination group (Rome, Venice, Milan, Bolzano/Bozen and Florence) was 3.3 and 3.2 per 100 enterprises in the periods 2011-2014 and 2015-2018 respectively, compared to 1.4 in the bottom group (Isernia, Benevento, Rieti, Caltanissetta and Enna) in both periods.

Table 6 - Top and bottom five Italian provinces for arrivals of non-residents who stay for at least one night, in absolute terms and per 100 residents in Italy. Comparison with the number of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs), period 2011-2014

Arrivals in a year		
	Arrivals	CCIs per 100 enterprises
Italy	104467977	2.5

Arrivals in a year per 100 residents		
	Arrivals per 100 residents	CCIs per 100 enterprises
Italy	171	2.5

Top 5 Italian provinces for arrivals		
Rome	9066226	4.4
Venice	8256496	2.3
Milan	6325617	5.1
Bolzano/Bozen	6019397	2.0
Florence	4571507	2.9
Average	6847849	3.3

Top 5 Italian provinces for arrivals per 100 residents		
Bolzano/Bozen	1182	2.0
Rimini	967	2.6
Venice	967	2.3
Aosta Valley	770	2.0
Trento	646	2.3
Average	906	2.2

Bottom 5 Italian provinces for arrivals		
Isernia	42501	1.3
Benevento	50263	1.5
Rieti	60229	1.3
Caltanissetta	62812	1.4
Enna	62898	1.2
Average	55741	1.4

Bottom 5 Italian provinces for arrivals per 100 residents		
Benevento	18	1.5
Avellino	19	1.5
Caltanissetta	23	1.4
Caserta	32	1.2
Enna	36	1.2
Average	26	1.4

Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT and Italian Chambers of Commerce

In terms of arrivals per 100 residents, the average number of CCIs in the top tourist destinations (Bolzano/Bozen, Rimini, Venice, Aosta Valley and Trento) was 2.2 per 100 enterprises in both periods, compared to 1.4 in the lowest destinations (Benevento, Avellino, Caltanissetta, Caserta and Enna).

Figures 1 and 2 show the geographical distribution of RTAG and CCIs per 100 enterprises in the period 2011-2014 (Figure 1) and in the period 2015-2018 (Figure 2): a general pattern emerges, with northern Italy showing the highest diffusion of CCIs and higher RTAG levels in both the periods, with a significant exception for Sardinia.

The strength of the association between CCIs and tourist attractiveness at the provincial level was assessed by computing the dependency index (η^2), based on the conditional distribution of the average number of CCIs per 100 enterprises across the five RTAG levels.

Table 7 - Top and bottom five Italian provinces for arrivals of non-residents who stay for at least one night, in absolute terms and per 100 residents in Italy. Comparison with the number of cultural and creative enterprises, period 2015-2018

Arrivals in a year			Arrivals in a year per 100 residents		
	Arrivals	ICCs per 100 imprese		Arrivals per 100 residents	ICCs per 100 enterprises
Italy	121783931	2.5	Italy	201	2.5

Top 5 Italian provinces for arrivals			Top 5 Italian provinces for arrivals per 100 residents		
Rome	10327783	4.1	Bolzano/Bozen	1352	2.1
Venice	9157239	2.3	Venice	1070	2.3
Milan	7402392	5.0	Rimini	1049	2.4
Bolzano/Bozen	7071263	2.1	Aosta Valley	945	1.9
Florence	5068190	2.8	Trento	767	2.5
Average	7805373	3.2	Average	1037	2.2

Bottom 5 Italian provinces for arrivals			Bottom 5 Italian provinces for arrivals per 100 residents		
Isernia	33644	1.4	Benevento	17	1.6
Benevento	47505	1.6	Avellino	22	1.6
Rieti	56866	1.4	Caltanissetta	23	1.4
Caltanissetta	60862	1.4	Rieti	36	1.4
Enna	64236	1.2	Enna	38	1.2
Average	52623	1.4	Average	27	1.4

Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT and Italian Chambers of Commerce

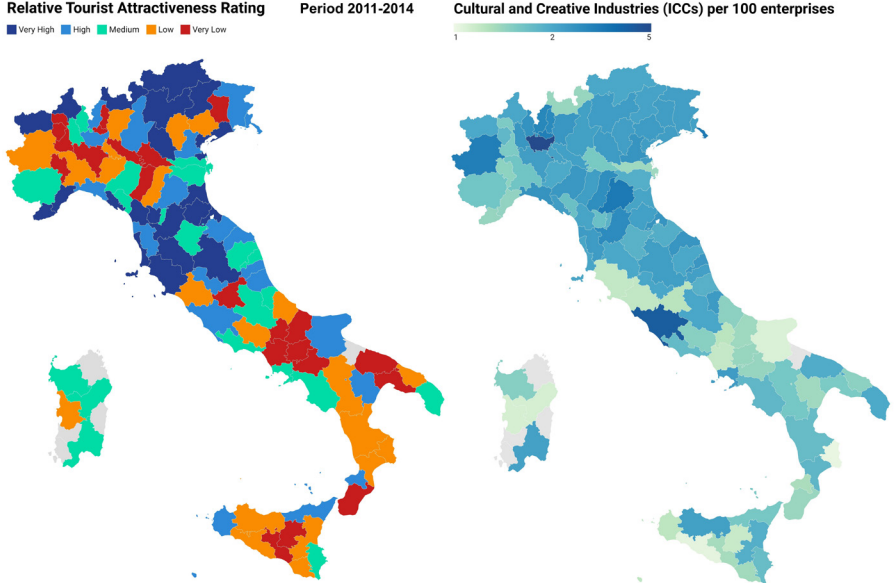
Table 8 reports the distribution of Italian provinces by RTAG level together with the corresponding average number of CCIs for each group in both periods. Although higher RTAG levels are generally associated with a greater density of CCIs, the relationship is neither linear nor particularly

strong. In particular, provinces in the highest RTAG category do not display the highest average number of CCIs. Consistently, the dependency index (η^2) is relatively low, amounting to 0.12 in the 2011-2014 period and 0.14 in the 2015-2018 period. However, since the level of tourist attractiveness could be positively influenced by cultural endowment, a further subdivision of Italian provinces by a relative index of cultural offerings (RCuC) is introduced to mediate the possible association with ICC diffusion.

Figure 3 shows the geographical distribution of the RCuC index, confirming the same general pattern in the north and south of Italy as shown in Figures 1 and 2, with the same significant exception for Sardinia.

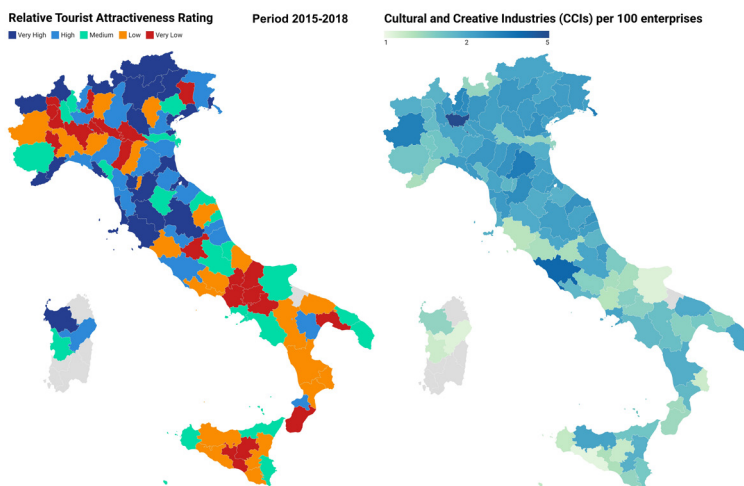
Table 9 show the provinces grouped by RCuC level, RTAG level and the related average number of CCIs for each group in both periods.

Figure 1 - Distribution of Italian provinces according to Relative Tourist Attractiveness Rating (RTAG) and number of CCIs per 100 enterprises, period 2011-2014



Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT and Italian Chambers of Commerce

Figure 2 - Distribution of Italian provinces according to Relative Tourist Attractiveness Rating (RTAG) and number of CCIs per 100 enterprises, period 2015-2018.



Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT and Italian Chambers of Commerce

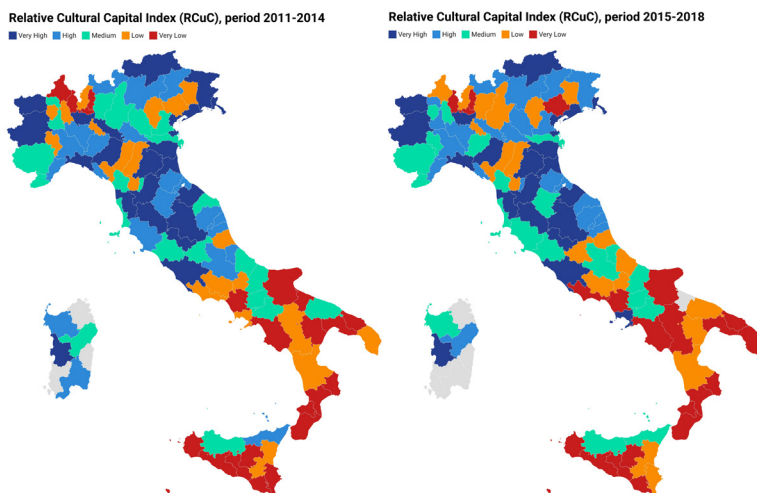
Table 8 - Italian provinces by Relative Tourist Attractiveness Rating (RTAG) and number of ICCs per 100 enterprises, period 2011-2014 and 2015-2018

Period 2011-2014			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	21	20%	1.8
Low	21	20%	1.9
Medium	21	20%	2.0
High	21	20%	2.5
Very High	21	20%	2.1
Total	105	100%	2.0
			$\eta^2=0.12$

Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	21	20%	1.8
Low	21	20%	1.9
Medium	20	19%	1.9
High	21	20%	2.5
Very High	21	20%	2.0
Total	104	100%	2.0
			$\eta^2=0.14$

Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT and Italian Chambers of Commerce

Figure 3 - Distribution of Italian provinces according to Relative Cultural Capital Index (RCuC), period 2011-2014 and 2015-2018



Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT, SIAE, ICCU

Table 9 - Italian provinces by Relative Tourist Attractiveness Rating (RTAG), Relative Cultural Capital Index (RCuC) and number of ICCs

RCuC – Very Low

Period 2011-2014			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	7	35%	1.9
Low	5	25%	1.4
Medium	3	15%	2.1
High	4	20%	1.3
Very High	1	5%	2.0
Total	20	100%	1.7
			$\eta^2=0.17$

Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	7	33%	1.9
Low	6	29%	1.5
Medium	7	33%	1.8
High	1	5%	1.4
Very High	0	0%	–
Total	21	100%	1.7
			$\eta^2=0.07$

RCuC – Low

Period 2011-2014			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	5	24%	1.9

Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	5	24%	1.9

Table 9 - continued

Period 2011-2014			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Low	8	38%	2.1
Medium	5	24%	2.1
High	2	10%	2.5
Very High	1	5%	1.8
Total	21		2.1
			$\eta^2=0.17$

Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Low	8	38%	2.1
Medium	2	10%	1.7
High	4	19%	2.2
Very High	2	10%	1.9
Total	21		2.0
			$\eta^2=0.10$

RCuC – Medium

Period 2011-2014			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	6	29%	1.6
Low	4	19%	1.9
Medium	4	19%	1.5
High	3	14%	2.5
Very High	4	19%	2.0
Total	21		1.8
			$\eta^2=0.51$

Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	5	25%	1.6
Low	3	15%	1.9
Medium	7	35%	2.0
High	1	5%	2.1
Very High	4	20%	1.5
Total	20		1.8
			$\eta^2=0.33$

RCuC -High

Period 2011-2014			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	2	10%	2.0
Low	2	10%	1.8
Medium	7	33%	2.1
High	2	10%	1.9
Very High	8	38%	2.0
Total	21		2.0
			$\eta^2=0.04$

Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	4	19%	2.0
Low	3	14%	1.9
Medium	2	10%	2.7
High	5	24%	2.2
Very High	7	33%	2.1
Total	21		2.1
			$\eta^2=0.22$

Table 9 - continued

RCuC – Very High

Period 2011-2014				Period 2015-2018			
RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC	RTAG	Provinces (N)	Provinces (%)	ICC
Very Low	1	5%	2.3	Very Low	0	0%	0.0
Low	2	9%	2.2	Low	1	5%	3.3
Medium	2	9%	2.2	Medium	2	10%	1.7
High	10	45%	3.0	High	10	48%	2.9
Very High	7	32%	2.2	Very High	8	38%	2.2
Total	22		2.6	Total	21		2.5
			$\eta^2=0.19$				$\eta^2=0.28$

Source: own estimation on data from ISTAT, SIAE, ICCU

There appears to be a positive relationship between cultural endowment and tourist attractiveness, as the share of provinces classified as having High or Very High levels of RTAG is greater among groups characterized by higher RCuC levels in both periods. Moreover, the diffusion of CCIs at the provincial level seems to be positively associated with cultural endowment: provinces with lower RCuC levels exhibit, on average, a lower density of CCIs.

However, the association between the number of CCIs and tourist attractiveness is positive and statistically meaningful only in provinces characterized by a Medium level of RCuC, where the dependency index (η^2) reaches 0.55 in the 2011-2014 period and 0.33 in the 2015-2018 period. This relationship is clearly non-linear, as already suggested by the results reported in Table 8: provinces with a Very High level of RTAG do not display the highest average number of CCIs. Conversely, provinces characterized by the lowest and the highest levels of RCuC show weak or non-increasing associations between tourist attractiveness and the diffusion of CCIs.

Discussion

Analyses of the relationship between CCIs and tourism have developed predominantly in the direction of measuring impacts at the economic, social, environmental, and urban/infrastructural levels (for recent review see Dellisanti, 2023; Sharma *et al.*, 2025). Limited, if not entirely absent,

are instead the empirical evidences indicating that the presence of CCIs, and their density, represents a factor of attraction for tourism. The present study adopts tourist arrivals as the parameter for observing the tourism phenomenon, defining this category as individuals who undertake a journey to countries other than that of their usual residence, outside their everyday environment, for a period of at least one night, according to the WTO – World Tourism Organization.

The evidence illustrated in the previous section, although presenting a low level of statistical significance, nevertheless allow some general indications to be outlined. First, it is possible to observe the existence of a general relationship between CCI density and tourist arrivals. Tables 6 and 7, elaborated on data from the Italian Chambers of Commerce relating to CCIs, present the comparison between the periods 2011-2014 and 2015-2018 and show how, both in absolute terms and in relative terms (scale per 100 inhabitants), areas characterized by a high stock of elements related to CCIs exhibit the best conditions of tourist attraction. Conversely, territorial areas with a modest stock of CCIs display a lower margin of competitiveness.

The maps further indicate that areas showing a greater capacity for tourist attraction in relation to the presence of CCIs are predominantly located in the northern and central parts of the national territory. These territories are more urbanized and densely populated and, historically, endowed with a greater supply of CCIs compared to the South and the Islands. A further interpretative element of the evidence can be identified in the mobility infrastructures present in these areas. Indeed, it can be observed that the territories of Northern and Central Italy exhibit a higher concentration of airports, railways, roads and, more generally, infrastructures and connectivity capacity compared to the South and the Islands. These conditions favor both improved accessibility for visitors and greater internal mobility, consequently increasing the potential tourist competitiveness of these areas.

Partial confirmation of what has been illustrated is provided by a study conducted by Pulido *et al.* (2021), which highlights a positive relationship between demographic density, the presence of CCIs and the tourist attractiveness of a territory, further demonstrating how the presence of a solid CCIs ecosystem, namely a high density of both components, is able to enhance territorial tourist competitiveness.

A second level of analysis sought to highlight how the sole dimension of cultural supply may become a driving force of a territory's tourist attractiveness. As indicated in the methodological section, this in-depth analysis is based on information from ISTAT, SIAE and ICCU and was developed in light of the high national cultural heritage, which permeates

the Italian territory in a deep and structural manner and may represent a priority element of tourist attraction compared to the dimension of Creative Industries. Figures 8 and Table 9 therefore illustrate the evidences emerging from the correlation between activities referring exclusively to the dimension of Cultural Industries and the tourist attractiveness of the territory. In provinces characterised by a high level of cultural assets (i.e. a high or very high RCuC score), particularly those driven by well-established attractions such as major historical, natural, or architectural features (e.g. Rome, Venice, Florence, and the Italian Alps), the results show a weaker association between the level of tourist attraction and the level of cultural and creative industries (see Table 9, last panel). This suggests that a territory's cultural heritage probably has a greater impact on its capacity to attract tourists than creative industries do. In these contexts, the tourism flows potentially associated with the presence of CCIs appear relatively marginal compared to those generated by traditional cultural attractors, resulting in a statistically non-significant association between CCI density and tourism attractiveness.

Overall, three general patterns can be identified:

- (i) In territories displaying a low density of activities, infrastructures, and events related to both CCIs, tourism attractiveness remains limited.
- (ii) In the presence of a dominant cultural attractor – such as major historic centers, museums, or archaeological sites – this tends to act as the primary driver of tourism flows, generating a crowding-out effect on the creative dimension, even where CCIs are relatively well developed, as observed in several provinces of Northern Italy.
- (iii) Where a more balanced configuration between cultural and creative activities is present, tourism attractiveness appears to be driven by the integration of the two dimensions, rather than by the predominance of either one alone.

Conclusions

This paper has examined the relationship between the diffusion of CCIs and tourism attractiveness across Italian provinces through a comparative, data-driven approach. The results point to a generally positive but non-linear association between CCI density and tourism attractiveness. Provinces with higher levels of cultural capital tend to show stronger tourism performance, confirming the importance of cultural endowments in shaping destination appeal. However, the relationship between CCIs and tourism flows is not uniform across territories. The association is

more evident in provinces characterized by intermediate levels of cultural capital, where the coexistence of cultural assets and creative activities appears to support distinctive tourism dynamics. In contrast, in provinces with very low cultural endowment, both CCIs and tourism attractiveness remain limited, while in contexts with very high cultural capital – often dominated by consolidated heritage attractors – the marginal contribution of CCIs to tourism performance appears weaker.

From a methodological perspective, the study contributes to tourism research by proposing a relative and comparative analytical framework that captures territorial heterogeneity without assuming linear or deterministic effects. The use of relative indices of tourism attractiveness and cultural capital allows for the identification of differentiated configurations of destination performance and highlights how the role of CCIs varies depending on contextual conditions. The analysis demonstrates the usefulness of correlation-based measures in identifying meaningful patterns and supporting more nuanced interpretations of destination competitiveness.

There are limitations of the study which suggest further research. Quantitative analyses such as the one proposed here could be complemented by qualitative and mixed-methods approaches, including case studies and interviews with local stakeholders, to better understand the mechanisms through which CCIs influence tourism dynamics.

Overall, the findings support a nuanced view of the relationship between tourism and CCIs, suggesting how the latter should be considered as contextual factors whose relevance depends on the balance between cultural capital, creative activities, and broader territorial characteristics. The study provides a methodological basis for more context-sensitive interpretations of destination attractiveness and tourism competitiveness.

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SECTION III

ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSION, AND MEDIATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF VENETO'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Nicoletta Pesaro

“Translating is not only connected with linguistic competence, but with intertextual, psychological and narrative competence” (Eco, 2008, p. 13). Following this fundamental principle, this introduction highlights the pivotal role of translation – conceived as both a methodology and a mindful practice – within the fields of tourism, culture, and the creative industries. More specifically, it examines the role of translation within the framework of the iNEST¹ project as a key tool for mindful mediation.

The overall activities of this project were supported by the members of the research team from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, who in recent years have been active within the increasingly demanding field of translation for tourism. The concept of a mindful approach to the complex system of communication and translation for tourism has been investigated from both theoretical and practical perspectives by Mirella Agorni (2016 and 2020), while Maria Elisa Fina has conducted research in the field of audio guiding at national and international level (Fina, 2018; Katan and Fina, 2024). Regarding audio description, Paolo Magagnin (2023) is exploring the landscape of museum translation in the Sinosphere, basing his reflections on his experience in Chinese-Italian audiovisual translation pedagogy. Evidence of the growing interest in this discipline at Ca' Foscari is further provided by early-career researchers such as Viviana Mauro and Liang Cien, who have devoted their PhD research to these topics, contributing to the field's general expansion.

¹ The acronym iNEST stands for Interconnected Nord-Est Innovation Ecosystem, a national inter-university project funded by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). Subtask 4.3, “Mindful communication and cultural mediation for more sustainable, accessible, diverse, and inclusive places”, was coordinated by the author of this introduction and comprises Mirella Agorni, Federica Alabisio, Nicoletta Pesaro, and Xu Fei.

Indeed, the researchers involved in this subtask not only share a background in Translation studies; they are also driven by the conviction that a mindful translational perspective is essential when developing projects that bridge the gap between public and private institutions, cultural heritage sites, industry professionals, and a diverse community of patrons. At the same time, the two chapters of this section demonstrate the responsibility held by researchers to transform their theoretical expertise into practical solutions that benefit both specific audiences and society at large.

This section presents the final results of the research conducted by the group working on "Mindful communication and cultural mediation for more sustainable, accessible, diverse, and inclusive places". The primary objective of this group was to explore possible strategies for enhancing museum inclusivity throughout Northeast Italy. Specifically, it aimed to develop specialised tools for both visitors with diverse abilities and Chinese speakers, enabling them to engage more closely and effectively with the history, art, and cultural heritage of the Veneto region. In doing so, the project sought to facilitate a more comprehensive and immersive museum experience – particularly for those who navigate museum spaces and layouts through specific cognitive systems. This approach addresses the unique needs of different age groups, individuals with varied sensory processing profiles, and audiences whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ significantly from those of local patrons or visitors with a Western-centric cultural heritage.

Despite addressing different types of visitors, both studies share a common understanding of what is at stake when making cultural resources and historical heritage accessible to a wider audience, taking into account diverse cultural, sensorial and cognitive sensitivities. This field engages not only with texts and words – the traditional domain of translation – but also with images, sounds, materials and cultural backgrounds. In this sense, mindful translation involves enabling every group of visitors to experience Veneto's culture and art through their own cognitive capacities and by meeting their specific needs. This extends to the choice of technical devices – such as audio guides, apps and immersive tools – which are organised not as mere linguistic replacements, but as creative adaptations tailored to meet the "horizon of expectation" of the patrons.

This requires an empathetic approach from museum institutions to anticipate the potential limitations and barriers that specific types of visitors encounter when engaging with heritage displays. Often, historical information and cultural artifacts are presented in an inaccessible way – through opaque language or complex terminology – due to a lack of alignment with the visitors' diverse personal competencies and cognitive

skill. According to both chapters, a “mindful” use of technology can successfully address and overcome these barriers. Technology alone cannot provide a mindful experience; however, it can offer ad hoc solutions when applied within a psychologically and culturally mindful translation framework, combined with a creative approach.

Accessibility is achieved by analysing physical, cultural and psychological barriers that prevent visitors from fully enjoying museum spaces, and subsequently “translating” them into mindful, playful and stimulating experiences. This is the case illustrated in the chapter by Mirella Agorni, Maria Elisa Fina and Federica Alabiso: the adoption of mediation and participatory practices – such as focus groups and audience-oriented mediation – allowed researchers to design an app for Vicenza’s Palladium Museum. Built on narrative adaptation, popularisation and multimodal integration, the app provides on-demand access to textual, visual, auditory and tactile resources for visitors of all ages and backgrounds. After providing a detailed report of the research methods and results, the authors conclude by emphasising the importance of considering the personal needs and demands of groups with diverse cognitive backgrounds. They argue that this is essential for designing display and information systems that align with the communication ecology. This focus-group method and the inclusion of subjects with specific cognitive needs in testing the final museum app represent an example of best practices in the approach to cultural heritage tourism. On the one hand, it provides a useful recognition of specific expectations from the audience, which can significantly improve the management of contemporary museums; on the other hand, it confirms the multiple skills required of translators to meet the needs of an increasingly varied audience. Ultimately, designing such specific experience-related devices is not only more inclusive, but is bound to improve the cultural experience for the general public.

In designing communication methods, the specific needs of Chinese-speaking visitors are addressed in the chapter by Xu Fei, which reports the results of a study on the main factors affecting the quality of museum experiences in Venice for the growing number of Sinophone tourists. This chapter analyses the demands and limitations related to this group’s experience as well as the discrepancy between institutional intent and visitor-oriented communication. In addition, a set of fundamental strategies to improve the experience of the aforementioned patrons has been identified, focusing on a mindful and suitably mediated translation of museum texts, especially regarding cultural and historical specificity. The study demonstrates that strategies such as readability, cultural

explicitation and narrative coherence are essential. This chapter also highlights the ethical value of fostering inclusive practices, aimed at bridging local narratives with global expectations. Furthermore, the author emphasises the need for an integrated approach to translation, involving institutions, curators and professional translators alike. This includes the implementation of quality assurance processes, such as peer reviews, and the production of reliable translation memories, glossaries and style guides. The reflections conducted on this specific *linguaculture* are built on a sound comprehension of cultural differences. In an era of globalisation, being able to design a culturally sensitive experience is the key to a more sustainable and inclusive relationship with patrons from diverse cultures – an approach that can also be replicated for other groups beyond Chinese and Sinophone audiences.

Despite the differing needs and communication strategies deployed across these two areas of applied research, the project has demonstrated a growing necessity for collaboration between academic translation research, public and private cultural institutions, and the technology sector. In the current digital landscape, app-based technology serves as an ideal interactive tool for fostering integration, providing visitors with an intuitive and seamless experience. Moreover, mindfully designing such an integrated system allows for the progressive recognition and fulfillment of the needs of diverse audiences. Adopting this approach for other historical and artistic sites in the Veneto region would transform engagement with cultural heritage into a mindful, ethically grounded, and effective experience. Ultimately, it would facilitate a more appropriate and sustainable approach to local heritage for all visitors – particularly at a time when many sites are subject to chaotic crowds and a superficial engagement with the location.

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8.

MUSEUM COMMUNICATION, ACCESSIBILITY, AND TECHNOLOGY: THE TICHO PROJECT

Mirella Agorni, Federica Alabiso, Maria Elisa Fina

Introduction

Museums and cultural heritage institutions have traditionally catered to an educated and culturally engaged audience. However, they are now expected to adopt a more inclusive role, interpreting and disseminating knowledge, and promoting accessibility, integration, and social inclusion. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), museums are non-profit, permanent institutions that explore, collect, conserve and exhibit tangible and intangible heritage, ensuring public access and ethical, sustainable engagement with communities (2022).

In order to reach a broader audience, many institutions have adopted new technologies, resulting in advances in digital content, such as text-based, audio, multimedia and multisensory guides, as well as AI-driven tools and tactile resources, including 3D replicas. However, the communicative and linguistic dimensions of museum text production remain largely unexplored despite their importance for visitor understanding and engagement. Linguistic diversity poses an additional challenge: international tourists often require translations, typically into English as a lingua franca. Drawing on Jakobson's (1959) broad model, museum translation encompasses interlingual processes (e.g. transcreation), intralingual practices (e.g. popularisation and narrativisation) and intersemiotic forms of transmediation.

Although translation is central to cultural accessibility, research on museum texts remains limited. Liao (2018) draws attention to its marginal treatment, while Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego (2012) and Neather (2024) highlight its importance. The lack of comprehensive research in this area indicates the necessity for a systematic study of museum translation and its effect on accessibility.

The TICHO project

The project “Translating Italian Cultural Heritage for Outsiders” (TICHO) – which was developed at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice within the framework of Italy’s *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza PNRR)*¹ – aimed to fill this gap by investigating translation and accessibility in museum communication, with a specific focus on cultural institutions in the Veneto region (north-eastern Italy). The main objectives of the project were the following:

1. to assess the current state of accessibility in museums in the Veneto area;
2. to identify effective strategies for improving accessibility;
3. to develop innovative communication models tailored to a diverse audience, based on audience reception research.

To achieve these objectives, the project drew on several interrelated research areas. Theoretical frameworks include mindful mediation (Agorni, 2016, 2018; Katan, 2016, 2021), multimodal theory (Kress, 2010; Maci, 2020) and popularisation (Garzone, 2020). Further methodological insights are drawn from studies on audio description (Neves, 2017; Fina, 2018; Perego, 2023), 3D modelling and rapid prototyping (Sdegno *et al.*, 2013), and translation reception (Agorni, 2018; Katan, 2016). In addition, the project incorporates insights from flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Gilli & Rozzi, 2013) to assess visitor engagement.

The main challenges addressed by the project revolved around knowledge, communication and cognitive barriers that hinder visitor engagement. Visitors can be categorised as “insiders” who share linguistic and cultural familiarity with museum professionals, “partial insiders” who understand the language but lack domain-specific knowledge, and “outsiders” who experience additional barriers due to linguistic, cultural, educational, and/or sensory differences (Katan, 2016).

A key assumption underpinning the project was that all “outsiders” face some form of communicative challenge, broadly understood as (dis)ability. This term is here used in a broad sense to include not only sensory disabilities (e.g. visual and hearing) but also a wide range of differences that may thwart effective communication. These include limited proficiency in the target language, lack of familiarity with cultural heritage

¹ Ca’ Foscari University of Venice is part of the iNEST (Interconnected North-East Innovation System) network, Spoke 6. www.consorzioinest.it/en/#content-1-en (last accessed May 2025).

discourse, and socio-cultural constraints that affect reception. The project therefore adopted a broad definition of differently abled visitors, who have been categorised as follows:

1. international visitors of various ages, using English as a native language or as a lingua franca;
2. Italian adult visitors with visual disabilities;
3. Italian adult visitors with hearing disabilities;
4. Italian young visitors, more specifically digital natives aged 15 to 23 years.

By considering these diverse visitor profiles, the project aimed to improve museum accessibility through culturally and linguistically informed translation and communication practices, which were integrated into an inclusive design framework for an interactive mobile application.

Phases of the project

To fulfil the objectives mentioned in the previous section, the project was organised in four main phases, as follows:

1. case study on accessibility in museums in the Veneto region;
2. focus groups organised at the selected museum;
3. application design and creation of contents based on the results of the focus groups;
4. testing of the mobile application.

Focusing on phase 2, the present article describes the organisation of the focus groups and summarizes their results, including the suggestions and needs expressed by the participants. The case study on museum accessibility in Veneto, analysed during phase 1, was published in another article by Alabiso (2026).

The project was carried out at the Palladio Museum in Vicenza, Veneto². The technology-related aspects (i.e. app design) were supervised and catered for by CONFORM S.c.a.r.l., an Italian company operating at both national and international levels to provide multimedia and technological solutions for cultural heritage promotion and tourism development.³ Before delving into the details of the project, we will provide an overview of international accessibility policies, followed by an outline of existing best practices in accessible communication for visitors categorised as “partial insiders” and “outsiders”.

² www.palladiomuseum.org/en/ (last accessed May 2025).

³ <https://conform.it/en/> (last accessed May 2025).

Accessibility and Universal Design

Over the past two decades, interest in cultural heritage accessibility has grown considerably, prompting extensive debate among policy-makers and scholars from various fields. This has led to new models of disability⁴ and the development of international frameworks. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) first referred to “accessible tourism” in its 1999 Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted in 2006, became the first international instrument to establish minimum standards for the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention defines accessibility as the set of measures enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life by ensuring equal access to the physical environment, transport, information, communication technologies and public services (Article 9).

The UNCRPD was ratified by the EU in 2011 and by Italy in 2009. With the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, the Charter of Fundamental Rights – containing Article 26 on the integration of persons with disabilities – became legally binding. Since 2010, the EU has launched two decade-long strategies to guarantee equal participation and protect disability rights⁵. To meet these objectives, EU accessibility policies rely on Universal Design (Mace, 1976; 1985), defined in Article 2 of the UNCRPD as designing environments and services usable by all people, supplemented where necessary by assistive devices⁶.

Lingua-cultural accessibility

In the cultural heritage sector, a significant share of the “partial insiders” and “outsiders” is made up of foreign visitors who have limited to no proficiency in the local language and lack familiarity with the host country’s socio-cultural context. Museums, in particular, may pose

⁴ For a discussion and comparison between the medical, social and human rights models of disability, see Lawson and Beckett (2021). See also Greco and Di Giovanni (2017) for account of disability and human rights.

⁵ They are called, respectively: “European disability strategy 2010-2020” and “Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030”. For a summary on EU policies concerning people with disabilities, see [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698811/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698811_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698811/EPRS_BRI(2021)698811_EN.pdf) (last accessed May 2025).

⁶ www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-2-definitions.html (last accessed May 2025).

significant barriers since they are ridden with cultural references. The most widespread solution to such barriers is the complete or partial translation of museum texts. However, as Katan (2012) and Neather (2024) have shown, such translations do not always consider the socio-cultural barriers that lie behind the surface of language difference, resulting in texts that include obscure, unexplained cultural references (ibid). Agorni (2016, 2018) and Katan (2016, 2021) have addressed the issue by developing the concept of “mindful mediation”. To mediate in a mindful way is to adopt a translation approach that factors in culturally-informed communication habits and values. Techniques include the explicitation of hidden cultural references, the reorganization of content, the addition or deletion of information, the adaptation of tone and style to the conventions of the reader’s culture (Manca, 2013; Katan, 2016; Neather, 2024). Yet, “mindful mediation” does not aim to simplify the text nor to completely adapt it to the reader’s culture; rather, it keeps some level of foreignization to engage visitors and fulfil their wish to explore new cultures (Agorni, 2016, 2018).

Accessibility for patrons with visual disabilities

In the museum context, the most common methods to enable access for blind or low vision patrons rely on multi-sensoriality, primarily using hearing (audio descriptions), touch (tactile replicas) or both senses (such as tactile tours and explorations). Audio description (AD) and its linguistic, paralinguistic and multimodal features have been researched extensively over the past two decades (Perego, 2023; Igareda, 2012; Fryer, 2010, 2016; Jimenez Hurtado & Soler Gallego, 2013; Braun, 2008; Braun & Starr, 2020; Neves, 2016, 2017; Eardley *et al.*, 2016; among others). Some scholars have also developed free training materials for AD professionals as part of the EU-funded *ADLAB* and *ADLAB PRO* projects⁷ (Remael *et al.*, 2015), and a set of guidelines has also been developed by *Art Beyond Sight* (Giansante, 2015) in the USA. As far as Italy is concerned, museum AD guidelines have been set out by non-profit *Associazione Nazionale Subvedenti Onlus* as part of the *Descrivedendo* project.⁸ AD guidelines address all aspects of a museum visit, from how to operate the AD equipment to navigation and description of artworks.

⁷ www.adlabproject.eu/ (last accessed May 2025).

⁸ www.descrivedendo.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SINTESI-linee-guida-Descrivedendo-aggiornate-2021.docx.pdf (last accessed May 2025).

Accessibility for patrons with hearing disabilities

Deaf communities around the world have a strong identity basis and their members share common (sign) languages and cultures on a national basis. For a great share of Deaf⁹ people, sign language is their mother tongue (Roque Martins, 2016), whereas their country's oral/written language is their second language. Nonetheless, an equally significant share of people with hearing disabilities do not know sign languages, and some using hearing aids can communicate orally. Such diverse language landscape leads to complex language interactions within mixed groups of deaf people, with some members seamlessly switching between oral and sign languages (Goss *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, to properly address such a composite audience, museum communication should include oral languages (in their written and oral modes) as well as sign languages.

Accessibility for young visitors

Research by the Arts Management & Technology Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA) emphasises how the combination of playful elements and interactive storytelling within museum tours not only helps capture the attention of digital natives but also promotes longer-lasting learning and a greater sense of belonging to cultural heritage (Kowach, 2019; Zhou, 2021). Among the key elements to attract young people to the museum are challenges and games, interactive narration, team-based activities and technologies such as mobile devices and augmented reality AR (see also Boschetti *et al.*, 2022). These latter allow museums to design unique visit experiences, while at the same time allowing visitors of all ages and backgrounds to adjust the visit to their time constraints and interests.

The Palladio Museum

The museum that was selected for the TICH0 project is the Palladio Museum in Vicenza. The selection took place by means of a public call for

⁹ The capital letter is used to refer to people who associate their deafness with their social or personal identity and identify as part of the Deaf community (Kalisher 1998). Not all people with hearing disabilities identify as part of the community, thus the use of d/Deaf later in the text (Roque Martins 2016).

interest that was issued within the above-mentioned framework of Italy's *National Recovery and Resilience Plan*.

The Palladio Museum is housed in Palazzo Barbarano, a well-preserved Palladian building in Vicenza. Owned by the architectural research institute *Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio* (CISA), it showcases Palladio's construction techniques, design language and key architectural themes mainly through large wooden models. The exhibition includes written captions, videos and video interviews in both Italian and English. An audio guide in Italian and English is also available and tactile tours of the models can be requested by blind visitors in either language.

The museum's visitor demographics show that 41% are Italian and 59% are foreign, and the dominant age group belongs to the 35-55 age range, in line with the audience engaged via the museum's social media channels.

Focus groups

The phase of the research involving focus groups was carried out by Federica Alabiso between September and December 2024 with a two-fold aim: on the one hand, to collect suggestions and feedback regarding the visit options offered at the Palladio Museum at the time of data collection as well as possible intervention strategies to be adopted; on the other hand, to collaborate with the involved stakeholders from the very beginning of the project. Nine focus groups were organised, involving overall seventy-four participants, as follows:

- Focus Group 1: young Italian visitors aged 15 to 16 years (five participants);
- Focus Group 2: German adults aged 30 to 65 years (fifteen participants);
- Focus Group 3: American adults aged 30 to 65 years (seven participants)¹⁰;
- Focus Groups 4 and 5: young Italian visitors aged 20 to 23 years (four and six participants respectively);
- Focus Groups 6 and 7: young German visitors aged 18 to 20 years (thirteen and seventeen participants respectively);
- Focus Group 8: Italian adults with visual disabilities aged 40 to 70 years (four participants)¹¹;

¹⁰ These were accompanied either by their Italian partners or Italian collaborators.

¹¹ These were members of the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted – Vicenza (*UICI, Unione dei Ciechi e degli Ipovedenti – Vicenza*).

- Focus Group 9: Italian adults with hearing disabilities aged 25 to 35 years (three participants)¹².

The groups to be interviewed were selected for them to be representative of the target groups involved in the project (see section 2). More specifically, groups 1, 4 and 5 relate to target group 4 of the project (young Italian visitors); groups 2, 3, 6 and 7 relate to target group 1 of the project (international visitors of various ages, using English as a native language or as a lingua franca); groups 8 and 9 relate respectively to target groups 2 (Italian adult visitors with visual disabilities) and 3 (Italian adult visitors with hearing disabilities).

Focus group organisation

The focus group was organised as follows:

- step 1: tour of the museum;
- step 2: structured interview.

Step 1 involved dividing each group into two sub-groups: one sub-group undertook the tour of the museum autonomously, while the other sub-group used the standard audio guide available at the museum.¹³ However, for blind and low vision visitors or semi-autonomous elderly visitors a museum operator conducted the tour. This was necessary because, at the time of the study, no self-guided tour options accessible to these groups were available.

Following the museum tour, the participants gathered with the researchers and representatives of the project partners for the interview session (step 2). The focus group was structured as a list of open-ended questions regarding the following topics: the participants' habits and preferences in visiting museums; their experience visiting the Palladio Museum; their opinions regarding museum apps; suggestions for the app to be designed for the Palladio Museum. The focus groups were recorded following permission by the participants and the contents of the recordings were then transcribed into Word files.

¹² These were members of the Italian Association of the Deaf (ENS – Ente Nazionale Sordi) and of the Committee of Young Italian Deaf People – Veneto (CGSI – Comitato dei Giovani Sordi Italiani – Veneto).

¹³ Obvious exception was made for Group 9 (deaf and hard of hearing visitors).

Focus group findings

The answers to the various questions overall present a high degree of diversification: this is not surprising, considering the subjective filter that normally characterises the museum experience. Due to space constraints, it is not possible to provide a detailed overview of the results obtained from each of the focus groups. Therefore, the results will be summarised for each of the four parts of the interview.

Part 1 – Habits and preferences in touring museums

Starting with visit preferences (solo vs. group visit; audio guided visit vs. no audio guide, group visit with a human guide), opinions are divided according to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each visiting options. The participants seem to overall agree that a solo visit without an audio guide makes it possible to set their own pace and customise the visit, but it may also result in boredom, especially when the museum does not offer interactive features. The audio guide to the museum is overall considered a useful plus when it allows visitors to customise the tour, for example by choosing which tracks to listen to (cf. Fina, 2018, p. 39). Group visit allows visitors to interact and share views on the displayed items, but imposes a pace which may not suit every visitor. As for group visit with a human guide, the mentioned advantages include communication tailored to the group's needs – which makes content uptake easier – as well as access to information which may not be present in the museum leaflet.

Interestingly, the groups that expressed specific visit-related needs are the blind and low vision visitors, who need to be led by a sighted person if not by a museum guide, and parents with young children, who tend to only visit museums that offer activities and materials specifically devised for children.

Part 2 – Feedback on the Palladio Museum

In this sub-section we will provide an overview of the strengths and weaknesses reported by the groups regarding the museum in terms of the way the visit was organised, the effectiveness/usefulness of the materials they were provided, and issues relating to their background knowledge vs cognitive effort in content uptake.

Strengths and weaknesses

The visit to the museum was overall well-received by the participants of all groups regardless of the visit mode. The strengths of the museum were identified in a number of aspects of the exhibition relating to its layout, its themes, and the building housing it. Particularly appreciated were the detailed scale models reproducing Palladio's original buildings, the sample of the materials used by Palladio, and the video-interviews projected on the walls.

As far as weaknesses are concerned, the participants detected flaws in way-finding and navigation, for example the lack of a portable map and instructions for self-orienting, and of numbers or names labelling the rooms.

Flaws were also detected in the descriptions of the items and in the fact that some useful information (such as the museum introduction and the description of the frescoes and courtyard) is only available in the audio guide.

Particularly interesting are the weaknesses that can be related to accessibility in its broad sense. Among the flaws reported by the interviewees we find the lack of playback controls for the video interviews and poor interactivity (e.g. the fact that architectural scale models cannot be touched).¹⁴ Language barriers were also detected: the video interviews in Italian are only subtitled in English, which makes them inaccessible to non-Anglophone deaf visitors, since there is no interpretation into Italian Sign Language (LIS) either. Interpretation in LIS is deemed essential by Group 9 as many deaf people have LIS – and not Italian – as a mother tongue; as a result, they might not be able to understand technical terms but also all those features of spoken language that are used in the museum texts.

On a more technical level, the participants reported excessive volume of audiovisual items, which can be disruptive for visitors using the audio guide or taking part in a guided tour and the lack of chairs or benches for visitors to rest during the tour or to sit for admiring the frescoed ceilings.

The visitors with visual disabilities took the human guided tour “Palladio per mano / Touch”, since no self-guided option was available at the time of data collection. As a result, for this category of visitors the weaknesses of the museum can be identified in complete lack of accessibility when visiting alone.

The weaknesses identified by the groups were of pivotal importance to the research, because they were used as a basis for structuring the museum

¹⁴ Touch is allowed only in specific guided tours.

app and its contents as well as making decisions on how to improve the existing materials.

Background knowledge and cognitive effort

We will now explore the responses concerning potential challenges experienced by the groups in understanding the content and how these challenges possibly relate to their background knowledge on architecture. The museum's contents were deemed overall intelligible by most of Italian and Italian-speaking visitors. As they explained, they were more or less familiar with the topic because they remembered it from school studies. However, some visitors noted that the information contained in the written texts was not always fully clear, but its meaning could be deduced from the context.

Interestingly, the visitors who took the audio guided tour seem to have experienced fewer problems in content comprehension because the audio guide helped bridge the gap in background knowledge and navigate the rooms.

Difficulties in content comprehension were mainly raised by non-Italian speaking visitors. LIS (Italian Sign Language) and German native speakers attributed these difficulties to the fact that they had to take the tour in a foreign language (Italian for LIS speakers, and English for German visitors). In contrast to the Italian visitors, the American visitors, despite being native English speakers, found some architecture-related terms unclear. Interestingly, one of the Italian companions in Group 3 suggested that the difficulties encountered by the American visitors were probably due not to the language itself, but to a lack of these architectural items both in the architecture and in educational programmes in their own geo-cultural context. This issue is strongly in line with the concept of “mindful translation” illustrated in Chapter 8 and validates our decision to adopt this culturally sensitive approach to accessibility.

Part 3 – Opinions regarding museum apps

Regarding the participants' opinions about museum apps in general, their answers can be summarised in a list of features that would make a museum app useful as well as of possible disadvantages. Their answers are based either on their prior experiences with museum apps or on how they imagine such an experience, and are summarised in Table 10:

Table 10 - Participants' general opinions on museum apps

Features that make museum apps useful	Possible disadvantages of museum apps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard interface with playback controls • Features for way finding within the museum • Possibility to customise the tour (selecting contents according to age, interests or time) • Access to extra contents • Instant recognition of the work via Bluetooth (for blind visitors) or QR code 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased or hindered group interaction • Distraction from onsite experience (loss in direct engagement with the artworks) • Reduced incentive for in-person museum tours (if the app contains extensive content accessible from home) • Distraction caused by pop-up notifications if the app is used on a personal smartphone

As can be noticed, the aspects that seem to be highly valued by participants are customisation and autonomy (cf. Fina, 2018, p. 45), with a museum app making sense only if it contributes to enhance and enrich the visitor's experience.

Part 4 – Suggestions for the Palladio Museum app

The final part of the focus groups is the most interesting one as it provides the participants' responses regarding the app of the Palladio Museum. The following list contains the features that the participants suggested that we include, classified according to specific areas of intervention:

- Technical aspects:
 - Easy to download and install, compatible with Android and iOS and their related screen readers, low storage consumption;
 - Eye-catching and user-friendly interface;
 - Adjustable playback speed for audio tracks.
- Way-finding, navigation, and instructions:
 - Map of the museum (plus portable tactile version);
 - Numbered audio tracks matched with the rooms and the exhibited objects;
 - Enlarged, high-contrast numbers and Braille or tactile QR codes next to the exhibited objects;
 - Ability to recognise the work that is being approached – either via Bluetooth or phone camera – and to automatically play the corresponding track;

- Video tracks in LIS associated with a picture of the corresponding object;
 - Audio description containing explicit and easy-to-follow directions for moving safely and independently.
- Contents:
 - Versions into other foreign languages;
 - Customisable visit paths (different lengths, thematic focuses, audience-tailored content, content choice);
 - Additional information on the rooms (decorations, artworks, original uses of the rooms);
 - Images depicting intricate details of the building’s decorations;
 - Supplementary material on Palladio’s architecture and the related national and international historical context;
 - Videos explaining the construction process of the buildings;
 - Video interviews projected in the rooms embedded in the app;
 - Glossary of technical terms (including LIS video interpretation);
 - Video interpretation in LIS of all materials;
 - Alternative narration strategies (e.g. narration delivered by a fictional character voicing Palladio).
 - Technology:
 - 3D models to explore the villas from the smartphone;
 - A 3D model of Palazzo Barbarano allowing visitors to self-orient within the building;
 - AR to visualize the real-world context of the villas represented by the exhibited models.
 - Interactivity:
 - Mini games;
 - Quiz for testing learning;
 - AD matched to tactile exploration.

Other suggestions include making the materials in the app accessible also outside the museum facilities, either in the app itself or in downloadable format. Furthermore, deaf participants suggested installing a video in LIS at the museum’s entrance, providing practical information about the visit and app usage. However, they also firmly believe that ticketing staff should receive basic training in LIS interaction.

The features that the interviewees mentioned as undesirable are very few and include mandatory registration or account creation (which should

be optional, instead), advertisement, pop-ups or paid premium versions, and information/materials overload.

We will now summarise the responses to the very last question, which investigated the participants' potential interest in a gamified treasure hunt. Several participants declared themselves very interested in engaging with a quiz-style game whose aim would be to assess their acquired knowledge and enable competition with other visitors. This gamification item could be either real-time or asynchronous. In the former case, the game would involve whole groups or other individuals visiting the museum at the same time. This option was deemed particularly well-suited for family and educational visits. In the latter case, the game would be supported by a ranking system tracking scores from all players, with visitors achieving top scores in their respective groups being awarded a museum token.

While the proposal seems to have been welcomed with interest and enthusiasm, several participants emphasized the imperative that the treasure hunt remain optional rather than replace the standard visit.

Conclusions and future steps

The focus groups aimed to gather the views and needs of visitors with different profiles and characteristics concerning their experience of the Palladio Museum and the accessible features to be incorporated into the app. The needs expressed by each group closely reflect the barriers they encounter. Their suggestions largely revolve around two core requirements: a personalised visiting experience and greater autonomy in navigating the museum. Non-Italian-speaking visitors emphasised the need for communication tailored to diverse cultural backgrounds, while deaf visitors stressed the importance of content in LIS. Visitors with visual disabilities highlighted the importance of AD enriched with spatial directions and tactile aids to support independent exploration. All groups shared the desire for autonomy, particularly with regard to wayfinding. Clear, accessible instructions for moving around the museum were considered indispensable by visitors with and without sensory disabilities.

Views on gamification were similarly aligned. While participants accepted that a treasure hunt could be an enjoyable optional activity, they agreed that it should never replace the standard visit. This suggests a shared perception of museums as fundamentally educational institutions, whose educational role may be supported but not replaced by edutainment.

Focus group findings informed the structure and content of the app, which was developed according to Universal Design principles. Despite

budgetary and curatorial constraints, the app provides on-demand access to textual, visual, auditory and tactile resources. Three communication strategies were prioritised: narrative adaptation (simplification, transcreation and mindful translation), popularisation for non-specialist audiences and multimodal integration (AD, tactile elements and visual enhancements).

The materials were tested in summer 2025, and the findings from this phase will contribute to the development of accessible communication frameworks that enable diverse audiences to fully engage with cultural heritage.

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9.

INCLUSIVE TRANSLATION FOR CHINESE TOURISM IN VENICE: MULTILINGUAL STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMUNICATION

Fei Xu

Introduction

Venice occupies a singular position in the global imagination as a symbolic destination of cultural heritage, artistic prestige, and historical continuity. The city also has increasingly taken on an important place in the itinerary of Chinese outbound tourism in the last 20 years and is driven by larger shifts in mobility, consumption, and cultural aspiration. The experience that Chinese visitors have with Venice is not just visual or spatial but communicative, which is mediated by institutional texts, museum labels, brochures, audio guides and digital interfaces. In this respect, translation is not an auxiliary service but a fundamental infrastructural component of access.

This chapter holds that the concept of inclusive translation within cultural heritage contexts should be perceived as a way of cultural mediation, as opposed to a linguistic substitution. In this regard, the concept of inclusivity is not only about access to a variety of languages, but the degree to which translated materials allow visitors to build meaningful stories, contextualize themselves both cognitively and culturally, and engage in the interpretive space of the museum or heritage site. The quality and design of the translated communication is a determining factor of both understanding and emotional involvement to Chinese tourists in Venice whose linguistic and cultural distance from the source context is often more pronounced than with the European tourists.

The chapter is organized in the following way. Section 2 describes the communicative demands and limitations that define Chinese tourism in Venice, in terms of language accessibility and informational requirements. Section 3 conceptualizes inclusive translation as cultural mediation based on the insights of museum research and translation theory. Section 4

discusses the multilingual approaches to cultural heritage communication, focusing especially on selective explicitation, adaptive recontextualization, and terminological mediation. Section 3.3.5 provides practical observations based on the context of Venetian heritage to demonstrate common issues and feasible implications. The concluding section ponders over translation as an infrastructural state of inclusivity and specifies institutional practice perspectives.

This analysis is informed by sustained engagement with multilingual heritage materials in Venice, where discrepancies between institutional intent and visitor-oriented communication emerge most clearly in the design of Chinese-language resources.

Chinese Tourists and Linguistic Accessibility in Venice

Chinese outbound tourism has experienced qualitative change where it was mainly a group-based and an itinerary based travel to a more diverse and experience-based form of cultural consumption. Museums, historical palaces and urban landscapes (UNESCO-listed) are being increasingly positioned as locations of symbolic interest, where cultural capital is accreted in the course of learning, documentation, and narrative engagement. In this context, language serves as a bridge and a barrier.

The current communicative ecology of the cultural heritage sites in Venice is still predominantly based on Italian and English. Although the languages act as default interpreters to international visitors, they do not invariably address the interpretation requirements of the Chinese audiences. English-language texts, usually written with European or North American audiences in mind, are likely to operate on the assumption of a common cultural background, knowledge of Western art-historical types, and tolerance of implicit allusions. When these texts are brought directly into Chinese via condensed or literal translation, it is often the case that the narrative coherence and cultural context are lost.

In the view of the Chinese guests, successful access does not rest on the lexical understanding only. Instead, it is the capacity to contextualize a monument, work of art or historical figure within a larger conceptual context. This encompasses the perception of the institutional working (e.g., the political role of the Doge's Palace), socio-historical processes (e.g., the correlation between Venice and its maritime empire), and symbolic messages inherent in architectural or artistic structures. The lack of cultural adaptive translation strategies may result in what may be described

as a state of informational opacity whereby bits and pieces of information are provided to visitors with no interpretive foundation.

The concept of linguistic accessibility is supposed to be framed, then, as a communicative comfort. This concept involves readability, story flow, clarity in the use of terms, and the correspondence between information density and the cognitive demands of the target audience. Communicative comfort may necessitate a greater level of contextualization and explicitness in Chinese-speaking tourists whose educational-cultural reference frameworks do not closely align with those assumed by numerous European heritage texts.

The proliferation of digital platforms in Venice, including the use of QR-code-based guides, mobile apps, and multimedia installations, has broadened the opportunities of multilingual delivery. But the availability of technology does not necessarily imply inclusive communication. In the absence of a strategic approach to translation design, online content stands a danger of repeating the same constraints of the printed materials, but in a different format.

Inclusive Translation as Cultural Mediation

In translation studies and museum communication, the concept of mediation has become prominent as an approach to move away from linguistic equivalence. In cultural heritage, texts do not passively convey information, but create interpretive routes by which visitors are welcomed to interact with the past, with institutional discourses, and with collective identities. Translation, in this regard, is working in a complex semiotic context that is framed by spatial arrangement, visual appeal, and institutional control.

The notion of museums and heritage sites as “translation zones” stresses the plurality of voices, codes and cultural frames that relate to and among themselves in these spaces. Original texts, curatorial narratives, visual displays and visitor interpretations co-exist, and interact, to provide a communicative field which is layered. Translation is the interpreter between these layers to audiences that need not necessarily be co-sharing the source language, and cultural context.

Inclusive translation is, therefore, related to the process of changing source-oriented fidelity to audience-oriented mediation. This is not to reduce and simplify content, but rather to restructure information, in ways which do not reduce interpretability at the expense of conceptual integrity. The important dimensions of this process are:

1. **Readability:** The use of patterns of syntax and word choice that makes understanding possible without loss of conceptual accuracy. In Chinese translations, this may be a balance between formality in written registers, and clearness and narrative.
2. **Cultural Explicitation:** The tactical presentation of contextual information which is implicit in the source text but is necessary to understand the meaning of a concept, institution or historical reference by the target audience.
3. **Narrative Coherence:** The presentation of data in a logical and thematic order that help to establish meaning (as opposed to the introduction of discrete facts).

Ethical and institutional considerations are also involved in cultural mediation. Heritage institutions perform the role of authoritative history and identity narrators. They bring this power into new linguistic and cultural realms through translation. Inclusive practices thus have consequences in terms of representation, cultural sensitivity and such a balance between local views and global availability.

Multilingual Strategies for Cultural Heritage Communication

In heritage environments, multilingual communication is not about producing parallel text but rather about strategic differentiation. The same content in Italian, English, and Chinese versions may be used to achieve different communicative goals and appeal to audiences with different expectations, degree of previous knowledge and interpretive practices. Acknowledging such differences is an antecedent to inclusive translation design.

Selective Explicitation

Selective explicitation is the deliberate insertion of information into the translated text to explain culturally or institutionally particular allusions. In the context of Venetian heritage, this can include explaining political institutions, e.g., the position of the Doge, or historical ideas, e.g., how the Venetian Republic governed the seas. Although these features might be obvious to Italian readers or generally well known to European readers, they frequently need to be framed by context when targeted at Chinese visitors.

Selectivity is essential. Excessive explanation might result in cognitive overload and interfere with aesthetic experience of the site. It is not the

purpose to turn interpretive texts into encyclopedic entries, but to pinpoint conceptual points at which the absence of background knowledge would hinder comprehension.

Adaptive Recontextualization

Adaptive recontextualization is the reinterpretation or modification of the narrative form of a text to fit interpretive norms of the intended audience. In Chinese informational discourse, and especially in education and culture, there is a tendency to proceed through a general context to a specific detail and the creation of a conceptual frame before presenting individual elements. In contrast, most Western museum texts are more object-oriented, starting with the description of an artifact or space and positioning it historically later.

In translation, the rhetoric sequence of the source text could retain formal equivalence but compromise communicative success. Recontextualization enables the translator to restructure the information without losing its conceptual content, thus improving narrative accessibility.

Terminological Mediation

Heritage communication is dependent on the use of specialized terminology, including art-historical categories, architectural forms and institutional names. Direct lexical equivalence between Italian or English and Chinese is frequently non-existent or deceptive. Terminological mediation thus necessitates a balance between transliteration, descriptive translation and conventional equivalents.

As an example, the translation of institutional names or architectural typologies can require a mixture of phonetic and functional description, to express identity and roles. The consistency of materials is vital as the divergence of terms may lead to misunderstanding and reduced perception of impact of the institution.

Digital Interfaces as Inclusive Devices

Digital solutions offer the possibilities to adopt a layered approach to communications. Practical content may be presented by means of QR codes, mobile guides and multi-media platforms, in which visitors may request further clarification to be given on request. This format makes it

easy to customise navigation through information, which operates under different levels of interest and background knowledge, especially among Chinese-speaking audiences.

Nevertheless, digital inclusiveness can only be effective with good translation and content design. Unedited or machine-generated translations which are becoming increasingly common in digital environments may come with inaccurate translations and stylistic inconsistencies that affect credibility. Professional mediation and institutional control is essential.

Institutional and Policy Implications for Inclusive Heritage Communication

Besides the degree of individual texts and translation modes, institutional policies and governance structures have basic influence on the inclusive multilingual communication in cultural heritage contexts. Translation does not occur in isolation; it is embedded in organizational systems that set priorities, distribute resources, and determine the level of engagement with the audience. In the case of heritage institutions in Venice, it is the availability or non-availability of systematic language policies that is the direct determining factor in the uniformity, visibility and maintenance of Chinese-language delivery.

One of the most important dimensions is the standardization of multilingual practices. Translation efforts in most institutions are designed on a project-by-project basis, often inspired by short-term funding programs or by cooperative endeavors. Although these strategies may result in new pilot projects, they do not often result in sustained incorporation in institutional processes. Without standardised rules on terminology, style conventions and quality control, platforms may become fragmented, with printed brochures, audio guides and digital interfaces presenting different versions of the same content, or even conflicting versions.

Policy-wise, inclusivity can be considered a social obligation, rather than optional enhancement. There is a mandate of public access and educational outreach to cultural heritage sites: especially those that have international presence and UNESCO recognition. By this, multilingual communication is a subpart of the infrastructural situations within which the cultural sphere can be engaged. The prioritization of some languages over others carries the implicit determination of patterns of accessibility, which represent which audiences are imagined as central and which as marginal.

Institutional investment in professional mediation is another significant aspect. The increasing popularity of automated translation systems and crowd-sourced solutions are characteristic of more significant trends of digital transformation, yet they also pose questions of accuracy, ethics of representation, and institutional voice. Heritage communication is concerned with official discourses of history, identity and cultural worth. Dependence on such reports by non-expert or automatic systems is dangerous to plausibility and interpretive consistency. The planning of the collaborative models integrating the curators, translators and cultural mediators can help introduce the assurance of the multilingual content as that defined by the scholarly integrity and the audience driven design.

Lastly, the role of evaluation and feedback mechanisms should be mentioned. Inclusive communication is not an event but an adaptation. Empirical data regarding comprehension barriers, information preference and expectations of experience could be provided with feedback from Chinese-speaking visitors (digitally, through surveys or a guided visit). This information can be used to improve the process of translation recurrently and the evidence-based language policies can be developed.

As translation is finally put into an institutional and policy-focused context, now heritage organizations can afford to leave their ad-hoc solutions behind and engage in multilingualism in a sustainable manner. By so doing, they are optimizing the role of translation as organizational element of the cultural availability and as an instrument of the strategic resources in the design of global tourism and intercultural discourse.

Implementation Frameworks and Quality Assurance in Multilingual Heritage Translation

Although the normative foundations of inclusive multilingual communication are strategic principles and institutional policies, their efficacy relies on the specific implementation frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms. In heritage environments, which are often marked by sophisticated content, multi-stakeholder environments, and varied visitor demographics, translation quality cannot be afforded a one-time fixed result but has to be viewed as a continuous process.

An initial implementation element relates to workflow design. Production of multilingual content usually incorporates curators, educators, designers, and external language experts. Lack of well-defined role and channels of communication means that translation will be brought in at the very end of the content development process where space and

design decisions already restrict the extent to which significant adaptation can occur. When translators and cultural mediators are introduced into the curatorial process earlier, anticipatory modifications can be made, including the identification of culturally sensitive references, the choice of terms to be rendered in a standardized way, and the decision of those aspects that are most likely to be most effectively explained selectively.

A second, equally important dimension is quality assurance mechanisms. In addition to simple correctness of language, heritage translation should be evaluated by interpretive success. This includes assessing the coherence of translated stories, institutional tone and accommodation to cognitive expectations of the target audience. The divide between the philological precision and the curatorial intent may be overcome by peer review models, in which the translation is not only viewed by language experts but also by experts covering the subject matter.

The production of terminological resources is an effective way of keeping the media consistent between themselves and from one period to the next. Multilingual glossaries, style guides and translation memories can be used as an institutional knowledge base, particularly in situations with a high rate of employee turnover, or reliance on external service providers. With Chinese language materials, these resources might relieve the discrepancy in the rendering of institutional titles, architectural terms and historical concepts, increasing readability as well as credibility of the institutions.

Digital infrastructures also determine the conditions of implementation. Mobile applications, interactive platforms and content management systems offer modular and updatable communication, but they also require governance structures to ensure version control and accountability. There can be inconsistency between on-site and online materials in the absence of the established protocols, which will not lead to the increased confidence of users.

Lastly, implementation structures have the advantage of feedback loops connecting translation practice and visitor experience. Insights into the reception and interpretation of multilingual content can be created through user testing sessions, digital platform analytics, and guided group interviews. These data may be used to inform iterative refinement, where translation becomes a moving element of heritage management.

When implementation and quality assurance are described as part of the multilingual strategy, the heritage institutions will be able to put into practice the principles of inclusivity and mediation that were mentioned in the previous sections. In such a way, translation is not a peripheral service, but a controlled process anchored in the organizational and technological environment of cultural communication.

Case References from Venetian Heritage Contexts

The results of the observations conducted on the largest Venetian heritage sites show how the use of multilingual communication patterns can influence the interpretive paths of the visitors in tangible and rather disproportionate ways. Although institutional discourse often focuses on internationalization and openness, the materiality of access, including language availability, textual structure, and media integration, still leads to the creation of various experiences between visitors based on their language background.

One of the recurring themes is related to the use of English as a mediator language. In most instances, English translations of institutional texts operate as a condensed mediating position between the Italian original and other language versions. A cumulative reduction may take place when Chinese translations are based on these intermediary forms instead of the original Italian. Historical accounts tend to be condensed into an order of date, names, and stylistic terms, and explanatory connective material is deleted, either in the name of space economy or design symmetry. To Chinese-speaking visitors, this compression may create informational fragments without an informative frame around them, which prevents the individual facts to be placed in a consistent historical or cultural framework.

This problem becomes especially apparent in the case of the translation of institutional roles and political structures. Allusions to the model of governance, civic offices, or legal traditions of the Venetian Republic are often maintained by lexical equivalence without any functional clarification. Such terms, though possibly familiar to the European viewer due to mutual historical patterns, might need mediation by context to the Chinese visitor whose system of educational references are structured by other political and cultural histories. Without the selective explicitation, these concepts are likely to remain obscure, constraining the extent to which the historical significance of the site can be explored.

The same is the case with architectural or artistic terminology. Heritage texts often depend on stylistic categories and formal markers based on Western art-historical discourse. Architectural order terms, spatial typologies, or artistic development periods might be translated into Chinese by transliteration or standardized equivalents, but without adequate contextual support. Consequently, the translated text can be accurate in form, but fall short of delivering the conceptual utility of the category to the larger narrative of the site.

The reception of multilingual content is further preconditioned by media format. Physically limited by space and layout conventions,

printed brochures favor visual symmetry more than narrative continuity. This may lead to the development of parallel columns of text that are not functionally equivalent in terms of the range of information. In comparison, audio guides and mobile apps are more flexible to layered communication and allow to provide more detailed explanations for the user, background modules or thematic paths. It has been noted, however, that these digital affordances are not always exploited in connection with Chinese language content. Meanwhile, Chinese versions take the shape and brevity of print publications, rather than the adaptivity of the medium to their advantage.

The uneven distribution of Chinese language resource in the urban heritage is another dimension. Usually, large attractions at least partially provide multilingual services (usually through digital interfaces), whilst smaller museums and heritage regions usually only provide Italian and English. This difference is the one that determines the flows of visitors and the visitor perception, which in the real sense constitutes an order of the accessible and inaccessible sites. Among the Chinese speaking audience that visits, the language assistance can be included to the planning of the itineraries, which will not just influence the experience of the single tourists, but also tendencies of cultural consumption in the city as a whole.

The voice and tone of the institutions also play a part. Translated text may also receive a register that alternates between formal institutional discourse and informal explanatory language, which raises the suggestion of contradictions of source of translation and editorial authority. Such inconsistency may have consequences on the legitimacy of the institution especially in circumstances where the cultural heritage is tied to the legitimacy of education and academic credibility.

These observations show the importance of situating translation within a holistic communicative ecosystem. The access to multilingualism is not formed during the very creation process of translation, but is based on the cooperation of the content design, the choice of the media, the institutional policy, and the quality management. Without such working together of parts even a well-constructed translation would not perform on its integrative promise.

Comparatively, those sites with more prominent interpretive planning for incorporating translation present a more advanced storyline comprehension and consideration of the viewer. The joint work of the curatorial will and the linguistic mediation allow creating the thematic focus points that are aimed at an ideal range of guests, including the Chinese-speaking audience that may be interested in both information and cultural connotations.

Venetian contexts of heritage, in this sense, are an example of the difficulties as well as opportunities of inclusive multi-lingual communication. They disclose how translation may serve as a minimal accommodation or become a transforming mediator, which not only determines what visitors comprehend, but also how they place themselves in the cultural and historical context of the city.

From the perspective of ongoing research on Chinese-language mediation in Venetian heritage contexts, these patterns suggest that translation quality is closely linked to institutional decision-making rather than to linguistic competence alone.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the idea that inclusive translation of Chinese tourism in Venice is to be theorized as a kind of cultural mediation that is entrenched in the communicative infrastructure of heritage institutions. Accessibility is not guaranteed by the mere presence of multilingual availability. Instead, inclusivity is a result of aligning translation strategies with cognitive, cultural, and narrative expectations of the target audiences.

Key strategic dimensions in improving the interpretability, without the loss of conceptual integrity, have been identified as selective explicitation, adaptive recontextualization and terminological mediation. Although digital platforms are increasing the scope of multilingual communication, they do not reduce the necessity of professional and institutional control in translation design.

Institutionally, translation is a participation mechanism. Translated texts contribute towards the creation of inclusive public spaces by shaping the ways in which visitors understand, negotiate and experience cultural heritage. In the case of Venice, a city at the intersection between domestic identity and international tourism, multilingual communication aimed at the target audience is not only a feasible requirement, but also a means to meet the moral obligation of cultural accessibility.

Possible future directions would include the integration of user comments, the development of standardized word banks, and the exploration of the use of collaborative paradigms between cultural organizations and linguistic interlocutors. These efforts can also make translation part of the repertoire of sustainable and inclusive communication of heritage.

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A COLLECTIVE EFFORT FOR A MODERN TALE OF TOURISM, CULTURE, AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Serena Volo

Tourism is shaped by narratives, images, stereotypes and symbolic constructions that influence how places are perceived, lived, governed, and transformed for and because of tourism. Communication actively contributes to the symbolic construction of destination realities. Through selective framing, tourism messages privilege emotionally resonant, visually iconic, and easily narratable elements, translating the heterogeneous fabric of everyday life into coherent and affective stories that circulate easily among different audiences, often consolidating reductive framings of destinations' meaning and exacerbating stereotypical representations. Narratives constitute the symbolic frame through which places are desired, experienced and remembered. By emphasizing tourism symbolic nature, this volume brings together theoretical advancements and empirical insights drawn from diverse disciplinary, geographic and institutional contexts. Indeed, the variety of disciplines and voices represented in this volume is in itself an expression of the relevance of *understanding and representing differences and differently*. Providing shared repertoires of signs, metaphors, images and scripts that orient visitors' expectations, tourism communication can shape and reshape the interpretation of imaginaries, and as destinations remain dynamic and contested, it is necessary to foster counter-narratives that can renegotiate the meaning of places.

With this in mind, across its sections, the book explored how destinations and cultural heritage are continuously shaped and reshaped through storytelling practices, visual representations, translation processes, and creative industries. Bringing together scholars from tourism studies, literary and cultural studies, semiotics, translation studies, regional economics, and communication, the volume offers an interdisciplinary reflection on the power of narratives in constructing territorial identities and

on the responsibility embedded in such constructions. The contributions converge around shared concerns: *How can stakeholders rethink tourism communication in a less stereotyped and commercial way? How can destinations be narrated in a more inclusive, critically aware, and culturally grounded way?*

The first section, dedicated to *shaping and reshaping narratives and visual representations of destinations*, addressed the urgent need to dismantle stereotypical tourist imagery and to promote more viable forms of engagement with territories. Emerging from a transdisciplinary research process on transmedial narration in north-eastern Italy, the contributions proposed a methodological approach grounded in speculative design and creativity-based practices. Tourism imaginaries were examined not as neutral reflections of reality, but as constructed frameworks that orient expectations and behaviours.

Roberto Gigliotti and Eliana Saracino investigated how transmedial strategies can generate alternative narratives of sustainable tourism, advocating for a model centred on the “emancipated traveller” – a visitor capable of critically engaging with media representations and seeking authenticity beyond cliché. Through case studies, they demonstrated how provocation, simulation, and community involvement can counteract the alienation produced by overtourism, redefining visitors as caretakers rather than extractors of territorial value. Alessandro Cinquegrani complemented this perspective by analysing literary, artistic, and cinematic representations of Venice that resist its reduction to a decadent or carnivalised stereotype. His work reveals the persistence of alternative imaginaries that portray Venice as a living, evolving city. Fabrizio Panozzo further argued that tourism actively contributes to the symbolic construction of space, examining how the notion of the “typical” can shift into stereotype and how storytelling operates as a key mechanism in the overexposure – or erasure – of places. Together, *these chapters foreground the transformative potential of narrative intervention.*

The second section, *Destinations and attractions as cultural construction: Imaginaries, Identities and Meanings*, deepened the analysis by exploring how places are imagined and structured across symbolic, communicative, and economic dimensions. Destinations are approached not as fixed geographical entities, but as dynamic cultural constructions shaped by stories, images, and stereotypes. From literary representations of mountain landscapes to digital storytelling in agritourism, from semiotic analyses of online reviews to empirical studies on cultural and creative industries, the section traces a trajectory that moves from symbolic narrative production to structural territorial dynamics.

Francesca Pangallo reconsiders mountain tourism through literary and cultural perspectives, demonstrating how archetypes continue to shape imaginaries and calling for storytelling and cultural engagement as tools for preserving and reactivating collective and individual stories, for the benefit of both residents and visitors. Giulia Grillini and Serena Lonardi examine “slow storytelling” in agritourism communication, showing how narratives centred on cyclical time, family heritage, and sustainability contribute to alternative branding strategies aligned with slow tourism values. Estela Mariné-Roig, Serena Volo, and Serena Lonardi adopt a semiotic lens to reveal how destination image is culturally mediated through language, stereotypes, and historical context. Using tourists’ online reviews, the semiotic analysis shows that perceived destination image is not homogeneous but relational, comparative, and shaped by historical and linguistic contexts. Finally, Federica Viganò, Giorgio Tavano Blessi, and Carlo Lallo investigate the relationship between cultural and creative industries and tourism attractiveness in the Italian context, highlighting the importance of territorial configurations. *The section underscores that symbolic frames and material structures are deeply intertwined.*

The third section, *Accessibility, Inclusion, and Mediation in the Translation of Veneto’s Cultural Heritage*, shifted the focus to translation as both methodology and ethical practice. The contributions demonstrate that translation in tourism extends far beyond linguistic transfer. Inspired by the idea that translating requires intertextual, psychological, and narrative competences, the section foregrounds mindful communication as a strategy to foster inclusivity in museums and heritage sites across Northeast Italy.

The chapters address diverse audiences, including visitors with different cognitive and sensory profiles and Chinese-speaking tourists, proposing participatory design processes, app-based mediation tools, and culturally sensitive translation strategies. Technology is conceived not as an end in itself, but as a means of creating empathetic, multimodal experiences tailored to specific “horizons of expectation”. Mirella Agorni, Federica Alabiso and Maria Elisa Fina contribution shows how to integrate narrative adaptation and multimodal resources via an app to provide accessible, on-demand content tailored to diverse cognitive and sensory needs, enhancing both translation strategies and the overall visitor experience. Xu Fei analyses the factors shaping Sinophone tourists’ museum experiences in Venice, highlighting gaps between institutional communication and visitors’ cultural and linguistic expectations and proposing an integrated, ethically grounded translation strategy – centred on readability, cultural explication,

and quality assurance – to foster more inclusive and culturally sensitive mediation. By integrating academic research, institutional collaboration, and digital innovation, these chapters maintain that mindful communication and cultural mediation are essential for more sustainable, accessible, diverse, and inclusive places. Overall, *the section exemplifies how theoretical reflection on communication can translate into practical solutions.*

Overall, the contributions in this volume argue for a critical interrogation of the significance that narratives transmit and through which destinations' imaginaries, identities and meanings are constructed and mediated. To reimagine tourism entails reconfiguring the narrative frameworks that define territories – ensuring that these stories foster care, inclusivity, and represent cultural depth rather than reproducing stereotypes, encouraging exclusions, or reiterating spectacularised consumption practices. A *novel tourism destination tale* is then a collective responsibility that includes actionable policies and ethical accountability of those who produce, circulate, translate and consume destination's representations.

In the hope of witnessing a meaningful shift in the prevailing narrative, I would like to conclude by expressing my profound gratitude to all contributors for their unwavering dedication, intellectual rigor, and sustained scholarly engagement throughout this demanding, extensive and multidisciplinary research endeavor. My sincere appreciation is likewise extended to those who supported the activities of the research group in numerous and often unseen ways, particularly in helping to navigate and mitigate the constraints of what was, at times, an administratively cumbersome structure, thereby enabling the research work to unfold more effectively and enhancing the overall value and impact of our collective efforts.

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La passione per le conoscenze

This edited volume explores the role of narratives and communication strategies in representing, shaping and transforming tourism destinations and practices, and cultural and creative industries. It aims to critically investigate the power of communication and collective imagination in reshaping destination identities and creating new meanings, focusing on dismantling stereotypical tourist imagery and fostering culture-driven narratives that can reposition destinations in more sustainable, inclusive, and creative ways.

Through interdisciplinary perspectives, the volume connects art, storytelling, marketing, semiotics, literary studies, and applied economics. By addressing sustainability, accessibility, inclusion, and multicultural mediation, the authors provide conceptual frameworks and methodological tools to re-imagine, reconstruct, and re-experience tourism narratives, encouraging more responsible, ethically sound, and culturally mediated tourism communication practices.

The volume is intended for scholars and researchers in tourism studies, destination marketing, cultural studies, art and creative industries, as well as PhD candidates and advanced master students. It also addresses policymakers, destination managers, communication professionals, and cultural practitioners interested in innovative storytelling, creative industries' contribution to territories, and novel communication strategies.

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This research has been carried out within the PNRR research activities of the consortium iNEST (Interconnected North-East Innovation Ecosystem) funded by the European Union Next-GenerationEU (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR) Missione 4 Componente 2, Investimento 1.5 D.D. 1058 23/06/2022, ECS_00000043 –Spoke6, RT4, CUP I43C22000250006). This manuscript reflects only the Authors views and opinions, neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be considered responsible for them.