

Almatourism

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

Tourism in Matera. A resource or a problem? Impacts of the fast rise of tourism in a heritage important Southern Italian city

D'Armento, Stefano¹

ABSTRACT

Matera, a medium-sized town in Basilicata, Southern Italy, was European Capital of Culture in 2019, at the end of twenty years of strong tourist flows growth. On the one hand, tourism development was perceived as a significant opportunity for economic development and urban and real estate renovation and enhancement. On the other hand, especially in the last years, tourism impacts were often considered excessive. First, there is a review of the most used terms to define the impacts of tourism, and a description of the context and the evolution of tourist flows in the city in the last twenty years. Then, the paper aims to explain the actual impacts of tourism on the urban environment, analyzing the spatial distribution of tourist attractions and accommodations, and the real estate market, taking into consideration also the role of accommodation booking and sharing platforms. The analysis partially confirms the worries about the negative externalities of tourism; nonetheless, it also scales them down, thanks to a more accurate investigation on the peculiarities and the potential of the city, which make it hardly comparable with other cities.

Keywords: tourism; touristification; overtourism; revitalization; Matera

In 2019 the city of Matera, Basilicata, Southern Italy, was the European Capital of Culture (ECoC). The cities holding the title usually take advantage of the event to promote themselves as tourism and cultural destinations and undertake renovation projects of varying ambition and magnitude levels.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the city of Matera and the Basilicata Region significantly pushed on promotion and the creation of attractions to increase tourist flows (Regione Basilicata, 2008). However, in the years just before 2019, Matera started to be described as a place suffering from overtourism, with overcrowded public spaces, unaffordable rents pushing out residents and traditional retail from the most touristic neighborhoods, and massive estate conversion

¹ E-mail address: stefano.darmento@polimi.it

into tourist accommodations: in brief, a city experiencing phenomena of gentrification and touristification (Zampano, 2017). The ECoC event was seen as an opportunity to work on the issue of overtourism; as a matter of fact, one of the goals of the bidding of Matera was to overturn the concept of tourist itself, transforming the tourist into a temporary citizen; someone more involved in the local community life and committed not to generate (or at least reduce as much as possible) the negative externalities. Another goal was to soften the tourism pressure on the city center, drawing part of the tourists to Matera's surroundings, in less-visited locations and the countryside (Comitato Matera 2019, 2014).

In the last years, many cities worldwide were facing, before the COVID-19 outbreak, an impressive growth of tourism. A higher degree of people mobility, thanks to low-cost flights, and the easiness to book cheaper accommodations through web-based platforms, which disrupted the hospitality industry, and massively increased tourist flows worldwide (Capocchi, 2019). Tourism became the heavy industry of the 21st century (d'Eramo, 2017), and inevitably its impacts on urban and not urban environments have been at the center of the academic and the public debate.

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the established trends of worldwide tourist flows; therefore, the paper refers to a recent past and a momentarily frozen situation. It is too early either to envision the actual impacts of the pandemic on tourism in the future (Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2020) or to assess to what extent the alleged boom of short-distance visitors during summer 2020 was sufficient to compensate for the lack of foreign visitors.

The paper discusses whether Matera is subject to overtourism and to what extent and provides a better understanding of the impacts of tourism in the city, shedding light on the complexity of tourism's multiple and multifaceted impacts. The article argues that, because of its peculiarity, it is not correct to consider Matera as an excessively touristified destination, even though the tourism impact has been significant.

The research is mostly quantitative, analyzing a large amount of data on tourism and their spatialization. Data available do not account for a part of the flows, as daily trips or second homes users; this is a common issue in tourism data (Becheri and Ciccarelli, 2018). However, because of the city's peculiarities and the kind of analysis performed (measuring the evolution on a twenty-year span and considering spatial impacts), conclusions do not depend on those issues.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a concise literature review that offers an overview of the impacts of tourism in urban settings. The case study and its relevance are then presented, followed by an analysis of the data related to tourism and its impacts on the urban realm. The paper concludes by discussing the findings and questioning the alleged excessive touristification of Matera, providing suggestions for future tourism management in the city.

1. Describing the excess of tourism and its impacts

Tourism is regarded as an essential factor of socio-economic development at all scales. Municipalities, regions, and entire countries made considerable efforts to foster inbound tourist flows. Since the beginning of the 20th century, tourism has been considered a driver of revitalization for declining and distressed places (Urbain, 2003). Since the 1980s, it is interpreted by European Union (EU) policies as a tool for reducing regional divergences and promoting cohesion and as a vital tool for the promotion of peripheral areas (Bohlin et al., 2016; Rabbiosi, 2018).

Hence, tourism has often been assumed to be a sort of overall solution and panacea to boost the economy, especially in peripheral places. However, many places that have become successful tourist destinations began to experience several negative externalities. From a generator of prosperity that helped cities revitalize historic centers, protect heritage, and recover public spaces, tourism turned into an appropriator of both public and private spaces to the inhabitants' detriment (Torres Outon, 2020).

With the growth of tourism and the attention the press and the public debate gave to it, several words emerged or got to know a wide use and success to describe the multiple effects of the many phenomena related to the excess of tourism and their impacts. Among all those words, "overtourism" emerged as a very successful buzzword invented by a magazine in 2016 for indicating in a sensationalistic way an excessive presence of tourists in Iceland, the result of a flow enormously grown in few years (Koens, 2018; UNWTO, 2018, Sæpórsdóttir et al., 2020). Nevertheless, overtourism can be considered a new label for what was known under the more technical definition of tourism carrying capacity (TCC) proposed and studied since the 1960s (UNWTO, 2018; Wall, 2020). Nonetheless, with the rise of academics' interest in better defining the term overtourism, a slight difference with TCC can be noticed. Milano et al. (2019, p. 2) define overtourism as "the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have caused permanent changes to their lifestyles, denied access to amenities and damaged their general well-being". While the UNWTO (2018, p.5) defines TCC "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, and sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction".

Therefore, overtourism, which became a description for excessive negative impacts of tourism (Koens, 2018), and a marker that stresses the presence of tourism in the public debate and the conflict between the residents and the tourists (Capocchi, 2019), can be considered as the process that brings to exceed the TCC. Passing this limit may cause the deterioration of the destination within the tourist area life cycle (TALC) model (Butler 1980). Because of the difficulty in establishing a number defining a tourism destination's capacity, especially if it is not an enclosed single attraction and is instead a complex environment, such as an urban center, the Level of Acceptable Change (LAC) can be a more appropriate tool. The LAC, indeed, shifts from numbers to quality parameters that measure advantages and disadvantages, suggesting a flexible managing of tourism rather than fixed limitations (Koens, 2018). Still,

assessing overtourism remains a difficult task. People's opinions should be carefully weighted; they could be the expression of a small percentage of the people who obtained much space in the press (Ebejer, 2020). For the UNWTO (2018), overtourism is just a question of -lack of management of tourism growth rather than absolute numbers. The expected growth of tourism (once the COVID-19 Pandemic ends) will cause a further concentration of tourists in already visited destinations. Koens (2018) also stresses how overtourism impacts a limited part of the city, usually the historic center and a few other neighborhoods.

Terms as Disneyfication or Disneyzation have been used to define the global processes of homogenization and standardization of consumption, focusing on the effects of mass tourism that significantly contributed to boosting them (Romano, 1981; Bryman, 2004; Settis, 2014). The words museification or museumification, instead, define the process of commodification of the heritage and its exploitation as a tourist and economic resource; from single object or artifact they progressively arrived to extend its meaning on the tourist use of urban fabrics, typically historic centers, and even entire landscapes (Čamprag, 2017; Salerno, 2018; Tessarolo Ruy and Hermanny de Almeida, 2020).

Another major issue linked to tourism is the impact of sharing economy companies in the field of accommodation. Since Airbnb's founding in 2007, sharing economy digital platforms gained importance and caused considerable impacts on every aspect of the tourism industry and the urban realm (Petruzzi et al., 2019). Landlords, attracted by the possibility of higher economic gains, started to convert residential dwellings into touristic accommodations, hence expelling residents from the historic centers or most touristic areas; entire parts of some cities progressively became almost exclusively oriented to tourism. The massive presence of dwellings used as touristic accommodation with the consequent transformation of entire neighborhoods of the city can go under the general name of touristification (Torres Outon, 2020); terms as Airbnbification (Ferri de Carmago Paes 2020) or Airification (Picascia et al. 2017) are present in literature but minimally used. The word bnbfication, not inherently tied to the multinational company, will be used in this paper to define the multiplication of a fragmented and dispersed accommodation offer. Even though Airbnb and other platforms deny their responsibility for the increase of prices and rents, researches confirm the opposite (Barron 2018, Lopez et al. 2019), suggesting to public administration a limitation to the conversion of the housing stock, which is a measure that has been already undertaken or planned by several cities (e.g., Barcelona, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin).

Overtourism, (air)bnbfication, museification, and the plethora of -ations-words that keep appearing and often do not have a clear definition, all describe, with a negative connotation, a multitude of phenomena or sub-phenomena emerging within the tourism practice deeply interrelated. Nonetheless, when tourism becomes such a relevant part of a place economy, it has positive and negative externalities that should be balanced as much as possible by policies and regulations. Tourism may indeed cause socio-economic problems, but, at the same time, produces consistent benefits. For overcoming the inherently negative connotation of most of the here-presented words, the term touristification (also touristization) will be here used with a more neutral meaning, identifying and defining all the tourism-induced changes, tangible and intangible, positive and negative.

2. Matera. A classic outsider's story.

Matera is a medium-sized provincial capital, of about 60.000 inhabitants, in the Southern Italian region of Basilicata, the instep of the boot. The city became quite quickly a very renowned tourism destination, driven by several facts, namely: the 1993 UNESCO title, the 2004 movie *The Passion*, and the 2019 ECoC event. The city started to be alleged to suffer from phenomena of touristification and overtourism. The city is one of the world's most ancient continuously inhabited sites for at least 9000 years. The first dwellings mostly consisted of caves excavated into the tuff rock that characterizes the area. As a matter of fact, the city is built on a ravine, a canyon excavated in the millennia by a little stream named Gravina (literally, ravine). More than built on the ravine, the city sort of comes out from the ravine: the more ancient district, the Sassi (literally, rocks), progressively became a more complex urban environment, and additional parts in the form of more traditional houses were progressively added ahead of the caves. The Sassi, profoundly integrated into the landscape, used to rely on an articulated water management system made of subterranean ducts and tanks.

The city was a relatively unimportant settlement, except for the significant wheat production, until well into the 15th century, when Matera started to be an administrative center and gained importance, and the city started to expand on the back plain over the slope of the ravine. During the centuries, Matera became a refuge for several populations escaping from persecutions, among which Byzantines monks, who realized most of the rupestrian frescoes for which the city is famous.

In the 18th century, the delicate balance between the Sassi and the natural environment came to an end. A dramatic demographic growth led to a progressive subdivision of the cave-dwellings and to the occupation of every space available within the neighborhoods, causing the overcrowding of the Sassi and a worsening in the socio-sanitary conditions. In the 1950s, the Sassi were home to more than 15.000 people living in so poor and deteriorated conditions that, after being defined "the shame of Italy", the neighborhoods were evacuated and their inhabitants forced to move to new districts planned by the most renowned Italian architects and urban planner of the time, making of Matera a living urban lab. The Sassi remained a forbidden and neglected part of the city until 1987 when the biennial recovery plans of the Sassi started. Since that moment, the Sassi were gradually rediscovered. In 1993 they were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site.

For its eccentric location within its own province and for geographical, morphological, and historical reasons, the city of Matera is more connected to the Apulian cities of the metropolitan system of Bari, 60 Km distant, which is the closest major city and main transportation hub.

Matera has been, and to some extent, still is, considered as a very isolated city. The region of Basilicata has always been regarded as peripheral, and so the city of Matera, which is still nowadays the only provincial capital not reached by the national railway carrier (nevertheless,

the city has a narrow-gauge train connection with Bari). The awarding of the ECoC 2019 title has been largely considered as the successful completion of a path from shame and marginality to be an international renowned destination (Verri, 2013). For an in-depth English introduction to the city, see Toxey (2011).

3. Matera as a tourist destination

Tourism in Matera is not something entirely new, although it is true that its consideration as a tourist destination is indeed only a recent phenomenon (Stanzione, Viganoni 2012). The city became famous (and infamous) for its troglodytic settlement of the Sassi in the 1950s and 1960s, when a book (Levi, 1945) and the evacuation of the Sassi brought the city to the national attention (Ranieri, 1959, 1961). However, back then, it could only be considered as a peculiar and niche tourism stop-over for urbanites during longer routes. In the 1960s, the film industry started its long-lasting relation with Matera as a movie set, giving a big contribution to the city's tourism promotion, which will prove essential for the tourism boom of a few decades later. Pasolini's "The Gospel According to St. Matthew", in 1964, was the first of a long series of religious-themed movies set in Matera because of the credible resemblance of the Sassi and the Murgian landscape to Palestine and the biblical places. The UNESCO listed the Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches and the Murgia as World Heritage in 1993, significantly increasing the notoriety of Matera, but, above all, giving back the Sassi to the rest of the city, making the inhabitants of Matera rediscovering them after decades of abandonment and negligence. In those years, the first actions for the recovery of the Sassi started, and, at the end of the 1990s, commercial and entertainment activities began to open in the neighborhoods, engendering the first conflicts with the residents (Fadini, 2011).

Nevertheless, the stepping stone for the city was Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ", in 2004, which marked the beginning of the exponential rise of the touristic flow that Matera experienced in the following years. The city found in tourism a new valuable driver of the economy, especially during the decline of the upholstered furniture industry that flourished in the 1990s (Barbiano di Belgiojoso et al., 2008).

The spiking interest for the city made it the engine of the tourism industry of the entire region (Regione Basilicata, 2008); the city of Sassi grew as the most popular destination outpacing by far all the other areas of the region. Indeed, after it was awarded the ECoC 2019 title in 2014, Matera registered more arrivals than the whole Jonian coast, traditionally the biggest receiving area of the region. As a matter of fact, 2014 seems to be the other turning point for the city. The title of ECoC 2019 brought wide notoriety through the national and international press. In 2014 the well-established tourism trends started to grow even faster, with a proliferation of accommodations, indicating a sort of mobilization of the whole city to host the massive flows expected for 2019 and take advantage of the boosting tourism economy.

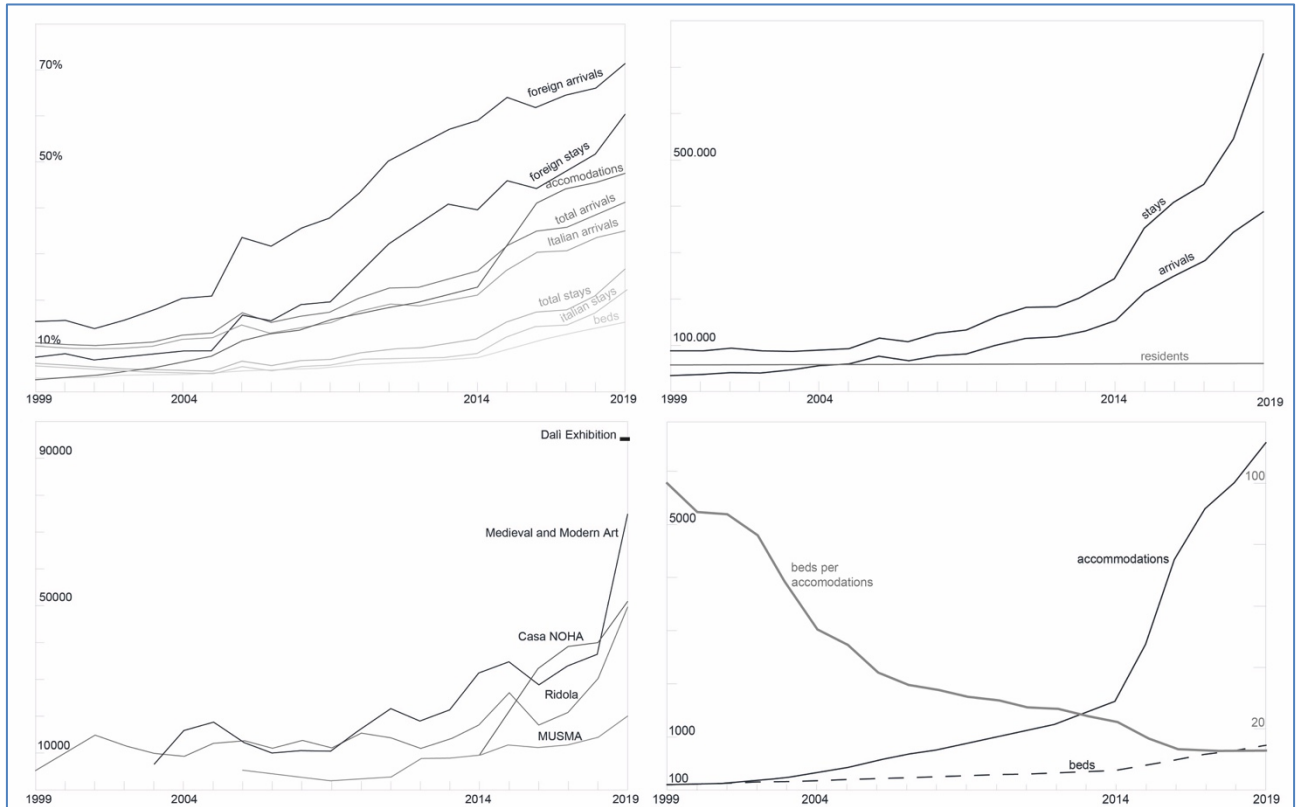
In the span of twenty years, the city, which maintained a stable population of around 60.000 inhabitants, boomed in the number of arrivals and stays (Fig. 2). The share of Matera in all the regional tourism indicators grew impressively, from being a marginal or anyway secondary

destination to account for a large part of the arrivals and stays and for about two-thirds of the foreign tourists (Fig. 1).

According to Butler's TALC model (Butler, 1980; Bojanic, 2005), which measures the maturity of a destination considering the proportion between residents and tourists, we can say that Matera is still a growing and not mature destination, which transitioned from the phase of discovery to the current phase of development in 2005 when the number of arrivals exceeded the number of residents for the first time. Notwithstanding the growing numbers of visitors, following a common trend in contemporary tourism, and especially in art-cities tourism, the average stay quickly dropped from 2,5 to 1,5 days, stabilizing around that figure since 2004.

Among its goals, ECoC 2019 aimed to maintain the total overnight stays around a figure of 600.000 per year, increase the share of foreign tourists from 30 to 50%, and the average stay of 30%, from 1,5 to 2 days (Comitato Matera 2019, 2014; Masiello and Izzo, 2017). During 2019, the average stay grew to 1,9 days, and the share of foreign tourists reached 40%. Compared to 2018, in 2019, the number of arrivals increased only by 12%, but the number of total stays grew by 33% until 730.000. In any case, what seems to be the most significant effect of the ECoC 2019 tourism boost was the impact on museums: all the main cultural attractions of the city registered impressive growth in visitors, driven by the several exhibitions they hosted along the year. As a matter of fact, the exhibition about Dalì, hosted in a cave complex, registered the record number of visitors of 95.000. Matera is home to most of the cultural attractions and facilities of the region; nevertheless, museums used to register a small number of visitors in comparison to the number of tourists; most tourists do not visit the museums or the cultural attractions available in Matera, presumably preferring just to have a walk around the Sassi. During 2019 those museums got to even double their visitors (Fig. 3).

Unfortunately, because of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it will not be possible to assess the impact of the ECoC in the years after the event, measuring if the increase in the museums' visitors or the increase of the average stay has been just an event-related issue or the beginning of a stable trend.



Figures 1, 2, 3, 4. 20 years of tourism growth in Matera.

Figure 1. Share of Matera in the region of Basilicata.

Source: Elaboration of the author on Basilicata Territorial Promotion Agency (APT) data.

Figure 2. Number of residents, arrivals and stays.

Source: Elaboration of the author on ISTAT and APT data.

Figure 3. Museums visitors.

Source: Elaboration of the author on MiBACT data and local press.

Figure 4. Indexed double-scale chart comparing the variation in the number of accommodations, beds, and beds-per-accommodation ratio.

Source: Elaboration of the author on APT data.

4. Spatial impacts of tourism in the city

In this section, the spatial effects of the impressive tourism growth of Matera will be analyzed. The process of touristification massively involved a very limited part of the city: as a matter of fact, the Sassi and the Historic Center, which cluster the large majority of the tourist activities, like museums, accommodations, and tourists themselves, cover just about the 0,15% of the vast municipality territory (392 Km², the 19th in Italy) and the 5% of the urban area. The main impacts of the touristification consist in the museification and bnbfication of the Historic Center and the Sassi and a consistent push to the renovation of private estates and public spaces.

4.1. Museification and renovations.

In the last twenty years, the city experienced a proliferation of museums and attractions in the city. The ECoC 2019 title further boosted the creation of new attractions and the renovations of spaces and infrastructures to improve transportation and access to the city.

On the one hand, a consistent number of small dwellings in the Sassi and the Historic Center was renovated as small tourist accommodations. The growth of tourism and the city's international exposure linked to the movie industry was also the driver for larger projects, renovating ancient buildings and converting them into luxury (five-star) hotels. The first to open, in 2008, was Palazzo Gattini into a former noble family's palace next to the cathedral, then other seven hotels, two converting 16th-century palaces and the others in the form of scattered cave-dwellings hotels followed, and eventually Alvino 1884 opened in 2019 converting a large former mill and pasta manufacture.

Besides the numerous tourist accommodations, tourist attractions sprung up in the city. Considering as an attraction an enclosed space with limited access (hence no open access churches or other architecturally important buildings without a ticketing system, but only facilities structured as museums) in the city of Matera, there are 30 of them, mostly within the perimeter of the Sassi. The other attractions, sanctuaries, archaeological and rural sites, and rupestrian churches are dispersed in the countryside, especially in the Murgia Park that faces the city on the opposite side of the ravine. Only three of those attractions were functioning in 1993 when the city was listed in the UNESCO. The others were established later (seven in 1994-2004, ten in 2005-2014, 10 since 2015). Attractions include major museums, little museums, exhibition spaces, rupestrian churches (which function as museums of themselves for displaying the rupestrian frescoes that enrich them), and case-grotta (cave-dwellings refurnished to display how people used to live in the Sassi before the evacuation). The progressive discovery during the year of new forgotten heritage (as rupestrian churches that had remained hidden in the continuous modifications of the Sassi), the relative easiness of setting up a casa-grotta, the repetitiveness of typical features (the cave, the water management system), and the saturation of the oldest and most famed ones, resulted in a proliferation of these little cave museums. Furthermore, in the attempt to diversify and create new tourist products, attractions started using yet unexploited elements of the local heritage, thus creating the olive oil museum in an ancient oil mill or the Bruna museum, dedicated to the city's patron saint cult.

Tourism, especially the indefinite number of daily visitors, concentrate in the Sassi. However, heritage (rural rupestrian churches, tuff caves) is scattered all around the municipal territory, hence, drawing tourists outside of the Sassi, especially to the Murgia Park, was a goal of the administration sought before approaching 2019. The attempt of increasing the fruition of the Murgia Park led, in 2015, to the realization of a new passage through the ravine, a suspension bridge, which became an attraction itself.

Nonetheless, two important projects have not yet been completed, notwithstanding decades

of plans and partial and unfinished works. One is the tuff caves park aiming to improve the fruition of the ancient and majestic former tuff caves at the north of the city, used to build the Historic Center, integrating them into the Murgia Park and the urban fabric. The other is the demo-ethno-anthropologic museum in the Sassi, a project envisioned already in the 1970s among the most important and meaningful cultural attractions of the city, but continuously stopped and restarted.

Notwithstanding the consistent growth of tourism, the city did not undertake a massive public space makeover plan. Interventions have been limited (mostly repaving of central streets) and mainly realized in the last years, in sight of the 2019 event, which managed to push for the advancement of some projects started in the previous years, as the completion of the new campus of the university, in the buildings that used to host the hospital. Nevertheless, plans for pedestrianization, cycle paths, green areas, and street repaving have been planned multiple times, delayed, scratched, and re-planned because of quite an unstable political environment. That contributed to the stop or lack of advancement in the renovation of crucial areas of the city, as the former Barilla factory compound, the large open area in front of the central station, and the main theater, which are still abandoned.

Only under the pressure of giving the city more decent access from Bari on time for 2019, a new central station was built in record time, and the sidewalks of the streets leading from the station to the city center were enlarged (with fast temporary interventions) to accommodate higher tourist flows.



Figure 5. Perimeter of the districts of Sassi and Historic Center and location of accommodations, attractions, and other projects mentioned, in the city center and immediate surroundings.

Source: Elaboration of the author on data from the Municipality of Matera.

4.2. *Bnbfication.*

After 2014, the growth in the number of accommodations has been exponential. Besides the concentration within the Sassi and Historic Center, data show the hyper-fragmentation of the accommodation offer in Matera. Indeed, the increase of facilities (hotels, bed-and-breakfasts and any kind of tourist accommodation) outpaced the, still huge, increase in the number of beds, with a drop in the beds-per-accommodation ratio (Fig. 4), which indicates that a large amount of small accommodations has been created. The city's largest hotel (250 beds) is located in a rural hamlet at 5 Km from the Sassi and the second largest (130 beds) is outside of the Historic Center, while small hotels, scattered hotels, and bed-and-breakfasts multiplied in the Sassi.

The spatial distribution analysis highlights the expected high concentration (about 60%) of the accommodations in the Sassi and the Historic Center. The concentration of accommodations and the proliferation of tourism-oriented commercial activities had the press and the public debate to claim an excessive touristification of the city (Zampano 2017). Even a research (Picascia et al. 2017) that aimed to analyze the Airbnb pressure in Italian cities concluded that Matera was the most impacted city, with an impressive 25% of the residential stock devoted to tourist use, distancing by far the runner-up, Florence (18%) and third-place Venice (9%). However, a more careful analysis of the data proves that research wrong. Attempts to contact the authors of the research to have more information on the data used were unsuccessful but a reverse operation starting from the result of the research (146 Airbnb properties in 2016 occupy 25% of the historic center housing stock) means that the housing stock of the Historic Center of Matera would amount to 584 units. First of all, the research does not specify what they consider historic center since, in Matera, the Sassi and the Historic Center are separate statistical units. Secondly, assessing the Sassi's housing stock is not a simple task since the area underwent a constant renovation with the recovery of old caves and abandoned estates. As a matter of fact, the neighborhood's housing stock grew by 53% (466 units) between 2001 and 2011, the last census available. There are no available data regarding the number of apartments in 2016, but some increase should be supposed. However, even pairing the 2016 Airbnb data with the 2011 census, the bnbfication percentage would amount to 9% if considering only the Sassi, and to 5% combining the Sassi and the Historic Center, which is still considerable, giving Matera the 4th place in the index after Florence, Venice, and Rome, but much lower than what assessed in Picascia et al. (2017).

This brief reassessment shows that the peculiarity of a place should be adequately considered and weighted when analyzing data; each city is a different environment, and data may mislead. After their evacuation, at the end of the 1980s, the Sassi were almost empty. Furthermore, the dwellings mostly consist, entirely or in part, of caves, making them quite a different historic center compared to other cities.

Moreover, the notable growth in the number of dwellings suggests that the increase of accommodations in the city is only partially caused by the conversion of the existing housing stock, and mostly in the Historic Center, while in the Sassi, acting on an almost abandoned

environment, tourism mostly created new dwelling renovating neglected spaces in areas where the costs linked to the renovation are very high.

Nonetheless, the degree of bnbfication is high, thanks to the profitability of tourist rents; as a matter of fact, renting an apartment in Matera can provide a good side income or a financially worthwhile first activity for those who own more than one apartment, and this is particularly evident in comparing Matera with the surroundings (Fig. 6).

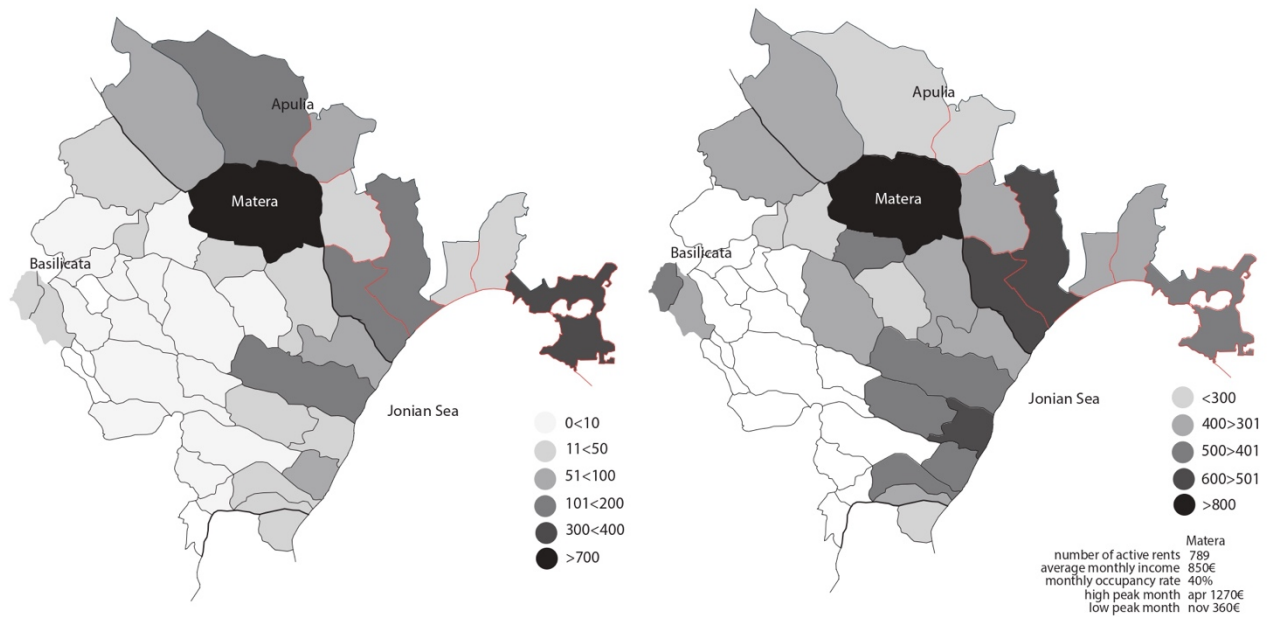


Figure 6. Airbnb listed dwelling in Matera and the surrounding territory (province of Matera, municipalities next to Matera, Jonian coast). Left: number of accommodations. Right: monthly income (€).

Source: Elaboration of the author on data from Airdna.co (referring to year 2018).

4.3. Real estate market

This section will verify, analyzing real estate prices and demographic data, if tourism pushed residents out from the more touristic parts of the city. With the first biennial recovery plans, in 1987, the Sassi started to experience a little repopulation. However, most of them are still today in a state of abandonment. The costs linked to the renovation, the limited accessibility by car, and the need to face the steep morphology of the site, with lots of stairs to climb for each displacement, make life in the Sassi a choice of lifestyle that needs a high motivation and also quite a disposable income. The first people who went back to inhabiting the Sassi were considered crazy by their fellow citizens and even relatives (Valente 2007, Toxey 2011). The analysis of the demographic data, for the period 2001-2016, highlights a consistent decrease in the population of both the Sassi (-30%) and the Historic Center (-17%), of which the largest share occurred in the more recent period 2011-2016 (Sassi -29%, Historic Center -12%). In the

same period, the most populated district of the city, statistically named Center, grew by 83%. According to leading real estate companies, sales in the city peaked in 2010, when they started to suffer the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, and they are now growing again. The ECoC 2019 event and the growth of tourism affected especially the short-term and commercial rents. The Sassi registered in the last years a growing interest of international investors; furthermore, during 2019, there was a spiking number of visitors of the sales advertisements for properties in Matera, which has been seen as a signal of a renovated interest that may result in a more dynamic market in the future (Ierace, 2020, Idealista, 2020; Scenari Immobiliari, Casa.it, 2020).

It is worth mentioning that the Sassi are for their largest part a public property of the State, which acquired them with the evacuation and then conceded them for 99 years to the municipality of Matera in 1986 when the law 771/86 for the renovation of the Sassi was issued. The municipality sub-concedes part of the units for 30 years (or with other public procedures). Hence, most of the units are under a special regime of concession, and only a limited part is subject to the free market.

Through the Italian Revenue Agency (AdE) database, it is possible to perform a real estate market values analysis. The AdE provides real estate prices data for the different areas of the city for each semester since 2006, dividing the estates for function (residential, commercial, tertiary, productive, rural; Sassi are listed under the special category of "typical units") and state of conservation (excellent, average, poor), highlighting the most common state of conservation in the area for each function (Osservatorio Mercato Immobiliare e Servizi Estimativi 2016).

Considering the period 2014-2019, the analysis highlights a substantial increase of the housing sales prices in the Sassi (+57%), the Historic center (+30%), and of both sales (+19%) and rents (+30%) in the Center. Commercial units rents rose steadily in the Historic Center (+100%) and the Center (+43%) (Fig. 7).

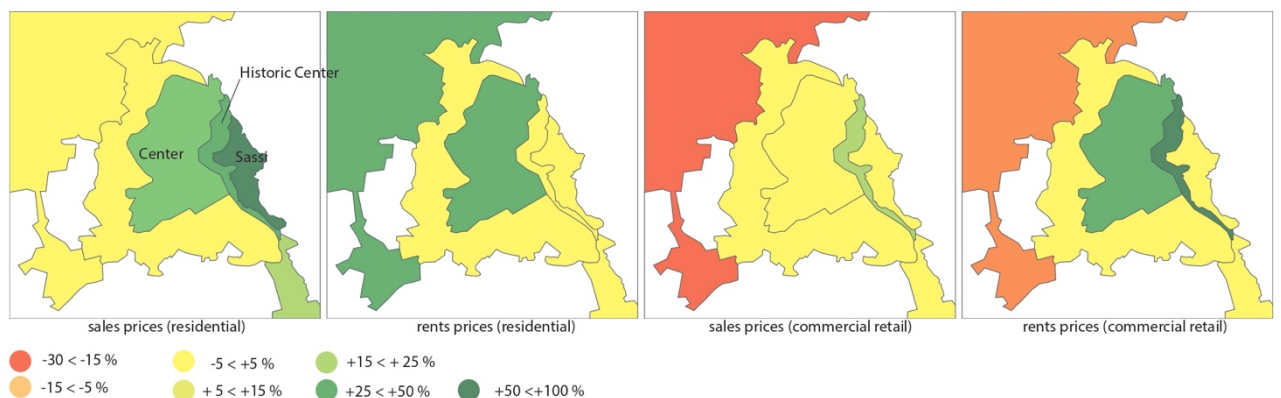


Figure 7. Percentage of sales and rents prices variation in the period 2014-2019.

Source: Elaboration of the author on data from AdE data.

The real estate market analysis, combined with the demographic data, suggests a notable

impact of tourism in the city. Surely, it also involved the Sassi, where the sale prices of the few properties available grew sharply; yet, the Historic Center is perhaps the most affected part. It is the most frequented part of the city by both residents and tourists: here, Materans stroll along the main street, via del Corso, go shopping, and go out to have dinner or to bars. They do not usually have much to do in the Sassi. Tourists visit the Sassi as well the Historic Center, an obligatory passage to enjoy the stunning panorama of the city and to get a glimpse of the local life. Furthermore, as opposed to the Sassi, in the Historic Center properties are on the free market, hence were more exposed to a considerable variation in the last five years, with high increases in residential sales and the spike of the retail sales and leases prices, indicating the high value of the area for commercial activities.

As previously mentioned, the residential population in the Sassi and Historic Center dropped from 2001 to 2016. Unfortunately, no data are available to extend the analysis to 2019. However, considering only the period 2014-2016, the trend to a decrease seems to be confirmed even with signals of a stabilization. It emerges a clear spike of interest in the Historic Center as a primary location for retail, and a great appreciation of housing sales prices in both the Sassi and the Historic Center, which could be regarded as a proxy for the impact of touristification. Therefore, data suggest the role of tourism in pushing out a part of the existing residents. The steady rise of housing sales prices (and not of rents) may indicate the inclination of landlords to sell their properties to tourist real estate operators who buy, refurbish, and put them on the tourist short-term rents market. Moreover, also the Center district's consistent growth could be related to tourism, as a side effect of the displacement of the population from the Sassi and the Historic Center and the revitalization of commerce, especially in the streets immediately adjacent to the Historic Center. However, further, more detailed research is necessary to establish the correlations mentioned above.

5. Conclusion

The paper first presented a series of terms (touristification, overtourism, airification, museification) that indicate the processes induced by and related to the growth of the role of tourism in a place, in this case, an important heritage city as Matera, used as a case study. Secondly, the growth of tourism in Matera in the last twenty years and its characteristics are illustrated and analyzed through the official data available, considering the impact of ECoC 2019. The city experienced exponential growth of the number of tourists and accommodations; the increase in the number of facilities and the drop in the bed/facility ratio is interpreted as a sign of bnbification that involved the most touristic districts of the city. Then, an analysis of the spatial impacts of tourism in the city has been carried out. Firstly, illustrating the proliferation of attractions that occurred along with the increase of tourism, and hence the process of museification and commodification of the heritage. Finally, the accommodation offer's spatial distribution was examined, assessing a high impact of tourist accommodations web-based platforms in the city, even if less than previous research (Picascia et al., 2017) supposed. The concentration of accommodations in the Sassi and the Historic Center and its impact on the real estate market and demographic dynamics were discussed,

highlighting a dramatic increase of prices that could have partly pushed out part of the residential population. Tourism profoundly affected the city; however, because of the almost complete abandonment that previously characterized the city's most touristic area, the Sassi impacted differently from other major tourist cities. Notwithstanding the issues and problems engendered and feared, tourism fostered, accelerated, or allowed processes of renovations that would have not otherwise been possible because of their cost, making them profitable enough to make worthy the renovation of properties and areas difficult to recuperate.

However, the lack of comprehensive planning, long-term vision, and the political instability limited the city in taking advantage of tourism to improve urban quality and connections outside of the Sassi and the Historic Center. Only the approaching of the ECoC 2019 pushed to partially solve long-lasting planning issues, as the construction of a new central railway station. The 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic completely wiped-out tourism for months and upset every established trend and future prediction. Both Matera and the entire territory will face new challenges. The city still has large unexploited abandoned spaces, especially in the Sassi: there is still room for tourism growth. Furthermore, as opposed to many other tourism cities, Matera has a significant advantage: the municipality owns most of the building stock in the most touristic areas. Therefore, the public administration has the power to manage a further growth of tourism, balancing the negative externalities. For instance, the municipality could terminate unfinished social housing projects or plan new facilities for hosting students or other residents interested in living in the Sassi, but that actually cannot because of high prices. Now more than ever, it is crucial to follow up on the intents of the ECoC of making tourists temporary residents, fostering all those rising or well-established flows of digital nomads, remote workers, and multilocal-living people that are not only interested in taking a walk around the Sassi but in really living and enjoy the city for a short-medium time.

Encouraging the afore-mentioned tourists, the settlement of new residents in the Sassi, and pushing further for a makeover of the city, making its public spaces much more livable for both residents and tourists, can be Matera's way to manage and take advantage of even largest tourists flows in the future.

6. References

Amore, A., Falk, M., and Adie, B.A. (2020), "One visitor too many: assessing the degree of overtourism in established European urban destinations", *Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 117-137.

Barbiano di Belgiojoso, G., Colautti, S., Florio, M., and Castelli, C. (2008), "The Natuzzi Group and the Bari-Matera (Italy) upholstered furniture district. A case study of internationalisation in a traditional industry", working paper, CSIL Centre for Industrial Studies, Milan, 18 June.

Barron, K., Kung, E., and Proserpio, D. (2018), "The Sharing Economy and Housing Affordability: Evidence from Airbnb", in Association for Computing Machinery (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2018 ACM Conference on Economics and Computation*.

Almatourism N. 25, 2024: D'Armento, S. Tourism in Matera. A resource or a problem? Impacts of the fast rise of tourism in a heritage important Southern Italian city.

Becheri E., Ciccarelli M. (2018), "Destinazione Puglia Oltre il turismo che non appare", available at: <https://www.dms.puglia.it/portal/documents/10180/2920246/Oltre%20il%20turismo%20che%20non%20appare> (accessed 22 November 2020).

Bohlin, M., Brandt, D., and Elba, J. (2016), "Tourism as a vehicle for regional development in peripheral areas - myth or reality? A longitudinal case study in Swedish regions", *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 24 No. 10, pp. 1788-1805.

Bojanic, D. (2005), "Tourist area life cycle stage and the impact of a crisis", *ASEAN Journal on hospitality and tourism*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 139-150.

Bryman, A. (2004), *The Disneyization of society*, SAGE, London.

Butler, R.W. (1980), "The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: implications for management of resources", *Canadian Geographer*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 5-12.

Calvi, A. (2019), "Matera fa il suo bilancio di Capitale Europea della Cultura", *Internazionale*, 5 December 2019, available at <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/alessandro-calvi/2019/12/05/matera-capitale-cultura-europea> (accessed 22 November 2020).

Scenari Immobiliari, and Casa.it (2019), "Il rapporto 2019 sul mercato immobiliare della Basilicata", available at <https://blog.casa.it/2019/04/09/il-rapporto-sul-mercato-immobiliare-della-basilicata/> (accessed 22 November 2020).

Comitato Matera 2019, 2014, Matera città candidata Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019, Antezza, Matera, Available at <https://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/it/news/550-il-dossier-di-matera-2019-%C3%A8-on-line.html> (Accessed 22 November 2020).

d'Eramo, M. (2017), *Il selfie del Mondo. Indagine sull'età del turismo*, Feltrinelli, Milan

Fadini, S. (2011), "Il turismo responsabile nel nord del mondo. Problemi di paradigma e ipotesi di studio della comunità locale materana", in Associazione Mediterranea Sociologia del Turismo (Ed.), *Atti del VII convegno Mobilità turistica tra crisi e mutamento. Città e contesti mediterranei*.

García-López, M.-À., Jofre-Monseny, J., Martínez Mazza, R., and Segú, M. (2019), "Do Short-Term Rental Platforms Affect Housing Markets? Evidence From Airbnb in Barcelona", working paper, Institut d'Economia de Barcelona, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, 29 July.

Idealista (2019), "Quanto costa comprare casa a Matera Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019", available at <https://www.idealista.it/news/vacanze/mete-turistiche/2019/02/26/130195-quanto-costa-comprare-casa-a-matera-capitale-della-cultura-2019> (Accessed 22 November 2020).

Ierace, L. (2019), "Basilicata, mercato immobiliare in continua discesa: calo anche a Matera", *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 27 August, available at <https://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/matera/1168049/basilicata-mercato-immobiliare-in-continua-discesa-calo-anche-a-matera.html> (accessed 22 November 2020).

Levi, C. (1945), *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, Einaudi, Turin.

Masiello, B., Izzo, F. (2017), "Eventi e progettualità condivisa per il rilancio di una città: il caso di Matera Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019", Bonetti, E., Cercola, R., Izzo, F., and Masiello,

Almatourism N. 25, 2024: D'Armento, S. Tourism in Matera. A resource or a problem? Impacts of the fast rise of tourism in a heritage important Southern Italian city.

B. (Ed.), *Eventi e strategie di marketing territoriale. Gli attori i processi e la creazione di valore*, Franco Angeli, Milan, pp. 243-278.

Osservatorio Mercato Immobiliare e Servizi Estimativi (2016), "Manuale della Banca Dati Quotazioni dell'Osservatorio del Mercato Immobiliare. Istruzioni tecniche per la formazione della Banca Dati", available at: <https://www.agenziaentrate.gov.it/portale/documents/20143/265514/Il+manuale+della+banca+dati+OMI+Manuale+2016+vers+2.0+modificata+in+data+02-01-2018.pdf/c2073cceb58f-cc2d-4827-d52a8b5eac95> (Accessed 22 November 2020).

Pepe, A. (2017), *Le Capitali Europee della Cultura. Il caso studio di Matera 2019*, FEEM, Milan.

Pepe, A. (2018), "The participatory process of a community involved in its biggest event: the case study Matera European Capital of Culture 2019", *Il Capitale Culturale*, No. 17, pp. 275-296.

Picascia S., Romano A., and Teobaldi, M. (2017), "The airification of cities: making sense of the impact of peer to peer short term letting on urban functions and economy", in José Antunes Ferreira, J. A., Simões, J. M., Morgado, S., Marques da Costa, E., Cabral, J., Loupa Ramos, I., Batista e Silva, J., and Baptista-Bastos, M. (Ed.s), *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of the Association of European Schools of Planning*, Lisbon 11-14/07/2017, Universidade de Lisboa, pp. 2192-2204.

Rabbiosi, C. (2018), *Il territorio messo in scena: turismo, consumi, luoghi*, Mimesis, Milan.

Ranieri, L. (1959), *Prospettive delle industrie e del turismo in Basilicata*, Cressati, Bari.

Ranieri, L. (1961), *Le Regioni d'Italia: Basilicata*, Torino, UTET.

Regione Basilicata (2008), *Piano Turistico Regionale*, available at: https://www.regione.basilicata.it/giunta/files/docs/DOCUMENT_FILE_523485.pdf (Accessed 22 November 2020).

Romano, M. (1981), "Il leit-motiv della contrattazione politica nel piano comprensoriale", *Urbanistica*, Vol. 71, pp. 66-84.

Salerno, G.M. (2018), "Estrattivismo contro il comune. Venezia e l'economia turistica", *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 480-505.

Sæþórsdóttir, A. D., Hall C. M. and Wendt M. (2020), "Overtourism in Iceland: Fantasy or Reality?", *Sustainability*, Vol. 12 No. 18, 7375.

Settis, S. (2014), *Se Venezia muore*, Einaudi, Turin.

Stanzione, L., Viganoni, L. (2012), "Il turismo nella Città dei Sassi: un fenomeno recente", Adamo, F. (Ed.), *Turismo e sviluppo urbano in Italia*, Pàtron, Bologna, pp. 571-578.

Tessarolo Ruy, A., Hermanny de Almeida, R. (2020), "Museificação territorial: fundamentos de um conceito", *Revista brasileira de estudos urbanos e regionais*, Vol. 22, e202026

Torres Outón, S. M. (2020), "Gentrification, touristification and revitalization of the Monumental Zone of Pontevedra, Spain", *International Journal of tourism Cities*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 347-369.

Toxey, A.P. (2011), *Materan Contradictions: Architecture, preservation and politics*, Routledge,

Almatourism N. 25, 2024: D'Armento, S. Tourism in Matera. A resource or a problem? Impacts of the fast rise of tourism in a heritage important Southern Italian city.

New York.

UNWTO (2018), "Overtourism? – Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions, Executive Summary", UNWTO, Madrid.

Urbain, J.D. (2002), *L'idiota in viaggio. Storia e difesa del turista*, Aporie, Rome. Original edition (1991) *L'idiot du voyage: histoires de touristes*. Plon, Paris.

Valente, M. (2007), *Evoluzione socio economica dei Sassi di Matera nel XX secolo*, Consiglio regionale della Basilicata, Potenza.

Verri, P. (2013), "2019: cittadini a Matera", *Casabella*, Vol. 831, p. 133.

Wall, G. (2020) "From carrying capacity to overtourism: a perspective article", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 75 No. 1, pp. 212-215.

Zampano, G. (2017), "Airbnb riempie Matera di turisti ma la svuota di abitanti", *Internazionale*, 4 September, available at <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/giada-zampano/2017/09/04/airbnb-matera> (accessed 22 November 2020).