

## Tourism, Public Spaces and Urban Cultures

# Who lives heritage: investigation on the impact of tourism flows and heritage protection in the use of public space.

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**Abstract:** The study turns to a theoretical reflection on the outcomes that the heritage protection over the last decades had on the use of public space and urban life, trying to compare the effects that have been observed on different urban models such as large metropolitan cities and small historic towns. The aim is to investigate the different responsibilities that contribute to the process of moving urban life away from historical and heritage sites, studying, among these, the impact of mass tourism.

**Keywords:** tourism, heritage, public space, landscape

### Introduction

It has been a long time since the protection of the heritage, both in urban areas and in smaller towns, has been increasingly accompanied by economic interests triggered by the strong tourist flows that characterize our time. The implications of this phenomenon can be traced on several fronts: from the hardships caused by a real estate market increasingly oriented to temporary rentals, to the musealization of small historic centers that, on the Italian territory, are emptying of inhabitants and filling up with seasonal tourists, unable, on their own, to revive the places or to substantially reactivate the local economy. In this context, the public spaces of big cities do not avoid the consequences of mass tourism.

Tourism, in recent decades, has been the industry that has perhaps more than anyone else changed numbers, nature and purpose, from aristocratic travelers of the Grand Tours between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, to the masses of people of all nationalities surrounding the main monuments of the world. Through the twentieth century and the technological evolution of the media and transport, the progressive lowering of travel costs and the disappearance of distances, mass tourism has invaded the centers of major capitals. International tourist arrivals in the world have grown almost uninterruptedly: from 25 million in 1950, to 278 million in 1980, passing through 528 million in 1995, up to over a billion in 2013 (and according to UN estimates, the sector, which will continue to grow by an average of 3.3% per year, is expected to double by 2030, up to 1.8 billion per year).

Assaulted are the most important and significant capitals, the UNESCO sites, which for some time was blamed for declaring the mummification of cities by marking them as "World Heritage", and putting them into the spotlight of mass tourism (from the article "La maledizione dell'UNESCO", Sciortino 2019, Panorama<sup>1</sup>). A tourism often concentrated in some parts of the year, paralyzing some parts in the heart of the city, morphologically not suitable to accommodate the flow of people we see walking through the alleys of our historic centers.

The other side of the coin is the paradox that sees small historical masterpieces, smaller towns such as small towns in Lazio, or small towns in the inner Cilento, desolate and abandoned. These centers, rich in history and heritage, are outside major touristic routes, difficult to access (lack of a quick connection to the networks of rail or public transport, or large leaps in altitude due to the morphology of many smaller centers) and so difficult to discover even for those tourists interested in different experiences, slower and of higher quality, compared to those of major destinations.

Over the years, some of them have become true ghost towns, often becoming targets to speculators who, by buying almost the entire historic centre, have transformed them into luxury theme hotels and open-air wellness centres, effectively erasing all the connotations of the city in what thus becomes a mere scenario.

For abandonment and depopulation, congestion and mass invasion both produce a chain of disappearance of memory and identity and the death of our cities. If, in fact, we take up again the Socratic thought according to which man is composed of the physical body, material, and soul, immaterial, and apply it to our cities, we understand that the part of immaterial and invisible city is not only people living there, but the mixture of tales and stories, memories and principles, languages and desires, institutions and projects that have determined its current form and that will guide its future development. And as Settis reminds us in his "Se Venezia muore", cities die for three reasons: when a ruthless enemy destroys them, when a foreign people settle there with force chasing away the natives, or when the inhabitants lose memory of themselves, and without even realizing it they become foreigners to themselves and enemies of themselves.

### **The periphery in the historical centres**

Gentrification and depopulation are thus the two extreme phenomena that afflict the Italian historical centres today. To define these phenomena it is necessary to keep in mind that the recurring cyclical nature of economic crises, the instability of markets, the processes of late industrialisation and deindustrialisation, climate change and deterioration of ecosystems have transformed the traditional perspectives of urban development and settlement and socio-economic dynamics at all latitudes.

Since the second post-war period we have witnessed a strong industrialization of the Italian territory, which has produced already at the end of the '80s a territory characterized by a system structured around poles of attraction, the provision of primary services, or large cities, which experienced phenomena of polarization, congestion, limited accessibility. Around them, gravitate belt areas characterized by a metropolized territory (Indovina, 2009), a fragmented and widespread urban continuum, dependent on economic dynamics and commutism from the large main nucleus, which invades the rural space, contaminating it with unusual functional mixtures, dismantling the structural plots (Macchi Cassia, 1992). The resulting territory has the pathological characteristics of an enormous proliferation of settlements in widespread form with flows of multidirectional private mobility (Ricci, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.inu.it/wp-content/uploads/Panorama\\_Unesco\\_22\\_maggio\\_2019.pdf](http://www.inu.it/wp-content/uploads/Panorama_Unesco_22_maggio_2019.pdf)

The progressive expansion of the belt areas around the attractive poles and the corresponding territorial disequilibrium contribute to delineate the so-called internal areas, defined by the Unit of Evaluation of public investments as "areas far from the centres of provision of essential services such as education, health, mobility, connectivity, characterized by processes of depopulation and degradation", which today constitute 61% of the national territory where, however, less than 20% of the Italian population resides (ISTAT, 2016), a percentage significantly reduced compared to the first decades of the 20th century. The present differences are not only due to the classic North-South gap, but also to the many factors inherent to the unequal development between town and country, between mountain and plain, between coast and hinterland (Marchetti, 2017).

In such a context, the very notion of "periphery" no longer measures the physical distance of a place from the central area, but rather recalls the characteristics of "economic and social marginality, building degradation and lack of services". (Bando "Periferie" DPCM 25 May 2016) typical of the development of large urban areas as a whole. These peculiarities are also found within the historical stratification of urban systems, structures and open spaces, which is the main reference for the identity and self-representation of local communities.

In recent decades, in fact, the profound socio-economic processes of gentrification and turistification, which characterize in particular the historic centers of large cities, have led to the escalation of problems related to the deterioration and impoverishment of contexts of historical value, with increasingly evident effects of removing the memory of places and local identities. These elements are associated with processes of abandonment and disposal of spaces, complexes and facilities that are no longer functional or appropriate in the context in which they are inserted (large hospitals, markets, theaters, cinemas, meeting places and spaces of relationships), due to the emptying of the catchment area, difficult accessibility or structural obsolescence.

These state assets are now subject to privatization and incompatible reuse, transformed into supermarkets or large stores, following the legislative decree 85 of 2010, the rule on the so-called "federalismo demaniale" signed by Calderoli, Berlusconi and others. This makes it possible for the City to sell all public state property, 536 pages of property of immense value that now the municipalities can put in the hands of private individuals.

Perhaps the island of Certosa will never be sold, but only because it costs too much and pays too little, not because it is a common good, and the mere price of all state property makes Italy in fact a giant supermarket (Settis, 2014). But the city, with its buildings and its heritage, also has a soul, the so-called invisible city.

Crossing the Alps and stopping in France, the report "L'economie de l'immateriel" considers immaterial values (which cannot be valued) as the basis for tomorrow's growth: "there is an inexhaustible wealth that is a source of development and prosperity: the talent and passion of women and men", we read on the first page. Talent and passion triggered and nourished by cultural memory. The report was commissioned by the Ministry of the Economy (2006, Chirac presidency) and concludes that intangible values *"hide an enormous potential for growth, which can stimulate the economy of France by generating hundreds of thousands of jobs, and preserve as many as would otherwise be in danger"*.

## **Big congested centres**

### *Venice*

The symbol is undoubtedly represented by the City of Venice. The territory of the City of Venice, according to the current administrative division, comprises in addition to the lagoon city, a large area of mainland, which includes Marghera, Mestre and other areas, such as the airport of Tessera. And it is here that the population has headed in recent decades, especially the younger generations and students who move there from all over Italy. Despite the internal movement, in this area taken as a whole population has fallen by as much as 100 000 inhabitants from 1971 (363 062) to 2011 (263 996), but the data are much more dramatic if you look only at the

historic center, from 108 426 in 1971 to 56 684 in 2014. As Settis recalls in his "Se Venezia muore", only the terrible plague epidemic of the 1600s had reduced Venetian population by half in this way. Since the 1970s, a new plague has been spreading, with an increasing number of elderly and exodus of residents, a low birth rate, a continuous contraction of population, and a city that is running away from itself.

As the city empties, the wealthy around the world buys houses, pieces of Venice to use five days a year, distorting the market and creating a price system that expels the Venetians and causes a gentrification perhaps unique in the world. Meanwhile, every year eight million tourists flow into the streets for thirty-four million presences, against a maximum "load capacity" of 12 million (Tattare, 2014): in other words, for every inhabitant of Venice there are 600 floating visitors, deeply altering the economy, demographics, but also social and physical balances. The city is now dominated by a tourism monoculture that exiles the natives and binds the survival of those who remain and the city itself almost exclusively to the intention of servicing the tourist, with b & b, restaurants and hotels, parties ad hoc, in order to transform their residence in the old city in a profitable extra-hotel activity. Often a small contribution to the tax is one of the pros of living in Venice. While everyone in the world dreams of living a bit of the magic the city has to offer, are countless the Venetias that have sprung up all over the world, the Venice of the north, the Venice of the south, the 27 Venetias scattered in the United States, starting from the famous Venice beach, the Venetias of the east, which is punctuated India, Japan, China.

The image of Venice today represents a model of life, exportable and exported more than any other in the world. The aggression against the city is like an embrace of love, but that progressively tightens and damages parts of the city surrounded by the grip. In recent days we have seen the impressive images of the cruise ship that hit the boat along the Giudecca canal<sup>2</sup>, making even more evident the risks and incompatibility of the system of exploitation of these places, denounced almost prophetically at the Art Biennale, by the artist Banksy in the performance in St. Mark's Square of "Venice in Oil" (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Venice on Oil, Banksy

<sup>2</sup> <https://tg24.sky.it/cronaca/2019/06/02/venezia-incidente-nave-crociera-video>.

But the people of Venice are not tourists, not even the most careful who spend a few days or weeks there. It is not that of those who own but do not live in the crowd of second and third houses. *“Neither can be what men and women must be for a city: the living blood that circulates in the veins that are streets and squares, the guardian and creator of memory, a community that identifies the physical form of the city and its ethical reason.”* (Settis, 2014)

### **Rome**

In this context, Rome also represents an emblematic case, both as a city and as a historic centre. The territory of its municipality is today the largest in Italy, with a population of 2,865,000.

The 2008 General Regulatory Plan includes the historic centre as part of the wider Historical City, which includes the integrated whole of the central historical area inside the Aurelian Walls, the urban parts of the nineteenth and twentieth century consolidated expansion, and the individual sites and buildings located throughout the municipal territory. These have a historical-cultural identity defined by particular qualities, recognizable from the point of view of the structural characteristics of the urban system and those of the morphological, architectural and use of individual fabrics, buildings and open spaces, also with reference to the sense and meaning they assume in the memory of the communities settled<sup>3</sup>. Rome is in fact the largest open-air museum, where every church, every suburban villa, every historical road axis tells a piece of the story and the image of the city. In 2016, thanks to the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, called by Pope Bergoglio in March 2015, there were 20 million arrivals and 40 million attendances, with an average staying, however, has gradually decreased to 2-3 days.

But the Rome of mass tourism is the Rome of its historical center; unique in the world not only for extension (1.470 ha, inside the Aurelian walls) and for the importance of its heritage (UNESCO site since 1980), but also for the extraordinary intensity of tourist flows (14.7 million tourists in 2017<sup>4</sup>), the center of Rome in recent decades is suffering massive phenomena of abandonment by the original inhabitants and gentrification (the population has risen from about 424000 in 1951, to about 133590 in 2012<sup>5</sup>), population aging (old age index equal to 227) and radical transformation of the socio-economic structure.

The number of visitors in 2015 in the archaeological complex of the Forums alone is impressive, 6,600,000 people, especially considering that the entire population of the Lazio Region, in which Rome is located, does not exceed 5,900,000 inhabitants and that the second most populated municipality of the same region, after Rome, is Latina and has 125,000 while that of the Roman area is Guidonia-Montecelio which has 89,000.

In the City of Rome is concentrated 88% of the accommodation activities (hotels and extra-hotel of the entire Province of Rome), and comparing the data on tourist attendance 2014-2015, it is clear that in Rome and its province is concentrated more than 85% of the presences recorded throughout the Lazio Region.

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<sup>3</sup> Municipality of Rome, General Regulatory Plan, approved by CC 18/2008, NTA, Art. 24, co.1.

<sup>4</sup> Tourism and labour market observatory.

<sup>5</sup> Roma Capitale. Statistical Office. Data for 2012 related to the I Municipio.

These data undoubtedly depend on the fact that Rome, for the very high concentration of assets, is a privileged destination for tourism on a global scale, cause but also effect of the reduced influx of tourists in the rest of the region, despite the very high presence of historic centers, museums, archaeological sites and points of interest (Cerasoli 2017).

This situation of massive tourism has important consequences in the use of public space in cities of art such as Rome, precisely. Today, in fact, the elements that physically make-up the squares and streets of the historic city, are the same as in the past, but lack the gestures, habits that gave body and life to that public space (Caudo, 2017). In a city like Rome, tourist flows reach such a volume as to transfigure the public spaces of the center, pushing the inhabitants to look elsewhere for new places of encounter that they can appropriate. As the monumental spaces of the historical city become victims of the substitution of the inhabitants in favour of temporary travellers, the identity of these places is lost and in fact these spaces are taken away from the citizens. In large cities, where there is certainly no problem of depopulation, as in more internal villages, there is the problem of social separation and the "migration" of public life from historical squares to more marginal and unconfigured spaces. The historical squares have been in some way "abandoned" by the citizens, who prefer to move to neighboring places, hidden corners in which to seek a greater identity and belonging of which many better known places have been emptied. In Trastevere, as well as in the areas of Campo dei Fiori or Piazza Navona (Figure 2), those that were the monumental public spaces and therefore designed and configured for the public life of the city, are reduced to a fictitious artifact, for the sole purpose of contemplation, almost denying the interaction with the actors who live the space, and therefore seek in places not configured the possibility of living freely the city, informally (Cianci, Mondelli, 2018).



Figure 2: Roma interrotta, Pasquale Iaconantonio

If it is true, in fact, that on the one hand tourism has increased the protection of heritage, it is also true that this protection has gone so far as to make heritage, and the space in which it is placed, an object of exclusive use of the tourist himself, effectively taking away the historical places from the life of the city and those who live there. Rome is an emblematic example in this sense. If it is true that many other cities of art in Italy have been invaded and transformed by the tourist industry, subjecting their structure and identity to the economic aspects of the tourism industry, no one like Rome has had the need to coexist this aspect with all the functions related to its role as capital. This means that the historical and monumental center of Rome is in a sense forced to live an superimposition of actions and flows that are twisted especially during the daytime, mixing tourists, workers,

students and so on. It is precisely this role of the city as a metropolitan city in which millions of people flock every day to "limit" the damage of tourism to a certain extent, and at the same time to make particularly necessary good practices for the reintegration of city life in historical, archaeological and monumental spaces.

If in Venice the city has abdicated to an almost mono-thematic and completely branded use of its urban space, triggering a process that has almost completely emptied the lagoon of its inhabitants, in Rome this can not happen and exactly for these reasons the city lends itself to become a fertile ground for initiating a debate and propose strategies that review in heritage sites opportunities for public space for use of the city and its inhabitants, counteracting the extreme musealization of the historic centers.

The attention that in recent years is focusing on the results that tourism is causing on the real estate, transforming most of the houses in temporary accommodation designed for travelers, must extend to the repercussions that this phenomenon has in the open spaces of the city. The idea of democratising space is therefore central, and only in modern times is it understood as "public" and therefore thought of and designed for the life of relationships and the needs of those who live in the city. Most of the squares that make up our historic centers, in fact, were not born in order to provide citizens with places where they could live the life of relationship, but were more than anything "the palimpsest of arrogant and egocentric representations of the powers that have dominated the city from time to time". (Cellini). Are we not now facing a new kind of "arrogance" in which economic interests dominate the city by materially selling its historical and artistic heritage and taking its spaces away from the citizens? It is necessary to reconsider the role of patrimonial protection in function of the city, tracing a strategy that balances the management of the patrimony with its usability by the inhabitants, avoiding the risk of a loss of identity and memory and therefore of the "death of the city".

### **Abandoned small towns**

The other side of the story instead represents all those small "valuable" places, historical urban centers that belong to the heritage of the minor centers, located almost always in the so-called "internal areas" of the Italian territory, which see - with naive short-sightedness - tourism as a panacea of their decline and abandonment.

This archipelago of ancient territorial garrisons, which is the backbone of the country, after the end of the Second World War has been affected by significant phenomena of abandonment. Forgotten, it has gradually become fragile, suffering the dismemberment of the network of interactions that for centuries had radiated sap to the whole system, transhumance, supply chains, ancient paths, pilgrimages, represented the networks of territorial relations that had kept alive the local economies for centuries, which urban polarization and globalization dynamics have almost erased.

Today, the smaller historical centres of the internal areas, except in isolated cases, present common pathologies, linked to the inability to respond to the needs of contemporary living (Abbate, 2011), mainly due to the marginality of these centres with respect to production processes, the lack of services and the criticality of connections.

The lack of financial resources in the smaller municipalities, certainly not facilitated by national and regional policies, absorbed by the chronic "emergencies", has allowed these minor urban realities to turn into ghost zones, or, in rare cases, into large real estate investments in tourism, linked by a double thread to exogenous economic dynamics.

It is therefore necessary to work with the existing materials to reverse the erroneous approach that does not consider the internal areas as a resource or an opportunity, but as a problem or a residue concerning the peripheral lands, to react to the progressive marginality, conceiving these places as a ground for social and productive experimentation, protagonists in some way of a cultural and economic rebirth.

The primary objective in these contexts is to highlight the territorial heritage of these areas, understood as the set of long-lasting structures produced by the co-evolution between the natural environment and human settlements, whose value is recognized for present and future generations (Marchetti, 2017). Territory understood as a cultural landscape, as an expression and outcome of the complexity of nature and culture and therefore as a product of history, immediate expression of the identity of a place and its inhabitants, whose components thus become the invariants of places and communities, trace of history and matrix for a historicalized and contextualized evolution (Carta, 2002).

This extension of meaning not only concerns the formal, civil and symbolic aspects, but also the time of belonging of the resources and their location in contemporary territories, thus representing an extension of temporal, spatial and meaningful interest. The traditional field of analysis of the physical city has in fact extended from the historical centre to the existing city as a whole, to involve the entire "historical territory" of which it is part, in search of the "widespread and often dispersed plot of the traces of man" (Amato, Bevilacqua, 2018).

It should be kept in mind, in fact, that mass tourism often results in putting at risk and altering the value of the Italian landscape. The landscape balance that characterizes most of our country is an invaluable value whose protection we try to operate at multiple levels. The passage that led to the enactment of the conceptual extension from historical centre to historical territory (Gubbio Charter, 1960, 1990), reaffirmed by the European Landscape Convention, has been further innovated with the concept of "historical urban landscape" that UNESCO introduced with the "Vienna Memorandum" in 2005 and that at the end of 2011 was consolidated in a special "Recommendation". Its field of application concerns the recognition of the quality of an urban landscape whose strength is in the widespread, capillary and living presence of a heritage that is not reduced only to protected historical areas and buildings, but refers to the physical, geographical, historical context in which it fits, resulting in a synoptic and organic vision of the heritage that opposes the idea of discontinuous and isolated emergencies (Settis, 2002).

In the polycentric territorial system, the smaller historical centres perfectly embody those landscapes of everyday life mentioned in the European Landscape Convention as territories capable of projecting and "making perceptible to the settled communities values of a proper identity matrix" to be preserved, avoiding homologating interventions that "safeguard stones but not people and traditional functions" (Cervellati, 2009).

If on the one hand these valuable characteristics that the national and European regulations tend to protect are precisely the attractor that makes Italy one of the most visited countries in the world, on the other hand the "bel Paese" consists of a territory that is difficult to lend itself to the management and assimilation of such large tourist flows, especially when it comes to the most internal areas.

### ***The case study of the small towns of the inner Cilento***

To deal with and analyse the issue, this contribution refers, by way of example, to the area of the Cilento National Park, a sub-region of Campania which, with regard to the debate on the internal areas, is a particularly interesting reality and perhaps unique of its kind. Its large size and distance from the most important metropolitan areas, make it a region with a rural identity that only in recent decades has tried to invest in tourism by exploiting the heritage inherited from the Greeks, Etruscans and Lucanians. However, this momentum has most of the time moved without an adequate awareness of a heritage that goes far beyond archaeological sites but that includes the rural landscape of the Park in its entirety, leading to the serious consequence of making gestures that have endangered its intrinsic value (Cianci, Mondelli, 2019).

In fact, the historical centres that make up the Cilento Park are an emblematic example of this marginal situation in which many Italian historical centres fall. The Cilento, in fact, is a large slice of territory located in the south



of the province of Salerno, while remaining a peripheral area in a region, Campania, already rich in coastline, cities of art and tourist attractions worldwide. This administrative situation, if on the one hand it has never launched the Cilento towards the possibility of a consistent modern development, has had, on the other hand, the welcome side effect of at least "limiting" the effects of the building pressure on the whole territory, delimiting it only to some coastal centers.

Tourism, mainly concentrated in the coastal strip, is kept away from what is the historical and cultural value of the inland villages, causing also the negative consequence of increasing the insediative pressure on the coast, often compromising the landscape value of the Park. The morphology of the Cilento territory is exactly what over the centuries has dictated the lines of settlement development, alternating periods in which the proximity to the sea was functional to communications, with phases in which the need for defense led the population to retreat into more rugged and controllable territories.

It is precisely those same topographical characteristics (Figure 3) that in ancient times allowed the rise of the Cilento centers, to be today an obstacle to their contemporary development, making difficult connections for the inhabitants and also driving away the tourism that could discover them. The settlement structure formed in the Middle Ages that gave rise to the small towns that now characterize the Cilento landscape has long been preserved unchanged, until, starting in the 70s, mass tourism has changed significantly the appearance of the valleys and coastal areas, through the emergence of new urban expansions devoid of that relationship between anthropogenic forms and natural environment that constitutes the value of the Park of Cilento. The need to promote a new type of tourism, alternative to the seaside one that only concerns the summer season, is therefore felt not only in order to repopulate the most inland areas, but also in order to preserve the landscape and contain the risks arising from the territorial changes made in recent decades.



Figure 3: small town in Cilento National Park

Very significant, in this sense, is the Landscape Plan of the Park of Cilento, which among the objectives also identifies the "awareness of the local community to the importance and value - including economic - of the landscape and historical pre-existing". This aspect wants to emphasize the implications that a greater awareness and enhancement of the historical and cultural heritage of the smaller towns can have on the territory, providing the opportunity not only to reactivate the tourism sector more widely throughout the region, but also to give a new impetus to the primary sector, recalling the interest in the rural vocation of the Cilento interior, which never

before in this historical period could rediscover an important opportunity for economic development and repopulation of the region. The abandonment of traditional activities, in fact, are often the cause of the disappearance of the characteristics of a particular landscape, with the consequent loss of cultural value and attractiveness of a territory for tourism purposes. Therefore, it is essential to preserve the link between the territory and the population that lives there intact, keeping alive the traditions and enhancing the activities on which these small societies have been based and developed, counteracting the tendency to depersonalize the smaller centers operated in the contemporary era.

## Conclusions

On the basis of what has been said so far, we can point out that it is possible and necessary to relate to the consequences that tourist flows are having in large cities that are congested on one hand, and in small inner cities that are endangered by them, either because of abandonment and marginalisation or because of a functional transformation that affects their cultural identity, on the other hand. There is no doubt that the planning of local territorial development must work putting at the core of the operations the protection and enhancement of the landscape according to a method that is not static or merely conservative, but identifying in the productive and economic activity of the places an important tool with which it is possible to dynamically preserve the landscape, attracting tourism inward and reactivating local economies. Tourism, in fact, can and must be in any case one of the tools for development and revitalization, but never the only source of economic support. Because in the latter case it is easily transformed into an element of degradation. In this way it will be right, then, to promote tourism in inland areas, also in order to unload and decongest the large cities of art, which on the contrary need to find their own dimension beyond the "urbs", the physical structure, and reconsider the value of "civitas", or the society that lives there, and that gives substance to the concept of the city itself.

Tourism is changing the historical centres of our cities, perhaps forever. It is said that "beauty will save the world", but not only, as Settis says, beauty will not save anything and no one if we do not know how to save beauty, and with it, culture, history, memory, the economy, but will gradually destroy cities that were previously resilient. (Cecchini, Bleicic).

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