

Carlos Larrinaga, Donatella Strangio (eds.), *The Development of the Hotel and Tourism Industry in the Twentieth Century. Comparative Perspectives from Western Europe, 1900-1970*, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2023.

The volume edited by Carlos Larrinaga and Donatella Strangio is part of an important academic discussion regarding the development of the European tourism system. The objective of the authors is to delve into the topic of hotel industry from a historical perspective rather than dealing with the more general question regarding the development of the tourism system, focusing the attention on Western Europe from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1970s. The topic of the debate is a fundamental component, i.e. the hospitality sector, without which the tourism of a city, a region or a country has no possibility of developing: hotels, therefore, represent an irreplaceable necessity for the valorisation of the tourism system.

The tourism system began to develop at a national and regional level approximately from the second half of the 19th century in countries such as Switzerland, Italy and France, and then grew steadily from the early years of the 20th century onwards. The hotels existing at the time when tourism started to develop were not intended to welcome tourists, since their guests were mostly merchants, entrepreneurs or professionals. In a short time, these structures began to modify their customer base, being forced to adapt their evolution to the need of modern tourism. In fact, as the editors state in the introduction, the hotel system had to adapt to the transition “from elite tourism to a progressive mass tourism, which began to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s and became widespread after the Second World War” (p. 2).

In consideration of the absence, until recent years, of detailed studies regarding the hotel industry, the work in question represents a fundamental contribution to the study of a component, which over time, has become irreplaceable for the valorisation of the tourism sector. As underlined by the authors, recent years have seen the birth of important academic studies on this topic and an interest in hotels. For this reason, the volume edited by Larrinaga and Strangio, considering several previous studies, aims at putting forward new considerations regarding the development of the hotel industry “with the objective of disseminating different realities that can be used to make comparisons and expounding the problems that the historian faces when studying the hotel industry in Western Europe” (p. 2).

As for the delay in carrying out studies on the development of the hotel industry compared to other economic sectors, the authors explain that the primary reason was the absence of primary sources. This

problem arises from the business structure of the sector: in fact, “until the mid-twentieth century, the vast majority of the hotel companies in Western Europe were family-run businesses, which makes it extremely difficult to access the necessary documentation which in most cases can only be obtained on request” (p. 3). The spread of limited companies mainly affected the post-war period, when the so-called mass tourism was born, and large hotel chains started to develop. Therefore, considering their low numbers, “often the only way of obtaining information on the hotel industry is to recur to public archives, travel guides or the press” (p. 3). However, most of the essays that make up the volume show that the push towards digitalization that has begun in recent decades is making a large amount of information available to researchers that was previously not freely or even easily accessible. The various essays, therefore, show that the work was based on a solid commitment to the search for unpublished documents, which represent the most praiseworthy part of the volume. All the archival research, however, was supported by a substantial study of the bibliography, through which a necessary comparison was carried out that allowed the authors and curators to put together a useful work for future analyses on the development of the tourism and hotel industry.

The importance of the research that makes up the volume is particularly relevant for providing a preliminary assessment of various aspects of the tourism system, often forgotten by academic studies, such as: “the hotel offer, its evolution throughout the century, its commitment in the configuration of tourist spaces, the role of the State, the impact of the war on the hotel industry and the resilience of the sector, the connections between the banking and hotel sectors and, of course, the investments made in the hotel industry” (p. 11). These aspects are fundamental to understand that “throughout the twentieth century, Western Europe saw the rise of a hotel supply that was increasingly related to tourism, as more and more people who did not form part of the elite classes began to partake in this economic and social phenomenon” (p. 11).

As it emerges from the introduction of the book, the editors have created a volume divided into three parts. The first part analyses the development of the hospitality industry in the long term. Two essays are included in this section: the first contribution was provided by Steve Hagimont, while the second is signed by Mathieu Narindal.

The chapter by Hagimont studies the expansion of the hotel industry as part of the development of tourism in mountain areas: the author therefore focuses on the analysis of the case study of the Pyrenees from the end of the 19th century until the 1960s, trying to examine the place and role of the hotel activity in the urban organization of tourist locations (p. 12). Thermal establishments were created in this area as

early as the 18th century, visited mainly by the elite classes. As the author states: "These resorts are the result of the interactions between a variety of players, from tourists to administrations, not to mention the environment (an object of appropriation and a source of attraction and hazards). They are embedded in networks of national and international imaginations, practices and investments" (p. 12). The final objective of Hagimont, therefore, is to "study the way in which the articulation between private hotel initiative and the will of public players influences the commodification of the desire for care and mountains, hypothesizing that forms of interdependence can be observed without there always being synergy" (p. 15).

In the second essay, which is part of a broader research on this topic, Narindal analyses the history of the Swiss hotel industry in the period between 1915 and 1967, trying to study the evolution of long-term public support to the hospitality sector (p. 35). This work therefore delves into those measures activated since 1915, as a response to the absence of tourists following the outbreak of the First World War: the *Hotelhilfsaktion*, initially a provisional policy, resulted, in fact, in a series of policies reused in the following years as a long-term support to the Swiss hotel sector (p. 34).

The second part of the volume delves into the history of the development of the hotel industry in the periods before and after the outbreak of the Second World War and consists of three essays, which analyse as many different geographical areas.

The first of the essays, written by Cédric Humair, studies the relationship between the Swiss hotel sector and the state banking sector in the Geneva Lake region, trying to analyse "the spillover effects of tourism on banking development and to highlight their importance at the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 58). The Swiss tourism industry, as the author states, has often been underestimated regarding its contribution to the country's economic development, when compared with more important sectors such as industry and finance (p. 56). However, in the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War "the added value generated by the hotel industry was almost equivalent to that of the metal and machinery industry and 60% higher than that of the prestigious Swiss watchmaking industry" (p. 56). Furthermore, "between 1900 and 1913, the hotel industry's share of gross domestic product averaged 3.5%, more than the 2.5% of the banking sector" (p. 56).

The second chapter of this section, written by Kevin James, studies the hospitality sector in Great Britain in the period between 1918 and 1925, one of the most critical moments in history, i.e. the years between the end of the First World War and the transition to peace. The contribution

examines the situation of hotels during war periods, when, due to greater needs, they acquired a new role and were requisitioned for war purposes (p. 79). The essay presents a problem that is exemplified through various examples and through the case study of a hotel requisitioned during the war and which, following the end of the conflict, remained in the hands of the British Government until 1923, despite the achievement of peace in Europe and the gradual return of tourists (pp. 89-94). This contribution, therefore, "contends that the hotel must be treated as an extension of the state's wartime uses of such establishments – as part of a pattern of requisition, bureaucratic colonization, and disputed terms of compensation" (p. 80).

The third essay of this part, which is the results of the research by Yves-Marie Evanno and Johan Vincent, studies, as the previous chapter, the impact of war on the development of the hospitality industry, focusing the attention on the case study relating to the region of Brittany in France between 1940 and the early 1950s. Analysing the situation of the hotels during the conflict and in the following phase, the authors explain that the provisional Government of the French Republic considered the problem of the hotel industry as a priority: for this reason the sector was the subject of strong interventions aimed at post-war reconstruction and it was able to accommodate the strong tourist flows that characterized the period from the beginning of the fifties onwards which preceded the phenomenon of mass tourism (pp. 111-113).

The third part of the volume, which hosts five contributions, focuses on the hotel sector in Mediterranean Europe before the Second World War.

The essay of Annunziata Berrino analyses the exemplary case of the "Grand Hotel du Vesuve", inaugurated in 1882, focusing the attention on the history of this hotel and on Naples, which was one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in Italy. Initially this hotel had all the features typical of the Mediterranean tourist establishments of the mid-18th century and was later modified with the addition of elements that characterized the tourist infrastructures after the second industrialization (p. 118). The author's objective, therefore, is to demonstrate, through the study of the documentation preserved in the historical archive of the hotel and the comparison of these sources with the most recent publications, "how, on a cultural level, the hotel, following the standardization of modernity during the second industrial revolution, lost its original and specific Mediterranean characteristics, including the significant influence of the ancient world" (pp. 119-120). Furthermore, the chapter aims to show that the hotel sector managed to improve its economic value in the context of the first globalisation, losing, however,

that advantage in the subsequent phases of the First World War, the dictatorship and the global economic crisis, suffering a “long and slow decline that lasted until the 1980s” (p. 120).

The second chapter of the third part, written by Carlos Larrinaga, studies the relationships between the hotel sector and the State in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, focusing its attention on a period in which the institutional framework was changing radically (p. 137). The case of Spain, explored in depth in this contribution, can be considered as exemplary and profoundly divergent compared to other Western European countries, due to the historical evolution of the country. In the first decades of the 20th century Spain was the protagonist of a succession of different regimes: for this reason, the relations between private companies and the State were strongly influenced, giving rise to different models of relations between the parties (pp. 137-138).

The essay authored by Víctor Heredia and Marta Luque focuses on a province of Spain, Malaga, which, as the authors state, had enormous tourist potential in the first thirty years of the twentieth century: in fact, “at the beginning of the twentieth century, tourism was seen as an alternative to the crisis of the traditional economic sectors (agriculture, industry) and as a new source of wealth” (p. 156). Malaga, thanks to its ideal climatic conditions and the presence of seaside resorts, began to be considered as an ideal solution for summer tourism, so much so that over time it started to attract sizeable tourist flows. This turning point gave the impetus for the creation of a hotel area to respond to the strong demand, which continued until the outbreak of the Second World War.

The essay by Donatella Strangio and Marco Teodori, making use of new and fundamental unpublished archival sources, analyses the development of the hospitality sector in Italy, focusing its attention on the case study of Rome between the two world wars. This chapter shows us the rapid recovery of the Roman hotel industry after the First World War and the changes it underwent in the transition from the liberal regime to fascism. The years between the wars, in fact, were characterized “by tourist flows that were becoming more substantial and changing in composition” (p. 176). While the weight of tourism fuelled by the white-collar middle classes increased anticipating the transition to the massification of the phenomenon and domestic tourism represented an increasingly important component, traditional elite tourism began to decline and even disappeared. The authors point out, therefore, that in this phase the fascist regime contributed in part to the implementation of changes in the hospitality sector, bringing many Italians, who were previously excluded, closer to tourism: in

fact, "the spread of tourism among Italians formed part of the strategies adopted to consolidate the popular consensus in a totalitarian view that aimed at controlling the leisure time of the masses, but the regime also paid attention to increasing foreign tourism, which had always been crucial in the balance of payments adjustment processes" (p. 176). Due to these new conditions, the Italian hotel system had to make changes to satisfy the new requests, only partially succeeding in this ambitious aim.

Carmelo Pellejero's essay, which closes the third part, analyses a singular example of tourism development: the origins of the group of public hotels "Paradores de Turismo de España". This case study is exemplary as it concerns tourism development through public investments. The author explains, therefore, that the objective of this essay is "to examine the reasons why, in the aftermath of the reign of Alfonso XIII (1885-1931), in a Spain in which pleasure trips were still an incipient activity, the authorities responsible for tourism deemed it appropriate to create a series of public accommodation establishments in areas of special tourist interest to complement or replace the scarce or non-existent private initiative" (p. 194). Pellejero shows how this initiative, which did not concern luxury accommodation, was born in response to various needs, such as: the need to increase tourist flows directed towards Spain or "the emergence of motor tourism in Spain, the modern conception of hotels and the expansion of tourism among social groups that were considered as elite" (p. 10).

In conclusion, the volume edited by Larrinaga and Strangio is a necessary study that tries to remedy to the lack of appropriate and exhaustive research regarding the development of the hotel industry, which, as it has been highlighted several times, is a fundamental component of the modern tourist sector. All the essays that make up the book show the intertwining of the process of democratization of tourism, the evolution of the hotel offer and the birth of a new class of entrepreneurs, who have responded effectively or not to the needs of the new tourism (pp. 215-216). In general, the volume addresses the issue of tourism development through the evolution of the hotel industry, touching on most of the related themes and fundamental geographical areas, managing to provide an exhaustive representation of the effects of private and public initiative and of the influence of the financial sector on the hospitality sector.

Matteo Nardozi
Sapienza University of Rome