Global importance, local problems: Degrowth in Italian World Heritage destinations

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ABSTRACT

Destinations face increasing pressure from ever-growing tourist visitation driven by an overall increase in expendable income and the emergences of new tourism markets. This places considerable stress on both the ecological and social fabric of both established and emerging tourist locales. Recent calls for more sustainable and responsible tourism practices have trended towards degrowth as a viable alternative to traditional economic activity. However, the application of these policies can be complicated in mature destinations that are very economically reliant on tourism. Similarly, emerging destinations may overlook the signs of growing resource depletion in the name of steady local economic growth. This chapter presents policies and practices with evidence from a mature World Heritage destination (Cinque Terre, Italy) and an emerging World Heritage destination (Northern Dolomites, Italy), where recent ecological disasters as well as tourist congestion concerns have led to a shift towards the implementation of certain degrowth measures. These examples will be used to critically examine the application of degrowth concepts within mature and emerging World Heritage destinations.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most important global economic drivers (UNWTO, 2019; WTTC, 2019). In 2019, tourism garnered approximately $1.7 trillion USD worldwide (UNWTO, 2019). Contemporary tourism has moved away from the mass tourism popular in decades past and has instead shifted focus towards more niche tourism types. Heritage and cultural tourism, which is a significant focus of modern tourism demand (Park, 2013), is one of these popular niches and includes a wide range of established and emerging destinations and sites. In Europe alone it is estimated that 40% of all tourists to the continent are motivated by the destinations’ cultural offerings (European Commission, 2019). For example, Venice, Italy, registered a record-high 28
million visitors, including overnight stays, day-trippers and cruise passengers in 2017 (Costa, 2018). In comparison, visits to Yellowstone National Park in the United States totaled 4.1 million in 2018 (National Park Service (NPS), 2019). The experiences of these sites reflect that of other cultural and natural heritage sites, many of which have had steady growth in visitor arrivals, site congestion and depletion of resources (Hitchcock & Putra, 2016; Kim, 2016; Lee & Rii, 2016; López-del-Pino & Grisolía, 2018). In some instances, particularly in emerging destinations, this trend can occur rapidly, as was observed in Iceland, where natural features are noted as the primary reason for visiting, contributing considerably to the boom in international arrivals (+225%) between 2014 and 2018 (Sæþórsdóttir, Hall, & Stefánsson, 2019).

Many of the previously mentioned examples are notable as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. While World Heritage status marks a site as of importance for all of humanity, inscription on the list comes with a series of managerial and planning duties that underpin the principles of sustainable development (Adie, 2017, 2019). However, the tendency among many local and national authorities is to use the World Heritage designation as part of their destination marketing strategy (Ashworth & van der Aa, 2006; Caust & Vecco, 2017; Lai & Ooi, 2015) regardless of the inconclusive findings in the literature as to whether or not the World Heritage brand functions as a tourism attractor (Adie, 2019; Adie, Hall & Prayag, 2018). There is awareness, however, of the shortcomings of growth-driven destination policies, particularly at sites that rely heavily on the integrity and uniqueness of the natural environment (Hakim, Soemarno & Hong, 2012). The emphasis on tourism growth can be tied to the increasing concern with overtourism at natural sites (Cruz & Legaspi, 2019), although this is not a new issue in and of itself. This in turn highlights the need for a more sophisticated approach to destination planning and site management, but as yet there has been no consensus as to how this can be achieved (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Tourism degrowth, then, provides an alternative paradigm that goes behind the rhetoric of sustainable growth and puts resource management and conservation ahead of profit and commercialization of natural heritage (Hall, 2009; Hall & Amore, 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesignhe & Boluk, 2019). To this end, this chapter critically applies the notion of tourism degrowth within natural World Heritage destinations, with evidence from two destinations in Italy, one mature and one emerging.

TOURISM, WORLD HERITAGE AND DEGROWTH

Regardless of geographic location, most destinations share two common features: the pursuit of economic, social and environmental sustainability (Edgell & Swanson, 2018) and an emphasis on the management of an attractive and competitive destination (Hall, 2008). For example, the
New Zealand Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) 2015-2025 strategy “aims to be universal so all operators are contributing to overall tourism industry sustainability … in a highly competitive global market” (TIA, 2015, p. 4). Similarly, Belize has implemented a 2030 Sustainable Tourism Master Plan whose goal is to be “an exclusive multicultural sustainable destination in the Central American Caribbean” (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2012, p. 7). The nexus between sustainable development and competitiveness has also been discussed previously in the literature, with evidence from national tourism policies (e.g. Andrades & Dimanche, 2017) and protected natural areas (e.g. Rodríguez-López, Diéguez-Castrillón & Gueimonde-Canto, 2019). Overall, a pro-growth agenda dominates, which reinforces the vision of short-term goals, fast-track development and resource exploitation (Getz, 1987; Hall, 2008). Thus, regardless of aspirational environmental goals, the capitalist drive in global tourism development has been dominant since the 1980s and has further expanded in the last years (Amore & Hall, 2017; Britton, 1991), resulting in alarming cases of site overexploitation, environmental erosion and exceedance of carrying capacity. Some examples include Boracay Beach in the Philippines (Cruz & Legaspi, 2019), Maya Bay in Thailand (Ellis-Petersen, 2018) and the Kvennagjá geothermal pool in Iceland (Iceland Magazine, 2018). In fact, the increasing concerns in relation to ‘overtourism’ are a clear sign of unsustainability in the current tourism development discourse. The growing awareness of both tourists and local communities in regard to issues such as overcrowding, site congestion and resource management at tourist sites highlights the need for “a response to the unwanted effects of tourism development” (Hall, 2008, p. 10), including overdevelopment, resulting in a shift in planning and management of tourism destinations.

The inclusion of a site on the World Heritage List adds a layer of complexity to any planning system due, in part, to the intricate nature of the World Heritage governance structure (Adie, 2019; Adie & Amore, 2020). This situation is compounded in disaster-prone areas, particularly given the requirements around safeguarding and preserving the heritage assets in situ. In fact, the increasing threats posed by natural hazards and climate change resulted in the inclusion in the Operational Guidelines of a recommendation to ensure that site management plans have disaster and climate change risk management policies (UNESCO, 2019c). While these recommendations are derived from World Heritage Committee decisions, the actual governance structure of the World Heritage system places the onus of control entirely in the hands of the individual state parties (Francioni, 2008). As the actual management systems of each site are dictated by each state party, implementation of requirements and recommendations from the committee can be extremely varied, particularly when there are governance clashes between the broader World
Heritage system and that of the state party (Adie & Amore, 2020). These broader governance issues have a ripple effect on management at site level with diverse interpretation of the UNESCO requirements resulting in divergent policies. This is particularly apparent when access to the site is interpreted as a license to overdevelop tourism. This can cause problems down the road when the site’s periodic reporting period highlights the threat that tourism may be to the listed site.

Given these complex issues regarding site management, World Heritage governance, and tourism activities, degrowth would appear to be an optimal solution. Hall (2009, p. 46) conceives tourism degrowth as an “alternative discourse to the economism paradigm that reifies economic growth in terms of GDP” and proposes a holistic destination planning framework, rooted in the steady state concept (Daly, 1991) and décroissance (Latouche, 2009), which restructures, redistributes, reduces, recycles and re-uses limited resources. In his view, “steady state tourism is a tourism system that encourages qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth that unsustainably reduces natural capital” (Hall, 2009, p. 57). From a demand perspective, tourism degrowth advocates for a shift in consumer behavior that ultimately results in the reduction of service outputs and resource use (Hall, 2009). From a supply perspective, business and destination management organizations must embrace measures and solutions to regulate and reduce the anthropic pressure at the destination level and embrace technological advancements that actually contribute to resource efficiency (Amore & Hall, 2016; Hall, 2015). For example, evidence from Malaga, Spain, illustrates how local advocates embrace the principles of degrowth in contrast to the prevailing tourism development agenda in order to pursue environmentally-sound policies (Navarro-Jurado et al., 2019). Overall, tourism degrowth views the reduction of environmental impact and visitor numbers as essential to the process of ‘sufficiency’ and ‘rightsizing’ of destinations.

Degrowth in the specific context of World Heritage is particularly apt given the foundational ideals of the World Heritage List. The original purpose of the Convention was to conserve and protect sites of Outstanding Universal Value, as highlighted in the emphasis on these activities in their mission statements (UNESCO, 2008). While the Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 2019c) stress the importance of the educational elements of World Heritage sites, this does not intrinsically require that the sites be accessible. In instances where access is very complicated or highly disruptive to the site’s environment, educational elements can be transmitted via designated information centres, often museums in the case of cultural heritage sites. However, although both the Convention and the Operational Guidelines are underpinned by conservation
and preservation ideals, recent shifts within the World Heritage system have resulted in a heavily politicized listing mechanism wherein the major impetus for listing appears to be driven by perceived political and economic benefits, predominantly in the form of tourism receipts (Adie, 2019; Caust & Vecco, 2017; Logan, 2012; Meskell, 2015; Plets, 2015). However, the current use of the list as a tourism brand places World Heritage at odds with the concept of degrowth.

Given that the World Heritage List is currently used as more of “a marketing device than a protection approach” (Caust & Vecco, 2017, p. 8), degrowth policies may be perceived as a hinderance of the ‘benefits’ which may have motivated a State Party to list a site in the first place. As Buckley (2018) has noted, tourism is an industry and as such is driven by self-interest wherein conservation and preservation are only acceptable activities if they lead to a clear benefit. In the context of World Heritage, this essentially creates an odd dichotomy wherein industry providers may, as was observed at the Great Barrier Reef, “see themselves as the key stewards” (Liburd & Becken, 2017, p. 1731) of a site while simultaneously eschewing more active environmentally driven groups. Unsurprisingly, this has also led industry members at the Great Barrier Reef to eschew climate change discussions in an attempt to avoid bad word of mouth. The avoidance of dialogue regarding climate change impacts is ironic when considering that tourism only heightens many sites’ vulnerability to climate change affects (Gössling & Peeters, 2015). This is exceedingly problematic given the aforementioned conservation aims of the Convention. Moving forward, there needs to be a re-focus on these original tenets. Thus, acknowledging the important role that tourism plays for the maintenance of many sites and surrounding communities, degrowth may prove to be an optimal solution, if the managing bodies can prioritize conservation and sustainable measures.

THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

Italy has a long-standing connection to the World Heritage Convention, having first ratified the document in 1978 and with its first site inscribed in 1979 at the third committee meeting. As of 2019, Italy has 55 sites inscribed on the List, sharing the title for country with the most World Heritage sites with China. While the vast majority of these sites are strictly cultural, Italy also has five natural World Heritage Sites: Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe, Isole Eolie (Aeolian Islands), Monte San Giorgio, Mount Etna, and the Dolomites. The relevance of natural heritage is a key element in the Italian Constitution (Article 9), which states that it is the duty of the State to preserve the landscape and the heritage of the nation. World Heritage sites have their own specific legislation, Legge 77/2006, which provides the regulations for the management of all listed site’s within Italy’s national borders.
This legislation dictates the importance of site-specific management plans and requires the incorporation of cultural services as well as tourism within this planning process (Adie & Amore, 2020). Tourism’s specific inclusion in this legislation can be viewed as essential, particularly as, based on international tourism arrivals, Italy is one of the top ten destinations in the world, with 62 million international visitors and USD$ 49 billion spent in 2018 (UNWTO 2019). The combined total of international and domestic arrivals in natural parks and protected areas was 24.7 million in 2018, with an average tourism intensity of 7.6 tourist nights for every 100 residents (Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRRA), 2019).

THE ISSUES OF MATURITY: CINQUE TERRE

Cinque Terre is a 15km-wide area stretching along the Levantine coast of the Ligurian Sea, Italy. It consists of five small townships – Monterosso, Vernazza, Riomaggiore, Corniglia, and Manarola – and the surrounding areas which together form the Cinque Terre National Park. This area, in combination with Porto Venere and the islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto, was awarded World Heritage Site status as a cultural landscape in 1997 due to its “exceptional scenic quality that illustrates a traditional way of life” (UNESCO, 1997, p. 10) and the extensive network of dry stone terraces that were first built as part of the fortresses system designed as protection from Saracen raids (Galve et al., 2016; International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), 1996). The landscape of Cinque Terre is a unique area that blends biodiverse ecosystems, both land and marine based, with agricultural products, particularly lemons, olive oil and the signature Sciacchetrà wine (Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, 2019). Cinque Terre is considered a mature destination which is attractive to international visitors which in turn contributes to the growth of tourism in the wider Province of La Spezia (Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo (MIBACT), 2016). In the early 2010s, Cinque Terre experienced a steady increase of visitor arrivals (Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, 2014b), with more than 3.5 million visits in 2018 (Bompani, 2019). As Amore (2020) observes, the rise in visitor numbers is a result of the post-2011 flooding destination recovery strategy, which culminated with the opening of a visitor centre and cruise terminal in Portovenere in 2014. There are, however, growing concerns with the increasing tourist pressure in Cinque Terre, with the Mayor of Monterosso advocating for the adoption of measures that would restrict visitor access to the site and regulate the local tourism industry (Moggia, 2018).

From a destination governance perspective, the national park authority for Cinque Terre acts as the dedicated destination management and marketing organization (Amore, 2020; Lorenzini, 2011; Storti, 2005). Moreover, it is also responsible for visitor management and accessibility
within the Cinque Terre park area. In 2014, the park authority and Trenitalia reached a partnership agreement wherein the park and train tickets were integrated, providing access to the several trails within the Cinque Terre site (Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, 2016a). The combined ticket enables the park authority to closely monitor the number of entrants and set a cap when necessary. More recently, the park authority has announced its intention to grant access to the national park only to rail ticket holders in an attempt to drastically reduce the visitor flow down to 1.5 million (Deiana, 2018). In fact, one of the townships has identified tourism as one of the major causes of site vulnerability and subsequently has prohibited large tour groups and train passengers from entering the town during the tourist season (Comune di Riomaggiore, 2019). These decisions met with opposition from local tourism businesses and Trenitalia, with the latter appealing to the regional court in 2019 (Destefanis, 2019). Local authorities and the national park view restricted access as the only solution to the steady increase of visitors following the 2011 flooding (Camera di Commercio di Genova, 2017). In the words of the former national park authority director, Vittorio Alessandro, restricted booking “increases the appeal and indeed establishes a virtuous pact between visitor and guest that elevates the quality of hospitality” (Alessandro, 2016, author translation).

To date, resource management in the Cinque Terre area has been predominantly reactionary in nature. As Amore (2020) observes, the flooding in 2011 diverted resources to the site while also concentrating manpower on the clearance of key tourist areas in Monterosso and Vernazza and the main hiking route on the coast. Additionally, the region of Liguria put in place “a ban on new building and on work to existing buildings that goes beyond mere conservation work” (UNESCO, 2012, p. 29), and the ministry of cultural heritage identified the maintenance of terraces and the promotion of agricultural production as post-flooding opportunities to repopulate abandoned areas and reduce erosion and landslides in the Cinque Terre (MIBACT, 2016). Nevertheless, the projects specifically designed to reduce or eliminate existing environmental vulnerabilities have been sporadic and mostly under the initiative of the private and voluntary sectors. This was the case at Casa Lovara, where the Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI) refurbished the terraces and reinstated the abandoned farm (FAI, 2016). While the area falls under the jurisdiction of the Cinque Terre National park authority, national heritage legislation and the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code, its governance is extremely fragmented and thus is unable to manage the highly vulnerable ecosystem. In May 2018, the Mayor of Monterosso advocated for the Cinque Terre national park authority to become the governing body of the whole area (Moggia, 2018). He further stressed the need to establish a strategic plan which would safeguard the existing cultural landscape from the steady tourism
speculation that will likely lead to the displacement of residents from the five townships (Moggia, 2018).

The current sustainable development strategy for Cinque Terre includes projects focusing on both the green economy and environmental protection. To this end, the park authority and the provincial Chamber of Commerce launched a partnership to promote green economic practices among relevant tourism businesses (Alboretti, 2015). Additionally, the park authority introduced an environmental quality certification system to persuade local businesses to proactively contribute to the promotion of sustainable development practices in the area (Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, 2016b). The Cinque Terre park authority views environmental quality accreditation as vital to the achievement of economic, environmental and social sustainability within the World Heritage Site (Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, 2016b). Additionally, the park authority has undertaken pilot projects like the INTERREG Programme Martittimo 2014-2020 and the LegaCoop Alta Scuola di Turismo Ambientale in order to promote environmental sustainability among local tourism SMEs operating in the area (ENEA, 2018; LegaCoop, 2013). There are nevertheless a series of shortcomings and incongruences in the pursuit of environmental and ecological efficiency. This is visible in the destination management strategy for Cinque Terre, which reiterates the idea of internationalization, specifically in regard to increasing of international tourism arrivals in the park. For example, in both the INTERREG and the LegaCoop initiatives the stated aim is to enhance the sustainability of tourist flows and attract lucrative foreign niche markets (ENEA, 2018; LegaCoop, 2013; Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, 2014a). Furthermore, the Cinque Terre park authority and the La Spezia port authority developed a memorandum for the development and promotion of a hallmark event in the Cinque Terre site (Amore, 2020). Finally, and more importantly, the finances of the park authority rely on the number of park cards issued via Trenitalia, which in turn makes sound sustainable development practices challenging.

NEW IS ALWAYS BETTER? THE NORTHERN DOLOMITES

The Dolomites are located in the north-eastern part of the Italian Alps and stretch between the provinces of Belluno, Trento, Bolzano, Pordenone and Udine (UNESCO, 2019a). The site is a renowned ski destination and home to one of the largest ski areas in the world (1,256 km of groomed runs), containing 446 ski lifts (Dolomiti Superski, 2019). In 2009, the Dolomites were inscribed in the World Heritage List due to their unique geological formation and “exceptional natural beauty” (UNESCO, 2019b, p. 257) of the area. The Dolomites World Heritage area includes three national parks: Parco Nazionale delle Dolomiti Bellunesi, Parco Naturale Tre
Cime di Lavaredo and Parco Naturale di Fannes-Seies-Braies. Based on estimates for the year 2015, the Dolomites had approximately 6.4 million tourist arrivals and more than 29.3 million overnight stays, with German and Italians representing nearly 80% of the tourist nights in the area (Istituto provinciale di statistica (ASTAT), 2016). As Elmi and Wagner (2013) report, the index of tourism density in the Dolomites World Heritage Site is concentrated in key areas (e.g. Cime di Lavaredo, Lago di Braies). This has resulted in early signs of visitor congestion across the property (ASTAT, 2016; Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2014) and raised concerns among local stakeholders in regard to the anthropic pressure on the site (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b).

In terms of destination governance, the Dolomites World Heritage site has a dedicated Foundation which acts as a steering group for the relevant public and civic entities (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2019). The Foundation was established following the inscription of the Dolomites on the World Heritage List in order to draft key strategic and resource management documentation, including the tourism strategy and Overall Management Strategy (OMS) (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b). The latter is focused on the enhancement of the site’s conservation through the implementation of an integrated management strategy driven by the area’s human, financial and environmental resources (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b). Similarly, the Parco Nazionale delle Dolomiti Bellunesi has developed and implemented dedicated strategic and operational plans for tourism. The park adheres to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, with relevant stakeholders agreeing on the importance of achieving economic sustainability whilst effectively managing the environmental resources of the property (Parco Nazionale delle Dolomiti Bellunesi, 2015, 2019). One aspect emphasized in the management plans concerns accessibility within the Dolomites. Stakeholders agree that there is a need to preserve the landscape of the Dolomites and use existing roads to promote slow tourism itineraries and practices (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015a, 2015b). These slow tourism initiatives are viewed as a preferred alternative to the current visitor behavior trends and mobility patterns at and to key attractions in the area (Streinfender & Omizzolo, 2017). Not surprisingly, the majority of the stakeholders believe that simple time-based restricted access for cars can actually promote sustainable mobility and, in turn, reduce the environmental footprint of tourism in the Dolomites (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015a).

Resources within the Dolomites World Heritage Site are managed using a networked system which stresses “conservation, communication and enhancement of the Property” (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b, p. 5). In contrast to Cinque Terre, where the management of the site is
fragmented, the current management system of the Dolomites is overarching and stresses local decision-making and cooperation across governance levels in order to create a “sustainable integration between man and the natural environment” (Parco Nazionale delle Dolomiti Bellunesi, 2015, p. 24, author translation). In order to ensure that this system complies with conservation demands, particularly given the site’s World Heritage status, the tourism management plan requires control of visitor levels in zones which are already heavily visited. It also aims “to prohibit intensification of infrastructure or inappropriate uses that could impact the values of the property, and to ensure effective presentation and tourism benefits compatible with the long-term conservation of the property” (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b, p. 7). The strategy goes further by explicitly banning the construction of any new ski resorts within the boundaries of the World Heritage Site (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b). Given the area’s importance as a ski destination, this ban appears to illustrate a strong commitment to the conservation goals espoused in the World Heritage Convention. However, recent developments illustrate that there is a disconnect between the developed strategy and actual resource use. More specifically, as reported in *The Telegraph* (Squires, 2020), the expansion of the Dolomiti Superski area in a run up to the 2026 Winter Olympic Games violates the conservation objectives found in the previous tourism plan. Additionally, this expansion will further complicate visitor management in the already heavily visited winter period.

Unsurprisingly, the sustainable development strategy for the Dolomites World Heritage Site espouses a vision wherein both the local community and tourists feel ownership and “responsibility for [the site’s] conservation and sustainable development” (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b, p. 11). However, the strategy also recognizes the complexity inherent in the sustainable development plan, notably the need to “[overcome] the juxtaposition of protecting the environment, with its overtones of prohibition, and driving economic development, which is seen as exploitation of natural and landscape resources” (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015b, p. 11). In order to balance conservation with socio-economic needs, the strategy requires that tourism be considered in tandem with the rest of the local economic environment and any tourism planning should occur in collaboration with the local community (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015a). Throughout the entirety of this management plan, sustainability underpins all stated aims and goals, regardless of the aspect under discussion. According to the report #Dolomiti2040, “sustainability is indicated as the way forward for a balanced relationship between growth and heritage protection” (Fondazione Dolomiti Unesco, 2015a, p. 14, author translation). Thus, even with the undercurrents of conservation and sustainability, there is still a continued focus on growth, albeit ‘sustainable’ growth.
DISCUSSION

In the case of both Cinque Terre and the Dolomites, there is a significant amount of focus on sustainable concepts and, particularly in the case of the Dolomites, conservation measures. Both plans specifically espouse goals focused on balancing environmental protection and human use, which would appear to indicate a willingness to adapt in order to ensure resource efficiency as called for by Amore and Hall (2016) and Hall (2015). It should be noted that while both sites stress sustainable principles, on paper Cinque Terre has a greater focus on economic development in comparison with the Dolomites, which may be due to its long-standing status as a tourism destination as well as its socio-economic dependency on tourism income. Regardless, on paper, both of these plans appear to subscribe, to varying degrees, to the degrowth principles of sufficiency and efficiency, prioritizing conservation ahead of profit and commercialization (Hall, 2009; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). However, in both areas, these conservation ideals are sidelined in the face of economic pressures to promote tourism growth. In the case of the Dolomites, this is particularly egregious given that the ski area’s development is expressly prohibited in the tourism strategy. Therefore, the management plans can be viewed as little more than site management greenwashing.

This may in fact be a result of both areas’ World Heritage status, particularly given the requirements around protection and maintenance of a site’s integrity. This greenwashing can be viewed as an exercise in appeasing the site management requirements laid out by the World Heritage Committee while simultaneously engaging in otherwise disruptive and destructive on-site behavior, which is not uncommon at Italian World Heritage Sites (Adie & Amore, 2020). In the case of Cinque Terre, its status as a mature destination, both in terms of tourism flows and length of listed status, has elicited a different response than can be observed in the Dolomites. As has been noted, there have been conservationist movements within the site, predominantly driven by local non-profit and private entities. It could be supposed that the pushback to the growth mentality at this site is a direct result of long-term experience with pro-growth policies. In contrast, the Dolomites, being a significantly newer and less developed location, has little experience from which to draw the same conclusions. This has resulted in divergent responses to proposed growth policies, regardless of conservation-driven agendas. These cases emphasize Buckley’s (2018) point that tourism is self-serving and will only take action when there are tangible benefits, or, in the case of Cinque Terre, visible threats.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented two Italian World Heritage case studies that have policies which appear, on the surface, to adhere to specific tenants of tourism degrowth. However, as has been observed, these degrowth and sustainable policies are predominantly hollow words, most likely used to fulfill World Heritage requirements. When the sites’ managing bodies do attempt to adhere to their conservation goals, actual interventions are limited to short-term solutions such as visitor caps and reduction of overall tourist flows. Unlike other destinations, World Heritage sites have specific conservation and protection obligations under the World Heritage Convention. Thus, these sites, by disregarding their management plans, are also placing their sites at risk of physical damage and potential de-listing. Degrowth, as previously stated, would be an ideal solution for World Heritage areas like Cinque Terre and the Dolomites as it stresses self-sufficiency, which does not preclude economic benefits from tourism activity but instead suggests that moderation is key. In order to ensure better protection, conservation and even the continued existence of sites like Cinque Terre and the Dolomites, a degrowth mindset must be adopted at the managerial level and there needs to be sufficient political will to enforce these policies in the face of economic pressures, both internal and external.

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