Como Lake and tourism imbalances. The limits to sustainable development.
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The tourism system lakesides of Lake Como:
Lake Como (or Lario) needs of a new geographic regionalization to understand the socio-economic dynamics of the basin and to lead the “territorialisation”. (Raffestin, 1984.) The official studies don’t take in consideration the region in its entirety: ISTAT considers only 14 coastal municipalities out of 46; the Tourism Observatory of Lake Como excludes chief towns but adds municipalities from nearby lakes, distorting the results. Tourism regionalization which proposes itself (Fig. 1) takes in consideration: 1) “Como lake”, as aggregate of municipalities of the coast and the basin, 2) “the Lake larian district” which includes the Lario and other ten lacustrine basins comprised in the area; 3) “Lario’s mountains” and the region is another area resulting from the proposed regionalization. This supports the lake as a tourism attraction by offering services, receiving visitors and being reconnected from the image point of view. (Cooper, 2006.) Having 40 percent of the population and 33 percent of the total land area, “Como lake” holds half of the receptivity and welcomes approximately 60 percent of total flows and over 70 percent of foreign flows; “Lake district” more than the 75 percent of the receptivity, more than 80 percent of the attendances and over than 90 percent of foreign visitors.

The “Lake” is the main geographical term of territory. It’s structurally connected to men’s history and to societies and has contributed to improve the region, since Bronze Age, as boundary space, as military camp, as communication route, as cultural context, as area of economic development and as a rest and vacation environment. Lake Como performs important functions: civilians and drinking water, energetic, industrial, irrigation, transport, fishing, sport and leisure. Lario’s physical-chemical and hydro-biological properties, are controlled by many institutional bodies (national, regional, local) and they are being studied by various research centers. This applies also to the other lakes in the district. On the contrary, the organization, planning, studying and environmental control of the area, of the basin and of the reliefs is rather substandard. This is the same for the building as well as for the tourism sector... Lake Como’s basin is not safeguarded in the environmental field and it is devoid of protected areas. The relationship between tourism and other social and economic functions of the lake is unbalanced.

The tourism system is characterized by a weak involvement of the local society and by scarce cooperative relationships. It is fragmented because of the multiple conflicts between institutions and administrative areas at different scales as well as between neighbor communities; between local and tourists, between residents and institutions; and among tour operators. The deficit of planning and control is mainly related with weakness at both national and local level. The first is represented by “tourism” as model of economic development that has never seriously been achieved at national level; no appropriate, effective, coherent and territorially structured policy exists, (Celant, 1999); the second is represented by the low level of credibility that tourism has at local level in comparison with other sectors, e.g. industry. The political and administrative devolution started in 2001 and never finished influenced this process by confusing tasks and responsibilities in local entities and encouraging public administrations in using private services.

Tourism supply and flows:
Como Lake is probably the most famous touristic lacustrine brand in the world. The lake image and the icon of Bellagio are world famous (Minca, 1999). With the exception of a little elite enclave, however, the touristic region is characterized by a limited supply and intermediate quality. Reduced tourist flows and imbalances are relevant; they’re due to a strong tourism seasonality and geographical concentration. There are no international chains in hotel supply which is mainly composed of: a) a few exogenous luxury structures concentrated in the center and in the first basin of Lake Como branch; b) mid-level, family-run hotels, denoting an unbalanced quality / price ratio; they are tackled by the economic crisis without being able to innovate structures for some time. The different types of tourism are imbalanced with respect to the opportunities offered by the environment; lodging options and green tourism, which are less invasive, are not very common. They concentrate in the upper lake as the established luxury destination image of Lake Como brand hinders the diffusion of alternative images, especially those connected with sports and environmental organizations.

Tourist flows are characterized by a high percentage of foreigners (76% of arrivals and 78% of overnights). The average overnights length is restricted (about 3 days) and further decreases (2.5 days) in the hotel facilities. The abundant extra hotelier accommodation of the upper lake is matched by limited flows. Hotel supply in the central area of the lake and in the first basin of the Como Lake branch is matched by important flows. They are however characterized by a highly concentrated seasonality (spring and summer) . Tourism indexes show very high figures in smaller municipalities too (Griante). The Lake Como basin branch of Lecco is marginal from the point of view of supply and even more in flows. Accommodation gross utilization indexes (only one Municipality above 40%) and net indexes (four municipalities exceed 50%) are low; they stress the strong seasonality of the region and a tendency towards black/non declared business.

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The tourism of second homes:
Lake Como is the first vacation place historically recorded (Pliny the Young, first century). Since the sixteenth century, the lake is a tourist destination for the Milanese nobility. It was also part of the Grand Tour. By the end of the eighteenth century Lake Como is an exclusive destination for the global elite, from Napoleone to Kennedy. The social and cultural functions of the "lake as a place" are amplified by the development of the "lake as an image" (Cani, 2014). The holiday resort developed itself between the second half of the 1920s and 1930s. The luxurious villas that surround the slope and the coast have an impact on the environment and on the landscape that cannot be compared to the massive urbanization of the following decades.
After Second World War industry, silk production, wood furniture and mechanics were developed at the expense of tourism. In a situation marked by conflict and lack of planning of regulation (bringing to a massive unregulated urbanization intermediate level residential tourism became common while the luxury resorts stagnate and survived thanks to the fame of their tradition. Residential tourism was monitored until 1987; this was the last year second homes for vacation were recorded in official statistics. In 1987 the province of Como had over 2,67 million visitors. They were only 1,38 million in 1988, with a general decrease of 48 %. Italian overnight increased of 64 %. This is visible in the diachronic graph presenting tourism overnights in the region. From then on residential tourism became invisible and its expansion at risk from an environmental point of view given the lack of space in a subalpine lake basin. Foreign tourist flows in hotels increased in the 1990s but this didn’t stop the progressive deterioration and abandonment of the historic centers of the old houses, small villages and also of obsolete industrial sites, the abandonment of which generates further “hunger” space.
Becheri (2005, 2009) estimated that the number of tourists that use a holiday home is 6,368,540 for the province of Como and 4,829,243 for the province of Lecco in 2003, with a multiplicative factor of the respective tourism official 5.05 for Como and 11.16 for Lecco; the impact of social and territorial cohesion of the phenomenon is high: 4,944 residential tourists per km² in Como, fifteen among the more than one hundred Italian provinces; 5,917 in Lecco, tenth nationally. In 2006, estimates of attendance in apartments and second homes are revised to 6,209,553 in the province of Como (coefficient 4.3) and 2,787,048 in the province of Lecco (coefficient 7.1), with 4,821 residential tourists per km² Como and Lecco in 3451. In 2006 attendance that are not recorded in the second homes would be nearly four times more than the official appearances.

Advancement of research
The current research aims to refine the data to the minimum possible territorial level, that is to say municipalities. This will help in assessing the number of second homes and corresponding tourist attendances that are not recorded in official statistics. This estimation is carried out by: 1) spatial statistical analysis, diachronic and comparative data on housing (first and second homes) and population; 2) the spatial synchronic statistical analysis of, urban waste water and the collection of solid urban waste; waste of electricity (2011); 3) comparative analysis of satellite measurements (Database DUSAF) in relation to land use.

First reflections:
The relationship between principal homes and second homes, although limited to 2001, shows that the general location of second homes is mostly in the lake basin and the adjacent pads. In fifty-five municipalities second homes are equivalent to the main house or more. In twenty-two municipalities the percentage of second homes is more than double of the first houses. The most affected municipal areas are also those marginalized by official statistics on tourism (especially in the upper lake and in the Province of Lecco) and are situated in sensitive areas in terms of environment, geology and landscape. Urban spread extended mainly in the seashore, in the lake basin and in the wider basin of the lake and in the mountains in the last decade (Fig. 5).
Second homes tourism is a key component in the tourist area of Lake Como and in the provinces of Como and Lecco but gives various problems in three ways: a) risk of local society marginalization and of the relationships between tourists and locals; b) land consumption by private property with possible dangerous impacts on environment and landscape, especially in areas with hydrogeological problems, as well as obstacles to access to or use natural resources; c) modification of the type of regional tourism. Economic development and tourism planning are damaged because the opportunity to promote other forms of tourism which might be more profitable for the local economy and low in environmental impact are preclude. Environmental degradation correspondingly decreases the attractiveness of tourist places. Last, escaping official surveys, second home tourism cannot be included in programmatic planning fostering a vicious spiral leading to the reproduction of the residential tourist model as the characterizing accommodation offer.
Bibliography: