



**SUBURBAN HOTELS AND THE
ATOMIZATION OF TOURIST SPACE IN
LARGE CITIES: THE CASE OF ROME**

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on theoretical and empirical studies on hotel location, as well as on enquires into the specificities of contemporary suburbanization, the article investigates the drives, directions and consequences of the dispersal of hotels into the suburban areas of large historic cities, with an illustration of the case of Rome. The attractiveness of suburban tourism for both private investors and planning authorities - it is argued - is not simply a response to the congestion of city centres, but is constructed upon more general changes in the spatiality of urban tourism. The spread of suburban hotels exemplifies an atomization of the tourist city and it is an excellent indicator of the changing socio-functional relations between the hospitality system and the city, the different role of accessibility and of agglomeration economies, the transformation of tourists' experience of cities in an age of global suburbanization.

Classification JEL: L83, R12, R33, R58, N94

Keywords: urban tourism, hotel location, suburbanization, urban planning, Rome (Italy).

1. INTRODUCTION

Suburban areas have changed in the last decades: they are increasingly attractive for firms and services, and they became privileged spaces for consumption and recreation. Notwithstanding the tourism industry plays an important role in this frame, the case of suburban tourism has rarely been the object of specific research.

Within the field of tourism studies, many authors have stressed the increasing dispersal of accommodation services toward the suburban areas of large cities (Bégin, 2000; Russo, 2002; Weaver, 2005). Such studies, however, do not provide a comprehensive assessment of suburban tourism. As we shall see, current theories on hotel location seem rather to predict the continuous clustering of accommodation services within city centres. Among the growing literature about suburbanization, on the other hand, the

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specificity of tourism is rarely addressed, while researches about suburban hotels are even more rare, if not totally lacking.

This article is an attempt to fill this gap, by investigating the drives, directions and consequences of the dispersal of hotels into the suburban areas of Rome (Italy). The case of suburban hotels is used as an indicator of more general changes that affect the spatial organization of urban tourism, as well as tourists' experiences and practices in an age of global suburbanization.

In the first section, the article offers a review of general models and empirical studies that have attempted to identify regularities in the location patterns of hotels within historic cities. The aim is to see how accessibility, agglomeration economies and the tendency toward segregation combine at different periods of time, and impact upon the spatiality of urban tourism in large cities.

The next section discusses the case of suburban tourism, drawing on the few existing studies as well as on more general enquiries about contemporary suburbanization processes. The rise of suburban hotels, it is argued, is constructed upon the loosening of the physical, functional and socioeconomic integration that characterized the relations between tourism and cities in the previous stages of urban tourism development.

The hypothesis discussed so far will be tested, in the following section, against the historical-geographical evolution of urban tourism in Rome. The spatial analysis of data on the distribution of hotels in Rome, from 1870 until the present day, will allow to introduce some hypothesis about the causes and consequences of hotels decentralization, as well as to reflect upon the strategies of local planning authorities that, in Rome as in other cities, actively promote suburban tourism in order to gain competitiveness and to favour evolution toward a polycentric metropolis.

The concluding section provides a summary of the main findings.

2. HOTEL LOCATION AND THE SPATIALITY OF TOURISM IN LARGE CITIES

Notwithstanding the diversity of tourist cities, many authors attempted to identify regularities in the spatial organization of urban tourism. The first typology of models are land use models, where tourism services are supposed to compete with other urban functions for the occupation of central areas of the city, in order to enjoy the benefits of agglomeration, the advantages of accessibility and proximity to a variety of attractions and services. According to Yokeno (1968) - the first author to include accommodation services among the various urban functions - the majority of hotels will occupy the concentric ring immediately outside the CBD, thus displacing all other functions apart from those that characterize the economic centre of the city.

Land use models, however, are too reductive and do not apply to large cities with a multiplicity of city centres, in part due to the partial decentralization of the CBD. In the case of tourism in historic cities, however, the assumption of a single centrality is more realistic, since the majority of the attractions are concentrated in the centre. For hotels of the same quality, therefore, prices will tend to be lower the further they are from the centre, a hypothesis that has been confirmed by empirical analysis of several cities (Shoval, 2006).

In historic cities, moreover, the conversion of existing buildings into hotels may be expensive or impeded by architectural constraints and planning restrictions. It can therefore be assumed that the largest concentrations of hotels are located immediately outside the historic city, as predicted by Yokeno but also by other models that will be discussed further.

Such a clear and predictable pattern of hotel location, however, cannot be found in cities that are either major tourist destinations or large metropolises. In the case of small-medium cities that attract large numbers of tourists, tourist services occupy the entire urban area and may even contribute directly to the city's growth by means of processes of 'tourism urbanization' (Mullins, 1991). In larger cities, on the other hand, tourism competes with a wider range of other functions that will tend to coexist within the same areas (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000, p. 84; Russo, 2002, p. 168).

Land use models, moreover, do not sufficiently take into account the dynamics of tourism supply and demand, but rather reduce them to a few profit maximization equations. Different types of hotels, for example, have differing needs and consequently are likely to display different locational patterns. One possible outcome is described by Egan and Nield (2000): medium-high category and business hotels will by preference be built *ex-novo* and located in the outer city. Lower category hotels will locate closer to the centre, because they can be established in buildings that previously had other functions and because their guests (e.g. backpackers) visit the city on foot. Luxury hotels will be found in the historic city or in the CBD, and within each concentric ring accommodation will find itself co-existing with other urban functions (Figure 1a).

A second typology of models includes those that relate the pattern of hotel location to the historical-geographical development of the city. The aim of 'evolutionary models' is, again, to identify regularities in the spatial organization of urban tourism. Unlike land use models, however, such regularities are deduced from empirical analysis of similar cities at different periods of time (Cohen-Hattab, 2004). Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000, p. 86), for example, identified four stages in the spatial development of tourism in European historic cities (Figure 1b): over time, tourism services are expelled from the historic centre and concentrate in a new 'tourist city' (elsewhere referred to as the 'transition zone') between the historic centre

and the CBD (stage 3), while in the following period they expand into the whole area surrounding the urban core (stage 4).

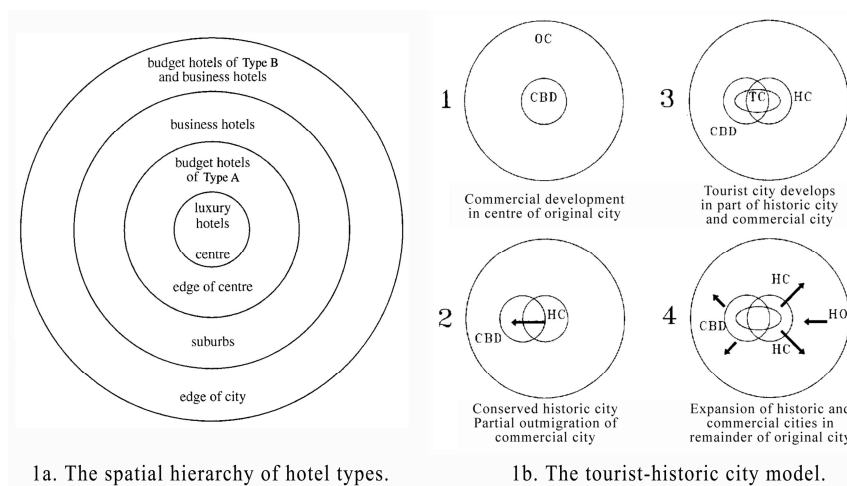


Figure 1. - *Hotel location models in large cities*

Sources: 1a. Egan and Nield, 2000, p. 612; 1b: Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000, p. 86 (OC: original city, TC: tourist city, HC: historic city, HO: housing).

Other similar models seek to identify typologies of tourist districts or clusters within cities (Pearce, 2001). Each district has a precise historical origin; they emerge in order to satisfy different sub-markets which respond differently to factors such as accessibility, the cost of services, urban quality. Major agglomerations form around rail, road or airport gateways, owing their development to the prevailing modes of transport in each period (Ritter, 1986).

The tendency toward spatial concentration indicates the existence of strong economies of agglomeration. Unlike in other industries, the clustering of tourism services is less dependent on direct supply-side linkages between firms, and more dependent on demand-side economies of scale; proximity to a wide range of services and businesses, in other words, is necessary to make a place attractive to tourists (Judd, 1995, p. 179).

Tourism districts within historic cities, however, are less homogeneous than those models would predict and they are rarely rigidly segregated from the rest of the city. According to Judd (1999, 2004), the formation of spatially isolated tourist bubbles was typical of the early stages of urban tourism while, over time, the whole of the city has been made attractive to visitors (2004, p. 329). Mono-functional tourist spaces, moreover, are more likely to be found in medium-sized cities rather than in metropolitan areas with a large mixed economic base (Fainstein and Judd, 1999, p. 264).

There is nevertheless a tendency towards spatial segregation that is typical of many other urban functions. In the case of tourism, such

segregation is further encouraged by tourists' preference for protected spaces, sheltered from excessive mingling with the chaos, unpredictability and insecurities that characterize the rest of the city. Rigid segregation, for example, has been found in cities that have large wealth gaps (Judd, 1999, p. 36); in many of these cases, tourist facilities are increasingly established in the suburbs, in order to be placed in what are perceived by (western) tourists as more familiar and safe surroundings (Preston-Whyte, 1999). Many authors, more recently, have investigated the formation of 'tourism precincts': concentrations of tourism-related facilities that share many of the characteristics of tourism districts, but have clearly defined boundaries and are explicitly designed to meet visitors' needs and to offer a reproduction of the urban experience (Hayllar *et al.*, 2008, p. 57).

The tendency towards the formation of mono-functional spaces dedicated to tourists, finally, may be reinforced by urban policies which, in some historic cities, have two opposing objectives: on the one hand, to attract as many visitors as possible while on the other protecting the rest of the urban area, the local population and the city's historical heritage from tourists (Fainstein, 2007, p. 4).

The spatial distribution of hotels, to conclude, is part of a complex socio-spatial dialectic that includes the evolution of the tourism market, the changing morphology of cities, the changing priorities of property developers and planning authorities. Despite some regularities that can be found in similar settings, hotel locational patterns are profoundly diverse and can only be investigated in relation to single case studies.

In addition to the general models discussed so far, there are plenty of case studies regarding neighbourhoods within cities that are for the most part highly 'touristified'. It has been observed in many of those cases that tourism contributes significantly to gentrification, to the 'alklorization' of city centres or to the creation of tourist bubbles (Judd, 1999; Fotsch, 2004; Gotham, 2005). These studies, however, mainly relate to central neighbourhoods. As we will see in the next section, studies that specifically address the case of tourism in suburban areas are rare and fragmented.

In the following sections, moreover, the aim will be to verify to what extent the hypothesis and models presented so far can be confirmed or contradicted given the spatial dispersal of the tourist city that is occurring in Rome as in other large cities.

3. SUBURBAN TOURISM

Tourism has both direct and indirect relations with urban growth and suburbanization. On the one hand, tourism-related services - along with other non-residential functions - imply a growing demand for central spaces and contribute to the expulsion of the local population (especially low-income groups) from the city centre (Berdini, 2010). On the other hand, the

value that tourists accord to central locations must be set against the considerable cost of space, as well as the architectural and planning constraints that are typical of historic cities. The outcome of this trade-off is a simultaneous tendency towards both concentration and dispersal.

The dispersal of accommodation facilities to peripheral areas has been found in many settings, ranging from the Chinese city of Xiamen (Bégin, 2000) to the Niagara Falls (Ingram and Inman, 1996). Large empty spaces in proximity to transport gateways appear as the preferred location for large and medium-high category hotels that are particularly suited for certain categories of tourists such as business travellers, organized groups or people in transit. Unlike individual leisure tourists, for these categories the accessibility of the centre is less important than other factors like the cost of accommodation, hotel quality, the availability of services, or easy access to and departure from the city.

The suburbanization of accommodation is caused by the same drives that contribute to urban sprawl more generally: the improvement of transport systems; the availability of large empty spaces and the higher functional flexibility of suburban areas; the need to satisfy growing demand in the face of the saturation of city centres and the high cost of building conversion or urban renewal.

The dispersal of the tourist city, however, is a more recent phenomenon in respect to suburbanization. Suburban spaces have turned only recently from being mainly residential areas into commercial and business locations (Garreau, 1991). The dispersal of the tourist city in such cases is following the decentralization of employment and of the CBD (McNeill, 2009, p. 219).

Suburban spaces are also becoming, to an increasing degree, places of consumption and recreation. Shopping districts, conference centres, recreational facilities, theme parks and indeed hotel complexes are spreading into suburban areas and they attract visitors from both within and outside the city. The distinctive character of suburban consumption spaces (e.g. shopping malls) has captured the attention of many authors, as it is paradigmatic of a more general transformation of cities in the post-industrial and post-modern era (Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1998; Gottdiener, 1997; Gospodini, 2006). Such transformations are affecting city centres as well, but are particularly evident in the suburbs, and are often criticized for the risks they imply in terms of standardization, the formation of non-places, ~~Mac~~Disneyfication+ of the urban experience and the privatization and ~~gating~~+ of public spaces.

Recreational and consumption spaces in the post-modern city - in some cases even residential areas (Bartling, 2006) - have much in common with the tourist space, insofar as they are often designed as themed and protected environments that are both extraordinary and predictable. Studies that focus on the specificities of suburban tourism and on suburban hotels more specifically, however, are rare.

Tourism in suburban areas is occurring for the most part inside precincts or in isolated structures that are rarely locally owned and have few functional relations with their surroundings. In contrast to central locations, hotels located on the urban periphery are likely to be far more self-contained in the services they offer, less strongly associated with other tourism elements apart from transport nodes, and thus relatively poor indicators of the tourist city (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000, p. 75). Local residents may thus see the costs of tourism development (e.g. urbanization, congestion) while getting few of the benefits (Weaver, 2005, p. 29). Tourism in suburban areas, however, does not generate as much hostility from residents as it does in the city centre - people who live in the suburbs perceive a significantly higher positive economic impact from tourism than those who live in both urban and rural areas (Sharma and Dyer 2009: 203) - but it may trigger competition between a wider range of alternative (urban and rural) land uses (Weaver and Lawton, 2001).

Hotels in the outer city are spatially dispersed and do not seem to rely upon agglomeration economies. As well as the benefits discussed in the previous section, according to Chung and Kalnins (2001), central hotels have lower advertising costs, since tourists can choose their accommodation, as well as defining their itineraries around the city, on the basis of on-the-spot observations and direct comparison. This is certainly not realistic, given the importance of intermediaries in channelling tourist flows. We may say, however, that the dispersal of the tourist city is even more strongly dependent, with respect to a more compact tourist city, upon the development of services and signals that mediate tourists' choices and their visiting experience.

Furthermore, the spatial clustering of hotels encourages competition and differentiation, as has been shown in the case of Manhattan (Baum and Haveman, 1997) and Madrid (Gutiérrez and Urtasun, 2006). The creation of market niches, therefore, is typical of central rather than peripheral areas, where the product is much more homogeneous and standardized in order to fit in with the requirements of global communication and service provision systems (Hoffman *et al.*, 2003).

In addition to their locational choices, the architectural form of contemporary hotels is an excellent indicator of the changing relations between the hospitality system and the city (McNeill, 2008; 2009). Suburban hotels exemplify a tendency toward isolation which is accompanied by increases in size. The spread of giant hotel complexes, as we will see further, may be regarded as an attempt to internalize the externalities that are typical of city centres.

The business hotels that sprang up at the beginning of the twentieth century, on the contrary, provided only a bedroom. For the parlors, dining rooms, and lounges (the guest at a business-men's hotel had to go elsewhere, probably to one of the growing number of commercial tearooms,

bars, restaurants, and cafés. There, visitors to the city might feel themselves immersed in the exciting, brightly lit life of the city (Cocks, 2001, p. 88).

Many hotels have subsequently undergone a kind of *retroversion* (McNeill, 2008, p. 395), and this is particularly evident in suburban areas, where hotels tend to organize internally the whole set of relationships which they previously had with their urban surroundings. A paradigmatic example is the proliferation of airport hotels, allowing business travellers to find all the services they need within one single building complex (McNeill, 2009).

Even if they are travelling on business, most tourists will continue to visit the city centre. Commuting tourists, however, must carry out their visits quickly, due to the extra time wasted in moving around the city. They tend to be less aware of the qualitative content of the tourism goods and less reachable by traditional information tools (guides, signals, press) (Russo, 2002, p. 169). The dispersal of accommodation services - according to Russo (2002) - is associated with the increasing mediation of visiting itineraries, the congestion of visitors around the most touristic areas of the city and may even lead to a *vicious circle* and to the decline of the destination.

4. THE SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF URBAN TOURISM AND SUBURBAN HOTELS IN ROME

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Rome was a medium-sized city that did not extend beyond the ancient Roman walls. The few hotels were located almost entirely behind what was then the northern gateway to Rome, *Piazza del Popolo*. The *Guida Monaci* - an exhaustive reference guide listing commercial services, published since 1870 - report that in 1870 there were 24 hotels, increasing to 34 in 1890, 74 in 1910, and 81 in 1925 (Girelli Bocci, 2006).

The information provided by *Guida Monaci* allows the identification of the exact location of hotels in different time periods (Figure 2 and 3). Hotel density is estimated using kernel functions (Silverman, 1986).

Between 1870 and 1940, while many new hotels were established within the historic city, half of them located in proximity to it, in newly urbanized areas. During this period, the main area of hotel concentration moved out of the historic city towards the central railway station (*Termini*) which, in the early decades of the twentieth century, became the new gateway to the city. The tourist city, however, remained spatially concentrated and clustered, while many mixed-income and densely populated historic neighbourhoods were found unsuitable for the location of hotels.

In the post-war decades the city grew rapidly, as did the number of tourists. The number of hotels increased by 65 percent between 1945 and 1960 (Colzi, 2006, p. 389). Although the majority of the accommodation capacity remained concentrated in the inner city, and in particular around *Termini* station, an increasing number of hotels located in newly urbanized

areas (Figure 3). More precisely, the north-western areas of the city . more elegant and with middle-high income residents . proved to be excellent locations for hotels which, in contrast, are almost totally absent (even today) from the less wealthy eastern parts of the city. During the 1950s and 1960s, moreover, we see the first signs of dispersion: the tourist city begun to loose its compactness with the establishment of a few hotels in the area built on the occasion of the 1942 world's fair (EUR) and along the *via Aurelia*. We see the creation of the first motel along the *via Cassia* and the first large hotel complex . the *Cavalieri Hilton* . established in 1956 on the top of *Monte Mario* hill, sparking bitter controversy due to the fact that it was built on a green space and due to the hotel's negative impact upon the urban landscape. Finally, 1960 saw the opening of the international airport at *Fiumicino* . the new gateway to Rome . around twenty kilometres outside the city.

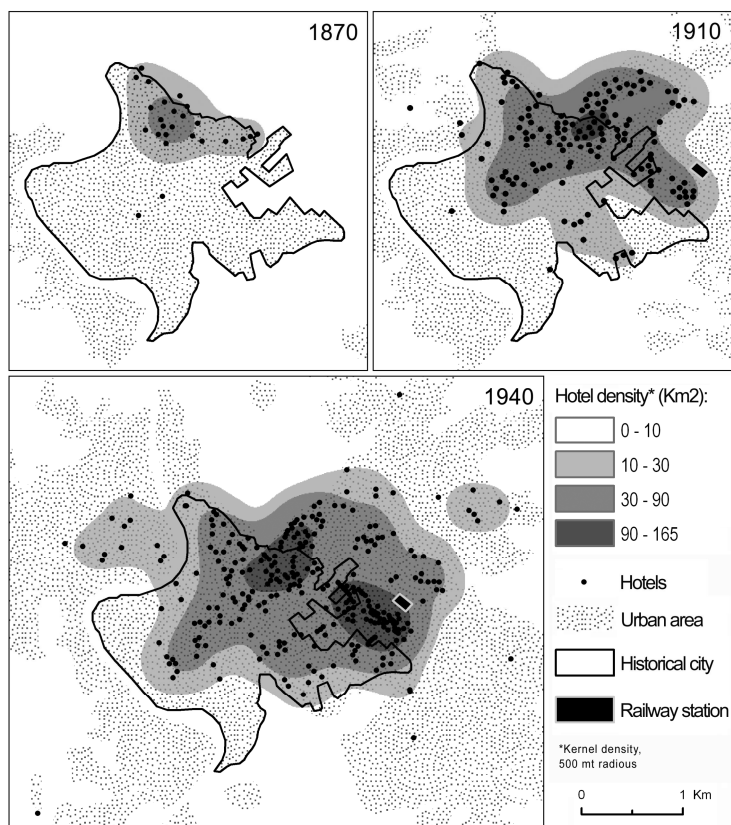


Figure 2. - Distribution of hotels in Rome between 1870 and 1940

Between the 1960s and the 1970s such dispersion was limited and with few exceptions - despite the incredible growth of the city itself - the extent and shape of the tourist city remained more or less unchanged (Figure 4).

The expansion of accommodation capacity . with a 60 percent increase in beds . was due to an increase in hotel density within existing agglomerations and above all to an increase in the size of the new buildings. Hotels went from an average of 39 beds in 1960 to 69 in 1980 (Conti-Puorger and Scarpelli, 2006). Today they average more than 100 beds per hotel.

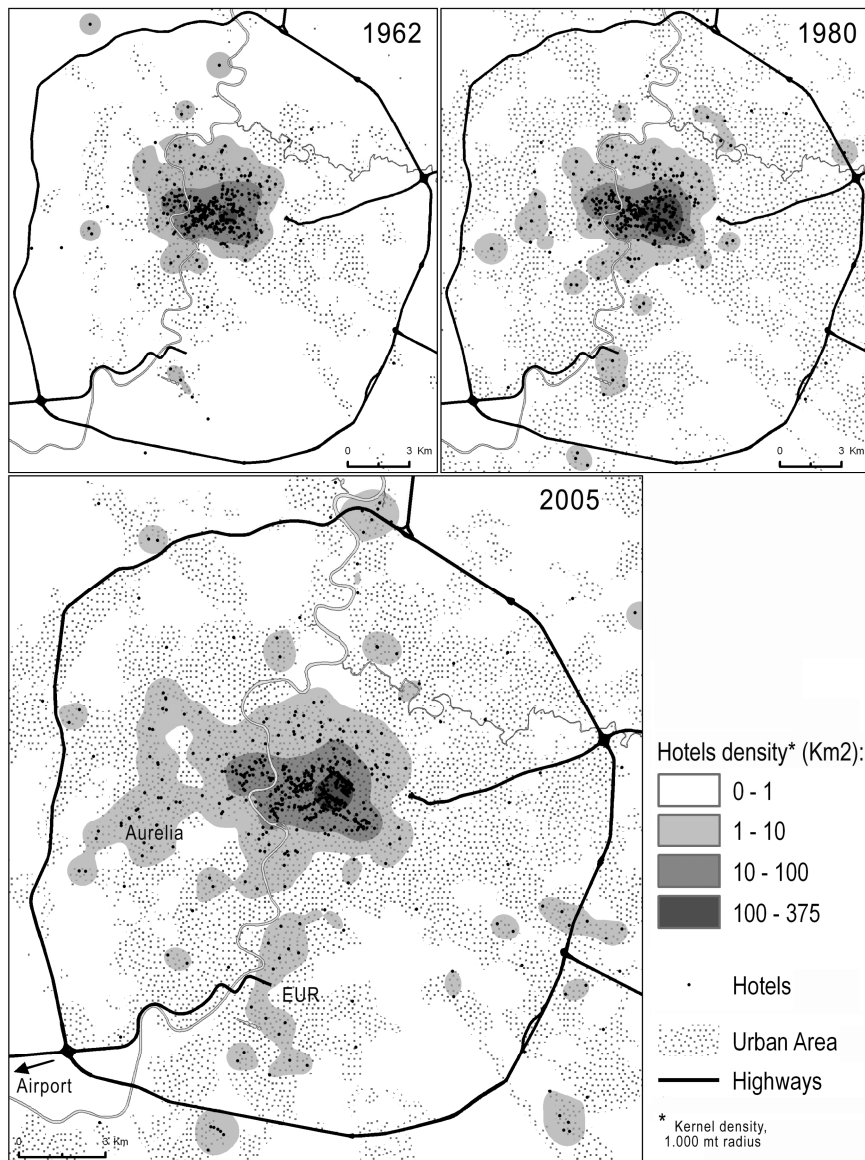


Figure 3. - Distribution of hotels in Rome between 1962 and 2005

The process described so far is similar to that outlined by Ashworth and Tunbridge in their model of the tourist-historic city (Figure 1b): accommodation services are expelled from the historic city, in part due to growing concern about conserving the historical heritage, but remain concentrated in the surrounding areas. From the 1980s onwards, on the contrary, the continuous increase in accommodation capacity consistently affects the outer parts of the city and exurban areas. The accommodation capacity of the city centre and surrounding areas continues to grow, but there is a reduction of nearly 50 percent in maximum concentration levels, confirming a general tendency towards spatial dispersion. The increasing dispersal of the tourist city may be regarded as an additional fifth stage with respect to the four stages already outlined by Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000, p. 86).

Suburban tourism, more generally, seems to contradict some of the traditional explanations on the spatial organization of tourism in cities, in so far as they predict the continuous agglomeration and clustering of tourism facilities.

Analogously to the city as a whole, the spatial form of the tourist city, in recent decades, seems to lose its compactness and become sprawling and fragmented. Up until the 1970s, indeed, the expansion of the tourist city seems to follow the growth of the city as a whole. Hotels tend successively to leapfrog the already urbanized periphery and invade suburban areas and empty spaces, especially along the main transport axes.

By looking at the current distribution of hotels in Rome, in peripheral areas the level of concentration is not high enough so as to lead to the formation of clusters or districts. Minimal concentrations can be found in the peripheral areas that have previously become touristified: the *via Aurelia* and EUR, thanks to proximity to Vatican city in the case of the former, and to *Fiumicino* airport for the latter.

In more central or semi-central areas, on the other hand, since the 2000s, there has been an extraordinary increase in non-hotel types of accommodation. The spatial behaviour of non-hotel accommodation shows two antithetical tendencies: on the one hand, they can be found everywhere, even in areas where hotels are lacking. On the other, thanks to their greater locational flexibility, they can more easily choose a central location and thus contribute to a further concentration of tourists in the city centre.

Central locations continues to enjoy a significant locational rent (Shoval, 2006), given that prices are progressively higher the closer hotels are to the city centre, with a correlation between price and distance of nearly -0.5 for each star class. At the same time, the growing number of suburban hotels confirms the attractiveness of peripheral locations. More precisely, a sample survey conducted by the author shows that suburban hotels are particularly suited to sub-markets - e.g. business travels, conference tourism, shopping tourism, event tourism - that represent a minority of total arrivals in Rome,

but nevertheless are growing rapidly and are particularly attractive for private investors and policy-makers in respect to the more traditional leisure tourism, which continues to prefer centrally located hotels.

The spatial distribution of hotels, with respect to their classification, is a partial confirmation of the above mentioned model by Egan and Nield (2000): luxury hotels have their highest concentration in the historic city, budget hotels are predominantly located within the inner periphery while the outer periphery seems particularly suited to business hotels.

Central areas . apart from a few specialized districts . host a variety of accommodation types. In the suburbs, on the contrary, hotels are far more similar. First, they are considerably bigger. The drive towards large, multi-functional facilities allows hotels to attract customers in an increasingly competitive and standardized market, and to increase profitability which, from accommodation alone, is rather low. In the absence of adequate levels of comfort, moreover, older hotels risk being downgraded as a result of the new methods of classification that are developed over the decades. Suburban areas, consequently, host a high number of not only medium but also high category hotels.

Being located in isolation and within unattractive neighbourhoods, there is tendency for suburban hotels to organize within themselves all of the services that, in central areas, are more likely to be shared with other hotels, outsourced to autonomous businesses or simply absent, since they are offered by the city as a whole (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000, p. 75). The above mentioned survey confirms the greater variety of services that are provided by suburban hotels in respect to centrally located ones and, most importantly, the higher propensity to internalize those services and a decreasing reliance on outsourcing.

Suburban spaces both allow (thanks to the low cost of space) and at the same time require that hotels internalize the externalities that can be enjoyed in the city centre. Suburban hotels, consequently, are far more introverted and isolated - in physical and functional terms - from their surroundings; they seek to increase their economies of scale both by growing in size and by joining global networks of tourism service provision. Hotel chains or *consortia*, historically, were rather rare in Rome where, even today, medium-sized, family-run hotels are still very common. The above mentioned survey confirms that suburban areas host a higher proportion of chains and foreign-owned hotels in respect to the city centre.

Up to the 1980s, in the majority of cases, new hotels occupied empty spaces that soon became integrated with the city which in the meantime was growing around them. Since the 1990s, subsequently, the city has continued to expand but in a scattered manner. Hotels continue to prefer newly urbanized areas which are now lying within a fragmented urban fabric.

The banality of suburban spaces, finally, must be in some way compensated for in order to guarantee a sufficient degree of variety in an

otherwise anonymous landscape. The multiplication of multi-functional hotel complexes and tourism precincts, the architectural creativity, the proliferation of events and themed environments, may all be seen as attempts to replicate a richness and extraordinariness that are typical of city centres.

The consequences of these transformations, which will be summarized in the concluding section, are generally ignored by tourism planning strategies that in Rome - as in other cities (Rätz *et al.*, 2008) - actively promote suburban tourism in order to gain competitiveness in the most emergent and profitable sub-markets.

The promotion of suburban tourism is not only aimed to increase the city's accommodation capacity, but also to favour mixed-used suburbs and the evolution toward a polycentric metropolis. On the one hand, the concentration of hotels in the centre is perceived by experts and policy-makers as a significant contribution to urban congestion and to the traditional mono-centrism of Rome. On the other, the dispersal of hotels into suburban areas (together with other non-residential functions) is supposed to favour multi-functionality and the polarization of the fragmented suburban fabric (Marcelloni, 2003). The potential for developing non-residential functions is particularly attractive to property developers and investors as well, as they offer a better return on investment compared with residential land uses.

Many new suburban centralities have consequently been planned within the new Masterplan for Rome (Comune di Roma, 2008) - mostly along transport axes or close to transport gateways. Suburban centralities are dominated by large shopping malls and some of them are expected to host accommodation services (Figure 4).

Alongside the construction of new hotels, the local authorities in Rome have promoted many projects for recreational, cultural and conference facilities to be built in suburban areas, including the construction of three theme parks. This is also because the simple dispersal of accommodation capacity is in itself insufficient to increase the attractiveness of suburban areas as places for tourist recreation and consumption. In any case, as set out in the previous sections, these structures are not likely to favour polarization and the regeneration of urban peripheries, unless we reduce the concept of centrality to the mere location of non-residential functions detached from their surroundings.

Apart from the above mentioned shopping malls and a few hotel complexes, the demand for non-residential land uses in suburban areas - in a city that is still largely mono-centric - have turned out to be far below initial expectations.

The dispersal of accommodation services, moreover, does not seem to be a solution to urban congestion, but rather the opposite, given that the main reason for visiting remains the city centre. The number of tourist attractions and facilities seems, on the one hand, to multiply while on the other hand, the areas of the city most attractive to tourists are growing ever more

crowded and congested. This is also due to the decreasing length of stay, which was between three and four days until the 1970s, and is now around two days. There is a risk, therefore, that the tourists' experience of the city takes place between two opposing polarities: the most popular tourist sites, where visits are rapid and strictly mediated, and the distant and anonymous locations where the tourists spend a good part of their stay and satisfy most of their needs.

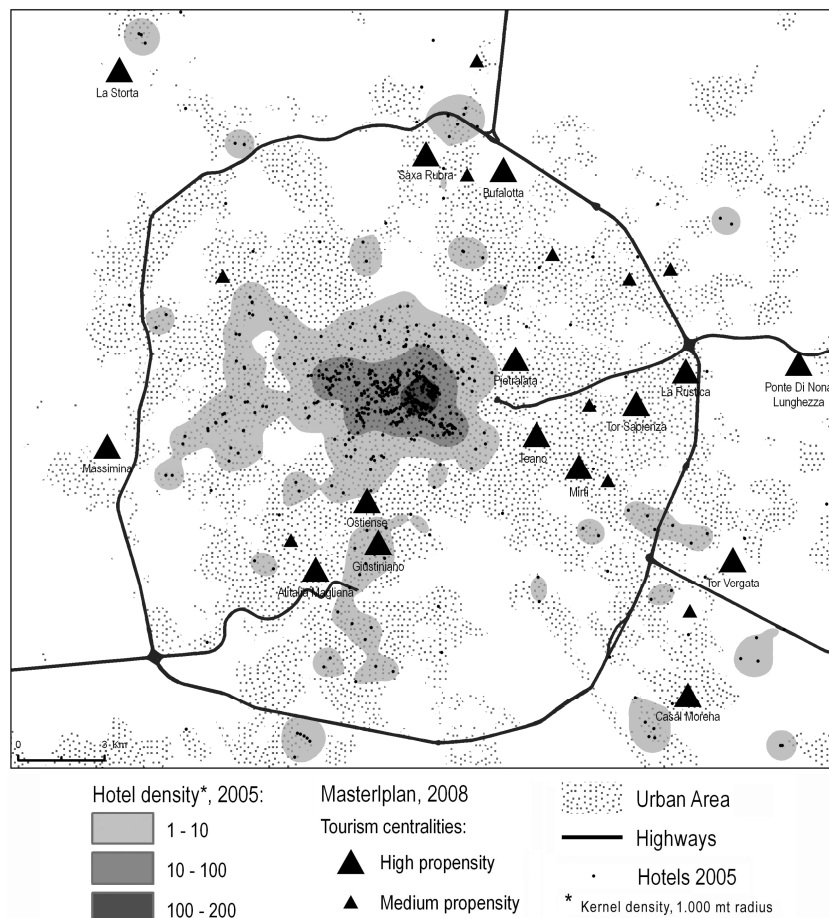


Figure 4. - Distribution of hotels and suburban centralities in the Rome Masterplan (based on: Praxis, 2004)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The dispersal of accommodation services into the suburban areas of historic cities is not simply a response to the higher cost of central locations. It is

part of a more general transformation of urban tourism and an excellent indicator of its changing spatiality.

The locational pattern of hotels in Rome confirms that the formation of a functionally integrated tourism city is typical of the early stages of urban tourism (Judd, 1999; 2004). Over time, the whole city becomes touristified. At the same time, several clusters develop in order to enjoy the advantages of agglomeration and to satisfy the needs of differentiated sub-markets (Pearce, 2001). Many authors have stressed the tendency toward the spatial and functional segregation of the tourist city from the rest of the urban space. In metropolitan areas with a large mixed urban base, however, such a tendency rarely develops into the formation of mono-functional tourist bubbles (Fainstein and Judd, 1999; Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000). A wealth of functional relations links the tourism system to its urban surroundings and to the social life of the city.

As the city grows, along with the number of tourists, due to planning restrictions and architectural constraints, an increasing number of hotels locate in newly urbanized areas which - in a compact city - soon become integrated into the expanding urban fabric. In recent decades, on the contrary, the city sprawls and becomes scattered. The whole of the city centre is gentrified (Smith, 2002). An increasing number of new hotels spread into the outer city in search of cheap and empty spaces, in proximity to ever more distant transport gateways, following the partial decentralization of the CBD and the transformation of suburban areas into spaces of consumption.

The tourist city in suburban areas is both far more disconnected and fragmented and, compared with the diversity of city centres, more homogeneous and standardized. Suburban locations allow hotels to increase their internal economies of scale and to gain in profitability by growing in size and improving the range of services and comforts. Large multi-functional suburban hotels are particularly suited for segments of the tourism market - such as business travel, conference tourism, shopping tourism, event tourism - that are growing rapidly and seem very attractive to both private investors and planning authorities.

The dispersal of the tourist city is also supposed to favour the decongestion of city centres and urban polycentrism. Suburban tourism facilities, however, are not likely to promote polarization as they are both physically isolated and functionally autonomous. Suburban hotels actively seek to internalize the externalities that are typical of city centres and to organize internally the whole set of relationships that they previously had with their urban surroundings. They isolate themselves locally while connecting globally into networks of standardized communication and service provision. The banality of suburban spaces, finally, is compensated for by the proliferation of services and events, architectural creativity and theming.

The dispersal of the tourist city, to conclude, is constructed upon an atomization of the tourist city. The atomization of urban tourism is associated with the parallel dispersion and fragmentation of the tourism city, and indicates that the advantages of agglomeration - accessibility, variety, relationships - are weakening (Garcia-López and Muñiz, 2010). In an atomized tourist city, moreover, visitors' movements are quick, increasingly mediated and themselves fragmented into a multiplicity of isolated structures and precincts.

Tourists continue to be detached from the material life of the city - the places where people live and work - and not only because of the formation of spatially segregated tourist bubbles. The local population is also relocating to ever more distant and mono-functional residential areas, while most of the city centre becomes depopulated and changes. Consequently, tourists and residents alike converge on the same central locations, where both are visitors, city-users or consumers.

A more in depth analysis of specific suburban neighbourhoods and a better understanding of contemporary hotel management and property development strategies, as well as comparisons with other cities, would be needed to confirm the hypothesis discussed so far; but this goes beyond the scope of this article. The case discussed so far, however, indicates that the changing spatiality of urban tourism, in the age of global suburbanization, does not only impact on the aesthetics and the quality of the tourist experience - subjects on which it is not possible to make objective judgments: it has consequences for the organization of the tourist city, for its internal and external socio-functional relations, for the distribution of its benefits and costs. These consequences should be considered carefully but are often ignored by tourism planning authorities, leading to inadequate explanations and contradictory outcomes.

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