

THE IMAGE PERCEIVED BY THE TOURISTS VISITING SARDINIA. FIRST CONSIDERATIONS FROM A QUESTIONNAIRE-BASED SURVEY

Silvia Battino

Università degli Studi di Sassari
sbattino@uniss.it

The tourist image is important in providing people with necessary desire to enjoy events and tourist destinations. This image, sometimes, puts itself as representation of fictitious attractions, far and different from real places which it refers to. Therefore a real and proper mediator of illusions and, moreover, it seems to be bearer of post-modern tourism which finds its premises in non identity-making spaces.

However, when it appears in a clear and direct way acquires the important role of first connection link between holiday maker and tourist place. In this case our image takes on different values, complex and manifold, in its processes and elements, and peculiarities of relativity and dynamism, with reference to space and time. The image is different and individual, every person tends to create an original pattern of the environments and from the comparison of that one with the perceptive elements of the individual starts up the evaluation of a certain place.

The tourist place, before being real, is an image arisen from readings, pictures and dialogues. It's «global» in meeting the aims and needs of the individual, «traditional» as built and settled in the time and «current» as expression of the custom and invention of the advertising. This our image tends to evolve in the time: indefinite at the beginning, when holiday is just an idea, it expands and becomes clear when it has been decided to go on vacation, it changes, once more, improving, when the tourist experience ended and, finally, changes, once again, in remembering the holiday, becoming a pattern for future holiday plans. It seems to put itself as a summary of feelings of different visitors of a certain place: a concise interpretation of different components, emotional, cognitive and perceptive, of the consumer, both potential and actual.

The marketing of tourist places passes through the planning, the creation and the promotion of their images which are, sometimes, expression of myths and, at the same time, tend to anticipate the experience of the tourist. The image assumes, in such a way, a value «heavenly» which, almost ever, has marked the representation of tourist insular regions, view existing in the diaries of travellers of the past: this is the case of Sardinia island in the West Mediterranean.

The various travel reports and the contents of guides of nineteenth century and of first years of twentieth century present a Sardinia that, even though attractive and heavenly for its creeks and its beaches with white and fine sands, puts itself to foreigners as wild land both in its environmental component and in that anthropic one. An old region and far from any modernity

where, nevertheless, last the authenticity and the sense of hospitality of its people; in conclusion a land out of the time and history. Even the Italian Touring Club, in 1918, suggested the Island as place suitable for holding tourism pioneers instead of tourists looking for comforts.

Only after 1950 Sardinia Region, in its farsighted belief that the modernization and economic development of the Island could, mainly, pass through its promotion as tourist place, assigns remarkable public funding to the accommodation structures. Some years after, the birth of Costa Smeralda Consortium and the realization of a tourist area planned in a part of the indented coasts of the Gallura, in the North-East of the Island promote, in a short time, Sardinia in the national and international tourism circuit.

Basing on these cognitive conditions our research, here summarized in article, wants to verify empirically which is the imagine of Sardinia pushing tourists to choose it as holiday destination and eventual modification of such an imagine, once ended this tourist experience.

Our work has been carried out by delivering a questionnaire, as per enclosure, to 883 tourists (48% Italians, the remaining foreigners) at the moment of their going back home. 27 items (20 at closed reply and 7 at open reply) have been organized, for a better, significant result, in 7 analysis groups: tourist peculiarities, reasons of stay, Sardinia imagine before and after the holiday, satisfaction and inclination to a return, visited places, beaches, tourist attractions and most impressed cultural aspects. The places of the survey have been ports, airports and some accommodation structures, different for typology and territorial distribution.

The research mainly confirms that the trinomial «sun, sea, beach» and the rest together with the peace are the principal reasons producing the choice of the Island as holiday destination. In the imagination of our casual sample, here never tested before, prevails the imagine (already mentioned for the past) of a wild land, uncontaminated and inhabited by people very hospitable. Probably this is due to the promotions of some tourist operators which try to arouse the «yearnings» of the people, through a going on of a collective imagination suggested by hidden desires and impulses connected with the custom.

At the end of holiday, almost entirely of bathing kind, the Island is felt essentially as fascinating and interesting place and few people which still suggest the imagine of a wild and uncontaminated land are to be found mostly among those tourists which have, totally or partially, spent their holiday in inland areas or along coastal territories not yet equipped for a satisfactory welcome.

Furthermore, the ephemeral doesn't seem attract those tourists interest of which in different visited/lived places is to attribute to the environment's beauties and to local anthropic peculiarities, surely not to tourism patterns created by advertising.

Moreover the desire of relating to autochthonous people, both through the will of approaching their culture and through consuming local products not yet standardized, shows a mould of a «slow tourism».

Essentially the imagine of Sardinia, after holiday's experience, is more complex and less misleading and conventional in respect to that initial one taken root in the tourists. It grows richer with new and different realities, more genuine and unique which are in the most inland places of the Island where still remain traditional, social patterns. From this tourist imagine, which better interacts with that geographical one, raises the desire of a tourism less frantic, more thoughtful and with clear, cultural features: finally, an imagine through which it's easy to promote tours in Sardinia even in a viewpoint of a sustainable tourism.