

History and Tourism

Paolo Sorcinelli

Medieval sources report of adventurous trips of young and noble gentlemen along the most important European capital cities. It was a formative ritual where the journey was considered like a life experience able to consolidate the right of citizenship among offspring of the upper class families destined to hold the most important public offices. This practice declined for a few centuries because of the fear of the Bubonic plague and for the contagion in general.

During the XVIIIth Century takes shape the so called "Grand Tour" that involves a new social subject: the bourgeois intellectual who travels for an own need of knowledge and to find the inspiration for his own artistic, cultural or intellectual activity. The "Grand Tour" preserves only the appearance of the previous nobility tour: that is to say the educational need that completes the formative itinerary of the subject which adds something new that is the individual need to know through a sort of secular pilgrimage, the vestiges of ancient civilizations.

In other words, it is not enough to learn from books and guidebooks anymore, but it replace the need of the direct contact and to see at first hand the places and the ancient vestiges.

With this practice, the greek and roman amphitheatres, the monuments of ancient Rome or ancient Greece, recover vitality and cultural value, thanks to the influence that has on the romantic intellectual of the XVIII and XIX Centuries.

In this way the "Grand Tour" take different directions from the previous ages of great travellers: apart from material movement and physical movement through unknown places, the travels purchase unknown connotations and romantic ideas.

Ulysses certainly was a traveller but not a modern one. Ulysses's travel has a great cultural value for the western cultural founding myths, but from a social and mental point of view it is miles away from the Goethe's Italian journey value. Travelling for knowledge is a travel of historic knowledge.

History as science of past has played and is still playing a very important role in the definition of journey: in the Eighteenth Century, the "Grand Tour" was meant to discover ancient vestiges, nowadays the cultural tourism flows considered as visit and fruition of monuments, museums, historical and archaeological sites, cities of art. Cultural tourism includes history, culture, the identity of a territory and its inhabitants. It can be classified as the individual and collective mobility shape, which is able to satisfy "the human need of difference" and to enlarge " the knowledge, the experience and meetings". Sometimes the connections with history can derive from educational assumptions: school educational tour (Nazi concentrations camps), desire of return for personal or corps memory (veteranism), sometimes from the search of a collective identity (Garibaldian places, Loire Valley Castle) or from policy nostalgia (Predappio) or from religious reasons (Lourdes, Fatima, Santiago de Compostela, Loreto). Indeed, the sense of

travel belonging to history nowadays has recreated the need of a sort of “Grand Tour”. After the “Grand Tour” which carried on the ancient roman and classic Greek traditions from the late 18th Century to the early 19th Century; after the “petit tour” of bourgeoisie marriage travel of early 20th Century focused on the discovery of the cities such as Rome, Venice, Florence, which are symbol of national history; after the mass travels on seaside resorts (valuable for the national trade balance), nowadays tourism has discovered again an “ideological plot” that is moved by “the wish of knowing past”, by “the need for education”, by “the need of a collective identity”. In this way, American historians talked about “hunger for the past”, that is the need to reconstruct “human mobility itineraries and collective accumulation of knowledge, usages, values and interests”. It is about a flow on the search of places and monuments which attract because of their connections with events promoted by men more than nature. In a circumstantial division it comprise many different subjects and objects: from prehistoric rupestrian graffiti to Romanesque Abbeys, from ancient or recent battlefields to art museum, entire old towns centre, ruins or scenographic landscapes; alpine peaks where hardy climbers traced the first route of climbing, literary itineraries defined by the writing of famous novelist.

The increase of tourism exposes the risk of manipulation in all these situations. It's obvious the temptations of operators, who prefers larger collection, to don't consider too much the authenticity. It pertains to the comparison between “preservation” and “conservation”: in the first case the object is to safeguard the original state, in the second case the object is to recreate missing parts of historical reconstruction but not without an alteration and an manipulation in the respect of users without the real historical knowledge. A series of films about the “civil war” broadcasted on American television obtained a record a 38 millions viewers and had an effect also on tourist flows: in Richmond. The visitors to the civil war museum increased from 700 to 45.000. The following year, at the end of the series, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, perhaps the most important and tragic site of encounters between Federals and Confederates, the visitors were 1.250.000. In tourism practice it is popular to create of “false-events” and an authenticity which is somehow crucial for historical tourism but is an open question between the experts. The case of San Leo (PU) with the story about the prisoner Cagliostro and the case of Gradara (PU) with the story about the adulterer kiss between Paolo and Francesca are two examples of manipulation of history for/at the use and consumption of the mass tourism. Anyway we must also consider that without the historical reconstruction of the two lovers story (the same is for Cagliostro story) few tourists have known the stories of these characters.

Maybe their journey would have preferred a “no place” like Disneyland or Gardaland or worse a shopping centre where you can spend an all week-end of spare time. Also Sharm el Sheik, even if in this case the place of bathing tourism includes a connection with history thanks to the “all inclusive” fast trip to the Egyptian pyramids and sphinxes.

It's very difficult trying to plan seriously tourism flows towards heritage and historical events, for two reasons:

1. The temptation to consider tourism like an industry from which you can get the largest profit with the lowest investment and planning.
2. The low propensity and the great confusion between the administrators management and operators.

In general we talk about these questions but not in a deep way and it moves more on contingent and extemporaneous factors than on exhaustive analysis and long-lasting strategies. We keep on covering consolidating lands without studies and trying other ways. Except sporadic occasions moved more by fortunate intuitions than drafting and strategic projections. Except historical-religious tourism which has a network of well organised travel agencies, historical tourism is largely dependent on the fragmented and often dispersive activities common in this regard.

In Italy (where probably there is the 70% of the worldwide historical artistic heritage) the cultural and historical network operates not so well: for examples there isn't anything like the "Loire Valley Castles" or "Sussex Castles" network. Recently tourism itineraries on historical events linked at the two World War have been created, like it has been in Alsace-Lorraine and in Normandy and Brittany: on one hand the Gustav line around Cassino itinerary on the other hand the Museum of the Great War between Italy and Austria, that is three sites (Forte Tre Sassi, Cinque Torri, Lagazuoi) within 5 km.

In the first case is a tourism pilgrimage of relatives, fellow soldiers, fellow countryman around five military shrines, abbey, museum of the war, but in the second case predominates a tourism for mountain and war worshippers. The tourist who travels searching a conscious itinerary through the past is a phenomenon that is not yet taking off. It hasn't got an organic size.

The package tours on the traces of the past seems to be a compromise between fashion and the search of an original story. As published on a Repubblica newspaper article on August 11 of 2007 with the title: On Holyday by the dictators, is boom of historical tourism.

"Granted the Ostalgia, the mix of memory and regret for the former East Germany that has been cleared by the movie "Good bye Lenin". But observing a fully booked hotel with the name "Ostel" and which offers a "Stasi Suite" in perfect DDR style, with Honecker portrait on the bed, is more than what the victims of former communist dictatorship can stand.

In Berlin, the associations that gather former dissidents complain "the offence against those who have been discriminated during DDR" but tourist are becoming increasingly fascinated by emblems of former dictatorships and in Germany items from east are near to being a pop phenomenon.

The "Ostel" with its thirty-nine rooms and six floors in Friedrichshain district, has become its war horse.

All accessories have been found after months of searches: tapestries, lights, tables and televisions that reproduce meetings between Erich Honecker and Fidel Castro. " It's just a joke, I'm not a nostalgic" says Daniel Habig the hotel manager and he

also explains that he wants to offer a “journey through time”. A step back in time for 51 euros! The maximum price for a double room.

The way to use emblems of former dictators for an holiday doesn't stop at Hotels. The last arrival in nostalgic tourism marketing is Primorka, Tito's yacht an hull of 25 meters for those who wants to stand in the marshal shoes, ploughing the waves and admiring the coast of former Yugoslavia.

Captain Smiljan Samardic is convinced that the project will have a great success and he boughts the boat for one hundred four thousand euro by Montenegrin government. The ministry of transport after using the yacht for some travel representation put it up for auction in March.

In Moscow the place par excellence for those who dream to relive the iron curtain is reported al on Lonely Planet. Its name is “the sword and the shield” as the symbol of Kgb, is a restaurant near Lubjanka palace the former headquarters of sovietic secret service. Since then the restaurant has been taken by storm from tourists that want to identify with the iconography of first James Bond's films: Stalin bust, portraits of all Kgb directors, the menu ensures all typical dishes of that time. Also other places around the area take advantage of the popularity of the restaurant using stamps and forms of secret service exposed on tables.

If Stasi and Kgb offers a really kitsch iconography, other historical places of former dictators show their past to a lesser extent. For example the case of Eagles Nest, the Kehlsteinhaus, Hitler's alpine hut, given to him for his fiftieth birthday. After the war the allies wanted to raze it to the ground but Bavaria has used it as destination for excursions since 1960, exalting more the beauty of this place than its past. The main reason of its popularity anyway remains the history of the chalet and tourists seat at the restaurant and spend 3,90 euro for a medium beer looking at the landscape so dear to Fuehrer.

Sleeping in Repubblica of Salò Mussolini's residence is definitely more expensive. Since 2001 the villa Feltrinelli in Gargnano, where the duce stayed since October 1943, is a luxury hotel where Japanese, Americans and Germans are willing to spend from 700 to 2.200 euro. But not only the houses of death dictators fascinate the mass. Ségolen Royale knows it very well, since she have challenged Sarkozy for the race to the Elysee, French and foreign tourists go to Melle a village of 4.300 inhabitants, just to see her house.

Even this is “mass tourism” but as some observant studies says “it doesn't seem to be able to gather all the aspects of the travel heritage and in its last forms seems rather more affine to one of the many way of spending spare time, to an entertainment that doesn't change its nature by the simple fact that it happen away from home”.

In this way Eric Leed (*the mind of the traveller*) try to oppose the distinction between tourist and traveller and to conclude saying that the travel became only a tourist matter that equals the continuous moving of a prisoner inside his cell. Instead Attilio Brillì (*Quando viaggiare era un'arte*) compares travelling “to the fanciful pleasure of the sedentary traveller confined to his own filled solitude”. The sociologist Augè observes the proliferacion of the so said, non-place and he

complains the loss of the sense of travel, wishing for the cultural necessity of a recovery.

While the holiday industry in Italy shows some sagging and heavy repercussions on the economy, maybe a good recipe could be the knowledge of combining with new formulas, historic, artistic, literary and religious past that abounds in Italy. Far from beaches without trees there are other places where is possible to practice the art of travelling as simple tourist of good cultures, good manners and extensive views. Paola Lugo has recently edited a curious book on the anti-nazifascist resistance. The title is *Montagne Ribelli. Guida ai luoghi della resistenza: (Rebel Mountains. A guide to the places of Resistance)* the author accompanies the reader in ten excursions, with practice notes (where parking are, journey times, where to sleep, overcome difficulties etc.) and with passages of many authors as Meneghello, Fenoglio, Calvino, Rigoni Stern, Francesco Guccini and of Lorian Macchiavelli, Giovanna Zangrandi who have lived and have written about the epic deeds of Resistance. Little journies and itineraries of tourist not in a hurry the nature in the historic maintaining memory. It remind us maybe that travelling is not necessarily travelling long distances.

As maintained by the young Savoyard officer Francois Xavier De Maistre during the house arrest because of a duel against a colleague for futile issues in honor in Turin in 1790: " My bedroom is situated at 45 degrees of latitude, according to the measurements of father Beccaria; it faces West, it forms a rettangle measuring 36 steps, skirting close to the walls. But my journey contains more because I will often cross it by length and width or diagonally, without following any rules or regulation. I will even go zigzag and follow every possible geometrical line if required".

So finally De Maistre can claim to have: "undertaken and completed a journey of 42 days around my room. The interesting observations that I have made under continued pleasure I have felt during the walk gave me the desire to make it public. Who infact is so unhappy or miserable not to have a hole of a room where one can hide oneself away from the world? That's all that is needed for the journey. Thousand of people who hadn't dared before me, others who were unable to and others again who had not thought of travelling, will be persuaded by my example. Allow yourselves to accompany me on my journey, we will proceed in small steps, making fun as we go, of travellers who have visited Rome and Paris; no obstacle can stop us; and gaily abandoning ourselves to our imagination, we will follow it wherever it wants to lead us".

Immagination plays an important role in our travels: travels of pure fantasy or travels planned for reason of tourism. Where this imagination will play a major role is still unsure. But in front of a tourism that is growing (there actually exists travel agencies specialized in travel of the "faith" sometimes really expensive or specialized in extreme holiday with many dangers) why we don't think about travel agencies specialized in historic travel? Our graduates in art history, medieval, modern or contemporary history, science and technology history and history of philosophy, they maybe lack in enterprise?

For years I have been obsessed by the book of Roy Ladurie about the Pyreanean village of Montaignou, known because of its inhabitants (a few hundred) that have

been well questioned by the bishop Fourier searching their Cathar Heresy during the fourteenth century. For years I promise myself to visit this corner of the world and finally from Carcassonne I start my journey to this village unknown on maps. In a village a nice person told me to follow his car for some miles uphill until we achieve a plateau where the gentleman told me to go on for some miles more and to find a road sign on the left. It was a piece of wood hand written almost invisible and then a little path of soil and grass, Montailou, namely few houses, few ruins and remains of a tower. Nothing more, only the wind and a house with a radio station that radiated music on the surrounded valleys. The story told by Le Roy Ladurie encouraged me and brought me with effort to Montailou, but everything would have been easier if someone had had the idea to think of a tourism following the tracks of history books.

References

- A. Brilli, *Quando viaggiare era un'arte. Il romanzo del Grand Tour*, il Mulino, Bologna 1995
- A. Brilli, *Il viaggio in Italia. Storia di una grande tradizione culturale*, il Mulino, Bologna 2006
- Il viaggio. Dal "grand tour" al turismo post-industriale*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Roma 5-6 dicembre 1996, Edizioni Magma, FLM Napoli 1996 (ed. it.) (in particolare gli interventi di Bernardi, Minca, Visentin)
- E. Leed, *La mente del viaggiatore*, il Mulino, Bologna 2008
- E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Storia di un paese: Montailou*, Rizzoli, Milano 1977
- P. Lugo, *Montagne ribelli. Guida ai luoghi della resistenza*, Oscar Mondadori, Milano 2009
- Th. Paggini, *In vacanza dai dittatori, è boom per il turismo storico*, di Th. Paggini, in "Repubblica", 11.8.2007
- V. Sanesi, *Turismo religioso, business del futuro*, in "Il Denaro-Denaro.it", n. 241, 27.12.2007