Salento Atmosphere and the Role of Movies

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we show how cinema, due to the inherent strength of the images it produces, interacts or even interferes with the processes of place image building. The topic under discussion is then absolutely crucial to geography, being it the science of place. The author, starting by explaining the reciprocity (cycling) relation existing between cinema and place, analyzes by means of a qualitative approach the case of Salento and the creation of its "atmosphere" through cinematic images, taking into account those movies that most have contributed to it. Concerning film-induced tourism the author found that, from the supply side, the local tourism system did not still fully adapted itself to the new needs of this segment. However, there is a great potential for its development, since a latent demand seems to exist and the activities of Apulia Film Commission are greatly contributing to it.

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Introduction: the cycle place-cinema-place

Cinema, due to the inherent strength of the images it produces and conveys, interacts or even interferes with the processes of signification and identification of places. It is a kind of reciprocity (cycling) relation the one existing between cinema and place: on the one hand, the specificity of the latter influences film production and the delivery of cinematic images; on the other hand, the former can in turn act on the local context and affect its perception by the community. The topic under discussion is nowadays absolutely crucial to geography, being it the science of place. Despite a long lack of interest of the geographic discipline for that issue, in recent years the extraordinary ability of cinema to create images and to take part to the process of identity construction of places (Pollice, 2012) has been discussed within a large scientific debate, that has always been characterized by a strong interdisciplinairy (Nicosia, 2012).

More than any other form of representation of space and thanks to its strong evocative power, cinema is a "tale" of places and, as such, contributes to the construction of the landscape in which action takes place and, in general, of territorial identities, following a circular relation that starts from the uniqueness of place. Once represented on the screen, in fact, this latter becomes a cinematic identity likely to influence in turn place identity, which in turn will be cinematically depicted being enriched with new images and new symbolic references. It often happens that the more a place is associated to a popular movie, the more it is chosen as a set for new film productions. By reiterating symbols and icons in some way linked to that place, they contribute to fix one "reel identity" to it, mixing with and partly overlapping to its "real identity": this identity is continuously renegotiated on the basis of spectators', tourists' and residents' tastes and needs. If cinema has been more and more shaping up as a modifying agent of place that is meant to represent and, at the same time, as a sense making factor – spreading its effects far beyond the perimeter of the screening rooms – what ties it to place is a kind of mutual relationship: on the one hand, the specificity of place influences and directs film production and the conveyance of film image; on the other hand, this "reel" image, reshaped this way, is likely to influence in turn local context. This influence can show itself both directly, by acting on local community's perception of itself and of its territory, and indirectly, by orienting the "demand of place" coming from the outsiders and therefore the supply that place is expected to offer. It happens then that reality bends to its representation, it is molded by it becoming an icon. The cinematic storytelling can sometimes take a real performative role in respect of the geographical reality: this is because, once the latter is internalized by local community, it shows its effects on individual and collective behaviors, becoming part of those identity references guiding the territorializing process (Pollice, Urso, 2013). The function of these images and of the "mediascapes" they produce, however, has an even wider scope in that they lead to the development of a reified "elsewhere" stimulating "the desire for acquisition and movement" (Appadurai, 1990: 299). The cinematic world plays a vital role in inducing in the viewer the need to travel to the places represented in the movie, a phenomenon which is commonly referred to as

"movietourism" or "film-induced tourism". The motion is, this time, from the cinematic space (which comes from the real one but inevitably doesn't coincide with it) to the real space, loaded with expectations and new sense, in a circuit of landscape construction. This starts from the geographical image, that fosters the re-invention brought about by cinematic space, then goes back to the starting point – place – which broadens the limits and the possible interpretations of the perceived tourist space. This is, in fact, an image, an image that travelers carry with them and convey to others (Miossec, 1977), and that they expect to find once they arrive at destination. Movietourism shows a causal link between the cinematic vision of a place and the decision to get there. It is quickly shaping up as a real tourism demand segment: industry more and more frequently sells tours to the places that have been cinematic sets (through package tours or "cine-tourist" guides). The power of cinematic images and their action on place is overwhelming. By influencing the perception of a place and, therefore, of all what it "contains" and, at the same time, what really "is" (needs, values and symbols, resources), in fact, they have the potential to influence local actors' choices in the matter of planning. Hence the importance of a thorough analysis of cinema when it coveys a notion of landscape which is not meant as a mere background, but as a meaningful element, as a narrative core of film production, a landscape which is not, then, a mere container, but a content.

In this paper we show how cinema contributes to the processes of place image building. We will analyze the case of Salento and the creation of its "atmosphere" through cinematic images by means of a qualitative approach, taking into account those movies that most have contributed to it. Finally, we will examine the level of development of film-induced tourism in the area.

1. Salento atmosphere. The geography of movie production: place image "in action"

In recent years, Apulia has more and more been chosen as the location for Italian and foreign film productions. It was not always like that, however: cinema has long preferred the archaic Basilicata, turning its attention to Apulia only at the end of the last century. Since then, the whole region and especially its southern part, Salento, has entered the cinematographic world because of their nature of being "border land" from where people, goods, but especially stories pass through. The revolution actually began about twenty years ago. Before that, settings were often "anonymous" and the region was totally depersonalized and mostly used to represent a generic "South of Italy". One of the first movie which was shot in Salento (between Presicce, Depressa and Galatina) and finally also set in Salento was "Pizzicata" by Edorado Winspeare in 1996; what is more, it recalls a very peculiar trait of the local culture (tarantism). From then onwards, viewers' chances of seeing Lecce and the whole region on the big screen have become many more. The list of movie production includes "I figli di Annibale" by Davide Ferrario in 1998, shot between Ostuni and Leuca; "Liberate i pesci" by Cristina Comencini in 1999, shot between Trani and Lecce. It is a period in which there are films entirely shot in Lecce and the surrounding area, but not set in the town in the fiction

(like Melissa P. by Luca Guadagnino, in 2005), and some others like "Italian South East" (2003, by Fluid Video Crew), where the territory is not only a wallpaper, but also the main character of narration. Then, in 2007, "Fine pena mai" by David Barletti and Lorenzo Conte, shot between Lecce and northern Salento which tells the story of the boss of Sacra Corona Unita, Antonio Perrone, and "Manuale d'amore 2" by Giovanni Veronesi, where in the city hall of the town of Lecce Antonio Albanese and Sergio Rubini get married. Then again, in 2008, "Galantuomini" by Edoardo Winspeare, shot between Lecce and southern Salento, with Donatella Finocchiaro, who was awarded best actress at the Rome Film Festival. There is no corner of Salento that was not choosen as a movie setting, also for international productions: in 2009 Lecce is the setting of "Indovina chi sposa mia figlia!", a movie for the German television and "Ne te retourne pas" by Marina De Van with Monica Bellucci and Sophie Marceau. In 2010, the year of "Mine vaganti" by Ferzan Özpetek, Salento is already well-known as a tourist destionation, but the movie is another extraordinary advertising for the territory. Many people chose Salento for visiting the historical center of Lecce, where some of the most beautiful scenes of the film were set, or to swim at Punta della Suina, in Gallipoli, one of the beaches discovered by foreign visitors thanks to this film. Between 2010 and 2012 there is a rate of ten productions per year in Salento: one of the most impressive was the TV fiction "Il Commissario Zagaria" targeting a general public. This is also the key moment for the hinterland of Salento and for some of its less known places: "Il primo incarico" by Giorgia Cecere was shooted in Castrignano del Capo (in the very South), "Senza arte né parte" by Giovanni Albanese in Palmariggi (near Otranto), Stefano Accorsi and Pier Francesco Favino acted in "La vita facile" by Lucio Pellegrini in Supersano, between Porto Cesareo and Nardò we have "Il pasticciere" by Luigi Sardiello. Among some of the most famous resorts, Gallipoli, which appeared in "La terra dei santi" by Fernando Muraca and in "Sdramma" by Gianni Ciardo; and Otranto, where "L'età dell'oro" by Emanuela Piovano was settled. Also 2013 was a golden moment for cinema as a driver for tourism in Salento: from the very successful popular sit-com "Braccialetti rossi" to "In grazia di Dio", the new film by Edoardo Winspeare, from "Allacciate le cinture" by Özpetek who produced its movie again in Salento (Lecce) to "Una donna per amica" with Laetitia Casta and Fabio De Luigi – shot between Gallipoli, Otranto and Lecce, with some scenes settled in Palazzo Carafa, the city hall of Lecce – Salento and its main town, Lecce, became most nationally – but fairly internationally – known and appreciated as vacation destination. The list of movies settled in Salento is now very long and, as we saw, has started growing up since 2007, that is when Apulia Region set up a film commission (Apulia Film Commission, AFC), which has greatly contributed to strenghten Salento's reputation as a natural film set. This is probably merit of the light, of its stunning sceneries and friendly people but, not least, of funding and infrastructures made available for movie productions by Apulia Film Commission.

But what "atmosphere" of Salento does it emerge from these movies? This is a crucial question to understand what "atmosphere" "movietourists" are looking for the moment they choose Salento for their holidays and, then, the moment they arrive and expect to find once there. Yes, because film-induced tourism plays with

viewer/tourists' desire of enjoying the atmosphere of a territory, fostering his/her excitement in (re)living that atmosphere, on the one hand, and his/her will to verify its authenticity, on the other hand (De Giacomo, 2013). Tourism can exploit the element "atmosphere" of a place so as to build a product which is respectful of its authenticity, both of its landscapes and traditions/customs, aiming at enhancing the concept of travel as a merging with place identity, like moving in an "emotional geography" (Bruno, 2006). There is no a broadly shared methodology to indirectly "measure" or at least "detect" which is the atmosphere associated to a place. A direct survey is still the best way ever, though recently the tools of web sentiment analysis for opinion mining are providing researchers with interesting insights at least as far as ex-post assessment of destinations is concerned. In principle, actually, for the purposes of our study an ex-ante evaluation of both the atmosphere attached to a place conveyed by cinematic images and their travel motivation would be more useful for understanding how much that atmosphere influenced the decision making process. In practice, it is quite difficult to empirically deepen this interaction. Nevertheless, a qualitative approach, applied by observing the plot of and images desplayed in movies, could be a first step in grasping the mechanism underlying the potential relationship "image (disseminated also through movies) – perceived atmosphere – travel motivation". By applying this simple methodology, and combining it with an analysis of messages spread through press and media in general, we can infer that what is most commonly attached to Salento are some core elements, such as the breathtaking beauty of architecture and landscapes, the strenght of local traditions, the importance of some values (i.e. family and community ties), people' warmth, an old-time lifestyle, the tasty, healthy local cuisine, and, in a word, genuineness. This is in line with the branding that the Regional government, local bodies and in general the supply system of incoming try to convey in their communication/promotional activities. Moving from those first movies in which Salento was the real set but not the fiction location, passing through those ones in which its landscape was only a mere background – following a kind of evolution we will try to explain further on – in recent years movie production has more and more frequently made Salento an active element of narration or even one of the character of the plot. Here we can notice the functioning of the cycle place-image-place we mentioned at the begining of this paper: the ever growing fame of Salento as tourist destination – and thus all images attached to it – has started attracting movie productions that chose it as a film location, contributing to strenghten its territorial identity as perceived by outsiders (viewers/tourists), in a kind of "iconisation" of place (Bencivenga *et al.*, 2013). Salento seems to be the case of an already well-known holiday destination that kept being chosen as a movie setting in part for its tourist appeal – but also undoubtedly due to the role of the regional film commission – and where cinema then led to an enrichment of the tourism supply, but was not a path finder in the sector or did not create a totally new, independent tourist flow. This means that it was the strenght of the place image of Salento and the general interest in the area – mightly coveyed through tourism, too – that appealed movie productions in shooting there as well as favourable working conditions made possible by grants and facilities provided by Apulia Film Commission. The more cinema disseminated images

of Salento throughout Italy and Europe, the more it stopped being a mere, anonymous support to the development of the plot: it took a very active role in becoming sometimes a main character, with its physical sceneries but, most importantly, with the set of values linked to it. In other words, the stronger place identity is, the less territory can be left out of narration: images attached to it in viewers' mind are too distinguishable, too identifiable not to be recognized as that specific town, village, street.

The best example for all that said in our study area is represented by Ferzan Özpetek's movies. On many occasions, the Italian-turkish film-maker talked about his "connection" with Salento and, most of all, with its people:

"I am very attached to Lecce and Salento. But above all to people. A town could be even wonderful, with beautiful landscapes and good food. But what makes Lecce and Salento so fascinating are people living there and their behavior towards others. Going around in squares and bars as a total stranger, before shooting my film, I felt fine and felt strong sensations. I found some behaviors of an Italy that perhaps today does not exist anymore, and that was probably like that in the '70s. And I find it so wonderful. […] When I am far away from Lecce I miss people, my new friendships, its atmosphere, its light. Salento is wonderful, for its architecture as well as for its natural environments. But I was especially struck by people. What really makes a city is people, not buildings."

(Interview to Ferzan Özpetek, 10/03/2010. Source: Cinemaitaliano.info). This quotation has a crucial relevance as Özpetek's impression on Lecce is transferred into his films, reaching the viewer and helping to form an atmosphere in her/his mind that she/he will attach to the city. The Italian-turkish filmaker's two movies set in Lecce ("Mine vaganti", in 2010, and "Allacciate le cinture", in 2014) have greatly contributed to disseminate true views of it throughout Italy and abroad (the first one was presented at the Berlin International Film Festival). Pictures, sceneries and landscapes spread through films, in a word, the "reel" place, become unmistakable, unique and inextricably linked to the "real" place. Lecce became highly recognizable and started having a peculiar "identity" for outsiders, which is made of its architecture, of course, but also of people's behaviour, lifestyle, values. This implies that it is more and more difficult to make a film set in an "impersonal" Lecce: films, therefore, have to be necessarily "consistent" with that "genius loci". The cinematic product, when it aims at being representative of the "real", must respect the authenticity of place and reflect its identity (*territorial consistency*). If then, it is included in a wider objective of tourist promotion, it should be considered as part of a development strategy affecting the territory as a whole (*strategic consistency*) (Pollice, Urso, 2013). This territorial consistency, based on the full respect of the proper identity of the space that cinema intends to represent, has a key role when considering the powerful "attractive effect" of cinematic images. Yes, because, it is exactly this feature of movies that is likely to give rise to the risk of a mystification of place image, with eventually some falsifications of it and of that "genius loci" which is the essence of identity. In this regard, it should be stressed that no attractiveness strategy can justify such a narrative distortion,

especially for the consequences that this may have on the dynamics of identity construction of place and on the territorial transformation processes which are intimately connected to them. After all, what really orients tourists' travel decisions is not the attractiveness of place in itself, but rather the image they attach to it. Not only does this image orient their decisions, making them visit a destination instead of another one or to chose an itinerary on a geographical map, but it also guides tourist "consumption" of the territory, being the "perspective" from which visitors "see" or better "experience" the place they are visiting.

2. "Salento special effect": potential for film-induced tourism

Cinema is nowadays the most powerful "art of places", a mirror of cities and lifestyles (Sutcliffe, 1984), like probably it was the case for other arts in the past, namely painting and photography. Due to a democratization of culture and to the spread of media and new technologies (internet), cinematic art does not have the elitist character of the other arts above mentioned, thus impacting people's imagination much more than ever. Understanding the role of place images makes us aware of the fact that: "*film productions also communicate concrete images and values* […] *This also interacts with the everyday life of cities and their inhabitants, in a virtuous cycle that feeds.*" (Martínez-Rigol, 2013: 353). As many geographers stress, film industries, as part of cultural industries, are activities that are concerned with image production (Scott, 1997), which is linked with a process of selection: "*films creates the image of the city through the selection of urban areas based on a commercial and touristic perception. There is a great part of the city that is underexposed, and a small part of the city that is overexposed, and from the last, the image of the city is created.*" (Martínez-Rigol, 2013: 361). This is exactly what we meant when we talked about "mystification" and the resulting potential gap that can separate "real" city from "reel city". Image-building, to which the entertainment and media industry greatly contribute – and, more precisely, not only "induced images" (promotional images purposely produced by the tourist sector) but also "organic images" (not directly linked to tourism, like movies) (Gunn, 1972) – has several entailments: one of it is tourism which, in its leisure segment, is generated from the need to experience an "image" of the place people have in their mind before leaving. Urry (1990: 3) argues that the tourist gaze is "*constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos*". What Urry was advocating is that the image consumers hold of a place (tourist destination) in today's modern world is strongly shaped and influenced by such media forms as films and television.

In a very broad definition of this segment of tourism, sometimes labelled as "film tourism", this phenomenon is described as follows: "*tourist visits to a destination or attractions as a result of the destination being featured on television, video, DVD or the cinema screen*" (Hudson, Ritchies, 2006: 256). More strictly, "film-induced tourism", combining consumption and experience (cinema and vacation), is defined as "*visitation to sites where movies and TV programmes have been filmed as well as to tour to production studios, including film-related theme parks* […] *what is it of interest is the*

tourist activity associated with the film industry." (Beeton, 2005: 11). In our opinion, from an empirical point of view and in a quantitative approach, the best way to prove the existence of this phenomen is veryfing the sales of package holidays focused on a movie by Tour Operators (i.e. those itineraries that follow all the location settings of a film) or the production of movie maps created by governments (i.e. the ones developped by VisitBritain, for "Harry Potter", "The Da Vinci Code", etc.). Directly relating the success of a movie and the increase in the number of tourist arrivals in the place where it was shot is not always as insightful as it could appear to be, as there can be many other reasons for that and it could be not possible to isolate them from one another. According to this narrow interpretation, Salento is not really a "film-tourism destination" in the strict sense, yet, since there are not guided tours or promotional activities advertising and making people discover the sets of a film. It falls rather in the category of those places that were already famous tourist destinations, where cinema contributed to further spread their image and to enrich their tourism supply, by enlarging it to previuosly unknown areas. A bigger impact in terms of tourist flows can be observed when it is a successful movie which paves the way for tourist development, as is the case with "The Lord of the Ring" in New Zeland (Di Felice, 2013; Di Cesare, Rech, 2007), with a 40% annual increase in tourist arrivals from 2009 to 2010 (Di Felice, 2013) or in part for Basilicata (Italy), too (Di Felice, 2013). In such a case, the link between cinema and tourism is more clearly detectable, inferring it simply from general official tourist data, though they do not directly account for tourist motivation in visiting that place. With reference to the film tourist's profile described by Macionis (2004: 87) – "*a specific film tourist is one who actively seeks out places seen in a film* […] *the general film tourist is not specifically drawn to a film location, but participates in film tourism activities while at destination* […] *the serendipitous film tourist just happens to be in a destination portrayed in a film*" – it seems that film tourists visiting Salento fall into the third group, the serendipitous one. This is because there is not an organized supply revolving around cinema and movie settings in the local tourist system. The only movies that seem to have activated a kind of touristification of movie locations and settings are the ones by Ferzan Özpetek, though not from the supply side (there are not themed guided tours), but still on a mediatic level. In many national printed or online newspapers and magazines, you can read several titles like the following ones, in which the main character is Salento, rather than the story itself or the actors involved: "Özpetek's Salento: light, Barocco, food" (La Repubblica, 10th March 2010); "In Lecce and Salento. The places and flavors of Mine Vaganti" (Il cinegastronauta, 16th October 2013), "Lecce, all Ferzan Özpetek's places" (Vanity Fair, March, 2014). Furthermore, by making a key-word research on Tripadvisor and inserting "Ferzan Özpetek", "Mine vaganti" or "Allacciate le cinture" you can find a forum on the last magazine article we mentioned (Vanity Fair) as well as some users' comments on specific places, cafés and restaurants that make explicit reference to the locations of both movies and where you can experience Ferzan Özpetek's Salento "atmosphere". This could be interpreted as a signal for a latent demand for themed, cinematic tours or even package holidays. At present, anyway, the most important contribution of cinema to tourism in Salento is undoubtedly rather connected to the

spread of a peculiar image of it, as we know that: "*from a marketing standpoint, the study findings suggest that the content of a movie can be related to destination image formation*" (Kim, Richardson, 2003: 232). As we have already said, most of the impact in this sense, as regards our case study, Salento, is attributable to Özpetek's movies. They revolve around the importance and meaningfulness of ties of blood and affection, with the fascinating Baroque architectural beauties of Lecce and of the seaside on the coast (Otranto and Gallipoli) in the background. More specifically, what emerges from "Mine Vaganti" is people's lively and engaging irony, warmth, openess towards others which appear to be typical of residents of that area in cinematic reality. The movie conveys a very characteristic, distinguishing atmosphere which, in viewers' mind, comes to be attached to Lecce and surroundings, made of breathtaking urban and natural landscapes, strong traditions, people's friendliness, goodness and genuineness of local cuisine. It also disseminates a great value: the strength of family ties. In an "enlarged", modern family, which struggles against prejudices and social conventions, parents' love towards their children prevails above all else. In "Allacciate le cinture", Özpetek's addresses an issue which he is particularly fond of, that is community ties, in other words, human solidarity in its diverse forms. He settled the story again in Lecce, thus corroborating film viewers' mental association "people/values/place". This is what comes to light from critiques, reviews and mass media. And this is then what contributes to shape Salento image among ousiders, and so in potential tourists' mind, too, and what they expect to find once there. In this regard, what is worth noting is Özpetek's stress on people, both in his words, as we saw, and in his movies – through which his attitude manifestly shows –. This is relevant because residents' approach towards "the other" (and therefore towards external visitors to their living space), as conveyed through the reel, implies a feeling of hospitality which can be one of the pull factor in viewers' travel motivation and a crucial element in destination attractiveness. After all, hospitality is an integral part, or even a major component, of tourist industry, though it is not an independent variable of tourism development (Pollice, Urso, 2014). Rather, it influences and is in turn influenced by tourism development and by tourist experience, in a complex dynamic of action-feedback between local community's attitude and type of experience offered: tourism acts on outsiders' experience (and perception) of place; the latter, in turn, influencing tourist's behavior, feeds back again on local people's approach to accept others. Finally, residents' pride in the fact that the place where they live is choosen as a film location and attracts tourists as well as the rediscovery of some values – such as community ties, as is the case in Özpetek's movies – could also result into behaviours which are potentially likely to positively impact the enhancement of local cultural heritage and the whole tourist system via the strengthening of their sense of belonging to their living space.

Conclusions

In the light of the objectives pursued by many places within projects of enhancement through movie tourism, it is clear that cinematic storytelling, because of the power of images that produces and evokes, can take a real performative role against geographic

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reality. As already noted, the increasing competition between places leads cities, and regions revolving around them, to adopt an "identity strategy" simultaneously acting on two sides. From the supply side (*Insiders*), interventions put in place are required to improve local actors' strategic convergence, social cohesion, differentiation of the local supply, coordination of the system (which is accomplished through governance) and, not least, community's sense of belonging. From the tourism demand side (*Outsiders*), identity strategies are intended to gain a better recognition of place and an easier transfer of its image, as well as an appealing representation of it which has to be well oriented so as to motivate the demand. An "identity strategy" requires the orientation of the processes of production of sense and, therefore, the orientation of territorial communication. Cinematic products can therefore become an instrument of territorial communication only if they are inserted within a comprehensive, consistent and shared communication plan. When dealing with this topic, we have to take into account that among the many propulsive effects produced by cinema there is one impact which is particularly important and still poorly regarded by scientific reflection: the "identity" effect. Supporting those film productions highlighting the distinctive features of a place and, indirectly, of a local community, often means help strengthening residents' sense of belonging and thus social cohesion and place identity. This is why "authenticity" in representation is so important when movies are intended to depict a territory and its uniqueness. In essence, that kind of cinema which is sponsored, by statute, by Film Commissions which multiply the images of a place, having a crucial "territorial" role. As we saw, Salento has a great potential to develop film-induced tourism and the activities of Apulia Film Commission are deeply contributing to it, but the supply system still needs to organize itself so as to keep up with the solicitations that are increasingly coming from the demand side.

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