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Sea scape

04

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EVOLVING ECOLOGIES ACROSS THE LAND-SEA BORDER

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LAND-SEA BORDERS AND TOURISM

TOWARDS A NEW FORM OF COASTAL HOSPITALITY IN ITALY

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APERVASIVE AND INTENSE PHENOMENON

We become unwelcome guests when we occupy the “front row” to enjoy a “sea view”, even if we pay for our vacation. The issue of coastal hospitality opens up to multiple interpretations and fierce criticisms.

In Italy, the topic of coastal hospitality intersects with broad and multifaceted reflections, ranging from socio-ecological and anthropological to economic considerations. Indeed, coastal areas are where critical issues “coagulate” and require solutions through an “intergenerational” and strategic project for the future of our country¹. This project must address the stresses imposed by climate change and promote a new culture of sustainable living, oriented towards integrated and harmonious coexistence with natural ecosystems (Franceschini 2014, Hagan 2016; Moccia 2012; Mostafavi - Doherty 2010; Scandurra 2022). It concerns the relationships established between people and things, with the landscape, soil, and nature; it involves the time we are willing to dedicate to commuting, leisure, travel, and discovering places, traditions, customs, and much more (Venneri 2023). More profoundly, it addresses the disparities between regions (Coppola et al. 2021), which not only continue to highlight differences between the rich and poor but also exacerbate risks for common goods and residents, whether permanent or transient.

The critical view of coastal hospitality partly stems from the interpretation of tourism as an “extractive” activity (D’Eramo 2017; Gainsforth 2020; Giuzio 2022), because the tourism is the heaviest industry of the 21st century «Tourism is the most significant industry of the 21st century». With this assertion, the journalist and sociologist Marco D’Eramo summarized in his book



Fig. 00_
The monster, Torre
di Bassano, Torre
del Greco, Naples.
Photo by
M. Pedone
© O.P.C.I. 2022

BORDI TERRA-MARE E TURISMO. Verso una nuova forma di ospitalità costiera in Italia

Il turismo ha un forte impatto sulle coste italiane ed è legato al fenomeno irrisolto del consumo di suolo. Dopo il fisiologico rallentamento nei due anni di pandemia da Covid-19, l'espansione lungo le aree costiere ha ripreso a far registrare numeri importanti. Città (spesso fantasma), grandi alberghi, villaggi vacanze, insediamenti illegali, porti turistici e strade ormai hanno coperto più del 51% dei nostri litorali; hanno privatizzato spiagge libere e zone dunali; hanno distrutto lunghi tratti naturali e zone umide. Le operazioni di trasformazione non riguardano esclusivamente il suolo ma anche il mare: l'irrigidimento della costa ha prodotto l'accelerazione dell'erosione che si tenta di mitigare per non perdere la spiaggia, costruendo barriere in acqua che in molti tratti hanno modificato

l'immagine di luoghi identitari. In altre parole, il turismo ha prodotto forme permanenti, solide e diacroniche, ha costruito un “muro di cemento” inadeguato ad affrontare gli scenari di aumento del livello del mare: il rischio è che tra qualche decennio una nuova geografia ridisegni il rapporto tra terra e mare, sommergendo molte aree e cancellando ingenti patrimoni naturali e antropici.

Questo contributo critica i modelli insediativi prodotti dalle forme di turismo costiero che abbiamo ereditato, e ragiona sulla necessità di interpretare l'ospitalità del futuro come motore strategico che, attraverso nuovi dispositivi funzionali a densità e permanenza diverse, può contribuire a ridurre la pressione del costruito, a connettere i bordi d'acqua con l'entroterra, agevolando la riattivazione dei «territori lasciati indietro». Il paradigma che si sta immaginando presuppone alcune priorità: rinunciare alla costruzione di nuovi edifici favorendo il recupero del patrimonio abbandonato, vacante o

sottoutilizzato; avviare un sistema di demolizioni strategiche per “liberare spazio” e favorire scambi ecologici e connessioni tra terra e mare; aggiornare i metodi di intervento per la mitigazione del rischio erosione ormai obsoleti; incoraggiare progetti di architettura del paesaggio e di adattamento per ridisegnare le interfacce, aumentandone la porosità. Sono imperativi da rispettare, evitando forme intensive di occupazione di suolo e favorendo modelli di ospitalità diffusa con basso impatto ambientale, reversibili e adattivi: per creare sistemi di ospitalità compatibili con i cambiamenti ambientali e sociali in corso.

L'Architettura e l'Urbanistica, unitamente a tutti i saperi che si occupano della terra e del mare, devono affrontare questa “sfida intergenerazionale”, per aggiornare, in senso ecologico e paesaggistico, i modelli insediativi che abbiamo ereditato e che continuiamo a reiterare... prima di ritrovarci a largo, isolati e imprigionati in edifici sommersi.

“Il selfie del mondo. Indagine sull’era del turismo (The selfie of the world. Survey of the age of tourism)” the definition of one of the most pervasive phenomena of contemporary times, which finds fertile ground in Italy. This is not only due to the rich heritage of our art cities but even more so for the beauty of historic coastal towns and natural landscapes, the quality of our sea-waters, and the increasingly equipped beaches that attract millions of Italians and foreigners every summer, driven by what Mariavaleria Mininni (2021) calls the «desire for the coastline».

In Italy, 35% of the tourism industry revolves around seaside activities: 45% of Italian holidaymakers choose the coast as their vacation destination, and 24% of this segment’s revenue is generated by international flows (Banca D’Italia 2020). This economy supports the lives of entire families, businesses, and small and large entrepreneurs, often at the expense of the landscape and the quality of cities, leading to banalization and homogenization, in service of the masses.

NUMBERS AND FORMS OF THE PHENOMENON

The dynamics of Italian coastal tourism find wide room for maneuver within the rhetoric of land consumption, a problem for which a solution has not yet been found. After the physiological slowdown during the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the phenomenon has restarted with determination (Ispra 2022-2023), particularly fueling the incessant coastal sprawl (Beach 2002) that continues to spatially modify this particular fragile ecosystem (Battigelli 2007), determining substantial impacts and contributing to exacerbating the stresses produced by climate change (Legambiente 2022a). Ultimately, the *urban tsunami* defined by Forman (2010) has never truly halted: in recent years, it has thickened and consolidated le *mur de béton*² constructed at varying densities, but increasingly in continuity and often illegally (Legambiente 2022b), with large objects towering over «amorfe agglomerazioni urbane lunghe decine di chilometri» to use the words of Antonio Cederna³.

Unfortunately, our country has accustomed us to many *ecomostri*⁴, primarily built along the coastline, precisely to meet tourist demands in an expanded and intensive form of hospitality. Large hotels, tourist villages, illegal settlements, beach resorts, marinas, and

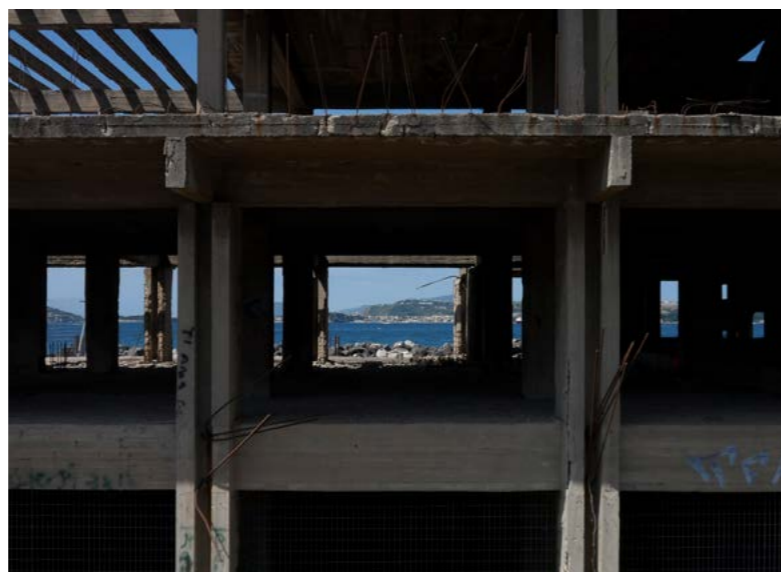


Fig. 01/03 From top to bottom:
Ruins, Torre del Greco, Naples. Photo by M. Pedone © O.P.C.I. 2022.
The cube, Rione Terra, Pozzuoli, Naples. Photo by M. Pedone © O.P.C.I. 2022.
Activated carbon, Lido Cerano, Brindisi. Photo by A. Parisi © O.P.C.I. 2022.



Fig. 04
The sea behind us, Partaccia, Massa Carrara. Photo by M. Pescio © O.P.C.I. 2022

coastal roads have covered hectares and hectares of valuable land with asphalt and cement, privatizing free beaches and dune areas, destroying wetlands and long stretches of coastline once covered by Mediterranean scrub. Not to mention the damage that tourist economy has generated on local communities, the social impact that has denatured and changed the characteristics of entire populations. From this perspective, the concept of hospitality appears overwhelmingly distorted, to the detriment of landscape quality that becomes a “monster”, because it escapes the taxonomies of control, surpassing the otherness between urban and natural, undergoing the assaults of speculation that often have also tampered with interesting forms of intensive architecture.

Seaside tourism is a phenomenon that originated in the nineteenth century as a health practice, first in Great Britain and then in Italy: in the early establishments (established in Livorno in 1781, Viareggio in 1827, and Rimini in 1843), people dressed to breathe sea air and to bathe for wellness reasons⁵. But it was the fascist regime that influenced the explosion of the phenomenon, with the construction of seaside colonies and with Benito Mussolini acting as a spokesperson for seaside vacations. While in France and England, especially in public buildings, a uniform imprint was conferred, in Italy, the imagination of designers was unleashed to make the

colonies a very particular observation point: highlighting especially the scenic effect, that is, producing buildings “in the shape of” ships, locomotives, or planes. The buildings acquired a monumentality capable of surprising and leaving the impression that the regime took care of childhood in a non-trivial manner. Not surprisingly, the specialized magazines of the thirties emphasized that the purpose was to give the little guests a memory of the structures remaining indelible in their memory, also due to the originality of the space in which they had spent this period of life.

The progressive attractiveness of the sea determined, between the fifties and sixties, a transition from elitist seaside tourism to mass tourism, using the coast as one of the main drivers of the tourist economy. It was the real estate speculation of the seventies and especially the eighties that led to the construction of hotels, bathing establishments, and residential buildings, making the phenomenon truly destructive and also involving the colonies: with maximum savings in terms of material, technologies, finishes, and little creative commitment from the designers. The colonies, generally located near the beach and surrounded by vast green spaces, became coveted prey for unprecedented real estate deals. Where there was once a colony immersed in pine forests and green spaces, condominiums surrounded by tiny



Fig. 05-06_ Two photos of the abandoned Stella Maris seaside colony in Montesilvano, Pescara. Photo by K. Di Chello © 2024

Today, apart from reuses in some virtuous cases and in others subject to real estate speculation, most of the buildings once used as colonies are abandoned – amid often sterile debates about their possible reuse – within post-modern spaces assimilable to Giandomenico Amendola’s «theater city», or attributable to Francesco Calamo-Specchia’s more recent idea of «isolated places», overcrowded in summer and emptied in winter. Indeed, the metaphor of the coastal strip becoming an “accordion”, proposed by Alex Giuzio first in “La linea fragile. Uno sguardo ecologista alle coste italiane (The fragile line. An ecologist’s look at Italy’s coastline)” (2022) and then taken up in “Critica al turismo (Criticism of tourism)” (2023), is widely shareable: in the summer months, coastal resorts open to host a sea of people, as if they were amusement parks, «superficialmente diversi ma che mostrano il medesimo significato»⁶, and in the cold months, they are ghost towns that close into a kind of hibernation.

According to ISTAT data (Italian Nation Institute of Statistics), the first twenty-seven Italian seaside resorts have an average of 2,471 beds per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to 680 per 1,000 inhabitants in other Italian tourist destinations, and above all, these beds are 829 per square kilometer against the 76 of other tourist destinations. The study carried out in 2021 by the Observatory of Seaside Municipalities, established by the Department of Economics of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice on behalf of the G20S network⁷, reported that Italian tourist municipalities have an average of 47 guest presences for each resident, while in the major seaside resorts alone, there are 171 tourists per inhabitant: the data, when related to municipal surface area, speaks of an average of 6,958 presences per square kilometer in Italian tourist territories, rising to 7,471 per square kilometer if only the first twenty-seven seaside tourist destinations are considered.

However, against this variability of presences between one period and another, tourism has produced “solid permanent” and “diachronic” forms, which “resist” the temporariness of vacations. While flows are seasonal (in the summer months our coastal resorts, where already 30% of the Italian population concentrates, increase their inhabitants from two to ten times), hospitality has greatly contributed to the density of buildings along the coastal strip and within the famous 300 meters from the sea, which is double compared to the rest of the peninsula, as reported in the ISPRA report of 2019. A pressure produced without planning and foresight,



gardens were erected, the plastic representation of that “bag of colonies” that lasted at least three decades. The more modest buildings were transformed into family-run boarding houses; others changed their destination, becoming luxury residences thanks to their privileged position facing the sea.



since the State has always delegated the management of the coasts to regional and municipal plans that have prioritized the needs of mass tourism rather than those of a fragile environment, treating the coastal strip with an “extractivist approach”, only for its economic value and not for its ecological value to be preserved.

THE IMPACT OF INTENSIVE HOSPITALITY... TOWARDS CHANGE

The desire to accommodate the new demands of contemporary living – through the development of settlements linked to tourism, the irregular proliferation of hotels and second homes, and the intensive use of beaches with equipment and structures – has altered the land-sea balance and transformed the morphological characteristics of the coastal heritage, contributing to its degradation (Zanchini, Manigrasso 2017). Despite the existence of seaside tourism being predominantly based on the beach, this natural and public asset has often been distorted indiscriminately: in many segments of the coast, such as the Romagna Riviera and Versilia – to name a few – coastal dunes have been demolished to make room for buildings on the frontline, eliminating a barrier created over centuries by the wind that has accumulated grain by grain and populated with native vegetation, a fundamental feature of the Mediterranean landscape essential for defending the beach from erosion, but replaced by hotels, houses, resorts, and restaurants (Pranzini 2021a; Macchia, Pranzini, Tomei 2005).

Today, the few surviving natural dunes are identified as protected ecosystem at the European level and therefore untouchable, while to defend the seafronts and buildings on the beach, for which natural dunes were previously demolished, either so-called rigid infrastructures are built for erosion mitigation (brushes, breakwaters, groins, and dams), or it has become a habit in many parts of Italy to raise crude artificial dunes in winter, sand mountains accumulated with bulldozers that, however, do not have the same compactness as natural ones and are, therefore, easily destroyed by the first storm surge (Pranzini 2021b).

Furthermore, the large buildings constructed on the coastlines, due to their weight, cause the phenomenon of subsidence, that is, the lowering of the ground level, contributing to the rise in sea level due to climate warming. Consequently, in recent decades, the Italian coastlines have undergone a marked overall retreat: over 50% of the coastlines of our peninsula are now eroding,

Fig. 07/09_ From top to bottom: The last beach, Lungomare Sud, Porto S. Elpidio, Fermo. Photo by N. Viozzi © O.P.C.I. 2020
Trench, Lungomare Sud, Porto S. Elpidio, Fermo. Photo by N. Viozzi © O.P.C.I. 2020
Shot n. 4, Lido Adriano, Ravenna. Photo by A. Zanni © O.P.C.I. 2018



Fig. 10-11
Examples of artificial dunes constructed to protect against storm surges, Francavilla al Mare, Chieti.
Photo by K. Di Chello © 2024



Fig. 12-13
Where the dunes and beaches remain untouched, the native vegetation thrives undisturbed, Montesilvano, Pescara. Photo by K. Di Chello © 2024

and strategies to address the problem have always focused on attempting to eliminate the symptom, the impact, rather than the many anthropogenic causes.

Among the most recent research, “Lo stato di erosione delle coste italiane”⁸, an investigation carried out by Diego Paltrinieri and Giancarlo Faina for the Observatory of Italian Coastal Landscapes of Legambiente (2020), has provided useful data for telling the widespread phenomenon along most of the Italian coastlines, the acceleration it is experiencing, and the expenses being incurred for mitigation. In summary: kilometers of eroding coast amount to 3,770 (out of approximately 8,000 km of coastline), so the current erosion rate is 46.4%; in 50 years (from 1970 to 2020), kilometers of eroding coast have tripled, meaning that at least another 40 million square meters of beaches have disappeared; in

the last 20 years, the State and the Regions have spent about 100 million euros each year on coastal defense works, of which at least 80% have concerned rigid works (brushes, barriers, groins); in total, we have about 1,300 km of rigid works caging our beaches (to these, we should add the port stretches that further stiffen the coastline, contributing to the phenomenon).

Moreover, just looking at the sea when traveling by train, for example, along the Adriatic Line, or when walking along the shoreline: by now, in many stretches, the natural horizon line has been replaced by an unjustified stone boundary. Cliffs and other rigid structures built for risk mitigation do not solve the problem at all; indeed, many structures exacerbate the erosion of adjacent beaches, to the west or east, and this is an indisputable fact, scientifically demonstrated but

rarely considered. Furthermore, the expenses incurred for mitigation works are widely above the benefits they bring. In other words, this operating practice has been an escape route for many regional and local administrations to employ – or squander – public money.

A good part of coastal erosion and urbanization is therefore caused by the consequences of mass tourism and its needs: the need for structures, infrastructure, and transportation means to exist and accommodate. Hospitality has enormous and multisectoral repercussions: it is one of the drivers that influence the quality of the coastal environment and therefore deserves a change of pace in policies, starting from the heritage of investigations and experiments now in our possession.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The attempt to halt soil consumption is not rhetorical... it is an opportunity for the landscape, for cities, for all disciplines dealing with land, for research, for the job market, for the quality of our lives. Because if going back is not possible, due to the scale and density of the phenomenon, then we must change the direction of the road we still have ahead, traveling at a speed that allows us to look at the landscape we inhabit in a different way, to take care of it, to reclaim it to the point of reimagining it (Paquot - Younès 2013; Serres 2019; Younès 2010).

Beyond mass tourism and intensive coastal hospitality, there is a growing need for change. A very interesting transformation is taking place in tourism demand, especially internationally, a phenomenon of truly unprecedented magnitude in history, which should concern us not only in terms of numbers but also in the forms it may take in relation to the characteristics of Italian coastal areas and the problems affecting tourism supply, starting from seasonality. One of the strongest and most significant trends is the growth of a demand for quality that does not settle for hotel services near the sea but seeks a connection with the surrounding landscape and cultural assets, nature, and gastronomy, and is interested in sustainable mobility forms (pedestrian and cycling, train travel, and electric vehicles) (Martinelli 2008; Palumbo 2017; Pd 2021; Venneri 2023).

However, to overturn established arrangements, it is necessary to intervene in the dynamics that together contribute to the reproduction of such criticalities, recognizing the coast as a public good, a fundamental infrastructure for the well-being of all, both resident and passing inhabitants. The coast of the future that we must imagine «è uno spazio riorganizzato nelle sue modalità di fruizione e gestione, riequilibrato sotto il profilo ecologico e della legalità, bonificato e alleggerito

dal suo attuale carico insediativo (is a space reorganized in its modes of use and management, rebalanced in terms of ecology and legality, reclaimed and relieved of its current settlement load)» (Curci et al. 2021). Within this complex system, hospitality is the strategic driver that can generate new functional devices with different densities and permanencies, contributing to the weaving of new lines of land use, rediscovering also and above all underutilized secondary paths rich in testimonials, history, and naturalness (Venneri 2022). In other words, updating the hospitality system and making it structuring for the development of territories means abandoning the intensive model we have inherited and imagining a network of points and lines that put the coast and the hinterland in tension, relate the interfaces on the sea (and the beaches) with the innermost historical heritage to be recovered, through gentle, preparatory speeds, precisely to rediscover places of beauty and the most authentic sense of travel: it means using the keys of porosity and slowness to open up new territorial perspectives, in which the criticalities resulting from too much coastal pressure and the state of abandonment of the «territori lasciati indietro» (Carrosio 2019), find a solution within a condition of balance, difficult to achieve but possible and necessary.

The paradigm shift referred to presupposes some priorities: renouncing the new in favor of the recovery of abandoned, vacant, or unused heritage; initiating strategic demolitions to “free up space” to facilitate ecological exchanges and land-sea connections, more generally in favor of an economic sector – that of demolitions, precisely – highly sustainable; updating intervention methods for erosion risk mitigation (against stiffening forms), or rather promoting and implementing landscape architecture and adaptation projects that do not so much affect the water but reshape the built thickness close to it, lightening it, increasing its porosity, facilitating the reconstruction of dune ridges, and restoring it as much as possible the relationship with the sea. These are imperatives to be implemented by shunning the intensive forms of beachfront construction, in favor of widespread, low-impact, reversible, and adaptive models, capable of coping with change, to host it and accompany it.

In this field of reflection and design, large, medium, and small coastal towns will play the game of their future, subordinate to the reinterpretation of the relationship with the sea and the construction of a new alliance with nature, aimed at “reclaiming the landscape” (Angrilli 2018) as a connective system, between coastlines, fine-grained voids internal to built fabrics, in-between spaces, “folds of the city” in fringe areas, rural dimension, and drosscape. This new “pact” between the coast and inland areas, in

the configuration of recognizable and identity-forming “territorial archipelagos”, could expand tourism programs that from coastal centers must open up to the hinterland, promoting cultural practices, en plein air, based on slow mobility, and fueling a more balanced economy.

Some innovation experiments carried out within our country can be useful for continuing to learn. For example, the practices that some enlightened administrations have implemented in recent years: coastal demolitions carried out along the coasts of Lecce or Brindisi in Puglia Region, which are returning beaches to residents and horizons to the coast (Salicandro 2023); landscape architecture works for the reconstitution of dunes in various Italian areas, such as in Lecce (Manna, Longo 2022), in Bibione (Ve), along the Muggesana coast between Punta Ronco and Punta Sottile (Ts); the valorization work of the Trabocchi Coast in Abruzzo that will increase flows towards smaller inland centers by activating even more forms of widespread hospitality (Tauro 2023); the innovative adaptation project for the seafront of Rimini that plans the strategic relocation of objects currently present on the coastal edge (Bagli et al. 2022). And going back a little further in time: the redevelopment of the Spiaggia dei Conigli in Lampedusa (DiMarca et al. 2023); the demolition of the never-completed hotel in Palmaria, and that of Alimuri in Campania (still awaiting redevelopment) (Zanchini, Manigrasso 2017).

On these issues, it is necessary to accelerate, especially if we consider the perspective of the great environmental changes that science illustrates to us through scenarios of sea level rise by 2050 and 2100. By the end of the century, whoever looks at the Italian territory from above, with Google Maps, will most likely find themselves observing a new geography, with much of the Italian coastal areas submerged.

Architecture and urban planning are called to the forefront to face this challenge. The settlement models we have inherited, and which we largely continue to confirm and reiterate, need a profound update, especially in ecological and landscape terms, before finding ourselves far out at sea, isolated and imprisoned in submerged buildings, shipwrecked by corsairs, like pirate ships that instead of landing from the sea, have arrived from land.

NOTES

1_ The concept has been extensively expressed by the author in the chapter *Il futuro passa per le città. Una riflessione sull'adattamento nei centri costieri italiani*, in di Venosa M., Manigrasso M. 2022 (edited by), *Coste in movimento. Infrastrutture ambientali per la rigenerazione dei territori*, pp. 39-59, Donzelli Editore, Rome.

2_ Definition by Miossec (2004) to describe the process of progressive cementification and the forms of privatization and appropriation of coastal spaces.

3_ Quotation within the essay *Il regno del cemento* by Walter Tobagi, in *Morte di un senatore*, by Giuseppe Bonura 2011, Edizioni Medusa, Milan.

4_ The term "ecomostro" was coined by Legambiente in the late 1990s, specifically referring to the Fuenti Hotel located in Vietri sul Mare, in the province of Salerno. See the link: <https://www.paesaggicostieri.org/interventi-virtuosi>

5_ A comprehensive and insightful study on the origins of seaside tourism can be found in the book A. Savelli 2009, *Sociologia del turismo balneare*, Franco Angeli, Milan.

6_ Quote taken from: Francesco Calamo-Specchia, *Isoluoghi turistici, ricerca di senso e realtà aumentata*, in Giuzio A. (edited by) 2023, *Critica del turismo*, pagg. 77- 99, Edizioni Grifo, Lecce.

7_ The G20S network (where "S" stands for "spiagge," meaning beaches) was established in 2018 by the mayors of the main coastal cities in Italy to discuss common issues, commission statistical studies, and make appeals to the government.

8_ See the link: <https://www.paesaggicostieri.org/erosione>.

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SETTLEMENTS

EVOLVING ECOLOGIES ACROSS THE LAND-SEA BORDER

This issue closes the first cycle of Seascope dedicated to the main phenomena affecting and shaping the coasts of the world. The journal wanted to turn the spotlight on the contribution that human actions are having with respect to the erosive phenomena accelerated by climate change, to the many forms of sustainable and unsustainable tourism, to the decommissioning and abandonment of heritage, and to legitimate or abusive margin occupation processes.

In the first four issues, critical reflections were presented often accompanied by action programs, plans and projects, drawing from the research carried out (or being carried out) by the authors, sometimes even through educational experiments useful as a test bench for testing possible innovations. Involving a plurality of different knowledge, Seascope observed these phenomena and possible approaches to mitigate or to correct them, sometimes to enhance them and operational methods to trigger processes useful for building better conditions to inhabit fragile coastal landscapes.

The selected contributions for this issue document the multiple facets of coastal settlement processes, restoring their stratified nature towards both land and water, and providing design and applied research examples to recognise and define new balances.

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