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**Constructing cultural identities:  
Venezia, *Venezia Nativa*, Venissa**

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Constructing cultural identities:  
Venezia, *Venezia Nativa*, Venissa<sup>\*</sup>

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**Abstract.** The article examines the social and cultural co-production of representations of a place addressing the role of tourism in this process. Conceiving narratives as sets of imageries and related performing practices, I aim at exploring the case of Venice, focusing on Burano/Mazzorbo context. This focus becomes central to understanding tourism as an everyday dimension of the locality, showing the interplay between different narratives constantly produced by a wide range of social actors involved in creating place identities. In this process each subject I consider, i.e. the hospitality company Venissa and other local actors, negotiates multiple *senses of place* and the related practices by which the place is experienced. In a first stage the article presents a discourse analysis of narratives produced by Venissa, the wine resort set in Mazzorbo, a small island connected by a bridge to the better-known island of Burano in the Venice Lagoon. Starting from the core meanings of the company's identity, I consider some of the touristic imageries strategically employed or simply evoked by the firm. In a second stage, the perspective was extended to the residents' perceptions and experiences of tourism in the broader sense. Exploring their senses of place and the ongoing, selective, multi-situated process of identity making, tourism emerges as a central and critical dimension for their identity/alterity issues. The focus on the residents reveals multiple processes of *sensing* tourism and *making sense of it*, and highlights the power of touristic rhetoric, embedded and negotiated by the residents themselves. Finally, the article concludes by suggesting how a dialectical analysis of the different processes which develop between contextual metanarratives produced around a place could offer insights into the cultural production of identities, of the related meanings, and of the ways by which a place is experienced.

**Keywords:** Venice, tourism, discourse analysis, identity, anthropology.

**JEL Classification Numbers:** Z13, O35, M14, M31, R3.

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## **Introduction. Research focuses and theoretical frame**

From an anthropological perspective, the phenomenon of tourism, or *tourism process* (Crouch, 2002), involves a wide range of social, cultural, economic, political dynamics that affect a locality. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the different actors of a heterogeneous locality (Leite, & Graburn, 2009; Chambers, 2000) engage in these transformative processes and the different ways in which they cope with tourism. It means considering the variation in the ways in which different members of local populations, such as the residents employed in tourism industry and those not directly involved with it, are linked to tourism. Numerous empirical studies illustrate the negotiation, interaction and friction processes occurring between touristic imageries and the inhabitants' *senses of place*. These processes take place between a few contingencies and ambiguities of the local agencies that embrace different perceptions and experiences of tourism, approaches to local social problems, and hopes for the future of the locality.

The research starts from a case study, focusing the analysis on the discourses produced by a hospitality company. Through these narratives and the related performing practices the company characterizes its touristic offer, referring to the wider discourses produced around the place where it is set. Venissa, the firm I consider, is set in Mazzorbo, a small island connected by a bridge to the better-known island of Burano in the Venice Lagoon. Starting from the core meanings of the company's identity, I consider some of the touristic imageries strategically employed or simply evoked by the firm.

In a second stage, the perspective was extended to the residents' perceptions and experiences of tourism in the broader sense. Exploring their senses of place and the ongoing, selective, multi-situated process of identity making, tourism emerges as a central and critical dimension for their identity/alterity issues. The focus on the residents reveals multiple processes of *sensing* tourism and *making sense of* it, and highlights the power of touristic rhetoric, embedded by the residents themselves. The residents negotiate their relation with tourism in everyday life, denying touristic imageries, reconfiguring them, or using antagonistic narratives and interrelated practices.

According to Leite and Graburn (2009),

“an anthropological approach precludes viewing tourism as a distinct entity in itself, to be defined everywhere in the same way. [...] Tourism can refer to a category of experience counterposed to everyday life; a local, national, global industry; an opportunity for employment;

a source of strangers in one's home locality; a force for social change; a form of cultural representation and brokerage; an emblem of globalization; a venue for the construction and performance of national, ethnic, gendered, and other identities; or any combination of these and more" (Leite, & Graburn, 2009, p. 37).

I conceive tourism as a cultural phenomenon with many sets of practices and representations embedded within broader social, political and historical contexts, "a way of being in the world, encountering, looking at it and making sense" (Bærenholdt *et al.*, 2004, p. 2; see also Franklin, & Crang, 2001).

Tourism Studies in Social Sciences have explored the polymorphic essence of tourism and the wide range of meanings it embraces in its specific contingencies, stressing the futility of rigid definitions or categories (Larsen, Urry & Axhausen, 2007; Coleman, & Crang, 2002; Endesor, 2000; Butler, & Pearce, 1995). They moved beyond models of "tourism" (Cohen, 1992; Graburn, 1983) and typologies of "tourist" (Cohen, 1979; MacCannel, 1976), or other fixed dualisms, e.g., the "host" and "guest" dichotomy, now empirically conceptualized as blurred notions (Nogués-Pedregal, 2009; Sherlock, 2001; Boissevain, 1996).

We could advance similar considerations on "Impacts Studies", a field of ethnographic research mostly concerned with the social, cultural, economic and environmental effects of tourism on local communities (Smith, Ed, 1978). Whereas early studies adopted a kind of "impact model", conceiving tourism as an exogenous active force on a passive local group, more recent research has been focusing on the issue of *agency*, investigating the meaningful practices and representations of every participant involved (directly or indirectly, in many ways and at different levels) in tourism process (Sampaio, Simoni & Insnart, 2012; Leite, & Graburn, 2009; Stronza, 2001; Chambers, 2000; Crick, 1989).

I am referring to what Larsen, Urry and Axhausen call "'performance turn' within tourism studies" (Larsen, Urry & Axhausen, 2007, p. 259), an approach that emphasizes *performativity* and *reflexivity* (Sampaio, Simoni & Insnart, 2012) to highlight the cultural and social engagement in the transformative process embedded in tourism. The concepts of *performance* (Endesor, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2007; Franklin, & Crang, 2001; Coleman, & Crang, Eds, 2002; Bærenholdt *et al.*, 2004) and *embodiment* (Rakić, & Chambers, 2012) do help us investigate place representations and practices. By studying a "touristic place" on the field, we are dealing with a complex process in which touristic (and other) narratives about the place and the practices through which it is experienced interplay with senses of place and identity. Place is not conceptualized as a passive setting, but rather as a meaningful and socially inscribed *entity*, and at the same time as a producer of meanings through people-place interactions, i.e. practice, performance and narration (Pritchard, & Morgan, 2003).

Before examining this issue, let me mention the heterogeneous actors, both individual and collective, that participate in the “social construction/production of place” (Low, 2014)<sup>1</sup>: residents, visitors and actors of the tourism industry (in its multiple dimensions and at different scales). Starting from Urry’s conception (1990), Simonicca (2006) conceives *gaze* as the composite action of seeing, understanding, and acting coherently oriented by strategies of self and place construction, and he properly defines *touristic space* as the outcome of different *gazes* (e.g. tourists’ gazes on the place, heterogeneous locality’s gaze on itself and on tourism/tourists, economic/political local subjects’ gazes on what is considered as sources, tourism industry’s gaze and more). Indeed, only at an analytical level we can distinguish: a) the residents’ sense of place connected to the ongoing process of identity making and to their changing ideas and understanding of tourism embedded in everyday life<sup>2</sup>; b) narratives and discourses produced around the place (Selwyn, Eds, 1996; Bruner, 2005) c) tourists' imageries and experiences<sup>3</sup>.

Rakić and Chambers supply a further fundamental element to the theoretical frame I am proposing: “at the point of experiencing or visiting a place, there is no dichotomy between construction and consumption of places and [...] these processes are dual, active and indistinguishable” (Rakić, & Chambers, 2012, p. 1614). Surely, focusing on tourism phenomenon involves the complex theme of consumption practices and processes (Bourdieu, 1979; Douglas, & Isherwood, 1984; De Certeau, 1990; McCracken, 1996; Appadurai, Ed, 1986; Friedman, 1994; Miller, Ed, 1995 A; Miller, 1995 B; Preshtold 2008, 2009; Hann 2008). Within the specific perspective proposed by Rakić and Chambers, which I share, the concept of *embodiment* “recognizes that the body is active in the consumption and creation of subjective meanings and experiences” (Rakić, & Chambers, 2012, p. 1617).

The fieldwork let us understand the negotiated ground of the dialogical relations between all these dimensions (Aime, & Papotti, 2012; Simonicca, 2006) as well as the re-configurations, tensions and frictions between them.

### **Multiple contexts. Venice, Burano island and Venissa**

Let me now introduce the research settings: Venice, the island of Burano, and the Company of Venissa. I will briefly return to Venice at the end of the paper.

Venice, as numerous other city centers both in Italy and abroad, has undergone a wide range of processes such as depopulation, widespread touristification and intensive commuting. However, Venice experiences a unique conjuncture because of the interplay of endogenous

and exogenous factors (Settis, 2014), i.e. its particular morphology and insular history, administration policy and economic management over a very long period of time. Let me provide a few fundamental historical references.

During the inter-war period, a kind of paradigm stood out, i.e. the political/economic project of the “Greater Venice” promoted by a group of Venetian financiers and industrialists linked to national and foreign capitals (Reberschak, 2002). This plan aimed at the industrial and residential development of Mestre and Marghera as a first step towards the tourist reconversion of the islands of Venice and Lido.

The idea of Venice as a *city-monument to be preserved* was born and developed within this project, activating broader dynamics<sup>4</sup>. During the 1950s and the beginning of 1960s, this representation led to the conversion of the whole city into a *piece of heritage*, which raised the costs of building maintenance (Dorigo, 1957). The economic miracle, the opportunity of a *modern* lifestyle symbolized by the new consumer durables (e.g., cars and electric appliances) inaccessible to most Venetians, played a key role in this conjuncture, encouraging most of the residents to move to the mainland.

The idea of Venice as a *heritage monument city* remains in the public debate to this day, in connection with the issues of modernization/innovation of the urban environment (Bosworth, 2014), social problems such as youth depopulation (and the progressively ageing population), and tourism mono-culture.

A monument, of course, is meant to be gazed upon and visited, and Davis and Marvin point out that “there is probably no place, however seemingly obscure and remote, that is not gazed upon and probably photographed by at least one tourist on any given day” (Davis, & Marvin, 2004, p. 97) and that “as tourists to Venice have blossomed in number and have pushed themselves ever more insistently into the city's more intimate space, this seemingly tranquil world of *campi*, *calli*, and canals has become increasingly contested territory” (Davis, & Marvin, 2004, p. 106; see also Quinn 2007).

In this perspective, the 1970s and 1980s are a significant period for the history of tourism in Venice: a kind of renovation process turned a few cultural celebrations (Vogalonga, Redentore and Carnival) into more spectacular events or “cultural commodities” (Davis, & Marvin, 2004). By renewing and promoting Venice’s cultural identity at the international level, the local administration intended to attract foreign interests and to cultivate the already flourishing tourism industry, apparently considered as the only practicable economic activity in the city center (Favero, & Moretti, *forthcoming*).

Tourism has been playing a key role in shaping both the urban environment and the imageries around the place. Referring to Russo (2002), Zannini, Lando and Bellio (2008) remark the development of a tourism mono-culture which, reducing the variability of economic activities, alters the existing system of the area and actively participates in the potential decline of the local non-tourist economy (Zannini, Lando & Bellio, 2008)<sup>5</sup>.

The process has been very similar in Burano. The most common touristic image of Burano can be summarized by the slogan *island of colored houses, lace handicraft and fishermen*. Linked to the increasing crisis of local fisheries, the development of tourism industry has fostered the growth of commercial activities, specially retail shops of tourist souvenirs. This category embraces both high-quality lace stores of and shops centered on “typical products” in the broader sense of the expression. Some public outlets such as bars, restaurants and shops have a hybrid target, even though some residents have contrasting opinions about the quality and target of their offer.

As there are few accommodation opportunities, tourists are present mostly during the day and one-day at the time. In the Burano/Mazzorbo area, there is only one hotel, i.e. Venissa, and a few guest houses and apartments for rent.

The hospitality company proposes a differentiated offer: a hotel (six rooms at the moment), a restaurant, a wine bar, and a local wine production in the vineyard closed to the buildings. The estate complex is one of the last existing Venetian walled vegetable gardens, towered over by a bell tower, a testimony of the thirteenth century Benedictine monastery that rose there. From the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1990s, the estate belonged to a local family, which then sold it to the Venice Municipality. After carrying out the necessary restoration works of the buildings, the Municipality granted the use of the estate to a few local associations (above all to retirees’ associations) which organised small public events (for instance the Christmas *sagra*). Because of management problems and expensive maintenance costs, in 2006 the Municipality issued a public call for tenders. Reading on the Venice Municipality website, the estate complex should have become an accommodation structure with a agro-environmental research and education center. This project was related to the broader one of the North Lagoon Park Institution, a municipal entity for the creation of a natural park in the North Lagoon of Venice<sup>6</sup>.

The business group constituted by Bisol, a centuries-old family enterprise in wine production set in Valdobbiadene, an area of Veneto, won a nine-year renewable concession to manage the estate complex. After the necessary restoration and adaptation works, Venissa started its business in 2007.



The company is a member of the consortium Venezia Nativa established by the local hospitality businesses of Mazzorbo, Burano and Torcello islands. It involves several sectors: accommodation and transport, food and beverage, and cultural-recreational & sports. The name “Venezia Nativa” is used to refer to this island chain, also called North Lagoon, and it has important metaphoric meanings, as we shall see. The consortium aims to develop a touristic circuit *complementary to* and *autonomous from* the tourist system of the Venice city center. Indeed, the consortium has been developing numerous projects to promote both local traditional economic activities and cultural peculiarities. To understand the composite nature of the locality I focused on this agenda and on others meaningful aspects i.e. on the perceptions of locality and representations of tourism.

### **Constructing identity of Venissa. Exploring Burano-Venice metanarratives**

The focus on the company identity discourse aims at discerning the process by which place imageries are contextually shaped and used in tourism sector in a broader sense. It also highlights the dialogical relations between the residents’ agency and representations of place within a kind of negotiated ground.

By studying Venissa identity discourse, i.e. narrative themes and performing practices, I have identified a few core meanings: *excellence*, *exclusivity*, *authenticity/tradition*, *geographic and historic peculiarity of locality*, *cultural/social commitment to the locality*. These main meanings interplay within identity narratives and each plays a role in defining the whole offer and each specific section (i.e. hotel, restaurant, wine bar, wine production)<sup>7</sup>.

Wine production plays a central role in the whole offer and becomes a company identity symbol, condensing all the cores meanings I have introduced above, indeed the firm presents itself as a “wine resort”.

For these reasons, by analyzing this process on several occasions, for instance the *ritual visit* to the vineyard during the practices to welcome the customer, and the wine tasting *ceremony*, we understand how all these identity themes are interconnected and how each of them finds a coherent expression at both discursive and practical levels by performing practices of consumption suggested during these two circumstances.

The wine becomes the symbol of *excellence* guaranteed by the company’s long-standing experience and competence in wine production. Expert agronomists and enologists developed the vineyard and they have been monitoring its growth cycle. It is a delicate process also because the autochthonous grape variety almost became extinct during the centuries of Venice Lagoon history and only a few plants were left hidden away in vegetable gardens and antique

convents. As we can notice, wine production recalls the *blurred* cultural notion of *authenticity* especially interpreted here as *local geographic and historic peculiarity*.

The wine symbolizes *exclusivity* because of its limited production in numbered bottles: the bottle, created by a Murano glass artist, contains a hand-made gold leaf fired and blended into the glass. Through the bottle packaging design, the company's identity narrative makes an explicit reference to the art craft of Venice, to the broader context of the locality.

The Consortium shares narratives centered on excellence and exclusivity, linking these concepts to a kind of idealized vision of tourism and tourists. This conception suggests both elite-tourism and sustainable tourism ideas, and it contrasts to the present experience of tourism as described by some members of the Consortium. Indeed, they described the tourist presence using expressions like "crowd" or "mass", of course both in the negative senses.

As I mentioned before, by focusing the guests' attention on the autochthonous grapes variety and on the set of special geologic and climatic characteristics of the place, the wine also metonymically refers to "Native Venice" (Venezia Nativa), i.e. the concept that condenses the geographic, historical and cultural peculiarities of the locality. However implicitly, the narrative alludes to the broader notion of *terroir*<sup>8</sup>. The company also describes the quality of the *collectible* wine from the point of view of an expert (and shows some of the awards it received), but it stresses the power of the wine as a medium of experience, a kind of vehicle to *feel* a place, its history and its distinctiveness.

The concept of Native Venice is shaped by several processes of value attribution and the firm often refers to it with different but coherent meanings<sup>9</sup>. Identity discourse claims the original historicity of the geographical area corresponding to Native Venice, i.e. the island chain of Mazzorbo, Burano and Torcello. This historical narrative describes the island chain as an early well-known flourishing urban reality, and identifies it as the origin of the first Venetian settlements. Identity discourse, through historical narration and a few fashionable suggestions of *myth* (Ortalli, & Scarabello, 2010), distinguishes two different historical authenticities, picturing Native Venice like a kind of *Venice before Venice*. But with reference to the present day, the relation between Native Venice and the Venice city center appears to be more complex. Native Venice is interpreted and promoted like an *alternative* to contemporary *Venice of mass tourism*, a common representation that stresses on a set of negative nuanced meanings and imageries like counterfeit, low quality, crowded place, cheap and trashy products.

As we have already seen, the most famous and recognisable image of Venice is evoked and celebrated through the wine bottle packaging, which especially exalts its centuries-long

handcraft traditions. The company's identity narrative develops a functional relation of both connection and disconnection (continuity and discontinuity) with its surrounding, the local context i.e. the Northern Lagoon and the Venice city center. In this relation several features of Native Venice and of the Venice city center are identified and differently valued even though not expressly contrasted. We can examine this issue, making some examples and taking into consideration also the role of the Consortium in this kind of narrative dynamics.

The Company and the Consortium share the narrative about the place describing it as *original* (i.e. a thriving urban center of the past) in a historical sense, as *natural* (i.e. still in contact with nature), *authentic* and uncorrupted, and also as an *almost secret* place with its own cultural traditions to discover. This narrative proposes its own version of binomial oppositions such as center/periphery, nature/city, authenticity/corruption, elite/mass, exclusive/common. However, it does not simply adopt them to contrast Native Venice against the Venice city center. Even if the tacit contrast seems to be logically deduced, the narratives act juxtaposed and the play is subtler.

Conceiving *cultural heritage* and *typical products* as meta-cultural concepts (Palumbo, 2009, 2011), the anthropological perspective explores how these concepts provide a useful frame to promote locality in tourism contexts. Obviously, the powerful narrative of Venice as a *world cultural heritage site* offers an official set of meanings to situate more specific discourses about Native Venice.

The case study shows a) the interplay between the processes both of *patrimonialization* and of symbolic construction of *typical objects*, b) how different local actors shape meanings of *cultural heritage* and *typical objects* by everyday negotiation practices.

The wine, the estate, the place (from Native Venice to the Venice city center), the gastronomy and the handicraft products of Burano isle move between these two categories of legitimating values. But even though the categories are inscribed in an official and institutional frame (i.e. UNESCO), they are automatically used in their more *common* sense, by negotiating the set of narratives and meanings they evoke. Focusing on these concepts in the local contest shows them to be blurred notions and the case of Burano lace making helps to outline the complexity of the issue.

The centuries old tradition Burano lace-making expresses a wide range of meanings related to different moment of its troubled history<sup>10</sup>. All these meaning have been stratifying over time, overlapping sets of practices and narratives, and each one comes up in everyday life of the locality. It was a thriving women's handicraft during the 17th century, almost abandoned one century later and then re-launched by the opening of a professional school (1872-1879),

which became the Venice Lace Museum in 1981 (Davanzo Poli, 1998). Nowadays, only a few old women practice lace handicraft and this little production is both private and commercially addressed. Even though its social and cultural context of production has been going through a long difficult period, it continues to be a private (i.e. pertaining to the family context) and public (i.e. shared by the locality) expression of material culture, both an object charged with sentimental value and an expensive, exclusive and fashioned product for European royalties of the past and for a heterogeneous contemporary elite. Lace shop owners describe it both as a priceless museum object/artwork and as a commercial product that competes with foreign imports and needs branding. Some still consider lace as a local identity symbol under the label of *tradition*, others no longer see it as *authentic* and contrast its past identity meaning to its present touristic essence, alluding to cultural erosion and to the local/touristic dichotomy. As we have seen, arising from a heterogeneous locality, authenticity shows its contested nature<sup>11</sup>, dealing with the natural environmental, the historical/mythical origin, and the cultural products.

These last considerations underline how the relation between different narratives on locality is not static but constantly built and re-built in several everyday contexts; and it let us move back to the central topics of the paper, i.e. the process by which place imageries are contextually shaped and used in tourism and the dialogical relations between the agencies of residents and place representations within the negotiated ground.

The senses of place and senses of *us* of Burano/Mazzorbo residents are produced by integrating individual and collective experiences and representations of tourism, of tourists, of the island-place and of the Venice-place. All representations present some contradictions, but this inconsistency is central to the negotiated grounded as I conceive it.

Compared to the Venice city center, Burano residents consider their island as a kind of village, more peaceful and safer than the crowded and tourist-packed city, but lacking in services for residents (e.g. schools, supermarkets, shops). Therefore the Venice city center is described both as a *hostage of mass tourism* and as an *enjoyable city*. In the description of some Burano residents, the development of tourism seems to have played and to still play a double key role: on the one hand it is said to have reduced the variety of economic activities, altering the commercial structure and the non-tourist economy; on the other hand, its development is thought to be a possible solution to the same problem, as it provides tourists with services that could be enjoyed also by the residents. Even if not consciously perceived, a kind of vicious circle emerges within the representations of the place as already *touristic* but not entirely *touristed* (Davis, & Marvin, 2004), as exemplified by the comparison with the

Venice city center. Other themes introduced by the residents, i.e. depopulation, the need of preserving traditions and of reviving local identity, are connected to this interpretative frame: tourism is both the cause of problem and its potential solution.

These dynamics refer to several imageries of Venice in the broader sense. To summarize, Venissa and the Consortium promote complex *alternative* representations of a locality by expunging them from some critical issues and by making contextual references (both in negative and positive sense) to widespread imageries of Venice and current narratives about the city. Some examples of these imageries are: *Venice of mass and hit-and-run tourism* (related to cultural, social and environmental impacts of tourism and exemplified by low-quality services, crowd or souvenirs), *Disneyland Venice*, *Venice of big events* (e.g. the Venice Film Festival, the Redentore, the Regata Storica, the Carnival), *Romantic Venice*<sup>12</sup>, *Venice art and cultural heritage city* or *Venice world cultural heritage site* or *Venice open sky museum*, *Luxury Venice* (or *The splendours of Venice*), *Authentic Venice*, *Venice of Venetians* (or *Hidden Venice*). Each narrative can refer to a wide range of differently nuanced meanings, depending on the context of use, and of course each implies different sets of practices by which the city is experienced.

The interplay between imageries needs deeper considerations by focusing on the residents of the city center. Nowadays it is commonly believed that tourism in Venice shows its *negative face* through the articulation of social, cultural, economic and political dimensions (Settis, 2014). This fact becomes self-evident by reading the front page of some of the local newspapers during summer season, or simply by listening everyday conversations between inhabitants. *Veniceland* (or *Disneyfication* process) is another popular theme connected to the previous one. This narrative suggests or claims a kind of process of erosion that has been affecting most of the social and cultural environment, but it also complains about the difficult conditions of life (Quinn, 2007; Davis, & Marvin, 2004). Residents tend to counterpose to this imagery that of *Authentic Venice/Venice of Venetians/Hidden Venice*. These latter imageries can also suggest a working-class sphere in contrast to the *Luxury Venice* linked to elite tourism and to multinational luxury brands which take advantage of the celebrity of a city used as a showroom. Some residents think that the protection and preservation of Venice (thought as a historical place and a way of life) are unquestionable, and oppose any kind of renewal or innovation promoted in the city. Of course some residents working in the tourism industry (e.g., souvenirs retailers) participate in the ongoing reproduction of these narratives as they take economic advantage from them. Conversely, residents that are differently employed distinguish themselves from the previous ones, and refer to different ways of

thinking, feeling, and living in the city. They stress the imbalance between the population of Venice and the number of tourists, which causes everyday tensions and nervousness. From these discourses a social and political sense of *vulnerability* emerges, and it can turn into a feeling of powerlessness but also in a call to react.

The point is that by juxtaposition, negotiation and friction processes a wide range of authors has been participating in the continuous social construction and performance of every narrative. This co-production involve several social subjects and spheres of action at different scales: from the single actor of the local tourism industry, to the regional, national and international corporations, from the members of the heterogeneous locality to the multinational luxury brands, from International agencies such UNESCO to each tourist of Venice. Within this panorama, tourism plays a key role as “a productive system that fuses discourses, materiality and practice” (Franklin, & Crang, 2001, p. 17).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The perspective drawn in the paper aims at focusing on narratives produced around a place, on the interplay between them, and on their contextual meanings. As I have claimed, all local social actors constantly and differently participate in creating these metanarratives during their everyday life. Within this panorama, tourism phenomenon emerges as a negotiated ground in which the tensions and the frictions between the representations of place, the processes of identity making and several social instances simultaneously express. Analysis of these issues become central to understanding tourism as an everyday dimension of the locality and, as Chambers claimed, “we are just beginning to realize how great a role tourism has come to play in shaping the way we understand and interpret the world in which we live” (Chambers, 2000, p. 124).

Obviously, the case of Venice is difficult because of the powerful and multiple imageries embodied by the city, and the article aims at suggesting how the dialectical analysis of the different processes which develop between the metanarratives could offer insights into the cultural production of cultural identities, of the related meanings, and of the ways by which the place is experienced.

The research is conceived as a first step toward a wider and more in-depth study of tourists involvement, as an essential aspect of the frame I have profiled.

## Methodological Note

Fieldwork, conceived here as an ongoing and circular experience (Fabietti, Ed, 2001), was traditionally registered by ethnographic notes, including audio-visual material like short video and photographs. It alternated different techniques such as passive observation, participation and participant observation (Fabietti, Ed, 2001)<sup>13</sup>, interviews and conversations (informal, structured by themes, in-depth, spontaneous and organized, recorded or written down). Therefore, research method was heterogeneous and adapted to the different settings of the fieldwork, i.e. Venissa, Burano/Mazzorbo islands and the Venice city center.

## Notes

1 According to Low's *spatializing culture theory* "the social construction of space is accorded material expressions as a person/spatiotemporal unit, while social production is understood as both the practices of the person/spatiotemporal unit and global and collective forces" (Low, 2014, p. 35).

2 Casey (2007) suggests the term "tourate" for inhabitants who interact with tourism and tourists, as opposed to those who generally do not come into contact with them.

3 The idea of the *touristic elsewhere* preexists the travel (within Appadurai's *mediascapes*), it has been taking shape in interaction between all kinds of touristic experiences, their narrations that circulate fluidly, and place branding strategies.

4 In 1944 its untouchable status called thousands of people from the mainland cities, being certain that it would never be bombed (Casellato, 2002; Favero, & Moretti, *forthcoming*).

5 See also Van der Borg, & Costa, 2004.

6 Link to the webpage

<http://www.comune.venezia.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/70306> (21/03/2015).

7 The production of identity discourse could be considered as a branding process (Manning, 2010), even though this perspective is not explicitly adopted and developed in the paper.

8 See UNESCO's definition at the link

[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/sc\\_mab\\_terroirs\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/sc_mab_terroirs_EN.pdf) (21/03/2015).

9 In September 2014, Venissa hosted the art exhibition "Burano tavolozza policroma sulla Venezia Nativa" ("Burano polychrome palette on Native Venice"), organised by the Auser, the local association of retirees. This initiative is a good example of the *cultural/social commitment* of the firm *to the locality*, as I mentioned before.

10 See Davanzo Poli, 1998.

11 A useful concept related to this issue is that of "customized authenticity" proposed by Wang (2007); see also Croes, Hyun Lee & Olson, 2013..

12 See Davis, & Marvin, 2004.

13 See also Duranti, 1992; Pavanello, 2010.

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