

Fostering Interculturality in Urban Ethnic Neighbourhoods:  
Opportunities and Limits of the  
Responsible Tourism Approach

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# *Fostering Interculturality in Urban Ethnic Neighbourhoods: Opportunities and Limits of the Responsible Tourism Approach*

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## **Abstract**

In recent decades, new forms of interculturality are emerging as a consequence of economic and cultural globalisation. Within these experiences, tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods can represent an innovative way to create new spaces for intercultural encounter in western cities. The aim of this paper is to analyse this new social phenomenon thanks to the results emerging from an exploratory ethnographic research focused on Mygrantour, an intercultural network which aims to create new forms of intercultural encounter between migrant communities and tourists in some Mediterranean cities. Adopting a responsible tourism approach, this paper will analyse the social and cultural consequences of this growing phenomenon in terms of social integration and inter-cultural encounter.

**Keywords:** intercultural encounter, responsible tourism approach, ethnic neighbourhood, ethnography.

## *1. Introduction*

Tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods is not a recent phenomenon. Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, metropolises all over the world started to promote their attractiveness through ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. Chinatown in San Francisco, for example, became the reference model for other Chinese quarters developed all over the world after the crisis of the Qing's Empire (Santos, Belhassen & Caton, 2008). Over the last two decades, European Mediterranean cities have also tried to attract tourists in ethnic neighbourhoods: the Raval in Barcelona, the Panier in Marseilles and the Esquilino in Rome are only few examples of this growing phenomenon (Aytar & Rath, 2012). A double motivation lies at the basis of these processes of cultural globalisation (Appadurai, 1996): on the one hand urban policies are examining the intercultural dimension of cities as a

potential force for social, economic and cultural enhancement (Wood & Landry 2007); on the other hand, contemporary tourists are changing their leisure behaviours. The phenomenon of 'slow tourism' is best representative of this idea, as it highlights a practice that emphasises the possibility to reach new relations with the anthropological space (Nocifora, 2011). Discussing these new consumption behaviours, Urbain (2002) suggests the notion of "interstitial tourism", which describes a tourist practice that reinvents the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 2002) within daily rituals. These notions express a process of re-configuration of the tourist phenomenon, as it now involves daily places, everyday life rituals and not only "exotic" and distant destinations.

Within this context, ethnic urban spaces can be conceptualised also as leisure and consumption spaces. This process is inherently divisive: humanities scholars (Lin, 1998; Shaw, Bagwell & Karmowska, 2004; Rath, 2007; Aitken & Hall, 2010, Aytar & Rath, 2012; Diekmann & Smith, 2015) have observed a series of negative impacts, such as gentrification, extreme commodification, social conflicts and crystallisation of urban and social spaces (Collins, 2007; Jones & Ram, 2007). Yet, scholars have also identified the possibility to generate positive processes and practices in terms of intercultural encounter, particularly in the case of responsible tourism<sup>1</sup>. According to this vision, tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods could facilitate social integration (Berti 2010)<sup>2</sup>, as well as the creation of new social networks and possibilities for fostering intercultural dialogue (Baraldi, 2006; Igbino, 2011; Vidmar-Horvat, 2012). Furthermore, on a territorial level, it could re-brand the neighbourhood image and generate processes of territorial de-hierarchisation, as well as enhance the neighbourhood economy at different levels. Nevertheless, only few cases of tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods adopt a responsible tourism approach. In fact, most activities regarding this kind of tourist experience are located into traditional tourism schemes and mass tourism patterns.

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<sup>1</sup>Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism (2002). Retrieved April 13, 2014, from <http://responsibletourismpartnership.org/cape-town-declaration-on-responsible-tourism/>

<sup>2</sup>In the perspective of this paper the concept of social integration is associated to the definition of Ambrosini (2013). Hence, according to the author, integration is a multidimensional and non-evolutionistic process that has a local and contextual nature and implies the receiving society and public institutions on different levels.

In the first part of this paper, the Mygrantour case study will be presented as a good example of intercultural networking (Smith 1999) developed in some Mediterranean cities. In this regard, the responsible tourism approach will be introduced as a tool to limit the possible negative impacts of tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods and to enhance mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue. The final part of this paper will analyse the results of an exploratory ethnographic research, with particular regard to the role of the responsible tourism approach in enhancing intercultural relations.

## *2. The Mygrantour network: from one Italian city to an international network of intercultural urban walks*

Although nowadays tourism in ethnic neighbourhood is widespread in many cities all over the world, Mygrantour network represents the only well-established case of responsible tourism in Italy. The network includes different subjects (e.g.: tour operators, NGOs, associations, individuals) that operate to develop and promote responsible tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods through urban walks, offering different moments of dialogue and intercultural encounter (e.g.: eating together, sharing experiences, confronting each other about different traditions). At the moment, the core of the experience is represented by responsible urban itineraries accompanied by migrant guides that play the role of mediators between tourists, shopkeepers, restaurateurs, pedestrians and other people they may encounter during the urban walks. According to the mission of the project, "the objective is to support the integration of migrant citizens into the nine participating cities, building mutual comprehension and respect. The development of a European network is the means for scaling up the impact of the initiative and guaranteeing the spread of good practice. (...) The idea of this project was also conceived as a way to give an added source of income for disadvantaged people, often from developing countries".<sup>3</sup>The network draws its origins from a creative writing laboratory that took place in 2007 in the intercultural centre of Turin. The outcome was the book "Torino è casa

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.mygrantour.org/>. Retrieved April 25, 2014.

nostra: viaggio nella città migrante” (Turin is our home: a tour in the migrant city).<sup>4</sup> The idea was financed by the programme “Agrobiodiversity, Cultures and Local Development”, promoted by IFAD (The International Fund for Agricultural Development) and supported by Oxfam Italia, ACRA-CCS, and Viaggi Solidali, the tour operator for responsible tourism who first developed the idea. Between 2010 and 2014, in Turin, Milan, Florence and Rome, over 11,000 people, have taken part in these walks (mostly secondary school students, but also curious citizens, tourists, groups and associations). After the success of the first phase of the project, since 2013 the network has launched the project “MygranTour: a European network of migrant driven intercultural routes to understand cultural diversity”, promoted by Fondazione ACRA-CCS (Milan, Italy), Viaggi Solidali (Turin, Italy), Oxfam Italia (Arezzo, Italy), Marco Polo (Paris, France), Bastina Voyages (Marseilles, France), Periferies del Mon (Valencia, Spain), IMVF (Lisbon, Portugal), Renovar la Mouraria (Lisbon, Portugal), Earth (Belgium) and co-financed by the European Union. In nine cities (Turin, Milan, Genoa, Florence, Rome, Marseille, Paris, Valencia and Lisbon) the partners are organising training courses and research projects on intercultural topics. Furthermore, they are creating new workshops and walks for children and citizens, in order to promote mutual understanding.

In this way, each individual can collaborate in order to develop intercultural skills and competencies. Furthermore, the partnership represents a multi-level network made up of three different levels of territorial diffusion. The first level refers to the urban territory: this local level includes a series of different subjects like NGOs, associations, public entities, tour operators and migrant guides that create and develop one or more itineraries within the same city. One example is the city of Turin, where it is possible to find three different consolidated itineraries of intercultural urban trekking. The second level refers to the national territory and to the diffusion of these itineraries in different Italian cities. At the moment, the network includes six Italian cities: Turin, Milan, Florence, Rome, Genoa and Bologna. On a third level, since 2013, the network expanded its international ground and now includes other four European cities (Marseilles, Paris, Valencia

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<sup>4</sup> This information has been extracted from Vietti F. (2012).

and Lisbon), where itineraries based on the Italian experience have been developed.

In this context, the concept of intercultural networking has a dual meaning: on the one hand it refers to a network of different subjects that deals diversely with intercultural topics (e.g. some universities and other public entities that study urban policy and its relationship to ethnic complexity); on the other hand, it indicates a network made up of subjects that are characterised by a high level of inner interculturalism (e.g. migrant associations that form their own network). These concepts can be examined separately or as mutually supportive theories, as they often exist and function within the same system. Intercultural networking considers the concept of interculturalism (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2006; Monceri, 2006; Mantovani, 2008; Cante, 2012; Meer & Modood 2012) as a further development of the term multiculturalism (Taylor, 1994; Goldberg, 1994; Parekh, 2002; Anagnostopoulos, Germano e Tumiat, 2008), which places more emphasis on the relational dimension of social agency and exchange (Mantovani, 2010). By increasing the intercultural dimension of a network, it is possible to generate innovative intercultural dialogue and broaden individuals' global perspectives. This social practice can take place in diverse milieus (e.g. public spaces, workplaces and classrooms). If viewed in the context of the urban space, it can imply positive impacts such as increased safety and walkability within urban neighbourhoods (Jacobs, 1965). It is therefore necessary to reconsider the analytical category of networking in order to emphasise the role of the intercultural dimension within relational contexts. As a result, this paper identifies the importance of generating innovation through a mutual and intercultural dialogue, by achieving hybrid outcomes and by broadening one's own perceptive boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The idea is perfectly summarised by Johannson (as cited in Wood & Landry 2007, p. 221) when he states "diverse teams have a greater chance of coming up with unique ideas as they allow different viewpoints, approaches, and frames of mind to emerge...People who have experienced the innovative power of diverse teams tend to do everything they can to encourage them (...) Invariably you find that the best ideas come from the mosaic of players working together in a team on a project. They will come up with an answer that is different from what any one of them would have come up with individually".

### *3. The responsible tourism approach*

The Mygrantour network promotes intercultural urban walks adopting a responsible tourism perspective. Nevertheless, there is not a universal definition about this term. In this regard, despite scholars have given different definitions about responsible tourism phenomenon (Reid, 2003; Goodwin, 2011; dell' Agnese, 2013; Musarò, 2013) and it is difficult to find a shared vision of the concept, it is possible to trace the main characteristics of this practice, on the basis of institutional documents (e.g. Cape Town Declaration, Kerala Declaration), "vademecum" provided by NGO's and other entities (e.g. Tourism Concern or the Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile) and different field studies. The result is the conceptualisation of responsible tourism around three main characteristics. The first characteristic concerns the reduction of social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts linked to the tourist practice, and the implementation of the interrelated potential benefits (Goodwin, 2003). Secondly, responsible tourism is focused on local communities, and aims to improve their quality of life and their active participation in the decision-making process (Pretty & Hine 1999). The third aspect is related to the previous characteristics: through the valorisation of environmental and human resources, tourists can visit a better place and experience better relations with the local community (Goodwin, 2011).

But, how can we adopt a responsible tourism approach in the case of intercultural tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods? On the basis of these three dimensions, which are the main aspects to be addressed to reduce the potential negative impacts deriving from the intercultural experience? Are there any studies that recognise the importance of identifying some preconditions to avoid negative implications? These aspects are crucial, especially for the fact that, as we have seen in the introduction, researchers have identified some negative consequences deriving from tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods, such as extreme commodification, exploitation and even self-exploitation, gentrification and social conflicts. In this regard, Hall and Rath (2007, pp. 16-19) have identified eight essential and interrelated preconditions which should be taken into account in order to promote tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods in a more responsible way:

- Political regulation and structure: urban policies should promote



intercultural complexity as a positive dimension of the urban space, including them in urban and regional development plans. The role of migrants in attracting tourists and in creating 'vibrant local culture' (Zukin, 1995) should be understood as an economic resource for cities.

- Growth coalitions: these coalitions, composed of different public and private subjects, represent an essential starting point to develop "place branding" mechanisms, with the aim to enhance the value of intercultural resources from a touristic viewpoint;

- Spatial confinement: it is necessary that territorial promotion be related to a specific urban area, characterised by a large number of migrants and associations;

- Immigrant entrepreneurship: there should be a proliferation of shops (e.g.: restaurants, cafés, butchers, bakeries, clothing stores) that lend the neighbourhood its ethnic flavour and stimulate street life;

- Ethnic infrastructure: migrant communities will need to be supportive, in order to develop a long-term commodification of the ethnic neighbourhood and to avoid a "top-down" approach;

- Accessibility and Safety: alleviating the negative image of the neighbourhood often promoted by media and various political groups;

- Target marketing: migrants should be considered by policymakers and by place promoters to be attractive elements for place-branding mechanisms.

As a result, the underlying assumptions that link the responsible tourism approach to the intercultural perspective in the case of tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods are twofold. Firstly, there should be a substantial presence of migrants who ought to be included in decision-making processes linked to place promotion, enabling intercultural dialogue within all the stakeholders. Secondly, there should be a willingness of the members of the critical infrastructure to enhance the value of urban interculturality as a social and economic resource.

#### *4. Towards new forms of intercultural practices in urban neighbourhoods*

### *Methodological aspects*

The results of an exploratory ethnographic research (Moralli, 2014) have disclosed a series of considerations about three examples of itineraries of the Mygrantour project, in Milan (via Padova), in Turin (Porta Palazzo) and in Florence (via Palazzolo). The decision to undertake exploratory ethnographic research (Gold, 1997) was due to the limited number of studies related to tourism in Italian ethnic neighbourhoods. Hence, the aim was to investigate processes linked to this cultural practice, focusing primarily on the role of responsible tourism as a vehicle for fostering social, economic and cultural equality and interculturality. The research has also highlighted the limits of the responsible tourism approach that this tourist experience entails in terms of crystallisation and museification of space and cultures, as well as of the contextual production of traditional tourism patterns.

In accordance with this aim, semi-structured interviews and overt participant observations<sup>6</sup> were held in order to better understand the main characteristics of this growing phenomenon and the related “shared meanings, purposes, knowledge, understandings, identities - collective and individual - conventions etc.” (Crossley, 2010, p. 7). In particular, participant observations during the urban walks<sup>7</sup> have helped to analyze the behaviour and the rela-

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<sup>6</sup> In particular, twenty-five semi-structured interviews and ten participant observations were held to investigate the itineraries located in Turin, Milan and Florence.

<sup>7</sup> In the city of Turin, the Mygrantour itinerary takes place in Porta Palazzo, a central urban area, close to important places like Palazzo Madama (where the first Senate of the Italian Kingdom was located), Piazza Castello, the main square, the Royal Palace and the Royal Gardens. Porta Palazzo is a large piazza that hosts the biggest open air market in Europe, where the itinerary begins. The whole itinerary is developed around the market and includes some interesting places like the Romanian bakery, and the first Italian shop which imported colonial products. Nevertheless, as the guides revealed, residents often avoid this area as it is associated to fear of being robbed and other perceived risks. The second example is the urban walk developed in Via Padova, in Milan. It is located in a semi-central neighbourhood, not far from the Central Station and Loreto square. As the previous example, it represents an urban area highly stigmatised and associated to crime and social problems (e.g.: street gang violence, robberies and public disorder). The Mygrantour network offers an itinerary with a lot of stops, such as a Peruvian restaurant with a tasting menu, Parco Trotter, an urban park that is now under regeneration and a South American party accessory shop. The final example is an itinerary that takes place near Florence’s central station, Santa Maria Novella, which is ten-minute walk from Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral

tions amongstourists and guides but also among other people encountered during the tourist experience (e.g.: pedestrians, shopkeepers, etc.). Finally, semi-structured interviews have been gathered by focusing on sample units chosen according to three different variables: the variable “experienced” in the case of tourists who took part in these itineraries; the variable “knowledgeable” in the case of the project’s coordinators who created the itineraries, and the variable “both” in the case of the migrant guides, who usually take part in the urban walks and co-create the itineraries.

Fig. 1: Type of sampling used in the research

SAMPLING PROCESS		
V A R I A B L E	experienced	tourists
	knowledgeable	coordinators
	both	migrant guides

*Is responsible tourism a vehicle for challenging cultural and spatial stigmatisation socio-economic exclusion...*

The results of the exploratory ethnographic research show that these experiences located in three different cities share some fundamental aspects. Firstly, they represent responsible tourism. Secondly, they are located in neighbourhoods where the migrant presence can be experienced daily. Thirdly, all these spaces are located in central urban areas but they are often avoided by Italian residents, and are characterised by a high level of stigmatisation, crime (actual or perceived) and other kinds of social and economic problems.

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and its popular main square. During the itinerary it is possible to visit a Kenyan barber shop, a Florentine carpenter shop and an association that works for migrant integration within the local community. Despite its centrality, this area is highly marginalised by residents because of its identity of “border place”, perceived as a dangerous and ambiguous neighbourhood.

In the case of Mygrantour network, the process through which the project and the related itineraries have been created, as well as the results deriving from this experience are a central element. Thus, the participant observations and qualitative interviews held during the research, have investigated the role of responsible tourism in challenging social and economic exclusion (Dal Lago 2004). At the basis of this hypothesis lies the assumption that tourism can be considered as a social force (Krippendorf, 1987; Hollinshead, 2004; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006), characterised by a transformative capacity in terms of social, cultural and economic consequences.

First of all, the results have showed that Mygrantour tries to reduce negative impacts by encouraging local community active participation, including residents but also shopkeepers and shop assistants. In this regard, migrant guides can be considered as the main beneficiaries of the tourist experience. In particular, their role consists in taking actively part in the definition of the itinerary and mediating between tourists and other people encountered during the urban walk. According to qualitative interviews, migrant guides admit to have the advantage of the possibility to narrate their past and their own culture, as well as the opportunity to create social relations with other migrants and tourists who take part in the itinerary.

This is exactly what we want, we believe in this. I am not able to enter a museum, to narrate about Leonardo da Vinci...actually I do not even like doing that. However, we like speaking about human relations, about how you can inter-act...and we really appreciate that. (...) And I love another thing...that I am discovering my own country. Because I have started to do research about what we have to say and how we could make relations between Italy and our country. I did a lot of research (Guide A.).

Moreover, during the urban walks, Italian citizens can dialogue with not only migrant guides, but also with shopkeepers, restaurateurs, pedestrians, activists and other people who live or work in the neighbourhood. Consequently, the rest of the local community can be likewise involved at different levels in the tourist experience.

You can realise that it exists something more within the same area where you live...that you would have never imagined, not only about specific places, but also about what it has

been constructed in those places (Tourist G.).

Finally, Mygrantour can foster a process of valorisation of ethnic neighbourhoods, which, as explained above, are usually marginalised and avoided by residents, city users and tourists as well. According to these results, the responsible tourist approach has improved local community's quality of life and the image of the ethnic neighbourhood through the valorisation of its resources.

So yes, I think it is an experience that could enrich the neighbourhood, that could help to enhance.... well, the image of the area (Coordinator B.)

Furthermore, it has enhanced the host-guest relation, by promoting intercultural dialogue and a sort of role reversal between migrant guides and tourists. In fact, Mygrantour reworks the idea of "Otherness" in cities (Bauman 1991, Cotesta 2003) not as something exotic within the city, but as part of the ordinary streetscape. The project implies new roles in the interaction among social subjects: on the one hand the migrant becomes the guide, the person who knows, narrates and lives in that urban space; on the other hand, the citizen turns into the 'Other', the person who desires to experience his/her own city in a different way.

*... or not?*

A less optimistic prognosis is that tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods always leads to an excessive commodification of the subjects involved. According to this perspective, commodification is described as "the transformation of a good or service into an exchange relationship. The person producing the good or service loses control of his or her work; the purchaser pays for it according to its market value regardless of its use value (...) critiques of tourism dwell on the manipulation of the consumer and of the resident of the place visited" (Fainstein & Gladstone, 1999, p. 29). Similarly, Conforti (1996) highlights that tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods generates a form of museification of the urban space, especially in terms of mythical reconstruction. Other authors emphasise the inauthenticity of these places (Collins, 2007; Jones & Ram, 2007), the risk of "zooification" of cultures and places (Williams, 2008; Freire-Medeiros, 2009; Meschkank,

2011) and of residential and commercial gentrification (Glass, 1964; Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Gotham, 2005). In this regard, two examples can be useful in order to understand gentrification<sup>8</sup> and “zooification” in ethnic neighbourhoods. The first example is given by Jones and Ram (2007), who have examined Birmingham’s Balti Quarter. In their analysis, the authors denounce the exploitation and the inauthenticity hidden under the created sense of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in Birmingham’s innumerable Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and African Caribbean restaurants and takeaway outlets. The second example concerns Sydney’s ethnic precincts, where different efforts have been made to make “the area more Chinese” (Collins, 2007, p. 78), or to create the Italian eating experience through Tuscan facades and upstairs balconies.

Such extreme commodification of commercial and consumption spaces (MacCannell 2001), and its interrelated direct and indirect consequences (e.g.: gentrification, zooification, stereotypization, etc.) are highly reduced by the responsible tourism approach adopted by the Mygrantour experience.

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of the phenomenon has underlined some limits deriving from this approach. The exploratory research (Moralli, 2014) has displayed a series of practices and processes that contrast with the dimension of responsibility. In fact, in some cases, the intercultural dialogue has been facilitated thanks to traditional consumption experiences, souvenirs or other material tourist objects (e.g.: visiting an Islamic butcher’s shop or eating in a Peruvian restaurant, buying Aleppo’s soap or Aragn Oil, tasting Plantain chips). These forms of tourist fruition are more eradicated into traditional schemes of tourist experience rather than in alternative ones. Consequently, tourists have few possibilities to deepen the encounter with the local community.

I mean that that fact of entering for only two minutes, maybe five or six but...maybe it could be possible to create longer moments during which there is little more time in such a way that it is not only kind of “I enter your house” .... I watch and then I go...because if there is not...you need time in order to have a real dialogue (Tourist B.)

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<sup>8</sup> In the context of this paper, the term “commercial gentrification” is conceptualised as a change in the function of commercial spaces, which are no more only spaces of ordinary consumption but mostly tourist attractions.

In addition, whilst one of the main aim of the project is the active involvement and participation of the local community, the results of the research have highlighted that the rest of the community is excluded from the process of the itineraries creation, and rarely interact with the tourists. A clear example is the unwillingness of some shopkeepers to open their shops to the group of tourists and to narrate about their story as migrants, because of different reasons (e.g.: annoyance, shyness, diffidence, fears of an extreme commodification and “zooification”).

The shopkeepers who have been included in the urban walks and you can see during the itinerary, have been enthusiastic from the very beginning of the project and they have told us “oh, yeah, good, it will be a pleasure to collaborate with you”. Then, in the daily practice, they divided into two groups: those shopkeepers who, after three years, are still enthusiastic and very friendly (...), and the others who are simply tolerant (Coordinator F.)

*A possible analytical perspective to understand intercultural relations between tourists and migrant communities*

These results should be analysed through an overall assumption. In fact, tourism always implies a form of intercultural encounter (Ceriani, Duhamel, Knafou& Stock, 2009), which is characterised by inequalities within the power relation at different levels (Coles & Church, 2007). This phenomenon enhances interpretative and relational asymmetries facilitating “zooification” of space and cultures and gentrification. For example, the intercultural relation that originates from consumption and traditional tourist practices between hosts and guests, can derive from the “possibility that both parties may perceive themselves to be empowered through their unfolding inter-cultural commercial relation, or there is at least a perceived ‘win-win’, positive-sum outcome” (Coles & Scherle, 2008, p. 227). This tendency to present cultures through commercial practices, can also be explained through the analytical category of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1987). In fact, Spivak uses this analytical and political concept to describe the adoption of temporary and conditional essentialism by minorities, with the aim to reaffirm and reinforce group identity and group solidarity (Lee, 2011). Whilst Spivak’s strategic essentialism has political aims, this notion can be usefully employed in the case of tourist encounters, as a tool to trace cultural borders and to present cultural

homogeneity towards a “curious” tourist. The Other “essentialisation” appears in this way unavoidable within the tourist experience, despite the use of a responsible tourism approach. In particular, during the urban walk each migrant guide adopts specific communicative patterns to present his\her culture which results “essentialised” through shared meanings and concepts (e.g.: food, dresses, songs etc.). For this reason, migrant guides become a sort of intercultural mediators (Alred & Byram 2002; Grein & Weigand, 2007) between migrants that live or work in the neighbourhood and the group of tourists, and as a consequence, they feel the responsibility linked to this role. As it emerges from the interviews, they are the real protagonists of the process of “essentialisation”, which is intrinsically related to the Mygratour experience.

We have a responsibility; we represent the image of our community. For example, I am Moroccan and I represent Morocco at all. And there are people that think certain things about us, but after the tour they could think differently (Guide T.).

In this regard, the concept of “strategic essentialism” helps us to better understand the role of the responsible tourism approach within intercultural tourism practices. The fact that migrant communities adopt a strategic presentation of themselves during the urban walks, implies that the beneficial consequences of the responsible tourism approach become relatively limited. In fact, the quality of the relation between tourists and the local community, which is one of the central principle of such an approach, is reduced. This process tends to limit the positive consequences of the responsible tourism approach within intercultural tourism practices with regard to the social and relational dimension of the phenomenon.

However, as we have seen above, the possibility that the process of “strategic essentialism” converts into forms of excessive commodification or stigmatisation can be reduced thanks to the combination of the responsible tourist approach with the intercultural perspective. In fact, although Mygratour represents a leisure activity, the social and political dimensions of this experience are clearly visible in terms of creation of spaces of intercultural encounter and of new forms of territorialisation within the urban *milieu*.

Because we are usually influenced by stereotypes, by things that could influence us



because of the media...but in this way you can find out that Arab doesn't mean terrorist, Rumanian doesn't mean criminal and Bengalese people do not only sell roses. You discover that other things and points of view exist...if you close your eyes and you do not want to see things, those things do not exist!(Guide M.).

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Mygrantour represents an interesting case to analyse new forms of interculturalism within ethnic urban spaces. As the above analysis has displayed, in the case of the Mygrantour network the responsible tourism approach represents the key factor that enables the creation of intercultural encounters between the migrant community and local tourists. In fact, the main focus of the responsible tourism approach relates to the socio-cultural aspect of the tourist experience and, in particular, is focused on the relation between tourists and the local community and urban and commercial spaces. However, the results of a first exploratory research have underlined a series of aspects ascribable within traditional and conventional tourist practices. These aspects are strongly determined by the nature of the tourist encounter, which is never neutral but socially and culturally embedded, and by processes of cultural simplification that can be explained through the analytical concept of "strategic essentialism" (Dervin&Machart, 2015). Nevertheless, the responsible tourism approach remains a useful tool to reduce the negative impacts of the tourist experience, especially in marginalised and deprived areas, where the territorial and the socio-cultural dimensions are related to processes of identity construction and urban regeneration. Further research should be done with the aim to better understand tourism in ethnic neighbourhoods in Mediterranean cities, where the immigration phenomenon has grown only during the last thirty years (Colombo &Sciortino, 2003; Avallone, 2007; Ballerini 2011).In particular, we underline the necessity to analyse the relation between these new spaces of urban interculturalism and contemporary forms of territorialisation (Turco 2010) and identity creation (Friedman 1994) in European cities.

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