

URBAN TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF ROME

Armando Montanari

Sapienza Università di Roma, Department of European
and Intercultural Studies

armando.montanari@uniroma1.it

ABSTRACT

Rome is a particularly significant example, as the city primarily attracts international tourists. Tourism to Rome has not been markedly affected by the international economic crisis, and in fact growth took off again from the second half of 2009 largely because of foreign tourists. This essay examines the renewed growth of tourism in the light of job losses and the policies the authorities wish to implement to consolidate growth. The author proposes to apply the principles of ecotourism to Rome, with visitors encouraged to behave as they would in a large protected area whose cultural diversity represents its biodiversity more extensively.

INTRODUCTION

Any tourism-related policy or initiative must take stock of the economic recession that started in 2008 and the lack of funding from the financial markets. International tourism demand is waning; some people have given up holidays altogether, while those who can afford to travel try to spend as little as possible on their tickets and stay. Many holidaymakers now prefer to travel closer to home and take a holiday in their own countries, and cut out the middleman by buying their tickets online. It is clear that many changes are underway and that tourism demand and supply will emerge considerably altered from the crisis. The point is therefore to identify those who have benefited most from the crisis

and the main new elements that will have to be tackled when the crisis is finally over. It is only when we can analyse the crisis from a historical perspective that we will be able to identify those who have benefited most from it, i.e. the winners, and the policies that have proved successful. In Rome, the economic crisis in urban tourism has overlapped with a policy crisis rather than a crisis of tourist numbers. In October 2007, commenting on tourism in Rome, Italian financial daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* said in very clear terms: «Tourists are returning to Rome and as a result of this trend, the city is overtaking Italy as a whole». In September 2007, Rome hotel occupancy stood at 82.9 per cent. Even before the global economic crisis, Rome's problem was a cultural identity crisis. The city was attracting ever-increasing numbers of tourists, but apart from those who gained immediate benefits – higher earnings for hotel owners and an enhanced image for the city's public administration – there was growing concern on the part of people who viewed the city's transformation into a huge junk heap as a genuine sign of an ongoing crisis. Comparisons with other European cities offer little by way of inspiration or ideas in this case. Tourist cities all sell the same products; they all have the same shops with the same merchandise and the same window displays with the same shirts on display. Even the Neapolitan pizzas sold to tourists are the same everywhere, floppy and undercooked. At the hot chestnut stalls on street corners in Rome, chestnuts were once roasted and sold by hill people, and the smell of roasted chestnuts heralded the start of autumn. Now, like tropical fruit, they can be found in any city, sold by a kind of chestnut multinational.

The first section of this essay examines the repercussions of the crisis on international tourism, while the second analyses its effects on Rome. Tourism to the city declined between end-2008 and early 2009 but is rapidly taking off again. This is a reason for widespread optimism and self-satisfaction, as it implies that Rome tourism is solid and capable of standing up to any global crisis. The traditional policy of building infrastructure and hosting events can therefore continue in order to tackle and overcome any problems the future might hold in store. The third section outlines and discusses the possibility that Rome tourism's real crisis is internal, and that the city is already prey to the danger it must guard against, i.e. the inability to plan the future in rela-

tion to a present that cannot merely be evaluated in terms of tourist arrivals and overnight stays, and therefore the rate of occupancy that hotels can manage each day.

1. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS ON THE TOURISM SECTOR

International tourism arrivals worldwide increased from 456 million to 924 million from 1990 to 2008. According to an UNWTO estimate, arrivals dropped by a few dozen million in 2009 because of the economic crisis to settle at 850 to 900 million, i.e. 2006-2007 levels. The number of arrivals had been forecast to go up to 1,006 million in 2010 and 1.561 million in 2020 based on the 1995 arrivals figure (UNWTO 2001). However, over the past two decades numerous and repeated crises have been sparked by wars – the 1991 Gulf War and the Kosovo crisis in 1999, not to mention terrorist attacks (Luxor in 1997, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, Bali in 2002, Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005) – and international pandemic threats such as the SARS epidemic in 2002-2003, and lastly the economic crisis, which began to have an effect from the last few months of 2008 onwards.

Until the financial crisis, these crises occurred in tourist areas and were the cause or effect of more widespread objectives. The crises also negatively impacted the possibility of transport and travel, a primary factor in tourism; worse, they demonstrated that tourist flows contribute to increasing the spread of diseases worldwide. People who travel to spend leisure time away from home try to avoid the risk of being caught up in anything that could endanger their own lives or those of their loved ones. As a result, they shun disproportionately large areas that they imagine to be connected with the reasons for the crisis, even if these areas are a long way from the epicentre. The effects of the crisis are therefore felt over a wider area. In most cases, however, once the initial uncertainty is past, tourist flows tend to move to other destinations. As a result, overall tourist flows are not significantly affected, but the effects on different geographical areas are quite varied. *Figure 1* shows

variations in tourist flows on a global scale as well as in individual tourist areas. Overall, events appear to have confirmed UNWTO's growth forecast, with positive and negative variations confirming average annual growth of around 4% at the international level.

The economic crisis that began in 2008 did not affect individual tourist attractions or regions so much as the tourism sector as a whole. Demand slumped as a result of a widespread drop in disposable household income. As a result, while people did not give up holidays or tourism altogether, they began to opt for less expensive destinations. The number of overnight stays decreased and, where possible, domestic tourism supplanted international tourism. According to UNWTO, international tourism grew 7% from 2004 to 2007 and continued to grow by 5% in the first half of 2008 before showing a 1% decline in the second half of 2008. With average growth of 2% in 2008, tourism resisted the economic downturn better than other sectors such as construction, real estate and car manufacturing. UNWTO has expressed uncertainty about the 2009 forecast outlined at the beginning of the year. The World Tourism Barometer

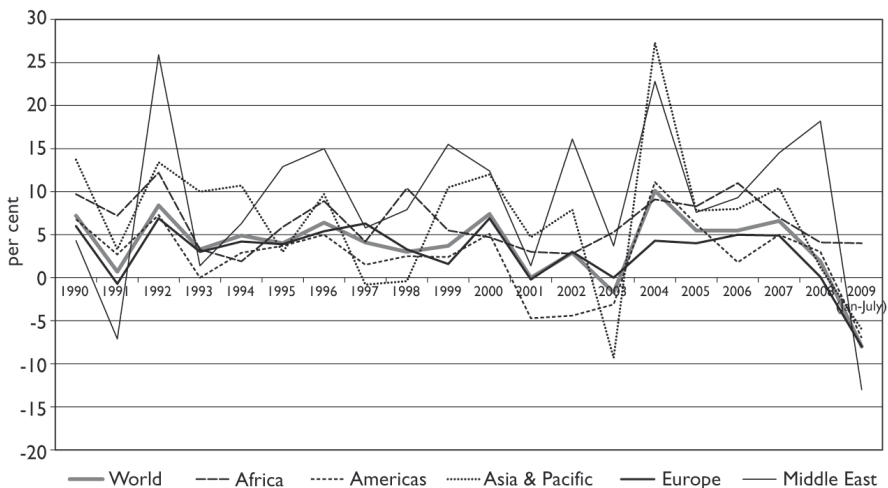


Fig. 1

International tourist arrivals, per cent change over same period of the previous year 1990-2009.

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

(interim update) published in September 2009 shows negative growth of 13% in March, 10% in February and May, 8% in January, 7% in June, 4% in July and 1% in April (boosted by the Easter holidays). The negative growth affected the main tourist regions quite differently – Mediterranean Europe, for example, reported an 8% decline from January to July 2009.

The crisis also affected the travel trade, with operators paying for their indebtedness and financial instability with heavy losses on the stock market. Shares of listed travel companies plunged 35% on average for hotels and 40% for tour operators towards the end of 2008 – in particular, Italian tour operators Viaggio de Ventaglio and I Grandi Viaggi saw their shares slump to a little over 40% of their initial public offering on the Milan Stock Exchange in 2007 (*Fig. 2*). Club Méditerranée (Club Med) shares plunged even more steeply on the Paris Stock Exchange. Besides grappling with financial problems similar to those of many other economic sectors, these operators also began to closely monitor previous investments in real estate, hotels, airlines and services – part of an acqui-

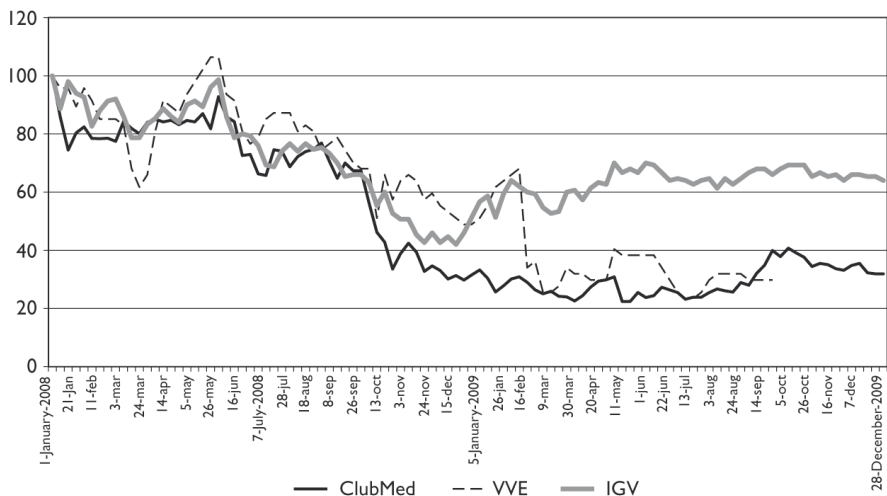


Fig. 2

Club Mediterranee (Paris CU.PA), Viaggi del Ventaglio (VVE.MI), I Grandi Viaggi (IGV.MI), weekly share price performance, 01.01.2008 - 31.12.2009, share price 01.01.2008 = 100 per cent.

sitions strategy to develop a vertically integrated distribution chain. In an attempt to parry the effects of the global crisis, travel trade operators tried to downsize the acquisitions made in previous decades to vertically integrate the distribution chain, attempting instead to start a phase of divestment. Competitiveness was played out in previous decades on vertical integration because horizontal integrations had proved hard to achieve (Montanari 2008). These forms of integration were implemented to enhance competitiveness and thereby cut costs. Above all, however, they were implemented in order to offer products over which operators could exercise total control, from their conception to their consumption by the tourist. It is hard to predict what the sector will look like at the end of the crisis and after the current restructuring process, which will claim several casualties among shareholders and managing directors as well as employees (their number and specialisation). Upscale companies such as Club Med, which have been on the market for a long time with undervalued shares, have resorted to capital increases and bond issues for dozens of millions of euros to ward off the risk of acquisition. They have also reassured the market by downsizing their offer and fully or partially disaggregating the production chain while enhancing quality. In Club Med's case, even as revenue dropped by 4.7% in the first half of 2009, the company's press releases announced its intention of reducing the number of villages and investing in renovating and upgrading existing ones, such as the villages of Caprera, set up in 1956, and Cefalù, set up in 1957, in Italy. However, closer examination of such strategies makes it clear that companies attempt to cut operating expenditure in the transition phase, with a resulting drop in service quality.

2. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND TOURISM DEMAND AND OFFER IN THE CITY OF ROME

Unless otherwise indicated, tourism demand as discussed in this section refers to hotel arrivals and overnight stays as published in the *Sistema di Rilevazione e Analisi della domanda turistica negli esercizi alberghieri di Roma e Provincia*, published by EBTL (Ente Bilaterale del Turismo del Lazio,

<http://www.ebtl.it>). 2008 data and 2009 figures available as of December 2009 have been used for the purposes of analysis and comparison. The international economic crisis had already begun affecting Rome's tourism sector in March 2008, when variations compared to the previous year, which were still positive in January and February, turned increasingly negative, with the lowest points in July (-8.06 arrivals, -9.56 overnights) and November (-8.82 arrivals, -10.01 overnights). Italian arrivals and overnights declined by 4.31% and 6% respectively in 2008, while there was a 5.42 and 5.32 drop respectively in arrivals and overnights by foreign tourists. American and German arrivals in particular dropped by 10.3% and 8.56% respectively. The foreign clientele in 2008 was less than double (1.6) the Italian clientele in terms of arrivals (*Fig. 3*) and more than double (2.3) as regards overnights (*Fig. 4*). The first and most obvious consideration is that the Rome tourism market is predominantly fed by international tourist flows; in theory, therefore, it should have been less seriously affected than other markets at a time when international flows were diminishing, with some level of possible recovery expected from the domestic market. *Figures 3 and 4* demonstrate that seasonality in foreign demand peaks in September-October and – albeit less markedly – in May, while dropping significantly in December-January, the city's only low-season period. September 2008 registered the maximum number of arrivals, while in October the number of arrivals diminished but the number of overnight stays increased – hence the average stay in Rome was longer. The seasonality of Italian tourism is not as marked, and the low season for Italians is essentially the month of August. This explains why there were more Italian tourist arrivals in December-January than foreign arrivals, with fewer overnights – this confirms that the average length of stay in Rome by foreign visitors was always higher than that of Italians. The EBTL has identified five main regions of origin for tourism to Rome – Europe, North America, Central and South America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The largest number of tourists come from the first two regions, followed by Southeast Asia. The number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays from Southeast Asia remained steady in 2008, with around 100,000 overnights. While the seasonality of European and North American tourism essentially goes from spring to autumn, the advantage for the city's offer is

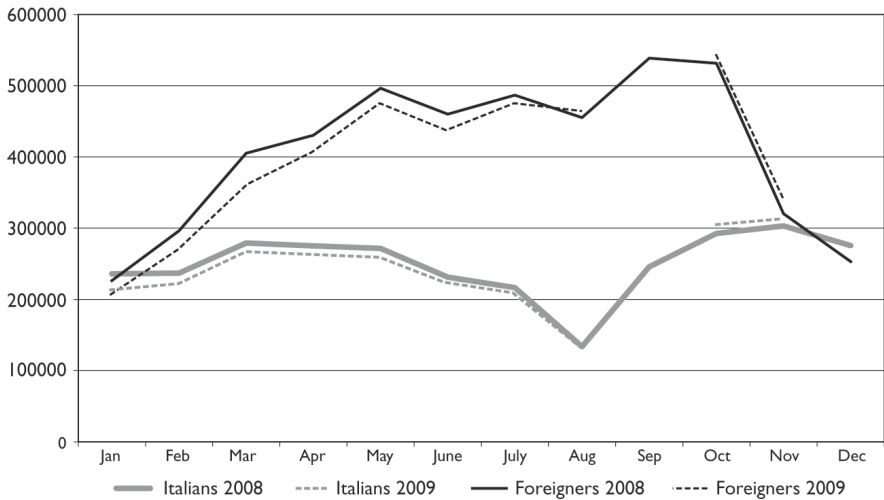


Fig. 3
Tourist arrivals in hotel in Rome by month, 2008 and 2009. Source: EBTL.

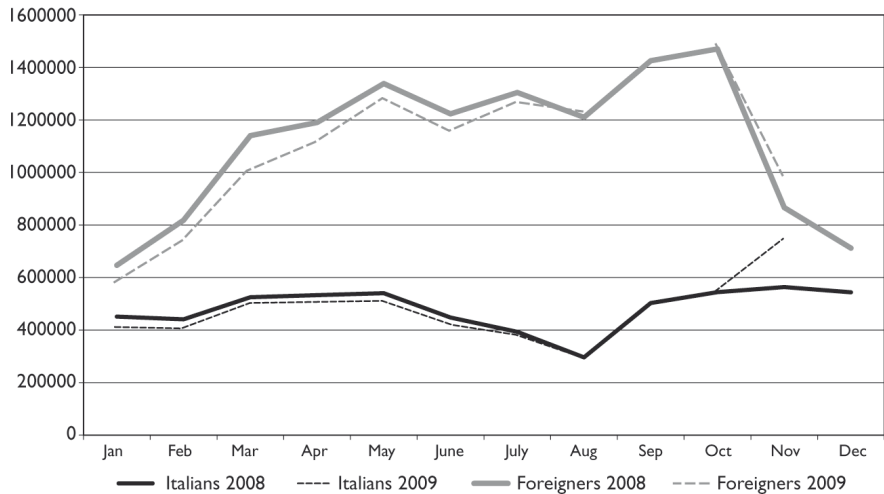


Fig. 4
Tourist overnights in hotel in Rome by month, 2008 and 2009. Source: EBTL.

that there is a peak in American demand in June, the precise month when there is a drop in the number of European overnights, as in 2008 (Fig. 5).

An overall view (Fig. 3, 4 and 5) shows that Rome tourism has not been as seriously affected by the international economic crisis as other cities. There were fewer arrivals and overnights in January-August 2009 compared to the previous year. In August, figures relating to foreign visitors once again turned positive (arrivals 0.94%; overnights 1.80%), while figures relating to Italian visitors remained negative (arrivals -1.90%; overnights -0.87%). From autumn 2009 onwards, the statistics show clear signs of recovery as regards arrivals and overnights for Italian and foreign visitors alike. While overnight stays by American visitors were consistently lower than in 2008, the difference narrowed from July 2009 onwards. The number of European visitors to Rome, on the other hand, dropped only in the spring of 2009, and starting from May-June their numbers began to go up again sharply. Arrivals increased 5.02% and overnight stays increased 3.18% in October.

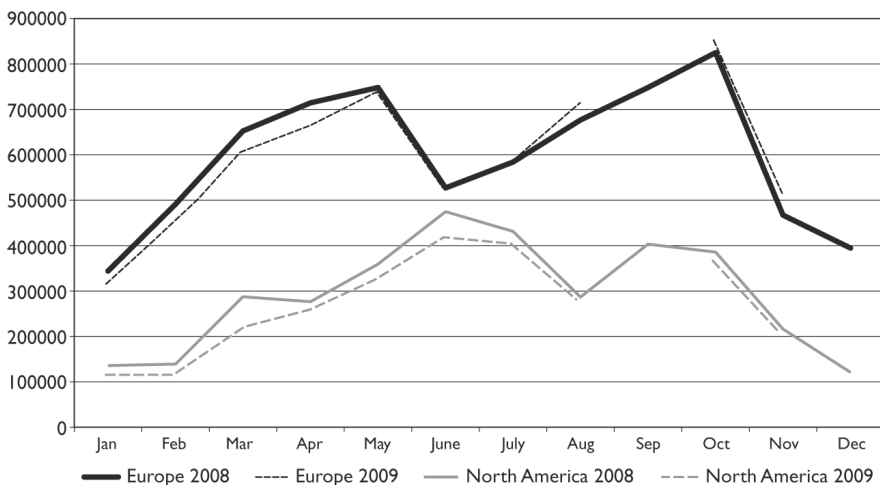


Fig. 5
Tourist overnights in hotel in Rome from Europe, North America,
South East Asia by month, 2008 and 2009. Source: EBTL.

Many hotels have started cutting prices – there has been talk of a «price war» – to stay on the market and afloat. According to the Chairman of Asshotel – Confesercenti Roma, the trade association which federates the Italian hotel industry and lobbies government in Italy and Europe, «[...] average room rates are at a record low. One four-star hotel in central Rome is currently (December 2009) selling a single room for 60 euros [...]». This means that the price of a hotel room is the same as it was ten years ago, while costing today's rates to run. In December 2009-January 2010, i.e. the low-season period, special offers for three and four-star hotels could be found online at approximately € 100 for a three-day stay. Discounted rates have become a systemic phenomenon, with a major impact on hotel earnings, which could actually drop by as much as 30-35% in 2009, according to the Chairman of the Associazione Romana Albergatori (Roman Hoteliers' Association). The situation is different outside the hotel sector, with a more widespread search for low-cost products prompting greater vitality in demand. The price war has also affected the job scenario. There are more than 44,000 hotel rooms in Rome with a total of just under 90,000 beds, divided as follows: 5-star hotels (8%), 4-star hotels (49%), 3-star hotels (30%), 2-star hotels (10%) and 1-star hotels (3%). The hotel industry employs more than 18,000 people, with a staff-to-room ratio of 1.32 for 5-star hotels, 2.78 for 4-star hotels, 3.20 for 3-star hotels, 4.11 for 2-star hotels and 4.80 for 1-star hotels. A «safeguarding agreement» has been reached on the basis of a spirit of co-operation between hotel workers' unions and employer associations, according to which hotels are granted a certain amount of additional flexibility to confront the crisis and ensure their survival. This has made it possible for hotels not to renew the contracts of the majority of precarious workers, interim workers, seasonal workers and all those working on call, as well as a certain number of permanent work contracts. In the course of 2009, at least 4,000 workers – around 20% of the total – lost their hotel sector jobs. According to the general secretary of one of the unions, Fisascat Cisl, while there are «currently no union clashes in any hotel in Rome, [...] there is some concern about this continuing in the future [...] if the situation were to worsen». Many services previously handled directly by hotel staff have now been outsourced to external companies, turning previously

permanent jobs into precarious ones. The number of online transactions has gone up as a result of the attempt to cut costs on the part of hotels as well as clients. The website Expedia handed 17% more transactions in 2009 than it did the previous year, for incoming as well as outgoing flows. This trend has had a negative impact on travel agencies, whose number diminished by around 5% in the course of 2009, and on travel agency employees, with 1,000 jobs lost in the course of the year.

The reduction in the number of employees in hotels and other tourism structures not only has a social cost, but also raises the risk of deterioration in product quality, which is no longer guaranteed by genuinely professional employees. This value component of Rome's tourism offer will not be easy to rebuild in the short term once the crisis is over.

Rome's offer – as the healthy performance of its tourism sector despite the crisis confirms – is based on the quality of its services and the unequalled density of its cultural product. The 2009 Report of Federculture, the national association of public and private entities in charge of cultural and leisure activities (<http://www.federculture.it>), confirms the integral place that Rome's offer occupies in the Italian and European context (Grossi 2009). The churches, *palazzi*, squares and urban design of this great historic centre form a museum circuit that has no equal anywhere in the world, and it would therefore be inappropriate to compare the number of visitors to Rome's museums with those of other cities. However, data on visitors to museums, galleries and exhibitions must inevitably be used to assess the cultural positioning of the Rome product, as the number of visitors to a church, *palazzo* or square cannot be precisely quantified. The Vatican Museums, which are located in the centre of Rome but fall within the jurisdiction of the Vatican, had nearly four and a half million visitors in 2008, over 3% more than the previous year. They are the sixth most visited museum in the world, having moved up a slot since the previous year. Comparing the number of visitors to the Vatican Museums with the over eight million visitors to the Louvre in Paris and the nearly six million visitors to the British Museum in London, first and second respectively on the worldwide list, would make little sense, except to identify a centre of interest for tourists coming to Rome. The other Roman museums on

Federculture's list of the most-visited museums lag well behind the top few. The Museo Centrale del Risorgimento with over 800,000 visitors is 55th, having lost 8% of visitors compared to the previous year, and the Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo, with over 700,000 visitors, is in 63rd place, having lost around 13% of visitors. However, these are museums with very specific themes and should really be considered niche museums. There were 9,189,066 visitors to government museums and monuments in Rome in 2008, and 1,317,229 visitors to civic museums. In a territory that is rich as a whole, with an offer differentiated by theme, historical period and geographical location, the really interesting information is that there were over 12 million visitors to government museums and monuments in Lazio, the region dominated by Rome's cultural presence, in 2008 – the archaeological circuit «The Colosseum, Palatine Hill and the Roman Forum» alone drew nearly 5 million visitors. The fact that the number of visitors to state museums in Rome went up by 21% and that visitors to civic museums increased by 47% in the 2000-2008 period is less an indicator of increased demand or a larger cultural offering than the ability of public operators to make at least part of the cultural services they are responsible for work a bit more and a bit better. Today, urban tourism is essentially judged by the ability to organise exhibitions and cultural events capable of attracting the attention of potential visitors, domestic as well as international. According to Federculture, in 2009 Rome organised at least four exhibitions that attracted a significant number of visitors: «Giotto e il Trecento» (Giotto and the 14th century – 196,544 visitors) at the Complesso del Vittoriano, 6 March-26 July; «Beato Angelico, l'Alba del Rinascimento» (Blessed Angelico – The Dawn of the Renaissance – 187,059 visitors) at the Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Caffarelli, 8 April-5 July, «Futurismo. Avanguardia-Avanguardie» (165,939 visitors) at the Scuderie del Quirinale, 20 February-24 May and «Giulio Cesare. L'uomo, le imprese, il mito» (Julius Caesar – the man, the exploits, the legend – 162,584 visitors) at the Chiostro del Bramante, 23 October 2008-3 May 2009.

In conclusion, one could state that the tourism and cultural offer of Rome's historic centre is so vast that the destination Rome cannot be evaluated like any other urban tourist destination, and therefore does

not depend on events in the rest of the world. The risk for Rome tourism comes rather from endogenous causes. The real question to be asked in a global economic crisis is: what are the internal factors that could jeopardise tourism to Rome? The lack of a clear vision of the future? The inability to implement alternative growth scenarios? The inability to propose growth policies compatible with the wealth of the city's historical and artistic legacy? The difficulty of co-ordinating the many initiatives promoted by the public administration?

The fact that the responses to these questions are probably all affirmative should not turn our attention away from other positive recent elements, such as the revamped public transport system and the progressive pedestrianisation of the historic areas; a richer and wider cultural heritage offer; a renewed offer of cultural events, new attractions such as the Parco della Musica to enhance the tourism offer and encourage seasonal visits and the restructuring and modernisation of hotels. In 2007, a prosperous time for Rome tourism, the municipal administration in power until 2008 was dreaming of 30,000,000 tourists in 2011. The current municipal administration, which is stepping cautiously because of the crisis, nevertheless estimates that Rome tourism could put the crisis behind it for good as early as 2011, with growth of 5% bringing tourist flows back up to their 2007 level. The current administration's policy focuses on consolidating the primary tourist hub, the historic centre, and starting a second hub in a 19th century suburb that has conveniently spread around the EUR business district. Built for a Universal Exhibition that never took place, it has already been identified as a second historic centre for the quality of its urban design. The strong point of this second hub will be the completion of the aquarium under the EUR lake and the Cinecittà theme park in 2011. «The Cloud», a striking conference centre designed by architect Massimiliano Fuksas, and the Formula One circuit will be operational in 2012 (*Fig. 6*). Meanwhile, the primary hub of Rome tourism is increasingly under attack from bad taste, bar tables crowding pavements and shops selling poor quality goods, all of which contribute to trivialising the popular image of the city's monuments and sights. Melotti (2008) says: «[...] it is the authenticity of one's feelings that ensures the authenticity of the site and the experience.

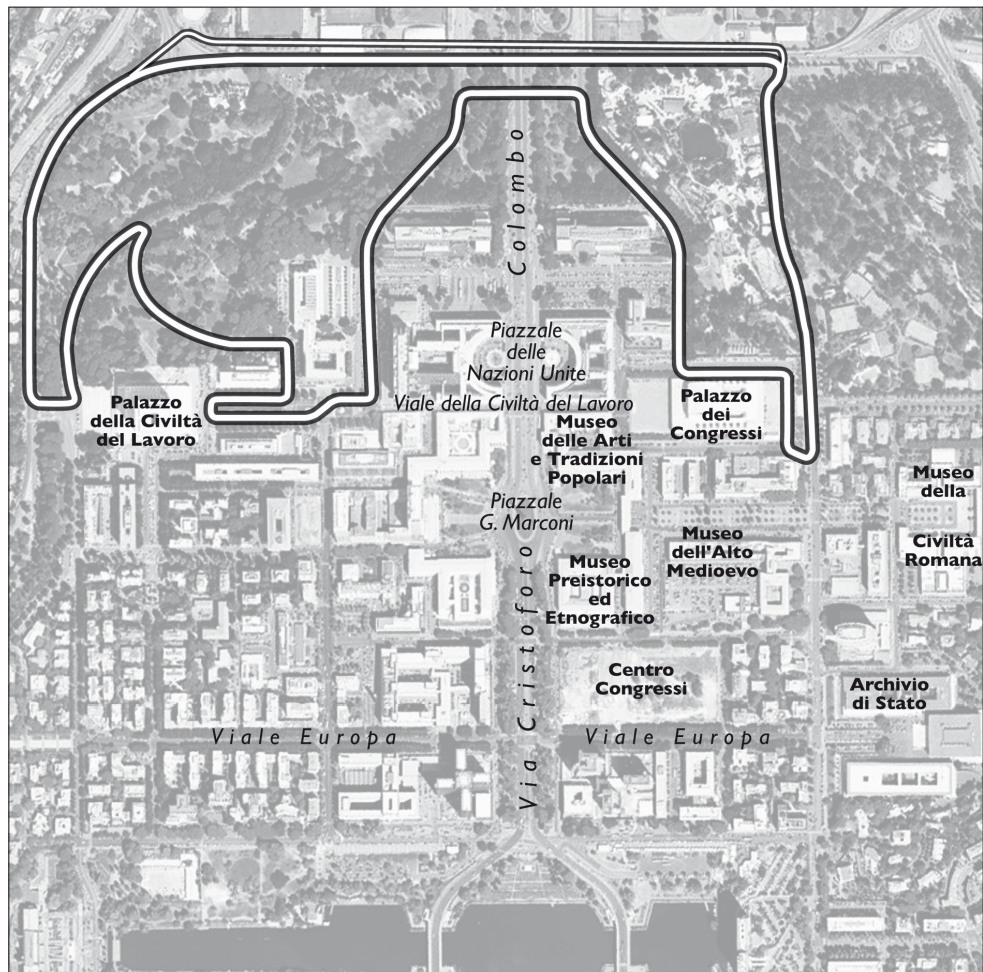


Fig. 6
2012 Rome Grand Prix Circuit.

In keeping with trends in international tourism, one can also attribute authenticity by recreating a context of authenticity in the place one is visiting.» In Rome, a travesty of authenticity is exemplified by the «fake gladiators for pictures», who initially «inhabited» the areas around the Colosseum and have since reproduced in large numbers to push their way into all the squares in the historic centre. Melotti (2008) reminds us that the «fake gladiators» are not very different from the «fake cannibals» who pretend to be amazed by the arrival of white men in Papua New Guinea. «The reasoning is the same and the fact that the former are not as credible is of no importance. The native in costume seems more authentic only because he is more exotic – the Western tourist is far more familiar with Ancient Rome than he is with cultures outside Europe».

The dreams and projects of successive municipal administrations all have one thing in common – they have all viewed an increased number of tourists as a priority, whatever this may mean for the city's culture and image and the quality of life of its residents and visitors. The project to organise a Formula One Grand Prix in Rome in the midst of the houses, offices and museums that make up the historic centre of the EUR is a glaring example of this. The project was presented as an event that would give tourism to Rome a huge boost, with 324,000 tourist arrivals and 1,300,000 overnight stays per year, financial spin-offs of over a billion euros for Rome and Lazio and more than 9,800 jobs. Private sector investments are estimated at € 160 million for the first season, while the estimated annual tax return is € 116 million in direct taxes and € 69 million worth of indirect taxes. Enthusiasm for the Formula One and references to Enzo Ferrari talking in 1984 about his dream of holding a race in Rome have pushed the ability to discern what the quality of the tourism experience should be for a city like Rome into the background.

3. CAN THERE BE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR TOURISM IN ROME?

While the risks to tourism in the historic centre of Rome mainly derive from within the city, we will have to look to Europe to find a model capable of guaranteeing a future that goes beyond the number of tour-

ists to offer environmental and cultural quality – the only true benchmark if there is to be any possibility of Rome's offer surviving. Despite opposition from some governments, in 1988 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the urban environment that became a political and cultural reference point for the Delors cabinet, particularly the then Environment Commissioner Mr Carlo Ripa di Meana, who had the Green Paper on the Urban Environment (CEC 1990) approved by the EU Council Environment Ministers in January 1991. The Green Paper outlined the need to take action on policies concerning the physical structure of cities with specific attention to planning, transport and safeguarding and enhancing of the historical legacy as well as natural areas within the city (Montanari 2004).

The issue of the number of tourists is not an independent variable that can be increased without constituting a series of disadvantages and burdens for the other variables contributing to the proper functioning of a city. Plog (2001) has pointed out that the number of visitors is related to the quality of the tourist experience and the visitor yield.

A review of the principles and experience of the ecotourism sector would be useful to ensure proper use by tourists of historic cities. Far from being a sector focusing on protected natural areas, ecotourism is an entire approach to tourism, particularly as regards the profiles and behaviour of tourists, from the perspective of sustainable development. The principal documents drawn up by the United Nations and the European Union (Montanari 2009) now view tourism exclusively as a sustainable product; in fact, tourism that is not sustainable is no longer tolerable. The extensive literature published at the international level on ecotourism (Weaver and Lawton 2007) provides principles that must also be applied to tourism policies in urban areas. These include the need to offer the tourist a holistic experience. The urban organism is a complex whole that cannot merely be viewed as a sum of squares and *palazzi*. The tourist is therefore a subject who must be helped to understand and appropriate this complexity. The «gaze» that Urry (1990) hypothesises is not a quick photograph of the Colosseum and certainly not a photo of the hyper-interpretation of the Colosseum exemplified by the «fake gladiators for pictures». The urban tourist too must be part

of a virtuous process that contributes to improving the sustainability trend, both locally and globally. This affirmation must have an effective impact on tourists' mobility, both on the trip and when going from one place to another in the city they are visiting. The principles of ecotourism can also help us to review the relation between the number of tourists and the quality of the tourist experience. The variables considered in Figure 7 are the number of visitors, the visitor yield, the quality of the tourist experience, the quality of life of residents, and finally the authenticity of the tourist product. Since the variables are interrelated, the number of visitors can only increase up to a certain point, after which all the other variables would be negatively impacted and so, therefore, would the growth process. The diminution of visitors that would eventually result is a subtle change, as the number of visitors apparently keeps grows for a certain period of time beyond the limit at which all the other variables begin to indicate a crisis phase for the tourism system.

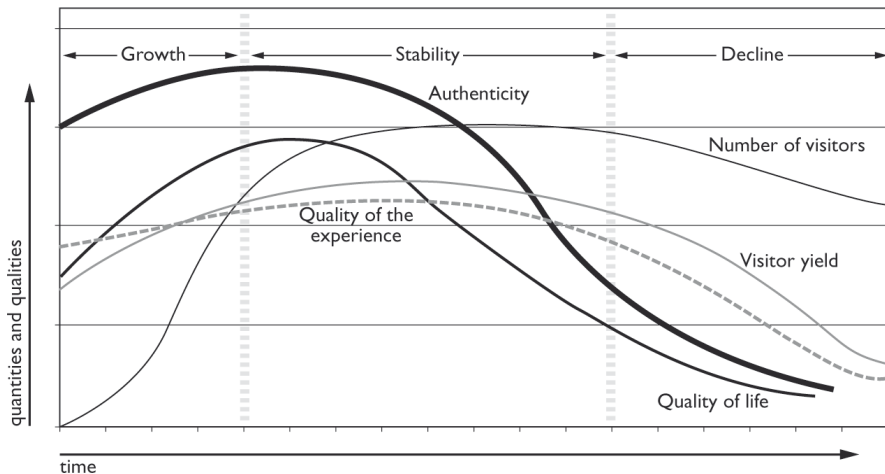


Fig. 7
Visitors, numbers vs. a quantitative approach.
Source: elaboration of a model by Plog (2001).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Rome's tourism resources are highly differentiated, and can be used and combined in so many ways that the city's tourism offer is immeasurable. It should come as no surprise to learn that the international economic crisis affected the usual trend of international tourist flows to Rome only slightly, and for a short period at that. Considering this potential, the real question concerns the number and importance of the objectives that Rome tourism – with all the potential it has been unable to capitalise on – has not managed to achieve. Patting oneself on the back for having reached a number of tourists equivalent to other cities hardly seems a major demonstration of intellectual honesty, especially when the result is obtained at the expense of a quality of product, tourist experience and life far below the standards that Rome could achieve.

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RIASSUNTO

Roma rappresenta un caso particolarmente significativo poiché il suo turismo è prevalentemente internazionale. Nonostante la crisi economica internazionale il turismo romano ha risentito meno della crisi e, proprio grazie agli stranieri, è ritornato a crescere già a partire dalla metà del 2009. Il saggio apre una riflessione su questa nuova crescita sia in rapporto ai posti di lavoro perduti che alle politiche che si vogliono attuare per consolidarla. L'autore propone di applicare a Roma i principi dell'ecoturismo e di comportarsi come si fa in presenza di una grande area protetta dove la diversità biologica è più compiutamente rappresentata da quella culturale.