

TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: Between pilgrimages and religious culture

Fiorella Dallari

University of Bologna, Italy

ABSTRACT: The field of Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism has been developing rapidly, especially since the 1980s. As a field of study it addresses phenomena central to our understanding of a post-modern community and to our visioning of the future and sustainable development. At the same time it contributes to a wider understanding of issues and processes in tourism management (at the national and regional level) as well as in development studies more generally. This paper offers a critical examination of contemporary pilgrimage trends and features through two case studies. The first case analyzes identikit and estimated data of the pilgrims of the Route of St Francis (Umbria Region, Italy); the second presents estimated data on incoming and outgoing flows and features from information made available by the TO and travel agency "Ariminium" of the Episcopal Curia of Rimini on the market for 20 years. Furthermore, it traces and assesses the establishment of the Italian Catholic Church Tour Operators and Travel Agencies that over the last decade have become an important factor in the development of the pilgrimage tourism sector. In particular, this article investigates, on the one hand, the geographical dimension of the pilgrimage experience, providing elements on the historical evolution of a national TO and travel agencies system owned and managed by the Italian Catholic Church. On the other hand, the aim is to contribute to the debate on the Pilgrimage and the Religious Culture in a post-modern tourist system, where Religious Associations and the Vatican can be driving innovative forces in the renewal of social and cultural motivation in tourism. **Key words:** Pilgrimage, Territorial Management, Italian Catholic Church, Tour Operator, Ariminium.

RESUMEN: El sector del Turismo Religioso y de la Peregrinación se ha desarrollado rápidamente, especialmente desde la década de 80 del siglo XX. Mientras sea objeto de estudio, este área aborda fenómenos centrales para la comprensión de una comunidad pos-moderna y para nuestra perspectiva del futuro y del desarrollo sostenible. De igual manera, contribuye para una comprensión más profunda de cuestiones y procesos inherentes a la gestión turística (a nivel nacional y regional) como también para estudios de desarrollo de un modo general. Este artículo presenta un análisis crítico de las tendencias y características de la peregrinación contemporánea a través de dos estudios de caso. El primer caso analiza datos estimados y el perfil de los peregrinos de la Rota de San Francisco (Región de Umbría, Italia); el segundo presenta datos estimados sobre los flujos de entrada y salida por medio de información dada a conocer por el Operador Turístico y Agencia de Viajes "Ariminium" de la Curia Episcopal de Rimini, en el mercado hace 20 años. Además de eso, caracteriza y evalúa el establecimiento de Operadores Turísticos y Agencias de Viaje de la Iglesia Católica Italiana que, en la última década, se volvieron un importante factor en el desarrollo del sector del turismo de peregrinación. Este artículo investiga, particularmente, por un lado, la dimensión geográfica

Fiorella Dallari is Associate Professor of Political and Economic Geography. Main research interests: Local development; Cultural and tourism itineraries; Tourism and Heritage; Geographical Information System; Training and teaching. Author's contact: fiorella.dallari@unibo.it

de la experiencia de peregrinación, forneciendo elementos acerca de la evolución histórica de un Operador Turístico y sistema de Agencias de Viaje gestionados por la Iglesia Católica Italiana. Por otro lado, el objetivo pasa por contribuir para el debate sobre la Cultura Religiosa y de Peregrinación en un sistema turístico pos-moderno, en que las Asociaciones Religiosas y el Vaticano podrán estar a ser el motor impulsor de la renovación de la motivación social y cultural en el turismo. **Palabras-clave:** peregrinación, gestión territorial, Iglesia Católica Italiana, operador turístico, Ariminium.

RESUMO: O setor do Turismo Religioso e da Peregrinação tem vindo a desenvolver-se rapidamente, especialmente desde a década de 80 do século XX. Enquanto objeto de estudo, esta área aborda fenómenos centrais para a compreensão de uma comunidade pós-moderna e para a nossa perspetiva do futuro e do desenvolvimento sustentável. Da mesma forma, contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda de questões e processos inerentes à gestão turística (a nível nacional e regional) assim como para estudos desenvolvimentais de um modo geral. Este artigo apresenta uma análise crítica das tendências e características da peregrinação contemporânea através de dois estudos de caso. O primeiro caso analisa dados estimados e o perfil dos peregrinos da Rota de S. Francisco (Região de Umbria, Itália); o segundo apresenta dados estimados sobre os fluxos de entrada e saída por meio de informação disponibilizada pelo Operador Turístico e Agência de Viagens “Ariminium” da Cúria Episcopal de Rimini, no mercado há 20 anos. Além disso, caracteriza e avalia o estabelecimento de Operadores Turísticos e Agências de Viagem da Igreja Católica Italiana que, na última década, se tornaram um importante fator no desenvolvimento do setor do turismo de peregrinação. Este artigo investiga, particularmente, por um lado, a dimensão geográfica da experiência de peregrinação, fornecendo elementos acerca da evolução histórica de um Operador Turístico e sistema de Agências de Viagem geridos pela Igreja Católica Italiana. Por outro lado, o objetivo passa por contribuir para o debate sobre a Cultura Religiosa e de Peregrinação num sistema turístico pós-moderno, em que as Associações Religiosas e o Vaticano poderão estar a ser o motor impulsionador da renovação da motivação social e cultural no turismo. **Palavras-chave:** peregrinação, gestão territorial, Igreja Católica Italiana, operador turístico, Ariminium.

INTRODUCTION

Italy is ranked as the most important “religious” and “cultural” destination and states its position as a leader in tourism offerings both at the international scale and at the domestic level: in 2007, nearly 43 million foreign arrivals and 53 million domestic visitors were recorded in accommodation facilities, thus producing 370 million overnight stays as a whole (ISTAT, 2009). Italy ranked number five in the world chart but number three in the chart featuring revenues. Such trend was also confirmed in 2008 (ISTAT, 2009). Furthermore, these figures do not take into account those visitors who make use of alternative accommodation types, and that, like the excursionists, do not stay overnight. The extent of the pilgrimage and religious tourism phenomenon is extremely difficult to estimate, as both terms or expressions, which may be ascribed to religion and spirituality in a broad sense and that will be analysed in the present research, are marked by a strong ambiguity as well as by multifaceted features, as Collins-Krener (2009), Richards and Fernandes (2007), Giussani (1997), Digance (2006) and Cohen (1998) state. However, due to the deep and steady enrichment process, the Christian pilgrimage is being increasingly associated with religious tourism, as Sesana (2006) suggests. Anyway, it is important to underline how religious tourism, despite connecting with spirituality,

is a heart-driven activity, while pilgrimage arises from the conscience, as Mazza (2007) highlights. The phenomenon is undoubtedly spreading due to the increasing number of pilgrims but also thanks to “new and alternative forms of religious and spiritual culture” (Reader, 2007, p. 213). The same happens with reference to new emerging destinations (Reader and Walter, 1993; Beaman, 2006 and Gilmore, 2006) introduced to the audience by media and other information sources, like traditional guidebooks, photo-reportage, CD ROMs, DVDs, websites, pilgrims’ forum, giving shape to a modern Geography, dealing with holy territories and sites as well as with forgotten and abandoned sacred paths. The role played by mass media is becoming increasingly crucial also in this field, as the restoration of the Franciscan path demonstrates. The route has been gaining in popularity since the 80s and especially since the 2000 Jubilee Year, thanks to the guide released by Seracchioli (2006) and numerous websites, such as www.diquipassofrancesco.it. Such trend has the potential to play a strategic role within the processes of territorial re-composition, on the condition that relations with the local communities are established, at the same time preserving an international dimension. Since the 80s and owing to its spreading process and characteristics, this phenomenon has developed management strategies employed in the tourism industry, at the same time preserving the religious journey’s distinguishing features, such as services provided by traditional religious institutions like the Catholic Church, to which the present study is devoted. Assessing pilgrimage and religious tourism in our country, as well as the evolution process occurred since the second half of the 20th century thanks to the affirmation, debate and reflection supported by the Italian Catholic Church is a quite difficult task. Remarkable studies (Mazza, 2007; Sesana, 2007; Lavarino, 1996, 2000b, 2002, 2008; Lavarino et al., 2000) were carried out in this field, of which the present research aims to provide a geographic interpretation. It is also important to underline how the Catholic Church, since the late 50s, has been courageously concerned with the leisure time issue and human mobility, producing documents and organizing events, pilgrimage agencies, religion-oriented TO, as well as establishing associations especially conceived to afford such a complex phenomenon. All these activities have been undertaken within a frame of social sustainability with reference to the religious community and the secular society.

THE CONTEMPORARY PILGRIMAGE: A CASE STUDY

Pilgrimage is a significant social and economic phenomenon which generally occurs at a national and local or regional scale, but it also impacts remarkably the international dimension (Swatos, 2006; Campo,

1998; Coleman & Eade, 2004; Harris, 1999; Reader & Walter, 1993). As Heelas (2005) suggests, we are currently experiencing a “Spiritual Revolution” originating from the popular culture (Reader & Walter, 1993) and from the Reframing Pilgrimage (Coleman & Eade, 2003). The growth of pilgrimage is a trend shared by all most important world religions (but also by minor religious groups, see Grandi, 2009), such as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. As a widespread phenomenon, pilgrimage takes place according to three stages: the journey, the arrival at the venerated site and the encounter with the Divine dimension, having differing relevance depending on cultural and religious patterns. The global resurgence of pilgrimage contrasts with the decline and the secularization processes which are being currently experienced by traditional religious institutions (Reader, 2007).

Until the 80s, pilgrimage was seen as “*a journey resulting from religious causes*” as Barber (1993, p. 1) claims. Things have radically changed since then, with particular reference to those areas where mass-tourism development has led to massive spatial transformations, both in the horizontal (accessibility, accommodations, facilities...) and in the vertical (landscape, local culture...) dimension. The old paradigm that places religiousness at the core of pilgrimage expresses a dichotomy between pilgrimage and cultural tourism, as well as between pilgrimage and cultural tourism and pilgrimage and religious tourism. This interpretation no longer exemplifies the complexity of the contemporary world, as Collins-Kreiner (2009) underlines. The distinction between pilgrimage and cultural tourism, considered as the opposite poles of a *continuum* at the centre of which tourism is found (Smith, 1992; Richards & Fernandez, 2007), allows us to overcome the theoretical dichotomy that supports the traditional model. At the same time, the process enhances the identification of emerging similarities as well as the “continuum of visitors”, followed by a spatial “dedifferentiation” based on shared “multiple activities” targeting traditional pilgrims, pilgrims-tourists driven by a spiritual and religious culture, also including culture-oriented tourists, as Collins-Kreiner (2009) points out. Fleicher (2000) elaborated a behaviour pattern that highlights a correspondence between pilgrimage and the holy site, religious tourism and venerated/secular site and tourism *versus* secular sites; a second analysis taking into account the Holy Land show how Catholics pay short visits to holy sites, whilst protestants are distinguished by a both secular and religious behaviour. At the end of the *continuum* we find tourists who are interested in visiting secular places within longer journeys.

In the Middle-Age, pilgrimage evolved nearly into a mass-phenomenon involving the whole society. At first conceived as a solitary experience, after the year 1000 pilgrimage assumed the characteristics of a collective journey undertaken, as it happens today, by small

groups (4/5 people), although solitary pilgrims were no exception. In that period, the two forms of Christian pilgrimage, namely the devotional and the penitential, merged into a single one. Whilst the devotional pilgrimage, which has its roots in the Classic Age, was part of the conversion process, the penitential pilgrimage typical of the Middle Age was linked to expiation procedures.

Today, pilgrims increasingly behave like cultural tourists and vice-versa, giving shape to a knowledge-based tourism as Jackowski & Smith (1992) suggest or, to be more precise, to a spiritual-based travel, distinguished by an increased attention given to the journey and to the arrangement issue. Furthermore, Collins-Kreiner (2009) suggests examining the pilgrim vs. tourist phenomenon according to two different approaches. Whilst the first one refers to the “religious organisations” and to the “travellers themselves”, that generally do not consider pilgrims as tourists, the second approach, typical of the tourism industry, identifies pilgrims with tourists. Understandably, the above mentioned models hold the potential to influence the development of the economic activities in terms of territorial accommodation and management strategies.

In all cases, pilgrimage essentially involves mobility, also determining a “post-modern” circulation, that, alongside with new emerging tourism typologies (Figure 1), cannot be fully understood unless also religion, beginning with the middle-age pilgrimage, is considered, as Timothy & Olsen (2006) underline. Such approach is needed to achieve a better comprehension of the spiritual-based travel in which religious institutions, the pilgrims themselves, the tourism industry and institutions such as UNESCO (Rimini, 2007) and the European Council are interested.

To the purpose, two studies were carried out in this field. The first one was conducted with the aim of identifying motivations and behavioural mindsets of pilgrims who undertake the St. Francis walk towards Assisi, while the second survey targeted those customers (religious tourists) who rely on a religious agency, considering the case study of the Tour Operator Ariminum, owned by the Diocese seated in Rimini. The TO is included into a TO-wide system exemplifying the guidelines set out by the modern Catholic Church, who, for over 50 years now, has been committed in considering the religious-motivated journey as a school of life and faith which is an integral part of the religious experience. In consideration of the current social, political and economic crisis, the religious journey, jointly with the religious culture travel, is deemed to be a privileged tool of evangelization, due to its significant symbolic and educational value. Furthermore, it holds the potential to produce a dramatic impact on the territory on a local, regional and international basis in terms of territorial development. As

Walton (2009) suggests, in periods affected by political and economical crisis, the boom in spiritual tourism is to be ascribed to a wider “think spiritually” and to a search for authenticity, which become even more significant with respect to holy sites and the pilgrimage experience (Belhassen et al., 2008).

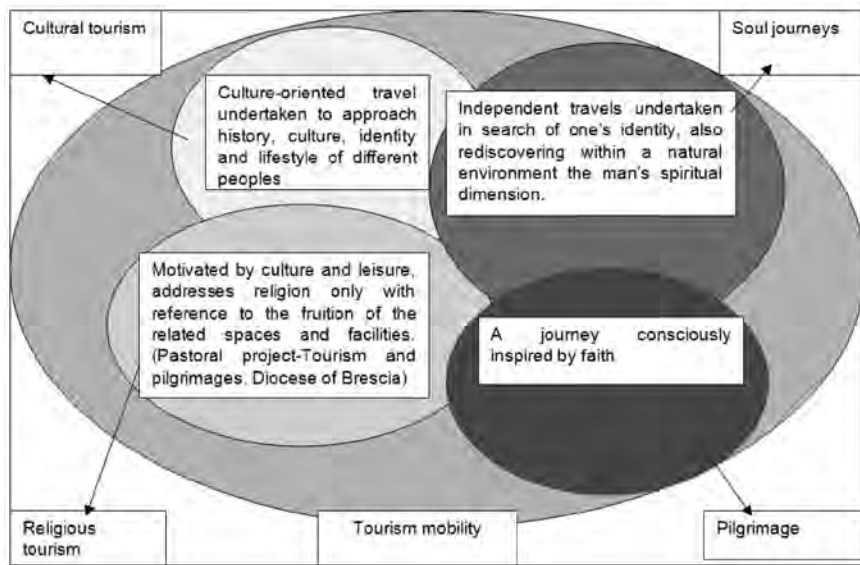


Figure 1. The mobility of post-modern tourism travel

The St. Francis Walk (La Verna – Poggio Bustone)

With reference to the St. Francis walk, it is interesting to note how the Umbria region, where St. Francis was born and used to live, established an international brand by telling the world about the story of the local pilgrim saint, who was able to give a remarkable contribution to Christian thought, as well as to art and architecture with the Churches built in his honour. Eight centuries after St. Francis's death, the blend of mysticism, nature, landscape, environment and culture is still the main highlight of a path stretching for over 400 km from the La Verna Sanctuary (Arezzo) to Poggio Bustone (Rieti), passing through Gubbio, Assisi, Rieti and Saint Francis's homeland, finally heading sometimes to the Holy Land. In addition, the Mountain Community in Alto Chiascio, where the “International Centre for peace among people” is seated, established in the 80s a 42 km long Franciscan path, which slightly differs from the original one (St. Francis used to walk from Assisi to Gubbio and back along the ancient path, pursuing religious conversion) and that was partly reintroduced by the Province of Perugia thanks to the funds granted through the “Jubilee Law outside

Rome". The itinerary, starting in the centre of Assisi, winds along the territory reaching Valfabbrica, a stronghold in the medieval route, and ends in Gubbio. The trail can be done on foot, or ridden with a bicycle or a horse – motor vehicles are not allowed – and features a historic-architectural, a nature-environmental and a mystical-religious path. The trail was conceived with the aim to attract, along with pilgrims, tourists pursuing the meaning of life and contemplation (see <http://sentierofrancescano.provincia.perugia.it/it/pages/index.html>), and who are also interested in enjoying the territory, the cultural heritage and the facilities provided by the local community (B&B, restaurants and purchase of local products). The concept developed with reference to the Walk is quite different. The Walk winds along four Provinces (Arezzo, Perugia, Terni and Rieti) and exemplifies the mystical and spiritual-seeking undertaken by the "post-modern" pilgrim, tied to a "a given space and time suitable to plunge deep into his own soul, sharing the experience with other – maybe just met – individuals" (see www.diquipassofrancesco.it/it/index.asp); anyway, the contemporary pilgrim requires accommodation facilities and is also in need to take some moments of communion along the Walk.

In order to identify the pilgrim's profile and motivations, a survey was carried out in July 2009.

The research is articulated as follows:

- the pilgrim and the pilgrimage (evolution and comparison within the academic literature);
- the material and nonmaterial heritage of the Franciscan tradition;
- the analysis of the territory including the provinces of Arezzo, Perugia, Terni and Rieti covered by the Walk (la Verna-Rieti, 432 km) and by the St. Francis's Path (Assisi-Gubbio, 46 km);

understanding motivations and behaviour mindsets of pilgrims who undertake the Walk and the Path by means of a questionnaire distributed in different periods of the year to a randomly selected sample survey, that must still be evaluated in terms of representativeness. A questionnaire was distributed at the Guest Room Perfetta Letizia in S. Maria degli Angeli, where all pilgrims can stay overnight for free: here, according to the hospitality provided in Santiago, night accommodations, dinner and breakfast are made available for guests. Pilgrims who stop at the Guest Room often continue their journey to the Holy Land. The 130 questionnaires which were equally distributed among men and women (Table 1) allowed us to identify two different profiles. The first one refers to an adult pilgrim (36/50 years of age), coming from Northern Italy and in most cases unmarried; if married, the pilgrim has generally two kids (45%), works as a clerk, or as a teacher in most cases, has a high education level and makes use of the internet

to arrange his own travels. The second profile is on the contrary represented by a young individual coming from both Northern and Southern Italy, with an education level reflecting his own age class. Both profiles have completed previous pilgrimages, travel in group with friends and relatives and are satisfied with their cultural and spiritual experience.

Table 1. The pilgrim of the St. Francis's path: target

	Rank n. 1	Rank n. 2	Rank n. 3
Age class	29% (36/50 yrs. of age)	25 % (below 25 yrs. of age)	24% (51/65 yrs of age)
Home country	60% (Northern Italy)	25% (Southern Italy)	13 % (Central Italy)
Marital status	33% (married)	56% (unmarried)	4% (divorced)
Education	37% (graduated)	43% (high school)	17% (secondary school)
Occupation	30% (teacher/worker/priest)	24% (student)	25% (clerk)

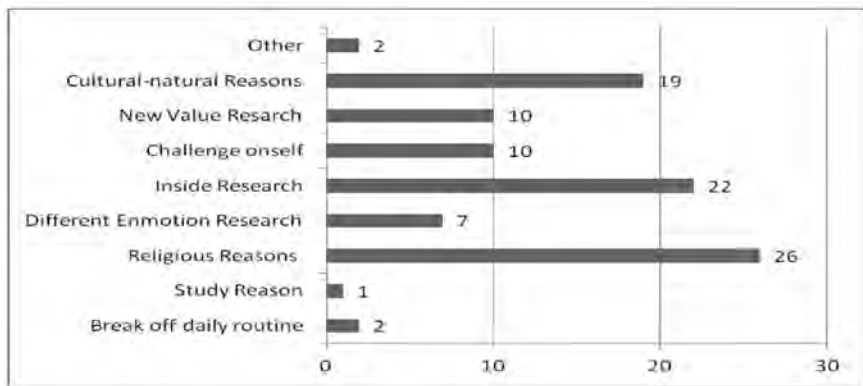
Source: internal data (2009, Perfetta Letizia- Guest Room).

The length of stay of nearly half pilgrimages ranges from four to seven days, whilst one third has a duration of two weeks, with some peaks reaching 3 weeks and even three months. The Guest Room hosts the visitors for one or two nights (97%). 70% of pilgrims basically travel with friends (46%) and relatives (33%) in groups made up of 2-5 individuals, whereas 17% undertake the journey with religious or scout groups numbering 11-15 people. Three fifths of the sample surveyed have completed previous pilgrimages in the past, with particular reference to the road to Santiago de Compostela (nearly half of the respondents), the visit to the Sanctuaries in San Giovanni Rotondo (26%) and Lourdes (10%); 98% of the respondents are fully satisfied with the "Franciscan" experience and also make positive comments on the Walk arrangement. 30% of the sample surveyed learnt about the itinerary on the internet, one fifth from friends and 17% thanks to the local church or other religious institutions; only 12% got the information from other pilgrims or through word-of-mouth. As for the motivations, about one fourth of the sample can be considered as a pilgrim in the strict sense, while the others exemplify human experiences and spiritual culture; one fifth is represented by cultural tourists having special interests in religious landscapes and local communities.

The motivations emerging from the research (Table 2) show how the journey is driven in most cases (75%) by spiritual needs, of which 26% are specifically religious, while the remaining part pertains to the intimate and spiritual area. This demonstrates the multifaceted nature of a phenomenon that, despite its thousand-year roots, is always the expression of the contemporary society. Similarly to what happened

in the Middle-Age, a merging process is currently in progress, distinguished by the complexity of the tangible and intangible heritage of pilgrimage. Such process also features a multiform reality, due to the eclectic and experience-related dimension of the post-modern society, and the extreme variability which is peculiar to the metamorphosis occurring in our times. The religion-based travel vs. the knowledge-based tourism (Jackowski & Smith, 1992) or rather the knowledge-based travel emerges as an ever growing new phenomenon: during the first 8 months of 2009 about 1500 credentials were submitted to the Guest House Perfetta Letizia, compared to the 1,300 credentials recorded in 2008. Furthermore, the sacred dimension has become increasingly intertwined with the secular one.

Table 2. The reason of pilgrims – The St. Francis Walk (%)



Source: internal data (J 2009, Perfetta Letizia Guest Room)

Ariminum, Travel Agency and Tour Operator owned by the Diocese in Rimini

Ariminum was established 20 years ago as a travel agency (Ltd). The Diocese of Rimini took part in the initiative within a general and national project pursuing the development of the tourist society and the renewal of the Catholic Church (Mazza, 2007). Few years after the release of the first catalogue as a TO, which occurred in 1991, Ariminum developed into an “accommodation” agency featuring incoming products (through the selection of extra-hotel accommodations suitable for “religious” tourists during their stay within the Municipality of Rimini).

The research carried out with R. Limongi on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Ariminum, recorded in 2008 400,000 overnight stays in the 800 beds available at the 18 religious institutions or “holiday houses” located in the Diocese (over 3,000 throughout Italy), as a part of the renown Rimini’s tourism district. The average length of stay is quite short (1-2 weeks) and the journeys are mainly undertak-

en for cultural and religious purposes. Such trend brings the evidence of the phenomenon's significant growth, thus providing a remarkable contribution in terms of local development policies and social and spiritual re-composition.

During a following stage, the company started to arrange long-range travels, became an IATA agency and organized the first diocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land. After working as the official Agency of the Emilia Romagna Region for the Jubilee in 1999, Ariminum essentially turned its attention to the outgoing sector. Two years later, after the termination of the collaboration with IVET (Tourism and Travel Institution), which had begun 10 years before, the Diocese of Rimini became the single member of the company. A significant step was made when the Agency joined the Adriatic Cost Coast, namely a partnership established between public and private stakeholders devoted to the tourist development of the Emilia Romagna's coastline in terms of incoming processes; the network, supported by the Emilia-Romagna Region, is an important system enhancing the promotion of the local tourist product worldwide and highlights once again the strong inclination of Ariminum and the Diocese towards the local territorial system and, more generally, the regional community. During the three-year period 2006-2009, the catchment area was enlarged to the neighbouring regions, and the range of services was also diversified: over 8,000 pilgrims - half of which in Italy and, of the other half, over 900 in the Holy Land, nearly 1,000 in Lourdes and over 800 in Megjugorje (and in Turkey, the Sanctuary in Fatima, Santiago di Compostela and Australia on occasion of the World Youth Day) - relied on Ariminum for the arrangement of their travels. The macro-destinations available at Ariminum are the Italian, European and extra-European Sanctuaries, the Middle East (The Holy Land, Jordan, the Sinai, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, Turkey) and Eastern Europe (Russia). The journeys' average length is 4-8 days for travel abroad and excursions (no overnight trips) in the Italian neighborhood sanctuaries. The catalogue also features cultural and traditional tourism packages within a frame of a religious-oriented agency.

Identifying the customer's profile (either pilgrims and spiritual-driven cultural tourists, also including cultural tourists in a strict sense) of a "religious" TO is significant within the present research, especially in order to make a comparison between the pilgrim undertaking the St. Francis Walk and the customer-pilgrim/tourist having a "religious interest" and making use of facilities conceived for leisure tourism. Although owned by a religious institution, the examined TO must deal with the traditional tourist and economic market. Hence, just like any other company, Ariminum is interested in carrying out a market research. Apart from that, the TO is also supposed to act consistently with the principles and the mission of the Church, as well as supporting

human promotion, spiritual values (Mazza, 2007) and the evangelization tasks (the *Vademecum per la pastorale del Turismo in parrocchia* (Diocese of Milan, 2005) defines Religious Tourism as a form of evangelization when the journey turns into a pilgrimage by approaching the Church in a given place or region). Obviously, the selection must orient towards programmes and Agencies concerned with a cultural–religious project pursuing a pilgrimage model reflecting the parish life and guided by a priest, a monk, a deacon or a guide appointed for a specific mandate.

The survey carried out among 200 customers of Ariminum in July 2009 (the questionnaires in Rimini and Assisi were distributed in the same period) highlights the profile of a mature individual (62% of the respondents belong to the 50-65 class of age). In most cases (60%), the customer is a woman, whilst retired people- generally affiliated to parish groups - account for half of the sample. These pilgrims-tourists require a special assistance and services during the journey, attention to detail (information on sites and territories, introduction to the local tradition, customs, religion, culture and lifestyle; encounters with the local community and institutions) and are generally inclined to favour a familiar treatment (helpfulness and understanding). Nearly 60% travel once a year and indicate as top destinations the Holy Land, as Jesus Christ's homeland, and Lourdes, due to its marked spirituality allure. Over 70% of the respondents are driven by faith, whilst 22% have cultural motivations; the remaining 7% travel to fulfil their vow. 60% travel with parish groups, 27% with family, 10% with friends, whilst 5% opt for a solitary experience. More than half of the respondents travels when specific offers are available. Most customers (70%) choose Ariminum as a Diocesan Agency, whilst the remaining respondents arrange the journey with the help of the local church. Anyway, over 40% of the sample surveyed has previously experienced travels organised by other Agencies and is familiar with the Opera Romana Pellegrini (57%), Eteria (19%) and Brevivet (14 %). The customer gets the information from the parish (58%), through word-of-mouth (18%) or from the travel agency (18%); only 6% of the respondents visit the website!

Comparing profiles

The striking difference existing between the “Franciscan pilgrim” and the “Ariminum's customer” can be easily inferred from Table 3; nevertheless, in both cases, the high spiritual profile is linked with relevant historic-artistic values. Undoubtedly, in some sites of recent tradition, spirituality is the sole motivation for visiting the site, as there are no other reasons for undertaking pilgrimages to destinations like Lisieux, Montserrat and Madjugorje.

Table 3. Comparing profiles

	St. Francis Walk	Ariminum TO
Class of age	From 36 to 50 years old	From 50 to 65 years old
Country / Region	Italy	Emilia-Romagna
Marital status	Unmarried	Married
Occupation	Clerk, teacher	Retired
Information obtained from religious institutions	17%	52%
Information from the web	29%	6%
Word of mouth	40%	18%
Agency	0%	18%
Travelling with parish groups	12%	58%
Travelling with relatives	25%	27%
Travelling with friends	34%	10%
Travelling with groups	71%	95%
Single traveller	29%	5%
Travelling with other individuals	71%	95%
Religious purposes	26%	70%
Vow fulfillment	0%	7%
Cultural purposes	19%	23%
Inside search new values	32%	0%
Organisational satisfaction	98%*	53%+25%**
Top destinations	Road to Santiago Lourdes	Holy Land Lourdes

Note: * satisfied expectations ** good + very good

Source: personal data (2009, guest rooms *Perfetta Letizia* and *Ariminum TO*).

The St. Francis Walk attracts pilgrims who are tied to past patterns and have a strong affinity with the knowledge based pilgrim (Smith, 1992) exemplifying a religious tourism and a religious-culture tourism that is becoming increasingly important in our society. Such profile includes young and middle-aged individuals, searching for their own identity and new values through the material and nonmaterial values in which the Christian European territory is extremely rich, beginning with its landscapes, natural environment and spiritual allure of certain places.

The Ariminum's customer profile shows more affinity with a tourist concerned with a popular religiousness, who also requires all supports and accommodation facilities provided by the traditional tourism sector. Due to traditional and cultural reasons, women account for the largest part of this tourist category, although the latest trends suggest that some changes are in progress, especially with respect to the adult and young age classes. It is important to note that the young individu-

als are far more selected customers; in most cases, they have already experienced religious events, either as members of a group or due to the need to deepen and consolidate the experience in the company of friends (see Bed&brBreakfast, www.bed-and-breakfast.it/news2). To them, the World Youth Day is a remarkable world event boasting an ever increasing number of participants.

As a general rule, the current religious target increasingly merges faith, history and culture, thus creating a new typology originating from the combination of pure spirituality and the seeking of a well-being meant in a broader and crossover sense. Nowadays, the concept of well-being is linked to the visit of art and cultural destinations, mystical and spiritual sites, natural environments; people search out their shared roots, their own identity and interior life, inspired by or regardless of faith. Over the last years, the participation has become more qualitative rather than quantitative, also standing out for a deeper awareness of the intrinsic value of religious tourism.

Pilgrims vs faith-tourists: the actual and the potential target, towards a spiritual management

Pilgrimage and religious tourism are growing phenomena when properly managed, in conformity with the marketing and management tools which are already available for the traditional tourism industry with reference to attractiveness, local development and territorialisation processes, they also hold the potential to play a significant role as social and economic opportunities. This is the case of the Province of Padua, that supported last June a survey carried out in order to understand how the local tourist offer could be improved, taking the image and the tourist attractiveness of St. Anthony as a reference point. The research, titled "The Saint opens the city doors to the tourists", observes in a first stage that Padua essentially owes its tourist fame to the Saint. Yet at the same time it is important to stress how the local tourist offer is affected by weakness and poor structure. Interviews reveal that 61% of tourists stop in Padua only for one night, despite positive comments and a high inclination to come back. A further analysis on the sample surveyed allowed to distinguish the interviewees in two categories having differing characteristics: on one side we have organized groups who visit the city only due to St. Anthony, with a scarce interest in the city itself and eagerly to leave after a quick visit (30%). On the other hand, a more individual and familiar tourism is found. Tourists belonging to this category travel for religious purposes but are also inclined to achieve a better understanding of the local territory by visiting other places apart from venerated sites as well (70%). This unfulfilled need may become a privileged target to invest on with the implementation of a marketing plan, in order to assess behavioural

patterns of the faith or religious-culture tourist. Current trend modifications as well as the tourists' needs, seeking and expectations should be also taken into account before proceeding with the introduction of either incoming or outgoing local development strategies. In order to identify the potential strategic areas for such a "territorial" approach, data resulting from the case studies were segmented into different targets – the major or actual and the minor or potential target – addressing tourists going on pilgrimage along the St. Francis Walk (Figure 2) and "spiritual" tourists relying on a religious TO respectively (Figure 3). The Abell matrix (1980) enables definition of three dimensions: the *customers groups served*, the *customers functions served* and the *technologies utilized*; the integration with Hamel matrix (Hamel et al., 1994) gives the opportunity to identify the three-dimensional space within which innovations may occur, pertaining to the consumer (either served or not), the demand (either expressed or not) and technology (either utilized or not by the entrepreneur). As a result, a potential target represented by young individuals (26-35 and 20-35 years with reference to individuals undertaking the Walk and travelling with Ariminum respectively) emerged in both cases. This tourist profile is in search of new values and knowledge, culture and spiritual motivations (reason). Thus, it would be important to develop both religious structures as well as a marketing and advertising strategy (website), as a part of a technology suitable to meet the requirements.

This way, religious tourism becomes cultural and territorial tourism as well. Thanks to its local systems, social capital and the institutional and religious structure, Italy has the potential to take advantage of this chance (see www.ghnet.it/Article243.html accessed 20 October 2009). Specific investments in the restoration of the country's wonderful historical and sacred heritage should also be considered in order to enhance further development opportunities. It is once again thanks to the TO Ariminum that the restoration of the ancient Franciscan route connecting Rimini and the La Verna Sanctuary is currently being completed. In our times, this itinerary is the starting point of the St. Francis Walk, that, for over one thousand years, has taken pilgrims to Rome and the Holy Land. After a period distinguished by a lack of interest, a project supported by both Ariminum and the local private and public stakeholders has as a main goal the rearrangement of the path under a historical, religious and geographic perspective, also supporting local economies. Once again, there is nothing new about this: in the Middle Age, the route had a commercial role before becoming a pilgrimage itinerary. The path is linked to the "Franciscan Walks", a thematic itinerary that overcomes the stereotype of religious tourism, featuring an enlarged walk across the whole region (see www.ghnet.it/Article243.html), where the increasing presence of numerous foreign

tourists looking for culture and religion within a peaceful natural surrounding can also be recorded. The whole process can hence be described as a new spiritual management, within which the Church plays the role of main actor for its territorial rooting.

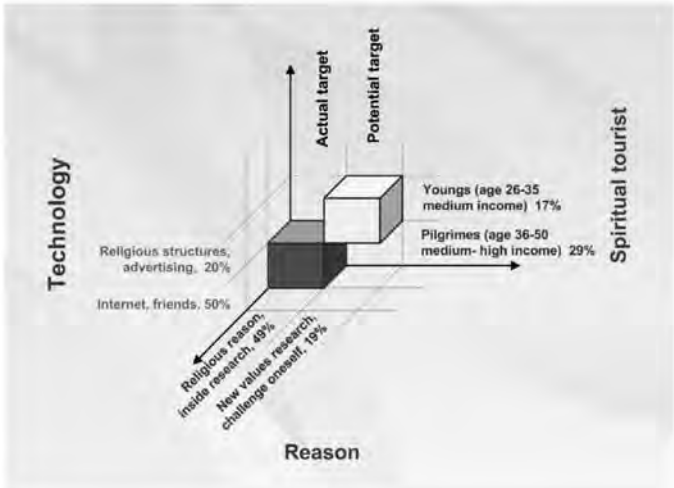


Figure 2 . The actual (religious tourism) and potential (spiritual tourism) of St. Francis Walk

Source: personal data (2009, guest rooms Perfetta Letizia)

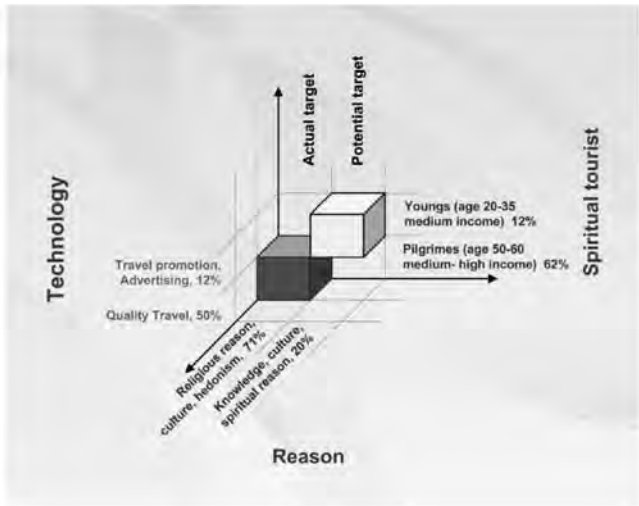


Figure 3. The actual (religious tourism) and potential (spiritual tourism) target of Ariminum

Source: personal data (2009, TO Ariminum)

THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: A STRONG TERRITORIAL IDENTITY

The Italian Catholic Church is deeply rooted in a territory that hosts over 100,000 Churches, 1736 of which are sanctuaries; furthermore, 70% of the Italian artistic and cultural heritage is owned by the Catholic Church that also runs 3,000 religious accommodation facilities. As for figures pertaining to the religious-motivated travel, according to the UNWTO (2008), the number of international arrivals driven by pilgrimage or religious motivation recorded the most significant increase during the 1990-2006 period. The figure also shows tourist flows motivated by health, visits to friends and relatives (Visit Friends and Relatives, VFR) and others. Thus, these figures must be treated with some caution, while the lack of information encourages collecting further and more significant data.

Whilst in 1990 nearly 56% of the whole tourist flow (numbering 438 million arrivals) was essentially based on a leisure and holiday tourism, in 2006 846 million arrivals, 5,4% more compared to 2005) such trend recorded a 5% decline. By contrast, religious tourism and pilgrimage increased from 86 million arrivals in 1995 to 225 million in 2006, thus accounting for 27% of the total figure. The growth in religious pilgrimages is a global trend, as Reader (2007), Mazza (2007) and Sesana (2007) demonstrate by describing several religious traditions and destinations throughout the world, from Japan to Europe.



Figure 4. The Catholic Sanctuaries by IGM

Source: Rapporto annuale 2007, Società Geografica Italiana

The UNWTO has also conducted surveys especially targeting religious tourists. In 2007, about 330 million religion-oriented tourists were recorded throughout the world, nearly 5 million of whom generated in Italy, with a total expenditure amounting to 18 billion US dollars. Figures presented by Trademark (quoted by Lusek (2009) in www.chiesadimilano.it/turismo) with respect to Italy, show how 2007 proved to be a record year for “religious tourism”, even more successful than the Jubilee year 2000. In 2007, 40 million pilgrims and 19 million overnight stays in accommodation facilities were recorded, thus highlighting a 20% growth. In spite of the global crisis and the decline evidenced in 2008, religious tourism characterized for a demand growth not only with reference to the most popular pilgrimage sites, but also to lesser known destinations. It is important to underline how the number of popular sanctuaries suitable to attract tourists is quite restricted – about 20 of all them. Surprisingly, these religious structures are able to generate consistent tourist flows, as it happens in San Giovanni Rotondo (Puglia), Assisi (Umbria) and Loreto (Marche). Actually, even with reference to Assisi and Loreto, the religious motivation is associated with other visit purposes.

According to a research carried out by Eurispes (2009 in www.eurispes.it), in 2008 330 million of people were confirmed as traveling to venerated sites, according to mixed forms of cultural-spiritual-religious tourism: as many as 35 million visitors were recorded in Italy, especially in the Central regions, when travelling across our country and discovering the countless sanctuaries, monasteries and hermitages scattered throughout the territory. Whilst pilgrims account for 14 million of the total figure, other 21 million travel for cultural purposes – the also called “faith tourists” – and opt for accommodation solutions available in monasteries, hermitages and welcoming houses, also visiting museums, sanctuaries and cloisters (see www.bed-and-breakfast.it/news2.cfm?id=212).

Within this scenario, both lay and more religious inclined – corresponding to the typology of the *Diocesan pilgrimage office* with its own technical agency- organizations can be found. The latter typology plays in particular a significant role both in religious terms and with reference to the evangelisation process and territorial development. As Mazza (2007) points out, the ecclesiastical religious institution has promoted pilgrimage for centuries so far. More recently, the attention was also turned towards religious tourism, according to a system including both individuals and institutions having an interest in the Church renewal, Christian lifestyles, and in tourism itself (strictly “cultural” packages are also available, including in all cases the chance to benefit from “religious and responsible services”, as it happens with reference to Ariminum). In Italy, both at the national and regional scale, the tourism policy is

managed by the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) and by its regional counterpart, the Regional Episcopal Conference (CER), jointly with the Regional Office for the Pastoral of tourism. The territorial rooting is accomplished through 227 dioceses, guided by the Bishops, within which the office for pilgrimages and pastoral of pilgrimage can be found. Above all, a major contribution is provided by 28,745 parishes, “taking care”, with no territorial interruptions, of the whole country with their churches, oratories, abbeys, monasteries, cloisters and sanctuaries. National and local institutions devoted to religious tourism, as well as tourism associations, travel and pilgrimage agencies, holiday houses and so on are also numerous throughout the country. Furthermore, a wide number of professional and private individuals are committed in the organisation of pilgrimages and religious journeys. It is also important to note how all traditional TO are interested in religious tourism; yet it is especially thanks to Tour Operators and travel agencies tied to religious institutions that, after nearly a century long working activity, a wide range of customized and all inclusive pilgrimage packages are made available for customers, especially from the 50s onwards, when adults and mature individuals with a low education and income level became interested in this tourism market. According the director of Ariminum, the number of TO having a diocese (or more) as a reference point do not exceed 50 units, with a striking difference between the Northern regions (numbering over 30 TO) and the Southern ones (numbering 10 TO) (Figure 5). Over the last twenty years, their presence has strengthened and supported significant pilgrimage flows. In 2008, nearly 100,000 pilgrims/religious tourists visited Lourdes on occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Marian apparition.

The above mentioned stakeholders are part of a remarkable human capital which is steadily growing also in terms of creativity, commitment and innovation, and that may, according to its scopes and aims, implement specific networks able to increase its value and competitiveness. Despite encouraging signs, the coordination is unfortunately affected by some gaps, for the network model is at the base of the sustainability paradigm. With particular reference to the local and regional scale, a fragmentation of religious companies still prevails: the implementation of a specific network and the development of professional skills are essential in order to compete with the major TO concerned with traditional tourism.



Figure 5. Italian Religious TO

CONCLUSIONS: TRAVELLING AND UNDERSTANDING OLD AND NEW SPIRITUAL VALUES

New strategies have to conceive for identify and support new travel culture able to join together the expectations: the integration between the individual consciences and the professional creativity of the TO devoted to pilgrimages and religious travels will be the future of the spiritual tourism, also taking into account the ecclesial local promoters and community (insiders), as the case study Ariminum TO, or the travellers (outsiders), as the case of Saint Francis Walk. This suggestion must be placed at the core of shared reflection among researchers about pilgrimages, religious travels and so on (Mazza, 2007). The traditional TO and community approach for a long time devoted to religious tourism studies should be also rethought through case studies in contemporary experience and religious/spiritual heritage with the aim of responding to integrated territorial approach, involving local community, travellers and landscape (Adriotti, 2011; Beaman, 2006).

As for the Catholic Church, its main task consists of recovering and renewing the ecumenical Mission with the help of pilgrimage, spiritual journeys and religious culture, also protecting the sacred sphere, rich in spiritual, common and civil values. Actions must be undertaken within a frame of social sustainability and respecting religious traditions and prayers procedures everywhere and at every level among different user targets (Yunis, 2009). The process also goes through the strengthening of identity and social roots, establishing a deeper relation with the territory, landscape and those values giving a sense to both life and

humanity. According to this approach, pilgrimage and the renewal of spirituality in countries having an European culture are decisive in order to build a common future and preserve an identity based on a deep authenticity (Belhassen et al., 2008; González, 2008).

Traditional tour operators who are also dealing in religious tourism and “religious” TO who have been committed for decades in religious tourism and pilgrimage need to establish collaboration relationships both at the national and local level; indeed, all spiritual and cultural journey proposals should be considered as humanly valid and religiously significant, ensuring authentic pilgrimages and intense cultural experiences. Furthermore, the activity of the TO is subject to the evaluation of the initiatives undertaken by the Church in terms of originality and pilgrimage approach; the pastoral perspective and the enrichment of the tourism experience due to spiritual values, with a particular attention to those individuals who have lost their roots and are looking for the meaning of life, should also be encouraged (Diocesi di Milano, 2005). This is especially true for young people. In this perspective, the analysis of pilgrimage and religious tourism’s potential targets takes on a political and social relevance, with respect to a general profile taking us back to a civil economy that in the 18th century could still boast ethical values linked to a widespread morality, that would be soon replaced by an economy model lacking in values and, as such, deprived of sense (Zamagni 2004, 2007, 2009).



Figure 6. La Verna Sanctuary

Source: Paola Bensi.

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