

The art city from within:
Young people negotiating tourism and urban heritage in
everyday Verona
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Background - Tourism has a significant impact on the socio-spatial fabric of cities, affecting urban systems and threatening urban liveability and sustainability – as issues of ‘overtourism’, ‘touristification’ and ‘tourist gentrification’ have shown (Cocola-Gant, 2018; Sequera and Nofre, 2018; UNWTO, 2019) – whilst also bringing important economic and cultural opportunities. In heritage cities, the intertwining of tourism, culture and urban space becomes even more evident, as diverse gazes cross (Santos, 2016) and local communities negotiate everyday access to, and use of urban resources with city visitors. Tourism and heritage have thus become prominent sectors for the pursuing of a sustainable urban agenda, even – and perhaps more so – in the rapidly changing scenario of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, it is expected that the post-pandemic rebound of tourism will pose even greater sustainability challenges (OECD, 2020).

The research - As key urban actors (UN-Habitat, 2016), young people are deeply involved in, and impacted by these challenges (UN, 2018; ILO 2020). Yet, their voices, visions and experiences

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are under explored in tourism and heritage research (Poria and Timothy, 2014) and continue to be little considered in urban inquiry (Skelton and Gough, 2013), despite youth groups being increasingly recognised as stakeholders in the public life (Smith and Mills, 2019). Contributing to bridge this gap, the paper explores the lived geographies of young city dwellers negotiating urban space in Verona, a heritage tourist city in Northeast Italy. Engaging with geographies of children and young people, heritage and tourism studies and critical urban theory, this intervention sheds light on the tensions, opportunities, discourses and practices that constitute urban heritage as experienced by young people in their everyday urban interactions with tourism. The paper is based on the ‘Verona Minore’ research project (2019-2021) investigating the impact of tourism on the daily life of adolescents living in Verona and its peri-urban area.

Case study and methodology - A UNESCO world heritage site and popular tourist destination, the case study of Verona enabled insights into the socio-cultural and embodied processes through which urban heritage is produced as an entangled space of tourism and everyday collective living, foregrounding young people’s experiences and participation in these processes. Through a mixed-method approach including an online survey, focus group sessions and class based creative works, the research engaged over 300 participants aged 15-18, who shared and represented their experiences of encountering tourism and heritage in daily life.

Key findings and contribution - These experiences have highlighted the aesthetics of belonging, the body, affect/emotion and cultural encounter as key points of articulation of young people’s relationship with the urban heritage, pointing out important criticalities in the tourism-

heritage-urban life nexus. In particular, the research exposed *everyday mobilities*, *urban ecologies* and *spatial inequalities* as sites of heightened frictions (Rabbiosi, 2019) in the trajectories, practices and spatio-temporalities of diverse city users – resident and tourist, young and adult. Focusing particularly on these three critical areas, the paper discusses young people’s claims to the city and their call for policies and praxes of heritage and tourism more orientated towards sustainable and youth-friendly urban living.

This research contributes to critical debates on the entangled politics of tourism, heritage and urban sustainability, bringing to light the everyday geographies of a social group little considered in urban tourism and heritage theory and policy. In particular, it advances notions of youth agency and participation by exposing experiences and accounts of adolescents’ everyday urban life and the manifold ways in which this is impacted by tourism.

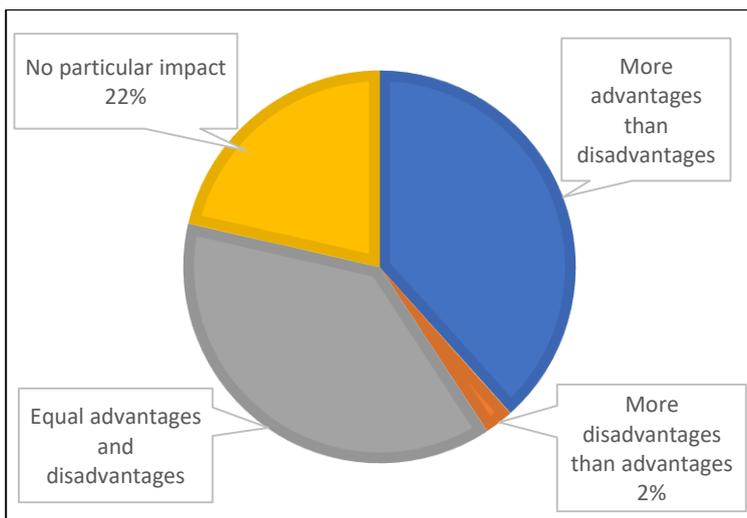
Tab. 1 – The impact of tourism on young people’s everyday life in Verona

IN MY EVERYDAY LIFE TOURISM BRINGS:	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	% RESPONSES	% CASES
More advantages than disadvantages	129	38,39%	38,39%
More disadvantages than advantages	8	2,38%	2,38%
Equal advantages and disadvantages	127	37,80%	37,80%
No particular impact	72	21,43%	21,43%
Total	336	100,00%	100,00%

Source: ‘Verona Minore’ research project – online survey dataset

Fig. 1: Tourism as perceived by young people in Verona

Source: 'Verona Minore' research project – online survey dataset

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