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# Cruise Tourism and Sustainability in the Mediterranean. Destination Venice

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.71459>

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## Abstract

During recent decades, cruise tourism has seen enormous growth in both passenger numbers and destinations. The downside of this growth is the negative impact on environment and society. This is even more true, if the destination considered has a fragile ecosystem. Associating the paradigm of sustainable development with the practice of cruise tourism might represent a solution to the problems faced by the industry. However, although cruise industry has apparently embraced sustainable good practices, a number of issues are still critical. This chapter explores the topic considering the case of Venice and its role as home port for cruise tourism in the Mediterranean area. Venice special legislation on tourist cruises and the debate on cruise ships in the Venetian lagoon are examined to highlight critical factors and remedies. Much remains to be done to balance the rapidly growing demand for cruising against its negative environmental impacts on this fragile city. The case of Venice shows how cruise tourism is a complex issue in relation to the sustainability paradigm. Indeed, the controversies stem from the different points of view of the various actors involved in the market—tourists, cruise companies, local administrations, suppliers, local companies and environmental and heritage protection associations just to mention a few—which identify benefits and costs of cruise industry in different ways and timespan.

**Keywords:** cruise tourism, sustainable development, sustainable tourism, Venice, carrying capacity, heritage, *Contratto di Rete d'Impresa*

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is recognised as a global industry and considered a substantial contributor to the development of countries. Tourism development potentially provides many benefits, but these can be realised only if tourism is managed in order to maximise positive impacts,

while negative impacts are kept to a minimum. These latter may include degradation of the environment, pollution, waste of resources, disturbance to wildlife and landscapes, cultural commodification and trivialisation, displacement of host communities and introduction of undesirable activities [1]. For this reason, there is a general consensus that associating the principles of sustainable development with the practice of tourism might represent a solution to the problems faced by the industry. As a result, sustainable tourism has been proposed as a development strategy that aims to increase economic opportunities and enhance quality of life while preserving the destinations' natural and cultural resources [2].

In the early 1990s, cruise tourism was mostly an elite privilege, but since then the phenomenon has constantly increased in popularity. Parallel to cruise tourism success, also its environmental, social and economic impact has been growing in scale. At the end of the twentieth century, cruise travel was popular mostly with wealthy senior holiday-makers, for whom a cruise holiday was the symbol of classiness and a luxurious lifestyle. With the beginning of this century, cruise market has seen enormous growth in both passenger numbers and destinations, with aggressive competition among cruise lines, which have developed distinctive brand positions to differentiate themselves from competitors. However, the downside of this growth is the negative impact both on environment and society created by cruise tourism. Hence, when big ships arrive to small destinations, phenomena of congestion arise causing impacts not only on environment but also on traditions and social behaviour of local residents. This would mean that many 'paradisiacal' places, such as islands, costs and ancient cities usually having a very delicate ecosystem, are at risk to be lost [3].

Today, the most popular cruise destinations are, listed in order of traffic volume, the Caribbean and the Bahamas, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Islands and Northern Europe. As some data from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) shows, the cruise industry has experienced impressive levels of growth. In the last 10 years, demand for cruising has increased by about 70%. In 2014, cruise passengers recorded to have cruised worldwide were more than 22 million, generating an economic impact of \$119.9 billion, while further increase is expected in 2017. Cruise ship capacity grew by 18% from 2009 to 2013. Due to this rapid increase in growth, sustainability represents a major issue also for the cruise industry, which has moved towards the wholesale adoption of sustainable principles in its development, operations and branding [4].

Cruise ships today offer a world of innovative facilities and services that aim to satisfy the expectations of a growing population of travellers. However, although it is clear that the cruise industry has responded to the desires of passengers by developing new destinations, ship designs and on-board amenities, in terms of sustainability the attention of the cruise lines seems confined to relatively minor policies and practices of waste management, water treatment policy and reduction of air emissions. Besides international and national laws on commerce and environmental protection, there are no standards for regulating cruise tourism. Due to the lack of comprehensive management and assessment strategies, there is no consensus about the economic, social, cultural and environmental effects of cruise industry. Therefore, much remains to be done to balance the rapidly growing demand for cruising against its negative environmental impacts.

This chapter explores the above-mentioned issues by looking at the strategies and policies used to market cruise tourism in the Mediterranean with a special focus on the case of Venice. The chapter offers also some reflections relevant from the perspective of cruise tourism management, highlighting the need for responsible tourist service providers to balance rent-seeking activities with the need to preserve natural and cultural resources. Venice special legislation on tourist cruises and more general law and legal aspects are examined to highlight critical factors and remedies. The intention is to identify the role of environmental values and sustainability in the cruise industry.

## 2. Background

Cruise tourism can be defined as a luxurious form of travelling, involving an all-inclusive holiday on a cruise ship of at least 48 hours, with a set and specific itinerary, in which the cruise ship calls at several ports or cities. It is characterised by the concentration of huge numbers of people in limited areas for brief periods, thus multiplying negative impacts that may lead to destruction of natural and cultural resources. According to Johnson [5], the growth of cruise tourism requires different management solutions. They include (a) fostering holistic integrated actions involving international agencies, cruise line operators and host communities; (b) reducing the impact of cruise activities for safeguarding destinations; (c) raising the environmental awareness of passengers; (d) sharing increasing profits more equably between cruise line operators and destination communities. Klein [6] highlighted that in order to keep the cruise industry focused on the issue of sustainability, it is important that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other interest groups redouble their efforts in the areas of media management, influencing also legislative processes.

Although cruise industry has apparently embraced sustainable good practices, and efforts are being made to respond to the environmental challenges it faces, a number of issues such as visits to sensitive areas, passenger-host relations in the destinations visited and waste disposal are still critical. Much remains to be done to ensure that the rapidly growing demand for cruising does not exceed the natural limits of the environment. This would lead to a potential conflict with the aims of sustainability stems from the impact of the cruise companies in the tourist destination areas [7]. Furthermore, it has been noted that cruise tourism options vary according to the size of the ship and the type of experience offered. Impacts vary widely and, therefore, many factors need to be considered by the companies, in developing sustainable cruise tourism strategies [8].

Currently, cruise tourism encompasses a variety of facilities and amenities, making sea travel much more comfortable and enjoyable for travellers. Cruise tourism has come to be associated with marine resorts, competing with traditionally marketed destinations and offering tourists an alternative form of holiday. Ritzer [9] used the expression 'cathedrals of consumption' to emphasise the structured and ordered nature of production and consumption within cruise ships, which are similar to the repeated contents of theme parks and enclave resorts. Similarly, Quatermaine and Peter [10] described modern cruises as 'cathedrals of entertainment', where destinations resemble the intervals of an ongoing show.

In the literature, many researchers have explored cruise tourists' motivations for choosing a cruise holiday. In this regard, Cartwright and Baird [11] say that the most common reasons cited are the search for luxury and entertainment. Others have highlighted that a cruise holiday allows tourists, for a short period of time, to escape their daily routines [12], to enjoy a life of privilege [13] and to be in a different world [14]. Hosany and Witham [15] investigated the relationships among cruisers' experiences, their degrees of satisfaction and their subsequent intentions to recommend the line to others.

Certain characteristics of the cruise industry seem to align the product with green values since the cruise experience brings passengers into contact with sun, water and open air. However, its eco-friendly profile has increasingly come into question, especially over the last decade, which has seen the emergence of floating cities in the form of supercruise ships, able to carry over 5000 passengers. In this regard, Sweeting and Wayne [16, p. 327] defined the cruise industry as 'a polluter, spilling oil and dumping garbage at sea', though they also pointed out that many cruise lines are now implementing practices and procedures to reduce their environmental impacts. On the contrary, some authors (e.g. [17]) have argued that, because it is an organised and spatially confined leisure activity, cruise tourism can be viewed as 'sustainable'.

The need to harmonise the interests of tourism companies with those of the populations and ecosystems they visit is the principal focus of an influential UNESCO report focusing on this commercial sector [18]. Other researches compiled a long list of potentially harmful environmental effects associated with cruise ships, most of which are exacerbated with the increasing size of the vessels: anchor damage, air and water pollution, damage to local natural and cultural ecosystems [5, 19, 20].

Cruise industry growth seems, therefore, to be in conflict with the sustainability paradigm. It therefore appears necessary to conduct proper assessment of the potential benefits, risks and impacts of cruise tourism. In this context, for an authentically sustainable version of cruise tourism development, the implementation of environmental protection measures would be necessary, involving all the stakeholders of marine tourism destinations, not just the cruise line operators [8, 21]. This would require a long-term management strategy, involving international agencies, cruise line operators and host communities.

### **3. Cruise traffic in the Mediterranean area**

If considered from a global point of view, the cruise market is in a continuous growth, very competitive and investing in new means every year. Data by CLIA state that in 2016, 24.2 million cruisers have been cutting through the seas, while in the 2017 projection, cruises are expected to rise globally to 25.3 million.

This global phenomenon is very similar to the market's trends in the Mediterranean Sea, where the number of passengers has increased to 10.1 million in less than 10 years, rising from 24.2 to 34.3 million from 2007 to 2016. The number of lower berths had reached 26.3 million at the beginning of 2017, with a growth of nearly 80% since 2007.

As stated in the introduction, the Mediterranean is second only to the Caribbean when considered as a cruise destination even if the near future does not seem to follow the same growth trend. Actually, a more realistic evaluation has to take into consideration the aggressive growth of other destinations especially those located in Asia.

The Mediterranean Sea counts more than 100 ports welcoming cruises. Of course accessibility, dimensions, facilities offered, proximity to touristic destinations, infrastructures, investments and local policies vary appreciably. In this analysis, it cannot be neglected how the peculiar geopolitical situation of many destinations of the Mediterranean area is affecting cruise tours. This is one of the main reasons why it would be better to consider the Mediterranean area divided into macro areas and/or different seas.

According to the most recent data of MedCruise, in 2016, the traffic in the Mediterranean Sea remained essentially stable compared to the previous year. Figures show that, in the same period, the Adriatic area represents the fastest-growing cruise market of the whole Mediterranean Sea, with the highest positive variation in terms of both passenger movements and cruise calls (**Tables 1 and 2**).

It is evident how in both tables the Adriatic area data variation is the highest and most positive between the years 2015 and 2016. This is very clear if compared to all the other Mediterranean area and Black Sea. This last and the East Mediterranean area have a very high variation but in negative terms.

As it is possible to analyse from the data shown above and considering then the last 5 years, the volume of passengers in the whole Mediterranean area has increased to the 2.4%, while the total number of calls has considerably decreased to more than the 8%. This data is easily explainable by the growing dimensions of ships; indeed, in the same range of time, the passenger movements per call have increased to 13%. As shown in **Graph 1**, the traffic in the Adriatic Sea remained essentially stable, except for a drop registered in 2015, in terms of both passenger movements and cruise calls.

The Adriatic Sea counts more than 30 cruise ports, mainly characterised by transit traffic, with a total of more than 5 million passenger movements. In this scenario, Venice plays the role of home port, being the lead destination of the whole area with the 31.7% of passenger share

Mediterranean areas	2016	2015	% Var. 2016 on 2015	2014	2013	2012	% Var. 2016 on 2012
WEST MED	20,077,773	19,641,139	2.2	17,971,531	18,857,996	18,546,398	8.3
<b>Adriatic</b>	<b>4,746,762</b>	<b>4,532,940</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4,604,764</b>	<b>5,117,572</b>	<b>4,859,013</b>	<b>-2.3</b>
EAST MED	2,604,421	3,516,851	-25.9	3,022,838	3,583,558	3,261,300	-20.1
BLACK SEA	16,742	70,934	-76.4	162,588	187,872	146,249	-88.6
Total	27,445,698	27,761,864	-1.1	25,761,721	27,746,998	26,812,960	2.4

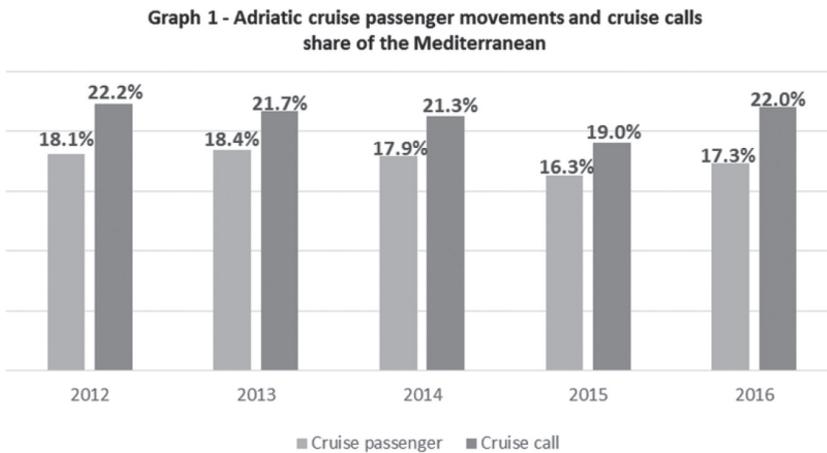
Source: MedCruise, 2017.

**Table 1.** Cruise passenger traffic in the 4 macro areas of the Mediterranean in MedCruise ports.

Mediterranean areas	2016	2015	% Var. 2016 on 2015	2014	2013	2012	% Var. 2016 on 2012
WEST MED	8617	8284	4.0	8327	8881	8641	-0.3
<b>Adriatic</b>	<b>2961</b>	<b>2578</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>2917</b>	<b>3221</b>	<b>3259</b>	<b>-9.1</b>
EAST MED	1861	2590	-28.1	2140	2430	2525	-26.3
BLACK SEA	28	81	-65.4	332	332	237	-88.2
Total	13,467	13,533	-0.5	13,716	14,864	14,662	-8.2

Source: MedCruise, 2017.

Table 2. Cruise calls in the 4 macro areas of the Mediterranean in MedCruise ports.



Graph 1. Adriatic cruise passenger movements and cruise calls share of the Mediterranean. Source: MedCruise, 2017.

considering the most important locally located 20 ports and 1,605,660 passengers in 2016 [22]. Following Venice, there are Dubrovnik with 833,588 passenger movements (16.5% on the total) and Corfu with 748,916 passenger movements (14.8% on the total). The last destination of the list is Igoumenitsa with 7623 passenger movements (0.2% on the total).

It is interesting to underline how in the top 20 Adriatic Sea port lists, five are Italian. They are in order of importance as follows: Venice, Bari, Trieste, Ancona and Ravenna. Indeed, Italy has the highest value in passenger movements, with 2.3 million cruisers. This value is equivalent to nearly half of passenger movements in the Adriatic and precisely to the 44.6% of it. It has to be stated that how in the last years many ports have been opened or enlarged in Italy and more are planned to be operative in the near future. This process interested mainly the region of Veneto, with 1200 new berths between the recently opened and the ones planned to be opened in 1 or 2 years in time.

The above-mentioned data show, on the one hand, how this area could be crucial to the development not only of the maritime tourism business sector but also for the whole tourism business and for satellite activities and communities in the area and Italy. On the other hand, the specificity of the area and passengers' data call for sustainable development policies. In this

regard, Venice is easily a symbol of a dilemma. The most sought-after destination but also a very fragile ecosystem is currently undergoing traffic restrictions and requiring a progressive regulation [23].

In the last years, a need for better collective actions has grown considerably, and it is not difficult to find research studies and projects stating the need for intergovernmental cooperation at every level linked to local business associations and stakeholders. A solution to this problem could be the coordination of the Adriatic maritime tourist destinations under a conjunct policy working also on safeguarding the sea and its ports of calls. To do this, being Italy one of the main players of this scenario, one of the possible solutions could be to apply the Italian latest and peculiar aggregation model to the whole area. The model is a kind of formal network called business network contract (or *Contratto di Rete d'Impresa*). This model is very successful in Italy, and it is widely applied in the tourism business sector in the country [24]. This kind of actions would transform the area in one destination and provide more coordination among different countries, offers, branding and marketing campaigns. Moreover, the business network contract could directly be the counterpart of the European Union bodies, lobbying for more innovative development plans and environmental safeguard policies. The network could be easily perceived as a valuable partner and also as an influential one because of its territorial extension, the number of its affiliates, the variety of legal entities such as NGO, ltd, foundations and local administrative bodies and its coordination system embodied by the management body. At present, in the Italian legal system, the members of a network contract, called *Retisti*, maintain their individualities, working together as if the network was a limited company under a common name, guided by an external management body and having in common a bank fund (see [24]).

External institutions, such as the European Union, international organisations, buyers and suppliers, would then have to deal just with the common management body having all the powers to act on behalf of the members. Of course, the model of business network contract should be tailored on the issues subtended to the area and this specific way of travelling across it. However, this kind of coordinated action could also be helpful to solve the long-standing question of Venice.

#### 4. Destination Venice

Venice is one of the most visited cities worldwide. Because of its uniqueness, Venice and its lagoon are both part of the UNESCO World Heritage List and form a very delicate ecosystem. The beautiful historical buildings are built on an ancient stilt system, already facing the everyday effect of saltiness, water, mud and frequent high-water events. Venice and its lagoon can be considered as a single entity, the centre of a productive, commercial and residential system. Preserving the lagoon environment and the cultural heritage of the city is a pivotal issue.

For Venice, its inhabitants and stakeholders, the question of sustainability is complex. Indeed, nowadays, its economy relies almost entirely on tourism, but tourism has to be balanced with the needs of the residents and the carrying capacity of the destination. Then, as Davis and Marvin [25] highlighted in their research, there is a clear contradiction between what appears

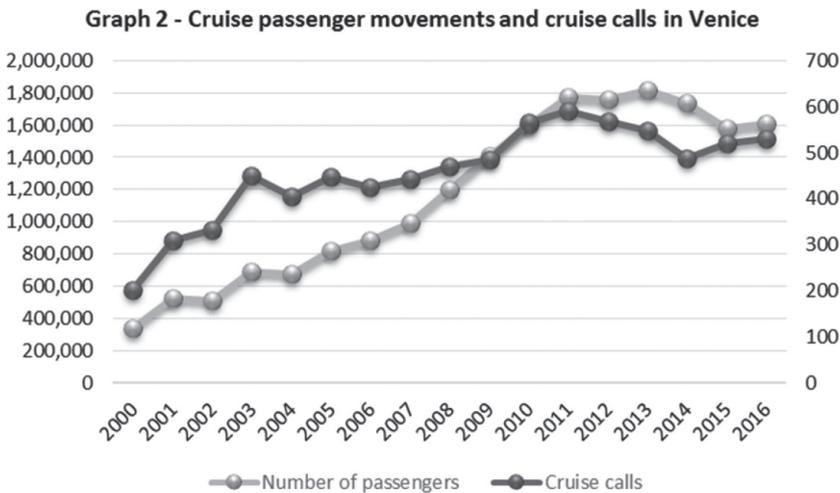
good for Venice in the short term—revenue from tourism—and what risks are killing the city in the nearer long term—mass tourism.

Just to consider tourist arrivals recorded in 2015, data show an increase of 5%, totalling 4,495,857, over the previous year [26]. These numbers alone make sustainable tourism in Venice, as an urgent and pressing question for a city that is already in a delicate situation, built on more than 100 small islands on the lagoon and with a total area of 797,9631 hectares excluding lagoon waters (data of the Municipality of Venice). This situation becomes more critical considering the role of Venice as home port for cruising and the increasing number of cruise passenger movements. Therefore, it is clear that the number of visitors is having a dramatically negative impact on the city, which highlights the need of initiatives to promote sustainable tourism and to help visitors reduce their impact on this fragile city.

The process regarding cruises has involved the Harbour Master’s Office, the Port Authority and the Venice Waters Superintendent’s Office and afterwards the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Culture and Environment, the Minister of Education, the Governor’s Office and Venice Municipalities and the surrounding communities.

The port of Venice is divided in more than one area, each one of them devoted to a specific activity and located in a different part of the lagoon. The different operative areas are (a) Porto Marghera, in the proximity of Venice, where once was the industrial district, dedicated to the commercial terminals and ferry, and (b) Marittima, located in the historical centre of Venice, dedicated to the cruise and passenger terminals.

Thanks to the cruise facilities and its strategic location, the port of Venice is considered one of the best home ports of the world. As **Graph 2** shows, the volume of cruise passengers and cruise calls has continuously increased during the last 15 years. According to the



**Graph 2.** Cruise passenger movements and cruise calls in Venice. Source: Venezia Terminal Passeggeri (VTP).

VTP data, from 2000 to 2016, cruise passenger traffic has risen from 337,475 to 1,605,660 passengers, with an average annual growth rate of 10.24% and an increase from 200 to 529 cruise calls.

Special legislation on maritime traffic in the city has been emanated in the last 40 years for different reasons. Law has seen the safeguarding of the port of Venice and its related activities as an important objective, because of its social and economic role [27]. Just to mention a few of those measures, the first special law for Venice is the 171/1973; it focused on the replacement of oil transportations by vessels with a more generic and less heavy commercial traffic. By the way, in 1984, the second special law for Venice was issued. This time the measure goal was to help the economic growth of the port activities. More recently, in 2007, the first Venice Blue Flag voluntary agreement was signed by local authorities and cruise companies. The agreement goal was to set less invasive standards regarding using fuel with an increasing lower level of sulphur and engine rules when in the city port. Moreover, 2013, the Blue Flag II agreement was also signed. This last agreement has a more strict environmental-friendly and sustainable focus and forces cruises to use only green fuel when near the city. Research conducted by the Local Environmental Protection Agency showed how the two Blue Flag agreements gave good outputs in the short term to balance economic and environmental aspects [28].

In the last decade, following the growth of cruise ship industry and of the dimensions of this kind of vessels, cruises have faced the hatred of local community, of national artists and intellectuals and of movements such as *No Grandi Navi* and associations such as *Italia Nostra*, (the National Association for the Safeguard of the Italian Historical, Artistic and Environmental Heritage). The question behind the opponent's choice regards not only the environmental problems linked to the pollution created by the big and many cruise ships passing into the lagoon, but also the phenomenon of mass tourism incriminated to be the main reason behind the turn of the identity of Venice into a fake amusement park, the strong depopulation of the city and the possible destruction of its fragile structure due to the unsustainable mass of people passing into the city.

At the same time, it has to be underlined how also those favourable to the role of Venice as port of calls are represented by a movement: the Cruise Venice Committee. The Committee was founded in 2012 by Venezia Terminal Passeggeri. Its chairman stated that over 3000 jobs would be in danger if the regulation about tourism cruise would change. Moreover, according to the Committee, already after a few months after its foundation, it could count on the support of more than 4500 local enterprises.

The last debate's effect resulted in a local referendum, with no legal value, on the topic. It was held on the 18th of June 2017 and was promoted by environmentalist committees and the *No Grandi Navi* association. People voting against tourism cruise in Venice were 25,000, but actually they could have been more as the promoters had only that number of ballot papers.

By the way, it has to be underlined how the debate on cruise ships in the Venetian lagoon became more vibrant after 2012 and precisely after the disaster of Costa Concordia, Isola del Giglio, Italy on 13 January of the same year.

The only significant recent legislative development of the Venetian case is the 2014 Clini-Passera Decree 79/2012. Following its provisions, the Italian government has forbidden the passing through the Venice lagoon of cruise ships having a gross tonnage over 40,000 tons. By the way, being the route followed by the cruise ships in Venice the only one possible, because of its depths and characteristics, the effectiveness of the Decree was postponed by the Order 178/2014 to the moment in which an alternative and safe route would be built, leaving in the meantime the possibility to local authorities to mitigate the risks through specific measures aimed to safeguard Venetian lagoon. The last word on the issue is left to the Maritime Authority. Actually, another route has been found even if no structural steps have been taken to make it viable.

However, the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) expressed in a statement how CLIA and its member lines would refrain voluntarily from bringing big cruise ships to Venice until a new navigational route becomes operational.

## 5. Conclusion and implications

The cruise industry is one of the most important growth sectors in the tourism market. Over the past few years, the cruise market has seen an enormous growth in passenger numbers, while an increasing number of new cruise destinations are emerging. This growth has given rise to a demand for very large cruise ships. Today's cruise ships have been designed for functionality, taking into consideration the desired target market.

Although cruise companies are making efforts to increase an environmentally safe profile of cruise product, there are many prejudices against cruise industry, because of the significant negative impacts of cruise vessels on the host environment, which is likely to increase due to the growth of the sector. Of the above-mentioned range of negative outcomes, the impact on the destination and pressure on the local culture because of inland visiting time of a large number of passengers is only one of the key factors to be considered. Consequently, cruise industry seems to be in conflict with the sustainability paradigm. Then, the images that cruise lines offer to the tourism market do not correspond to an authentically sustainable version of tourism, genuinely respectful towards the environment and natural ecosystems.

Nowadays, the concept of sustainability seems to occupy an important role in cruise industry, and environmental issues appear to be pivotal for the cruise companies. However, cruise tourism is full of controversies in relation to sustainability paradigm, as the case of Venice shows. On the one hand, it is true that controversies in tourism are both ample and widespread due to the multitude of types of tourism, tourists and stakeholders. That indicates a need to incorporate ethics into tourism [29]. On the other hand, in the case of cruise tourism, it should be noted that controversies stem from the different points of view of the various actors involved in the market—tourists, cruise companies and destinations—which identify benefits and costs of cruise industry in different ways. Therefore, the practical implications in terms of sustainability emerging from the different actors' perspectives are quite evident.

Hence, cruise passengers are interested in their tourist experience, while cruise companies exert considerable effort in constructing cruise products that are designed to meet their expectations. The cruise experience embodies a series of powerful motivators: it is often perceived to be safe, social, customer-friendly and service oriented [11]. Passengers' perceptions of quality and value lead to satisfaction, which inevitably leads to their intent to repurchase a cruise. Therefore, cruise passengers are fascinated by visiting attractive destinations, but they do not seem interested in supporting sustainability problems arising from shipping and cruise destinations. That means cruise tourists are likely to be emotionless about the negative impact that huge cruise ships cause passing into the Venetian lagoon, while they are excited for having the sensation to touch with their own hands all the historical buildings along the lagoon.

Cruise companies, from their point of view and also because of the growing popularity of this industry, attempt to increase their share of tourism market developing new destinations around the world. Beyond this background, many studies (e.g. [30]) have highlighted also environmental problems concerning a number of waste generation and discharge associated with air pollution and pressure exerted on places with a very fragile ecosystem, as in the case of Venice. This effect is also evident considering the Mediterranean area as a whole. Indeed, in this area the absence of any international coordination of the cruise industry at the regional level leaves it open to exploitation. In this regard, it has been noted that the environmental costs of the cruise industry are incalculable because the cruise ship industry is unregulated and its impacts are difficult to gauge. As mentioned before, the environmental controversy surrounding cruise activities, however, has not prevented the cruise companies from branding their products as 'sustainable' or 'eco-friendly'.

Finally, considering cruise destinations it should be noted that preserving these destinations to ensure them a sustainable future has a very high cost. Destinations play a major role in itinerary development, as they are an attraction basis for the enrichment of the cruise passengers' travel experiences. However, while there are no doubts that cruise industry can generate economic contributions to tourism destinations, it is not so sure that the benefits of attracting cruises to a tourism destination are higher than the costs. All over the world, local governments invest large amounts of money in high-quality infrastructures to attend the colossal ships and thousands of passenger arrivals. Then, it must be questioned if the various players in the cruise industry are taking proactive measures to safeguard destinations. Again, the case of Venice represents a remarkable example of the need to reduce the negative impacts of cruise tourism, having regards for environmental carrying capacity of this fragile destination. The concentration of highly numbered tourist visits in the centre of Venice, along with the passing through the Venice lagoon of cruise ships, produces damage and serious potential risk for the environment. The result is that a large part of local inhabitants show a great intolerance towards cruise activities.

In conclusion, in spite of the effort made by the cruise industry to embrace environmental good practices, it is important to improve the understanding of the link between the environment and the ecosystem characterising a destination and the cruise tourism as a whole. This is particularly crucial considering that, in general, cruise tourism is being promoted as an important sector to help the economy of many cruise destinations but at an environmental cost that

seems to be hidden. In this regard, Venice is an example of a cruise destination where stakeholders, tourists and interested parties should consider the environmental impact of cruise industry in order to ensure the sustainable development of the destination. Hence, following what argued Klein [6, p. 208] ‘when considering environmental responsibility, it may not be whether a company uses ‘best practices’ or follows international regulations, but instead the environmental impact on people of those practices. (...) Similarly, when considering economic benefits of cruise tourism the focus may not be on whether a port community realises income but rather the degree to which economic benefits are distributed equitably between the cruise line and port and among the stakeholders and segments of society in the port’.

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