

Chapter 11

From the Periphery to the Centre – Beyond the Traditional Destination Experiences

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Abstract

A primary urban destination can be accessed through its regional periphery. Thus, while a city centre may be the primary attraction, by approaching it from and through the periphery, suburbs can become part of the place and marginalised people as part of the destination from a more holistic perspective. Tourists who are more attuned to the various layers of the transformation of a destination may be more attentive visitors and might empathise and engage with the lives and survival of others when given an opportunity to reflect on other elements of the destination beyond the central area. As part of a field trip to Rome, the Chair of Tourism of the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt explored the inequalities at the periphery of Rome as a destination with undergraduate students from the Faculty of Mathematics and Geography. The results show that a holistic impression and deep understanding of a destination can only be gained by visiting both: its centre and its periphery. Moreover, the centre and periphery of a destination can then be compared in terms of, for example, poor or rich, well kept or unkempt, or native or migrant. However, these comparisons should not be used to look at poverty or similar factors, but to develop an awareness of differences and to look behind the typical tourist zones of a destination. In this case, we suggest that tourist routes can be key in providing a more holistic experience in an historic city.

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Introduction

Traditional tourism has typically focused on the centre of a destination, the main attractions and the well-trodden tourist zones. From a marketing point of view, the desired attractions, the most famous and iconic, are the focal points of the destination. These main attractions are surrounded by services that help optimise the experience. In most cases, guests make their way directly to the primary points of interest and ignore the lesser known and less visited attractions and other areas of the destination. This bundle of core attractions and services form the core perceived destination, where experiences are expected to take place. This traditional focus on central sights has led to the phenomenon of overtourism, especially in heavily visited cities such as Barcelona and Venice. Overtourism indicates that an excess of visitors and guests at and near attractions, mostly in the central areas of popular destinations, has led to frustration among the local population. This issue, as well as increased travel experience of travellers, and increasing technological developments, leads to tourists becoming dissatisfied with the traditional mass tourism-oriented superficial sightseeing experience and begin seeking more authentic experiences in the destination away from the central attraction area.

Interest in the ordinary lives and living spaces of destination residents is increasing. This causes visitors to become interested in interacting with the local population and learning about their lives, economic activities and political and religious beliefs. All this goes hand in hand with the increasingly widespread belief that tourism primarily shows the most beautiful sides of life and the most attractive places, while ignoring less appealing localities and marginal areas. In the current vernacular, nobody wants to be ‘a tourist’; instead, people prefer to be labelled a ‘traveller’ or a ‘guest’, shying away from the notion that they are only interested in typical tourist attractions and experiences. The traditional destination – focused essentially on iconic attractions and wondrous experiences – may lose value and credibility in this new movement towards more holistic travel experiences. This raises the question, ‘can the continued superficial engagement with destination residents compensate for this lack?’ The increasing speed and massive acceleration of daily living also accelerates a form of tourism that promises some level of fulfilment by checking off attractions on a list of place one wants to visit. However, this and the overall increase in social alienation (especially via social media and the COVID-19 pandemic) is deepening the desire for relationships, for meaningful experiences rather than titillating adventure, for depth instead of breadth. Religion, art, nature, history and everyday moments outside core tourist zones can enrich people’s experiences in the places they visit, to resonate with place and people, and to appreciate reflection rather than suffer through acceleration.

This understanding was studied during a field trip in Rome with the question, which conscience does Rome has as a tourist destination. Students from the Bachelor of Geography and the Teaching Degree in Geography from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, together with the Chair of Tourism, researched places and attractions in Rome. Routes/trails were developed to integrate these uncommon things in the city's periphery into the main attractions of the historic city centre. The working groups involved exploring potential routes and recording undiscovered attractions with the aim of deepening the conscience of Rome as a destination. The moral responsibility and ethical aspects of Rome as a tourist destination were addressed. As one of the most famous and historically important cities in the world, Rome carries a special responsibility to develop and guide tourism in accordance with the city's values and principles. The protection and preservation of architectural heritage, the preservation of Rome's cultural identity and respect for the needs and rights of local communities are a few examples. Rome as a destination should take measures to control mass tourism, minimise environmental impacts and promote sustainable practices. Balanced and responsible tourism development should be pursued, considering the long-term benefits for the city and its inhabitants. In this regard, the peripheral areas of Rome present an opportunity to contribute to better balanced, more holistic and sustainable tourism so that the industry might have a greater positive impact, with more diverse attractions and experiences being accessible to travellers.

Focusing on the Guest

The overall product of tourism is the journey itself, which consists of sub-components such as transport, accommodation and gastronomy. The goal of tourism service production and the travel chain is to offer and sell experiences for a limited period of time that will generate feelings such as fun or happiness (Smith, 1994). Experiences have an overwhelming effect and are not entirely within our power. They refer to the personal experiences and impressions travellers have during a trip and can be generated by a variety of activities and interactions that allow visitors to engage with the culture, nature, history or people of a particular destination. Adventures such as hiking can be as much a part of the experiences as cultural events, sightseeing tours or food consumption. Individual experiences are often unique and help to enrich the travel experience, and they can create unforgettable memories. However, it is still unclear when an experience becomes an experience for the individual traveller, or what part individual experiences play in the overall satisfaction of a tourist (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2016).

Additionally, in the German language, unlike in English, a distinction is made between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* (Duerden et al., 2015; Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Schmitt, 2010). The English term *experience* describes both the lived experience, and the knowledge and the experience that arise through an encounter. *Erlebnis* means objective interactions between providers and guests (e.g. a visit to a

restaurant), whereas *Erfahrung* refers to the resulting and subjective effects (e.g. satisfaction with the service quality) (Duerden et al., 2015).

Over the years, many experiential products in tourism have developed with the aim of satisfying guests' consumption of experiences. The research shows that visitors continuously seek unique and authentic experiences. The desire for relationships is growing as *Erfahrungen* become more desirable than staged *Erlebnisse* (Grötsch, 2006). With these developments in mind, the social and cultural impacts of tourism are of particular interest. The role of tourists and hosts and the interactions between them needs a closer look. Questions such as the influence of tourism on social structures, identities and people's everyday lives, but also issues such as social inequality, sustainability and the development of tourist destinations (Heuwinkel, 2019) have to be studied to develop greater Destination Conscience.

The Touristic View From the Periphery to the Centre

A destination is defined as a geographical place or a specific area characterised by tourist activities and representing a destination or place of desire for visitors. A destination has no particular spatial extent, as the guests themselves define the parameters of the destination. A destination might be a city, a region, a country or even a continent that arouses the interest of travellers and motivates them to visit. Destinations contain the facilities, such as accommodations, food and entertainment, that are necessary to provide 'holiday' experience (Fyall, 2022).

Tourists typically choose a destination based on its attractions and available activities. Thus, attraction points play an essential role in a destination's appeal. Attractions are geographical units, points and/or clearly delimited spaces that motivate people to spend an autonomously determined amount of time visiting. Attraction points consist of a combination of activity opportunities and services. They are controlled and have appropriate structures to offer certain differentiated moods or atmospheres, enabling unique visitor experiences (Kušen, 2017; Leiper, 1990; Richards, 2002). Consequently, attractions become exchange platforms and catalysts for community growth. The crucial factor is that, as in any network or system, network effects occur. These reinforce the effect of the individual elements via redundancies and broad effects (Benckendorff, 2014; Leiper, 1990). The network effect in tourism can also have negative consequences. If the attractiveness and benefits of a destination or tourism product increase with the number of travellers, a self-reinforcing cycle can develop in which more people are attracted than the destination can carry. The phenomenon of overcrowding thus arises. The combination of central attractions with corresponding activities leads to high numbers of tourists, resulting in overcrowded places, often crowding locals out of their own action spaces. Such a phenomenon is apparent in popular tourist cities such as Barcelona and Paris (Milman, 2020). According to Beritelli (2013), these destinations are characterised by a spatial structure that often clearly identifies tourist areas, and in historic cities, these typically develop organically

through time. These areas can be delineated on a map, characterised by central attractions and connecting spaces (e.g. transport or accommodations).

This spatial structure also creates a tension between the centre, with its tourism infrastructure, and the periphery. Centre refers to the core area of established and popular tourist destinations, while the periphery includes lesser known or remoter regions surrounding the centre where far less tourism generally takes place. The centre is the most centrally located area and is in high demand. Centres have a spatial concentration of core facilities, a good infrastructure, a variety of attractions and a wide range of services. They often generate significant economic benefits for the city at large. In contrast, the urban peripheries are less developed and lesser known than the core areas they surround. Peripheries usually have less tourist infrastructure and devote fewer resources to tourism development. Consequently, they may be seen as disadvantaged or backward with a lack of innovation, low self-organisation and weak entrepreneurship. Issues such as de-concentration, dependence on the centre, deprivation of value and resources, provinciality, peripheral location or poor accessibility characterise the periphery. However, these peripheral regions often have their own charm and unique attractions, including ‘untouched’ nature, agricultural landscapes, authentic cultural experiences and remoteness (Beetz, 2008).

The theory of central places, developed in 1933 by Walter Christaller, is a spatial location theory that deals with the hierarchy and distribution of central places in a region. The theory states that central places provide services and goods that are in demand by surrounding areas. These central places operate in a hierarchical structure, with larger centres having a wider range of offerings (Braun & Schulz, 2012). In the context of tourism, Central Place Theory relates to the distribution of tourism services, attractions and infrastructure in a destination. Centres are often viewed as major attractions that provide a wide range of tourism offerings. Further development of Christaller’s theory has focused on the role of peripheral areas. It recognises that not all attractions and tourism services should be concentrated in central locations, but that a decentralised distribution can allow for more balanced and sustainable development (von Böventer, 1968). The centre–periphery model describes the tension between a central area that functions as an economic, political or cultural core and peripheral areas that are less developed, less dynamic or even remote. In the centre–periphery model, important functions, resources and investments are concentrated in a centre, while peripheral areas typically have less infrastructure and fewer socio-economic opportunities. This imbalance can lead to social, economic and environmental disparities; the gaps in development dynamics or wealth disparity between the centre and the periphery typically increase. As a result, agglomeration disadvantages may also arise, leading to suburbanisation within the centres, and consequently the development of new centres in the former periphery. These subcentres have a similar economic structure to the centres and benefit from the state’s decentralisation policy, which attempts to restore equal living conditions by promoting the subcentres. This creates a stable polycentric settlement system in which the former periphery is integrated into the economic cycle (Braun & Schulz, 2012). A further development of the centre–periphery model is the three-zone

model, which aims to divide a region or country into three main zones: the centre, the periphery and the semi-periphery. The understanding of centre and periphery remains unchanged. The idea of an intermediate zone is further elaborated in the three-zone model, which plays an important role in political and social stabilisation. The semi-periphery lies between the centre and the periphery and shows characteristics of both zones. It usually experiences higher levels of development than the periphery, but still does not reach the level of the centre. The semi-periphery may be affected by inequalities in the economy and regional disparities (Schmalz, 2020).

At its core, the tension between centre and periphery in tourism arises from the focus of excessive demand on the best-known centres. This leads to mass tourism, congestion, hierarchised service relationships, environmental impacts, cultural and regional identity loss, reduction of quality of life, social problems and the out-migration of the local population. Real cultural exchanges no longer take place, but instead are staged or superficial. On the other hand, peripheral regions remain underdeveloped, and the potential economic benefits of tourism cannot be fully exploited. However, there are efforts in tourism to promote the reduction of disparities between the centre and the periphery. In the periphery, other approaches to tourism (e.g. sustainable tourism) are more possible and must be developed by strengthening social cohesion, economy and infrastructure. In this way, a more balanced distribution of tourism products can be achieved and the principles of sustainable tourism development can be better promoted.

Route-based tourism provides a possible solution to imbalance and tension between centre and periphery. With routes and trails, itineraries are developed to connect different attractions, including in both the centre and its peripheral areas (Timothy & Boyd, 2014). Purposively planned routes have economic significance and a tourism function, and in most cases, the itinerary connects attraction nodes that share a common connection to a certain theme or a combination of themes, such as architecture and culinary traditions. Tourist routes can have elements of main attractions and core areas. However, lesser known or remote places and potential attractions can also be part of tourist routes. (Murray & Graham, 1997; Vada et al., 2023). Incorporating peripheral areas in these linear tourist routes allows people and places on the margins of central tourist destinations to benefit from increased attention and visitor expenditures. This can lead to greater social and economic empowerment in local communities and alleviate some of the overcrowding that typically occurs in popular central areas. City walking is an important part of the trails concept, as 'Walking around a destination to experience a place is an attraction in its own right' (Ram & Hall, 2018, p. 281). This approach to tourism entails exploring a destination on foot (sometimes including using local transportation to access distant points on the route) and discovering lesser known neighbourhoods and districts away from the touristified centre. Culture, history and daily life can be discovered in a unique way that is more personal than might be experienced in city centres. City walking can include interacting with local people and enables more authentic, less staged interactions with area residents. It also provides an opportunity to discover and support local

stores, restaurants and cultural institutions in peripheral areas (Giddy & Hoogendoorn, 2018; Ram & Hall, 2018).

Methodological Approach of the Study

To achieve the aim of the research project – to describe the conscience of Rome as a tourist destination, the students approached the centre (the core of the city's main attractions) from the periphery. Initially, four possible routes were defined from the four cardinal points, which have St Peter's Square in the centre of Rome as their culminating destination. A radius of 8–10 km from St Peter's was defined to simplify route formation from the periphery, a distance that would be easy enough to walk while encompassing a variety of cultural, social and gustatory experiences and locations. Using websites, travel blogs and social media platforms, potential itineraries were developed to connect attractions or places that correspond to the themes or sites of general interest. The routes were studied by the students and travelled at different times of the day. In addition to exploring the routes, the qualitative method of 'cultural probes' was used. These 'rely on participants' self-documentation through photographs and narratives' (Celikoglu et al., 2017, p. 85). Through the use of cultural probes, a deeper understanding of cultural and social contexts, insights into the design of products, services or social innovations can be gained. This method allows participants to participate actively in the research and contribute their individual perspectives and experiences (Townsend & Patsarika, 2022). One aim of this exercise was to document the suggested tourist trails through short video sequences (maximum 10 seconds) to create an approximately one-minute video per route at the end. In addition to environmental influences, such as weather, number of people or noises, the main goal was to create an itinerary that would help create an understanding of the destination and capture moral and ethical elements of Rome's periphery.

It is important to note that the preliminary results are only an initial starting point. Driven by the urban environment on site, after the initial trip the results collected by the students were evaluated cartographically, new routes were created and further research was carried out. Additionally, the route tracking results were supplemented by expert interviews in the field, but the findings from the interviews are not presented here.

Selected Findings: Routes From the Periphery to the Centre

Northern Route

The route from the north starts at the main church, Gran Madre di Dio. Passing the Social Welfare Office INPS Roma Flaminio, the Tiber River is crossed on the bridge Ponte Duca d'Aosta to reach the Olympia site and the Ponte della Musica bridge. The Tribunale di Roma, Sezione Fallimentare, the Giardini di Piazza Mazzini and the Fontana delle Cariatidi are other key points on the trail before it reaches St. Peter's Square. Fig. 11.1 shows the route and stops along the way.



Fig. 11.1. Northern Route. *Source:* Cartography/Alexandra Kaiser (2022) with the tool geofabrik.de.

In general, coming from the north, the route can be summarised as non-touristy and well suited for immersive experiences with the local culture. The route does not lead out the city, but the tourist centre is quickly left behind and local residential areas are opened up for exploration. The disparity between rich and poor in Rome becomes visible on this trail: one side boasts well-kept houses, whereas many buildings on the other side are in ruins and littered with garbage. In addition, contrasting moods and sensations that reveal tensions between modern and old or welcome and unpleasant can be felt.

Eastern Route

The route coming from the east (see Fig. 11.2) starts in the ‘slums of Rome’ near the metro stop *Quintiliani*. Through empty industrial areas and very wealthy residential areas (gated communities), the route leads to the train station *Roma Tiburtina*. The route then leads to the Museum of Comparative Anatomy: ‘*Battista Grassi*’, the university quarter and the old city wall *Viale di Porta Tiburtina*, before the more touristic city centre opens up, starting with *Roma Termini*, the Pantheon and *Castel Sant’Angelo*. The end point on the route is once again *St. Peter’s Square*.

This route reveals the tension between the centre and the periphery in Rome very well. Ten kilometres outside the centre to the east, the area is rather isolated, unsafe and poor. As one moves towards the centre, the urban landscape is better maintained and welcoming. Nevertheless, the neighbourhoods are very quiet and rather empty of people. At the beginning of the tourist zone, the number of people increases significantly to the point of overcrowding around the main attractions. As a result, this latter part of the trail is characterised by tourist services such as restaurants, hotels and numerous souvenir stores. The residential areas are very clean, isolated and home to the city’s wealthy population.

Southern Route

The third route, from the south, starts at *Parco di Villa Bonelli*. Setting off towards the centre, users can discover the church *Chiesa Parrocchiale del Santo Volto di Gesù*, the library *Biblioteca Guglielmo Marconi*, various local markets, the *American University of Rome* and the fountain *Fontana de’l’Acqua Paola*. Before reaching *St. Peter’s Square*, the *Conventual Church of San Giuseppe alla Lungara* and the paediatric hospital *Bambino Gesù* are key stops along the way. Fig. 11.3 shows the route coming from the south as well as other attractions.

This route is characterised at the beginning by quietude, with a sparse population (mostly locals) and a well-kept environment. Many historic church buildings can be seen on the route. Towards the centre, the variety of educational institutions (e.g. libraries, schools or universities) also increases steadily. Even in the central areas, hidden, less-visited sights can be discovered. There are no large tourist crowds on this itinerary; only in *St. Peter’s Basilica* does one encounter large throngs of tourists.



Fig. 11.2. Eastern Route. *Source:* Cartography/Alexandra Kaiser (2022) with the tool geofabrik.de.



Fig. 11.3. Southern Route. *Source:* Cartography/Alexandra Kaiser (2022) with the tool geofabrik.de.

Western Route

The fourth trail approaches the centre of St. Peter’s Square from the west. Two routes were created along this corridor, both starting from the Hotel Villa Carpegna (see Fig. 11.4). On the first route (No. 1) are a number of churches (e.g., Parrocchia S. Pio V, Chiesa di Santa Maria del Riposo and Casa Generalizia

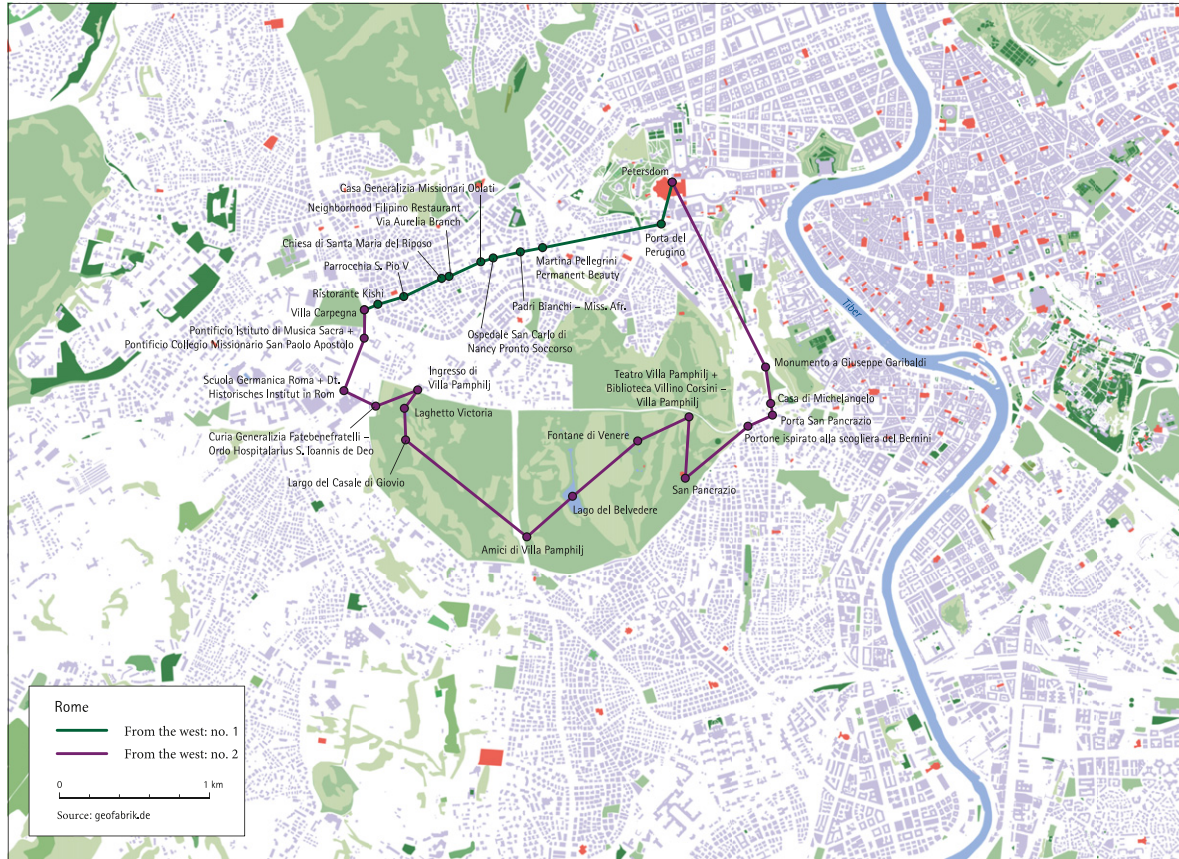


Fig. 11.4. Western Route. *Source:* Cartography/Alexandra Kaiser (2022) with the tool geofabrik.de.

Missionary Oblati), the hospital Hospital San Carlo di Nancy and the city gate Porta del Perugino. The second route (No. 2) heads south before eventually reaching St. Peter's Square. On Route 2, the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, various churches (e.g. *Cúria Geral da Ordem Hospitalária de São João de Deus*), a small lake in a park, the library Villino Corsini, the museum Porta San Pancrazio, the house of Michelangelo and the monument of Giuseppe Garibaldi are the main features.

In this itinerary, two sub-routes were created, allowing the linking of different impressions and enabling a comparison of locations in the general vicinity. Route 1 is characterised primarily by a built environment and religious theme, including many churches characterise the image of this route. The second includes more open space, including a large park (Villa Doria Pamphilj). This is a popular recreation area among locals and tourists. It is well maintained and clean. It was also noticeable that the degree of pollution increased from the centre to the periphery, but in residential areas, much less attention appears to be paid to cleanliness than at the well-known tourist sights.

Discussion and Outlook

This chapter illustrates that balanced, holistic and sustainable development in tourist centres and peripheral areas can help to ensure the positive impact of tourism on all areas of a destination and that a destination's multiple attraction points – not just its main attractions – are accessible to travellers. In other words, tourism has the potential to build bridges between the periphery and the centre. Places are characterised by both geographies, and thus in many cases these completely different urban spaces are characterised by a tension between periphery and centre, giving rise to a destination's conscience. The people at the margins of society give a destination a more comprehensive and perhaps authentic face, as they reveal the vulnerabilities of locations and make their struggles visible to the outside world. This chapter shows that urban (or peri-urban) peripheries in major tourism centres can become suitable starting points for exploring popular destinations. We postulate that tourists can access destinations through their peripheries and that on their way to the centre. They can learn much more about the city and appreciate it more holistically than only seeing what every other visitor sees. Thus, they may better understand and appreciate the places they visit and become 'experienced' guests themselves through their interactions as tourists, abandoning traditional 'touristic thinking' and adopting a greater experiential approach to the historic city. The margins of society (socially and physically) are often the key to a deeper understanding. Peripheral places can be laboratories for individuals to see the 'big picture' and what locals value in their own non-tourist spaces. This includes the contrasting notions of poor versus rich, important versus unimportant, relevant versus irrelevant, periphery versus centre and tourist versus traveller. The important point is to draw attention to the street and ordinary life

but away from the well-trodden tourist centre. This can help create a greater understanding of broader conditions, spread of benefits to other neighbourhoods and contribute to the improvement of the area by visiting, encountering and developing relationships.

In summary, three elements contribute to a better understanding of world-class, albeit extremely crowded, destinations like Rome. First, attraction points are places of desire for tourism. They reflect historical and contemporary perceptions and interpretations of transformation. They are mostly located in urban centres or become centres through marketing and increased visitation. Second, destination peripheries usually lie outside the boundaries of normative tourism space. They are sites of vulnerability and are relatively unknown to outsiders but have potential to experience greater social resilience as tourists value their cultures and action spaces more fully. Finally, trails and corridors that connect peripheries to tourist centres may be key tools for overcoming vulnerabilities, increasing community resilience and providing transformational experiences for tourists and community members.

Destinations have a moral and ethical responsibility. Tourism development must focus on the current interests and needs of local people as well as long-term sustainability. As one of the most famous and visited cities in the world, Rome is a good example of this. Destination Conscience refers to the shared values, principles and norms of behaviour defined by a community or place as moral guidelines for tourism. These include a commitment to manage tourism in a way that is ethical, sustainable and respectful of the environment, culture and local communities. In this sense, the Destination Conscience can focus on promoting sustainable tourism, protecting the environment, preserving cultural heritage, supporting local economies and respecting the rights of local people. It involves using tourism as a force for positive change that meets the social and environmental needs of a destination while providing an enriching experience for travellers. Route-based urban tourism that links peripheral areas to city centres where most tourism takes place can help achieve some of these goals and may be a useful tool for other cities which desire to create holistic destinations with shared visions for sustainable tourism.

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