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Religious itineraries as the driving forces behind sustainable local development in the Veneto? Towards a proposal for promoting an unusual and often “subliminal” form of heritage: sanctuaries and minor churches¹

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ABSTRACT

Religious sites/assets are reacquiring pre-eminence, partly in the role of mainsprings for local development: they are privileged witnesses to collective memory and depositories for symbolic, historical, cultural and spiritual values that they have contributed towards forging. These are essential keys for interpreting “places” and their evolution, as well as for studying their various facets and nuances in greater detail. In full knowledge of this, we are presenting here a study on the subject of cultural (and religious) itineraries as a determining element in territorial conservation and as an instrument for: a) promoting a type of tourism that is sustainable, alternative and aware, in which the approach towards “exploitation” changes (contributing towards not only the “consumption” of experiences, but also the enrichment of the tourist); b) highlighting the value of authenticity and contact with local culture, as well as promoting contextual elements that are highly distinctive. In line with the need to make better use of local religious heritage, we identified anchor sites

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(sanctuaries and “minor” churches) around which to develop further forms of (religious) tourism.

We devised an itinerary some 300 km long that “expresses” the diverse environmental/cultural/gastronomic realities that have the sanctuaries at their centre.

This itinerary and its sub-routes – created via GIS – cover the central and western parts of the Veneto (Italy), as well as the south of the Region. The main route connects the sites in an attempt to link the area under examination, thanks to a ring, to the ancient Via Romea (the subject of research and reclamation as a long-distance route).

Keywords: Route-based and Special Interest Tourism (SIT); Local Religious Heritage; EU Long-distance Routes; Veneto; Local Sustainable Development.

1 Introduction: *religious-based routes* as engines of local development? A reflection on the current debate

Culture is increasingly considered to be an instrument of local development and the market for cultural tourism is constantly acquiring new attractions and products that can enhance tourist participation and awareness of the full value of the region they are visiting. As far back as the 19th century the Grand Tour emphasised places of culture, and in 1979 the French musician Jacques Serres argued that “the cultural element must always and in every way be an integral part of every tourist activity” (cited in Lozato-Giotart, 2008, p. 36). Today, travellers are still attracted by social heritage (*anthropôme*), understood as the local populations' ways of living, and artistic and cultural heritage (*lithôme*), i.e. monuments, museums, festivals, etc. (Lozato-Giotart, 2008). And they are demanding even more! Tourists have become more demanding, as have the host communities. The cultural journey involving visits to museums and places of historical and architectural interest is currently undergoing a transition (Richards and Wilson, 2008). Traditional cultural tourism² – which since the early 1980s has become a mass phenomenon, imposing “external” economic and socio-cultural costs on local communities that are hard to sustain – has resulted in a substantial loss of economic viability for the mass model. Tourism linked to cultural journeys is not particularly beneficial either for the tourist destinations, which are subject to a progressive erosion of their cultural idiosyncrasies and characteristic

social structures, or for the tourists, who seek high levels of information and empathy with the place they are visiting. Many consumers are tired of the mass-production of cultural elements that are replicated across different regions and are looking for alternatives. This has led to the success of the journey as an emotional, educational, social and participatory experience for the tourist, who desires to “live” the place being visited, to feel an integral part of the community that inhabits it, to understand its culture and to purchase its products.

The tourist is increasingly interested in knowledge of the cultures of the past and present, the fulfilment of a *dream* that allows him or her to “see and touch the vestiges of past civilisations and experience famous artistic and cultural places in such a way as to complete the knowledge they learnt in a basic way from school text books” (Lozato-Giotart, 2008). However, the tourist is also interested in enjoying the atmosphere of the places being visited, along with the emotions they evoke and the context of everyday life. These enable the tourist to emerge enriched from what the dream has produced and the region has been able to accomplish. Consequently there is a need to modernise the range of products and services on offer, recovering the importance of identity and the acquisition of cultural capital. Cultural tourism thus entails attention to the attractive capacity of heritage, understood as a reason for interest in the past, whether it be monuments, works of art or the landscapes of yesterday and today, but also a series of values and principles that a community attributes to its own history, on which there is now a considerable body of literature (Hanna, 1993; Herbert, 1995; Nuryanti, 1996; Hall and McArthur, 1998; Palmer, 1999; Hargrove, 2002; Poria, Butler, Airey, 2003; Weaver, 2011). There is a greater emphasis on creativity, which adds value to conventional cultural tourism. Increasingly successful now is the latest generation of *creative tourism* (Richards and Raymond, 2000; Richards and Wilson, 2006; Richards, 2008), which combines well with cultural tourism and enables interaction between the tourist and the region. This enables the tourist to enjoy fuller involvement in authentic and genuine experiences, contact with the residents and the creative flow of its living culture, and participatory interaction with the artistic expression, cultural heritage and distinctive local products of the host region (handicrafts, food, etc.).

Creative tourism entails the active involvement of tourists, seen not only as spectators or simply present in a region, but as people seeking a considered and successful interaction through them and the local community. Tourists seek to interact actively and autonomously with their surrounding environment, transforming their knowledge into skills. They wish to take an active part in the cultural and economic dynamics of the community they are visiting. In turn, the community seeks to connect the visitors' new needs and new sensitivity with local cultural expressions and resources, which in many cases lie outside the goods and services traditionally offered by established forms of tourism in that area, and encompass a broad range of regional features. Reference is made here to a sort of “development repertoire” (Ray, 1999), which Ray summarises as “*ways of doing things and ways of understanding the world*” (Ray, 1998: 12), including all the

elements that have acquired a collective visibility (which is almost never questioned), which the community or a series of players recognises as heritage that still counts today.

This is a heritage understood in reference to its natural and given attachment to specific places or to a region as its *cultural capital*, a potential resource, that does not exist *a priori* but depends on the local community's *desire for appreciation*; on the ability to recover everything of the past that can restore the least faded image; on the willingness to attribute the identity of an organised community to a certain geographical area, which is characterised not only by a simple combination of natural conditions, but also by the permanent presence of socio-cultural features that have become consolidated over the years (Mautone, 2001; Dematteis, 2002). Cultural phenomena migrate, are grafted on to each other, mix, represent the identity of a community and are co-responsible for its development, which is the result not only of an entirely endogenous dynamic of the economy, but also of interaction between economic, social and cultural systems. The entire region is seen as a cultural system, as the result of processes that are stratified over time and are a creative opportunity for new interpretations, compatible measures and economic resources brought by history and culture to the table of competition. From this new viewpoint, heritage resources are proposed as "one of the oldest and most important generators of tourism" (Thorburn, cited in Richards 1996: 10), which is no longer that of the Grand Tour but is a “new” tourism, qualitatively and quantitatively different. Heritage tourism thus becomes the vehicle of regional development.

Itineraries, understood as opportunities for integrated marketing of culture, economy and tourism, are increasingly preferred to *places*. An itinerary enables the tourist to access the “ancient palimpsest”, the unique text, written and rewritten over the course of time, that is the landscape-system, to decode it and to interpret it, to grasp its environmental, historic and cultural meaning, to experience it profoundly even in terms of its economic aspects (Scazzosi, 1999, p. 10). Itineraries (whether they are based on food-and-wine, nature, culture or religion) enable a linear enjoyment of the landscape in terms of its physical components and historic layers, together with its underlying system of signs and its distinctive economic resources. They favour short production chains in integrated economic activities such as agriculture, handicrafts and accommodation. They bring together various factors of cultural interest (gastronomy, handicrafts, folklore, architecture) and environmental interest, providing an opportunity for regional development. This type of journey has considerable implications in terms of planning the tourist sector and other economic activities: it promotes tourist marketing activities, facilitates the creation of a network of alliances between rural areas, and produces income and employment. Creating a cultural itinerary means implementing public policies that safeguard it and promote it. The recognition on the institutional level (regional and/or European) of routes of historic, artistic, religious and naturalistic interest³ represents the validation of a new model of cultural tourism involving exciting journeys that go beyond traditional circuits, making it possible to rediscover the most authentic

cultural roots in the sharing of a common heritage. However, it is also a powerful expression of interest in a new model that creates regional development. This is what emerges from the “case” of the religious itinerary of the medieval route of Santiago de Compostela, whose recovery and promotion by the Spanish authorities – validated by UNESCO and the Council of Europe – has facilitated the growth of tourist flows and the development of many cities in north-western Spain.

1.1 Structure of the paper

Referring to the conceptual framework described in the introduction, this article seeks to illustrate the results of a study carried out in 2012, examining in greater depth the contents of our work entitled “Religious tourism: an itinerary in the Veneto Region linked to the ancient Via Romea. From Lake Garda to the Adriatic coast”⁴. In the first part (§ 2) we shall define the objectives of our research and the method adopted. In the second part (§ 3) we shall present, according to the type of site involved, the religious itineraries we have conceived and created: leitmotifs with a wealth of contents that can contribute towards informed enjoyment of the site/s being visited. After also outlining the procedures that are of use for creating the GIS we shall provide a brief description of the routes (a “ploy” which we hope will also evoke in the reader images, experiences and a desire to come and explore an area that is rich, if often also rather contradictory). This will be followed by our conclusions (§ 4), in which we shall reflect on the theme of “itineraries, minor ecclesiastical sites and the territory” and on the perceptible renewed interest in investigating the connection between the latter two (and between these and the stakeholders who will have to be able to present these assets as opportunities for local development and for a type of special interest tourism that respects local and territorial systems, of which they become representative destinations⁵).

2 Design of the research

2.1 Objective

Linked as it is to what we have outlined above in a case study covering a vast area, our research aims to contribute to a precise goal, pinpointed within the scope of Regional programmes for the development of the countryside and tourism⁶: to encourage sustainable tourism by promoting itineraries of various types that have been specifically created for that purpose (in our case having to do with the theme of “religious heritage and tourism”, which is in fact only touched on in the projects

referred to in the footnotes). In our research, we concentrated on a particular type of heritage⁷: local “minor”⁸ religious sites, and more specifically sanctuaries and churches⁹; specific local resources that are certainly physical, but also filled with symbolic legacies and value-related connotations. It would be worthwhile to invest even more in these, making them the object of promotion that favours alternative forms of sustainable cultural and religious tourism. These are emergences that are often unnoticed or “unknown”¹⁰ even to locals as well as to visitors from Italy or abroad. They are assets that in many cases offer high degrees of artistic and architectural worth and an almost tangible potential as driving forces for economic and social growth, if one discovers and visits them. In the area under study - as we shall see below - policy-makers are starting to take steps (if not of an altogether systematic nature) regarding these only recently rediscovered resources, and are beginning to seize the opportunities that result from giving them adequate promotion.

It is based on this local religious heritage that we have constructed our proposed itinerary, on the strength of the value it expresses as a “depository and representative” of local qualities, cultures, identities and landscapes that it itself has partly contributed towards forging over the course of time. We are working, therefore, on the creation of a route some 300 km long that involves a large part of the Veneto Region. This Region is not “crossed” by long-distance European itineraries that are focused on the theme we are dealing with. Believing this to be less a handicap than an incentive to intensify our efforts yet further, we are seeking to produce a variant that acts as an improvement and alternative to the main routes to which it can be linked: religious-based routes that are currently being studied and re-explored both by academic institutions and by other organisations that are active at a local or Provincial level. An example might be the Via Romea¹¹ or alternatively – in view of the strong relationship of this type among many of the sites catalogued and selected as points of interest (POI) – a route relating to the Virgin Mary. Either option constitutes an opportunity, if taken in a broader sense, to research into history, imagining and establishing connections, drafting and representing the “geography of relationships” that have been woven in the course of the centuries between Southern and Northern Europe or between West and East, by and between the territories that make up these macro-areas. Our aim here is to seek to make explicit one of the highest qualities that a European religious and cultural itinerary can express, or as a result of the planning that local areas devise and put into practice: not a mere linear route on a page, but a common denominator that helps one to create a solid basis for a dialogue between cultures, religions and places, uniting peoples and nations through the discovery of common roots.

2.2 The area covered by our study: a summary

A few indications about its physical characteristics and its anthropic contexts – Our case study focuses on the Western Veneto (the Province of Verona), part of the

Region’s central section (the Provinces of Vicenza and Padua) and the southern section (the Province of Rovigo) (Fig. 1). The area in question stretches from the Prealps – in its most northern part – down to the plain of the River Po (to the South-East). Travelling through the zone, one comes across very varied environments: Prealpine mountains, karstic plateaux and valleys; high, medium-high and low piedmont hills and morainic hills; high, medium and low plains; thermal springs, Lake Garda (one of Italy’s major lakes of glacial origin); etc.. Moving on to the principal anthropic characteristics of the area, it is worth bearing in mind that this is a Region well known for its wealth of urban centres (the art-rich tourist destinations – Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Treviso and Venice – as well as numerous minor towns: Villafranca, Soave, Bassano del Grappa, Marostica, Cittadella, Montagnana, Castelfranco Veneto, Conegliano, Vittorio Veneto-...), of urban sprawl and industrial districts. The incessant work of man during many centuries of settlement has led to the digging up, smoothing and terracing of land, the movement of materials and the channelling of water. This is, generally speaking, an area whose morphology is ideal for diversified farming¹²; within it, the totally agricultural parts – specialized viticulture being prevalent, with numerous D.O.C.s and D.O.C.G.s (Rizzo L.S. and Rizzo R.G., 2010), as well as olive groves – lie alongside intensely built-up districts. The central zone is innervated with road and rail systems running east-west and north-south, which are of national and international – and not merely Regional - importance.



Figure 1 - IGM Relief Map (original 1972 edition; scale 1:250000; Map of the Veneto Region) and map of the Veneto. The Provinces under study are in colour.

Cartography by L.S. Rizzo (in ArcGIS 10.1)

Some data on the tourist movement in the Veneto – The Veneto Region stands out among those in Italy for which tourism represents a major factor for development and growth (Becheri and Maggiore, 2011). The overall tourist opportunities offered by the five areas of which it is made up¹³ (Regione Veneto, 2010) contribute towards making the Veneto:

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- the top Region in Italy for visits and stays in 2011 (Fig. 2);
- one of the leading Regions in Italy for income deriving from visitors’ spending (second in 2009);
- as well as – again in 2009 – the third most sold by European tour operators.

Because of the very nature of the assets to be found in the Provinces that are dealt with in our study, they are destinations for various types of tourisms, including cultural and religious ones. Verona, in particular, is second only to Venice.

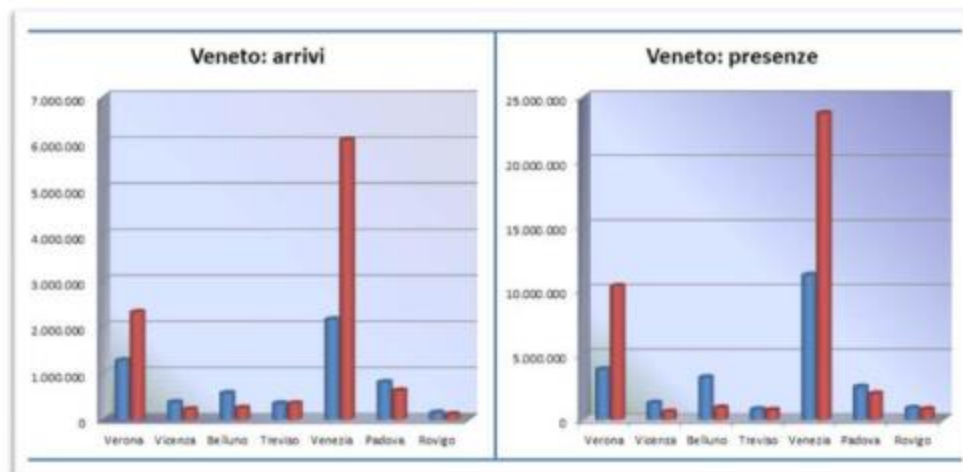


Figure 2 – International and national tourist arrivals (left) and overnight stays (right) in the Veneto by Province (2011). Foreign tourists are in red, Italian ones in blue. Graphs by L.S. Rizzo, based on data of Regione Veneto - Direzione Sistema Statistico Regionale (basic data: ISTAT).

2.3 Method

Our work called for a combination of different approaches, from a qualitative one to the creation of GIS (to which we resorted because of the opportunities for cartographical representation and analysis that the new technologies can provide). For this paper we concentrated primarily on the Province of Verona, as this is the one that features the routes we have shown as examples¹⁴. We proceeded with the creation of the basic itinerary, identifying a principal route centred on “sanctuaries” (in most cases “minor” ones) (sections 3.2 and 3.3): a thematic leitmotiv in line with the renewed interest in sites of this nature¹⁵. To this we then linked rings and detours which also included other religious sites, as will be made more explicit in section 3.4. The main itinerary was created by GIS, using proprietary software (ESRI); the above-mentioned rings, on the other hand, by resorting to Google Earth’s graphical user interface, supported by the basic cartography supplied by Google itself (Andreucci, 2011; Favretto, 2009, chapter 3). This double option results partly from the need to test the advantages and limits of both instruments, about which we shall refer in our conclusions. Greater details on the steps and procedures used will be given in section 3.

3 Discussion of the results

3.1 Design and construction of the itinerary: the various stages and procedures used

*Itineraries created using “traditional” GIS*¹⁶ – As indicated in section 2.3, for the creation of the main route involving the sanctuaries – and the related urban, periurban and Provincial rings – we worked with “traditional” GIS, using ArcGIS 10.1 (ArcMap). These (very briefly) were the steps we took:

- identification of the places the route should run through;
- selection of the most stimulating points of interest (POIs) to be included as stopovers (and creation of relative sub-rings and themes that make the tourist’s experience more varied and interesting and allow him or her greater choice);
- creation of a geodatabase, whose attribute table is that of the POIs;
- design and creation of the itinerary using GIS (on municipal, Provincial, Regional and State roads and motorways);
- insertion of the POIs in the GIS (with auxiliary levels of information);
- creation of exemplificative maps.

This phase of our research called for the acquisition of geo-spatial data and other materials from various bodies as well as for the creation of those that were not already available (but necessary). Both of these groups of data were merged in our dataset¹⁷, which was then managed using spatial analysis operations such as: data aggregation; selection by attributes and calculation of the route; editing; creation and insertion of hyperlinks to text, audio or video files that give access to more detailed and contextual information¹⁸ (something that is of undoubted interest because of the interaction it allows from the viewpoint of augmented reality¹⁹ when talking about heritage, monuments, (wide-open) spaces and/or high-quality landscapes).

Detours and sub-rings created using interactive Google Earth – For the representation of the itinerary of minor sites we decided to test Google Earth. The relationship between the phenomenon of digital tourism and the ever-greater use of localization instruments on the web (such as Google Maps and Open Street Map) and/or that of the so-called virtual globes (like Google Earth or Virtual Earth) is evident today. These virtual worlds are often incorporated in websites as localization markers of a cultural asset that is proposed as a point of interest to be visited by tourists²⁰. The efficient and well-known method for creating itineraries (Baldacci, 2006; Azzari, Cassi and Meini, 2006: 281) can readily be inserted in this perspective. For the route designed for this study we therefore selected the POIs, visualizing them as labels on the virtual globe of Google Earth and editing the route connecting them in the same programme. Obviously this should be considered as a method/instrument for representation of an itinerary whose validity and value lie in the contents proposed, in the landscapes offered and in the atmospheres evoked

(Corna Pellegrini, 2004; Dallari, Grandi and Sala, 2008). A by-product of both these approaches is the possibility to geo-reference information resulting from a rapid investigation and extracted from the analysis of secondary and auxiliary sources. This information can be offered in a variety of ways: on smartphones and PDAs, on the web, on SAT NAVs, on information panels or by means of tags (QR codes).

3.2 The main itinerary created using traditional GIS

This is a large-scale work that is still in progress from which, for the time being, we have extracted a part. We carried out a study on all of the sanctuaries in the dioceses²¹ of Verona, Vicenza, Padua and Rovigo-Adria. Many were surveyed in the field and we took various sources into account [websites²², parish yearbooks²³, special inserts in diocesan journals – such as, for example, “La Difesa del Popolo” (in Padua); etc.] (Rizzo L.S. *et al.*, 2012: section 3.2). All of these sources had to be checked to verify to what extent the universe under investigation was complete and correct. Our research envisages, as its final output, the positioning of POIs in order to be able to appreciate cartographically the distribution of the type of heritage in question. Generally speaking, the sanctuaries can be divided up into two macro-classes: a) those that are pilgrimage destinations²⁴ and b) numerous small local sanctuaries, but which are striking because of the building itself and for the aura that surrounds them (important because they are a point of reference for local worshippers and for particular services or interesting because of the landscape in which they are to be found). The majority of the sanctuaries are Marian. The Virgin Mary gives her name to the church with a whole host of epithets that may have to do with a quality (for example, Santa Maria Assunta) or a function (Santa Maria Liberatrice, at Malo, or Madonna dei Miracoli, at Lonigo²⁵; both in the Province of Vicenza) which is attributed to her. Very often the name of the place where the site is to be found gives it its denomination (e.g., “Madonna della Strà” in the Province of Verona²⁶ or others around Vicenza). The sanctuaries may be inspired by an apparition that was local or otherwise (for example, the Santuario di Nostra Signora di Lourdes in Verona or Santa Maria de La Salette in the municipality of Fumane, which hark back to apparitions that took place in France); on the other hand, they may have been built in thanks for liberation from contagious diseases – such as the plague – or as a shrine against drought. We are also completing the construction of our geo-database²⁷, which at the moment includes over 130 sanctuaries in the area under investigation. (To be precise, we are gradually adding small sanctuaries that we have observed ourselves in the field: this requires a great deal of time, as they are very scattered in their distribution).

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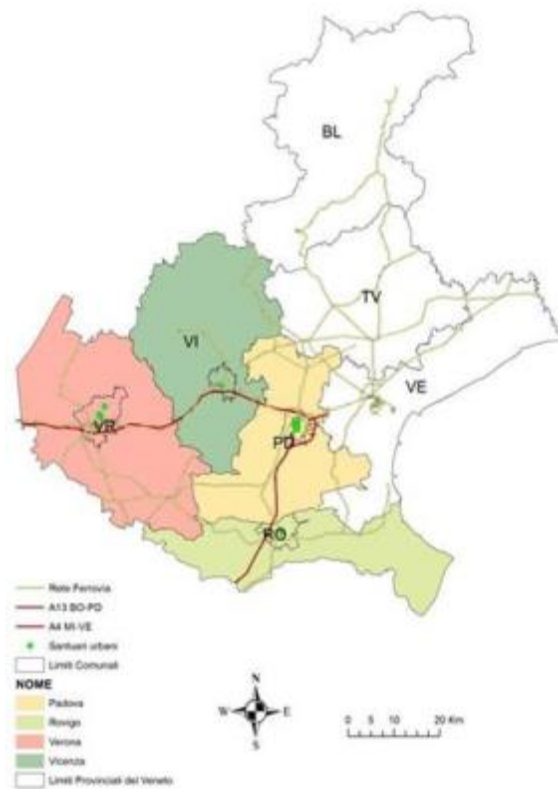


Figure 3 – Major infrastructure (motorways) linking the urban sanctuary itineraries between the Provincial capitals: Verona, Vicenza, Padua and Rovigo.
Cartography: L.S. Rizzo (Rizzo *et al.*, 2012).

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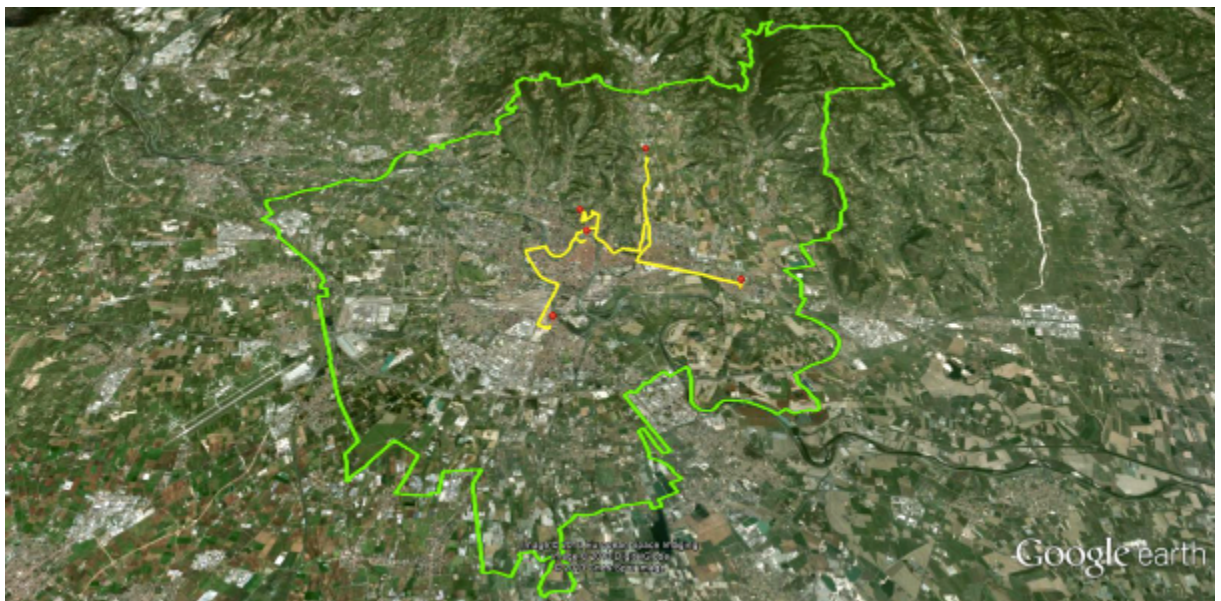


Figure 3a – Itinerary (detail) between sanctuaries in the Commune of Verona (whose administrative borders are shown in green). Cartography: L.S. Rizzo (2013) (the itinerary was created in ArcGIS 10.1. The related layers – the administrative boundary of the Commune of Verona; POIs; the route – were converted into KML/kmz format so as to be able to upload them and visualize them directly in Google Earth).

At the time of designing the principal route, considering the abundance of sites located in the vast area under investigation – many of which were potential POIs – we decided to devise two types of itinerary, aimed at satisfying different needs (regarding the objects of interest themselves and those to do with logistics and transport). We therefore conceived a first itinerary aimed at tourists – not necessarily from abroad – interested in local religious heritage (and more particularly in the sanctuary) but also in the town/city itself and the artistic treasures it contains, in characteristic events and in the typical “atmospheres” of the various districts of the town²⁸. As Leotta reminds us (2005: 4), “Italy already has the guide to the international tourist market firmly in its hands: this is characterized especially as cultural tourism related to the cities of art”. This is particularly true in the Veneto and the Provincial capitals in our study (Verona, Vicenza, Padua and Rovigo). With the aim of promoting sustainability-based territorial mobility – which has undoubtedly increased compared to the past – favouring the use of the train or moving along the main road routes (Fig. 3), we created an itinerary within an urban setting (Fig. 3a). To this we then added a second itinerary – which could, however, be linked with the first – which passes from one sanctuary to another across the Provinces, which are indeed rich in such assets (Fig. 4).

3.3 The long-distance itinerary which leads from Madonna del Frassino (VR), localised in the south of Lake Garda, to the southern part of the Province of Rovigo: a brief description

For our representation we took into consideration a unique yet exemplary itinerary. This twists and turns along a route that incorporates all types of sanctuaries, with urban and extra-urban sections in order to give an overall picture. For the purposes of sustainable religious tourism as well as touring/hiking and in view of the numerous stops available, the time required would obviously be in the order of several days if one were to complete the whole route. Here, then, are various choices one might make:

- a) the destination may be a sanctuary to which one makes a pilgrimage, to which one adds perhaps another, deriving merely spiritual enjoyment and appreciation of its setting (or some other factor);
- b) a segment of the basic itinerary, with two, three or four small sites to be visited;
- c) a small or medium-sized site to be visited for an event;
- d) other choices.

In the western and central part of the Veneto, the basic itinerary – that which links the extra-urban sanctuaries with the urban ones (and their surroundings) – is almost completed. Brief details of the future itinerary will be given. Obviously, our choice of POIs has already been made. A rapid description follows below.

Leaving (south of Lake Garda, on the morainic hills near Peschiera) the Sanctuary of Madonna del Frassino, which belongs to the category of large sanctuaries that are the object of pilgrimage (Lodi and Varanini, 2010), one crosses the hills eastwards in order to reach the small sanctuary of Colà di Lazise, referred to as Madonna della Neve (again in the hinterland to the south of Lake Garda, in the midst of the vineyards of the Lugana, Bardolino, Custoza and Garda D.O.C.s, which often overlap) (Fig. 4a).

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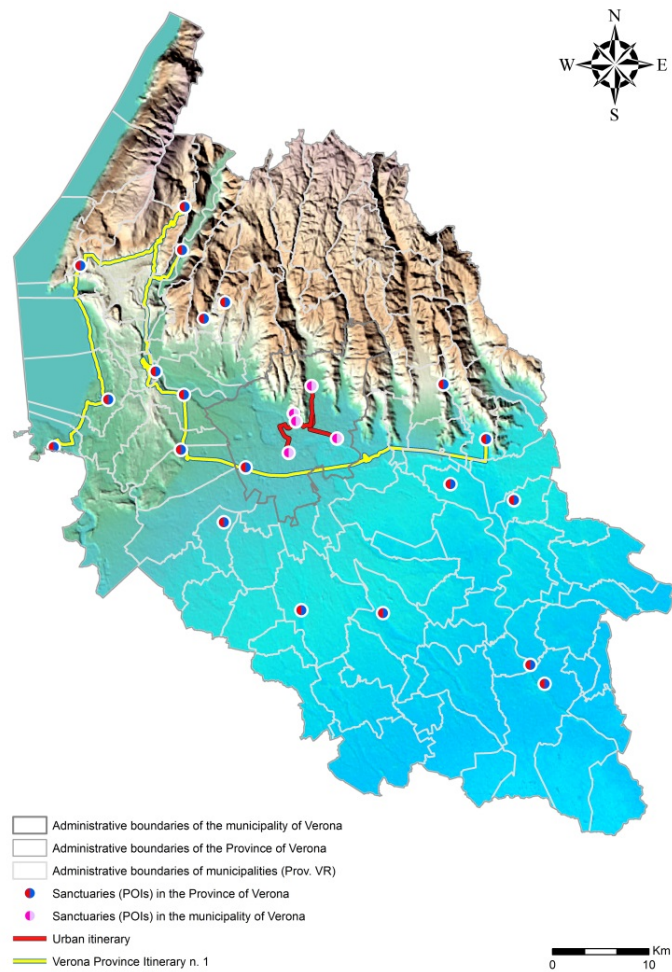


Figure 4 - A segment of the itinerary regarding the sanctuaries in the Province of Verona. In the centre one can also see the urban section. Here one can identify 24 sanctuaries out of the forty or so catalogued by the authors. Cartography: L.S. Rizzo (2013).

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Figure 4a – A detail of the itinerary in its western sector. Cartography: L.S. Rizzo (2013) (for the procedure used, see Fig. 3a) (1 = Madonna del Frassino; 2 = Madonna della Corona).

Then we can either go up Mount Baldo towards the much-visited Sanctuary of Madonna della Corona (Cervato, 2007) or transfer directly – again going east – to Santa Maria di Pol in the hamlet of Pol on the right bank of the River Adige, and then to the Santuario del Perpetuo Soccorso (Zocca and Bonizzato, 2003, pp. 572-586) (Fig. 4a) in the residential area of Bussolengo. Having crossed the river, we head north towards the Valpolicella zone, coming across two small churches: Madonna de La Salette (nestling – but still visible – on a slope of the Fumane Valley) and Santa Maria della Valverde (built on a jag at around 400 metres above sea level that affords one a bird’s eye view of the vast expanse of vineyards on the hummocks and plain below, allowing one’s gaze to pass from vine row to vine row and from one building to the next) (Figs. 5 and 6).

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Figure 5 – The Sanctuary of Madonna de La Salette at Fumane. The photos show the building and part of the view below.

Photos: L.S. Rizzo (2012).



Figure 6 – The Sanctuary of Santa Maria della Valverde with the viticultural landscape below. The building dates back, with later modifications, to the beginning of the 15th century.

Photos: L.S. Rizzo (2012).

Then – returning onto the low-lying Provincial roads that lead into the city – one can head for the sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna of Lourdes (a destination for pilgrims): a

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large circular building that overlooks the city from a hill in the north of Verona and represents the main element that is visible from a distance (especially if one arrives by train) (Figs. 7 and 7a).



Figure 7 – The Sanctuary of Nostra Signora di Lourdes in Verona (top left in the photo). On the right is a 19th century Austrian fort. Photo: L.S. Rizzo (2012).



Figure 7a – The route, shown in yellow, which leads to the Sanctuary of Nostra Signora di Lourdes in Verona. Created by L.S. Rizzo (2013) (for the procedure used, see Fig. 3a)

Alternatively, one can proceed to Santa Teresa del Bambin Gesù (again for pilgrims) or seek out two extremely interesting little churches: Madonna del Terraglio (lying against the city walls, now restored and with a particularly fascinating history) and Madonna dell’Altarol

(just outside Verona, in the Valpantena and at the foot of the Lessini range – a small sanctuary along the very busy Provincial road that leads up towards the mountains).

Then it is the turn – continuing to head eastwards – of the eastern part of the Province of Verona, where there is no shortage of minor gems to discover. One can opt to take the SP 38 Provincial road, slightly to the south of the SR 11 Regional one. This offers one itinerary route almost entirely in the midst of the vineyards of the Arcole D.O.C., with a stop in the commune of Belfiore at the Romanesque Madonna della Strà before proceeding to seek out – hidden among the industrial buildings that have quite literally taken over the area between San Bonifacio and Arcole – the small sanctuary of L’Alzana at Arcole, a municipality famous for the battle against Napoleon. In this zone – very intricate from a production point of view, with its industrial and commercial units, new roads and numerous roundabouts – one finds the logistical headquarters for the Lidl supermarket chain. We have already left the diocese of Verona and entered that of Vicenza. Our proposed route continues to the south-east and suggests one goes to Madonna dei Miracoli, a sanctuary at the foot of the Colli Berici hills that offers some splendid frescoes. At this point the itinerary cannot but take in another major sanctuary, that of Monte Berico (to the south of the city of Vicenza). However, as our route now takes us south/south-east in order to make our way through the Euganei hills, it is well worth our while not to leave unexplored an area that is replete with sanctuaries and which lies to the north of Vicenza in an arc that takes in the whole of the Vicenza plain (where we also find the main roads that lead to Schio). Here are a couple of examples: the Sanctuary of Santa Maria del Cengio - at Isola Vicentina, the most important in the zone from a historical and artistic point of view – and, a little further north, Santa Maria Liberatrice (a Malo). Also important are the sanctuaries under the lee of the mountains, in an area that stretches from the Chiampo Valley to Mount Summano, the Asiago Plateau and Mount Grappa.

Returning to our original itinerary, after leaving Vicenza we head towards Padua and its extremely famous Santuario del Santo. We also suggest, however, that one visits the concentrated group of sanctuaries located in the area of the Colli Euganei (at Abano, Monselice, etc.) – a particular zone that is a favourite destination for spa lovers – before moving on to Rovigo and its Province. From there, one would leave the Veneto Region in order to take – for example – the ancient Via Romea²⁹.

3.4 Local segments on a religious theme: detours from the main long-distance itinerary featuring different types of “church”, created with Google Earth.

As one finds out more about religious buildings, one gradually realizes how concentrated their presence is in the various areas, one appreciates their richness to greater extent and one is stimulated to communicate the possibility/desirability that they should be enjoyed by a wider public. Once we had recognized that “fixed” religious sites may very often be considered cultural assets (built heritage), the objective of our research has been to study them, appraise their distribution/differentiation from a quantitative point of view and

understand how they are used, as well as conceiving means of communication so that they might be considered “resources” for religious, cultural and sustainable tourism. A series of recent developments have made it seem desirable to offer (or continue to offer, in the case of the authors of this paper) to create itineraries which are in this case specific, i.e. having to do with ecclesiastical buildings. To be more precise, these are:

- detailed study for various research projects carried out for various reasons on dozens and dozens of cultural and environmental assets including historic/religious ones (Rizzo R.G., 2008 and currently being published);
- reading De Sandre Gasparini *et al.* of 2002 and the recent study by Rizzo L. S., *et al.*, 2012;
- collaboration in the construction of a database of the dioceses of Verona and Vicenza (cf. the European RECULTIVATOR Project);
- having become conscious of the recent great awareness with regard to “minor” ecclesiastical sites³⁰ or those “outside the cities of art” on the part of associations³¹, dioceses and local councils.

This is, therefore, a system for carrying out applied geography *tout court*. In creating these illustrative themed itineraries and limiting oneself exclusively to actual churches, one discerns in these points of interest certain types of site that always have a story to tell. If these are then extracted from a macro-area (by type) they could indeed constitute a number of different itineraries that have a similar number of stories to tell about:

- Fine parish churches, sometimes resulting from subsequent building/reconstruction/juxtaposition with previous edifices (CP);
- “Twin churches”, standing side by side (cc);
- Abbeys and parish churches that are still in their original state (a, p);
- Churches of modest size in residential areas that have been renovated by the local community or associations (Rotary, Lions, foundations, etc.) (c);
- Small chapels strewn around the countryside (x);
- Chapels belonging to an architectural/economic *unicum* (for example: country mansions, farmsteads, etc.) (^)
- Sanctuaries (s)
- Modern (but not commonplace) parish churches (Ω)
- Deconsecrated churches (cs).

In support of our claim, we attached in the Italian version (see footnote 1) at pp. 75-79, an operational example complete with both indications for “navigating” on the web as well as a commentary “during the journey”. This has been completed by the annex (pp. 87-89) in which one can find explanations of the stop-overs that may be visualised on the web. The above abbreviations/symbols have been used in the detailed description in the Italian version just mentioned explaining the sub-itinerary (ring) devised as an example with dozen of our ecclesiastic elements. This sub-itinerary runs between the eastern part of the Verona municipality and the Berici hills

in the province of Vicenza (round) touring through four DOCs areas (Soave, Gambellara, Colli Berici and Arcole).

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 Can an itinerary resulting from renewed interest in minor ecclesiastical sites offer opportunities for tourism based on sustainability as well as respect for and rediscovery of local areas and communities?

As hinted at above, if we were to summarize in a single sentence the way in which the “cultural tourism” phenomenon is changing, we might say that we are faced with the effective spread of the so-called experience economy: a growing portion of the market – paraphrasing what Opaschowski stated as long ago as in 2001 (Trauer, 2006, p. 183) – wants to experience emotionally and personally the material and immaterial qualities of a given place. These people – as said in the introduction (§ 1) - are looking for atmospheres, locations and elements that allow them to “take possession” of their aesthetic qualities and internalize them (and not just for the duration of the journey). It is essential that the experience should be rich and respond to the requirements of intensity, complexity and heartfelt familiarity – in different degrees and forms, of course, depending on the person. Tourism professionals, stakeholders and, in a broad sense, the territory itself are required to “bestow” new dimensions to the basic ones that the experiences themselves can offer. It is not, however, just a simple evolution of the service economy. The fundamental idea – as pointed out in the introduction to this paper – is that the tourist should not only consume such these experiences but should be changed by them (Richards and Wilson, 2006, 2007)³². The above gives force not only to the rediscovery of sites disseminated within the territory – and previously not understood or taken advantage of – but also to the religious-based route itself, whose function seems evident. It also gives the latter an even more significant role in view of the new and more recent developments in cultural tourism which – if we may remind the reader – have to do with:

- greater involvement of the consumer in the creation of his or her experiences (i.e. stronger links/greater exchanges between supplier and consumer – so-called “co-creation”);
- a sense of community between one and the other, finding as they do on the web and in the social media fertile ground on which to meet and develop common projects together by means of networking;
- greater emphasis on the everyday life of the places being visited and their related tangible and intangible heritage;
- greater interest on the part of today’s tourists in events of all kinds, resulting from a paradigm shift that now conceives these as being real instruments for giving roots to and valorizing cultures and places (it is not only “where” one is that counts, but also “when” one visits a place)³³.

Our itinerary in fact represents an instrument for safeguarding the territory and is of use in consolidating practices for tourism that is sustainable, alternative and aware³⁴. It is a means that can induce, above all, the territory and the various sites to undertake a course of action that has as its outcome self-awareness and self-discovery; secondly, it acts as an outline through which to “offer” territories without making them suffer or penalizing them, promoting use that does not only involve “consuming” experiences but which actually allows for a “closer” encounter between the local culture/society and the tourist. In our study we have sought to create a route that stimulates investment in the value of authenticity and in the valorisation of contextual elements that have a great wealth of originality. This can obviously not exclude the need to identify a vision by giving ourselves a mission and – at the same time – reflecting in a strategic manner on how to put into operation alternative ways to promote growth (according to a shared, multi-actor scenario at whose centre the religious-based route lies). It should be said that our incentive to pursue this course of research comes from our perception that a reawakening is taking place on the part of the territory’s fabric that is giving rise to a whole host of initiatives aimed at making better known and offering to the public the types of sites that provide the theme of our itinerary. There are, for example, the guided tours entitled “Chapels open to the public and religious itineraries in the province of Verona” (cited in note no. 31 above), promoted by the Centro Turistico Giovanile of Verona in conjunction with the Province of Verona and the Curia of the Diocese³⁵. Then – even wider in scope – there is the Protocol of Agreement and Collaboration between the Veneto Region and Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi signed in May 2012. This project involves – at least for now – favouring the initiatives conceived by the Opera itself with the intent of increasing incoming from Brazil (and spreading the “Pilgrim Lifestyle”). Indeed, our qualitative analysis did not find within the ambit of the Region’s most recent tourism-related planning any activation of specific measures to finance projects aimed at designing and creating integrated religious itineraries; rather, that reflection along such lines is still very much in the early stages. We envisage an operational future in this sense in the new tourist law of the Regione Veneto (L.R. 14 giugno 2013, n. 11 (BUR n. 51/2013) *Sviluppo e sostenibilità del turismo veneto*, art. 3 – “Risorse turistiche”, in which religious assets and sites are mentioned as resources. We hope that it will become a common ground for operations in the future.

4.2 Notes on methodology: some marginal reflections

In this research, we have investigated the paradigm shift in experiencing cultural tourism linked to religious itineraries (and more specifically that regarding “minor” sites); besides it has allowed us to look into and test different instruments for representing such routes in cartographic form (highlighting limits, advantages and potential synergies). This representation of geographical information may, at one level, be created by the average internet user by means of the now very common instruments on the web (Google Earth, Google Maps, etc.), which provide

AlmaTourism N. 7, 2013: Rizzo L. S., Rizzo R. G., Trono A., Religious itineraries as the driving forces behind sustainable local development in the Veneto? Towards a proposal for promoting an unusual and often “subliminal” form of heritage: sanctuaries and minor churches.

immediate visualization of both the route and the POIs. However, it cannot always be taken for granted, because recognizing the selected elements necessarily implies a profound knowledge of the territory (in particular in the case of minor sites). Often, even when this knowledge is more than satisfactory, it is necessary to combine various means of representation in order to succeed in pinpointing the desired element. Indeed, the satellite image is not always clear or the site correctly positioned and easy to interpret. To this end, complementary geographical information systems are required. These, however, call for users who possess greater expertise and skills in dealing with modern geo-technologies and their related software. Nevertheless, it would seem that a combination of these two worlds is possible and indeed potentially very fruitful (Fig. 8).

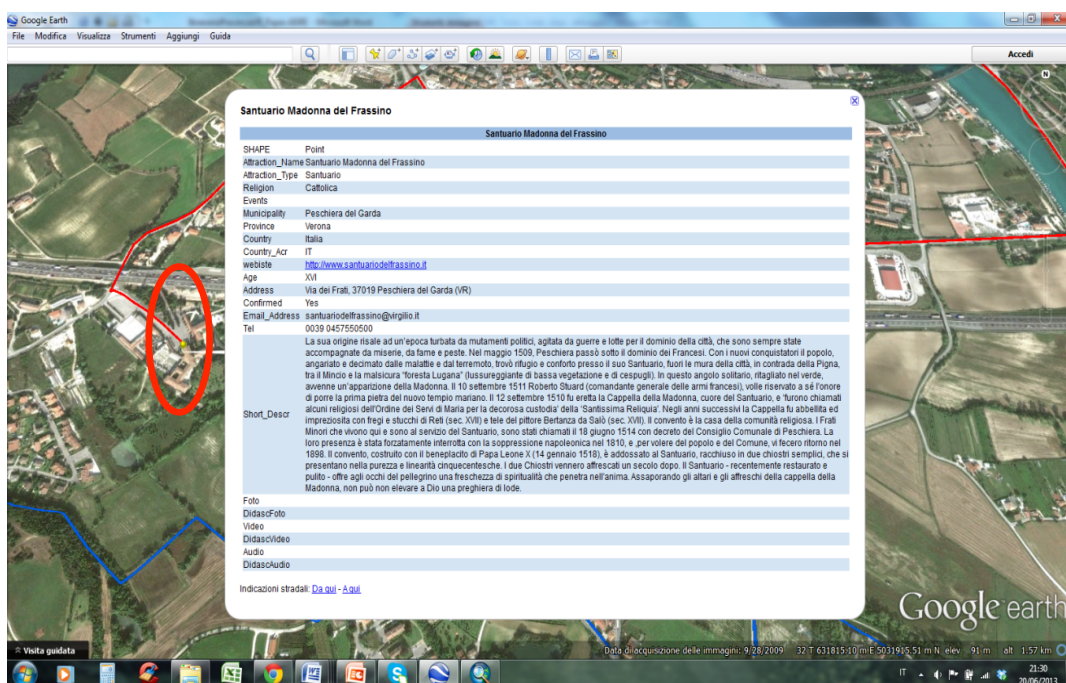


Figure 8 – The image shows the information that appears when one clicks on a POI (here circled in red). This figure allows one to grasp the now highly developed interoperability between geographical information systems created using proprietary and/or open software and the virtual globes. In fact, the KML/kmz file imported in Google Earth, also has associated the attribute table of the layers created and managed in “traditional” GIS and – consequently – the possibility for interrogation. Processing: L.S. Rizzo (2013) (the information shown comes from the website of the sanctuary).

Structured sites from which to draw on and usable multimedial materials need to be sought out ever more scrupulously, as well as being used to their full potential, moving deftly from one to the other. We noted that it is necessary to complete the information in order to provide optimum communication that will allow cyber-tourists to make good use of it. The itinerary produced by traditional GIS, for example, can now be imported relatively easily in Google Earth; vice versa, one

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created using this latter programme – in view of the increased interoperability of software and access to the web – can be downloaded not only onto a PC but also onto mobile devices (smartphones, PDAs, etc.³⁶) using .kml/.kmz extensions. This involves, therefore, development as regards the complementariness and “circularity” of interaction between different instruments for representation/localization, which are increasingly being used by tourists/web surfers when planning trips as well as in information provided at an institutional level (Urbisci and Milani, 2012). We believe this to be the essential element in order for the itinerary to express its function to the full: that of promoting territorial development that is as sustainable as possible.

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¹ This article is the result of the combined efforts of the authors. The design of the research is attributable to Luca S. Rizzo, as are sections 1.1, 2, 3.1 (the part entitled “Itineraries created using ‘traditional GIS’”), 3.2, 3.3 and 4.1. Raffaella G. Rizzo wrote sections 3.1 (the part entitled “Detours and sub-rings created using interactive Google Earth”), 3.4 and 4.2. Anna Trono wrote section 1.

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² A form that today represents a substantial market, accounting for 40% of the global total (UN-WTO in Khovanova-Rubicondo K., 2011: 19). For the European market see: Richards (2011).

³ For example, the Via Francigena (Bettini *et al.*, 2011), the Phoenicians’ Route, the canals, parks and gardens routes, the Silk Road, the Routes of the Olive Tree, the Iter Vitis Route (Robiglio, 2007), etc.

⁴ Presented during the 1st EJTHR International Conference held at the University of Santiago de Compostela in June 2012 (entitled “Destination Branding, Heritage & Authenticity”) (Rizzo *et al.*, 2012).

⁵ See: Regione del Veneto, PTRC (Piano Territoriale Regionale di Coordinamento), DGR 372/2009, Variante parziale con attribuzione della valenza paesaggistica. Norme tecniche, Allegato B4 Dgr. n. 427 del 10/04/2013, art. 50.

⁶ We refer here to the following documents of the Veneto Region: the Triennial Development Plan for Local Tourist Systems (PSSTL) and the Annual Executive Plans regarding tourism (PEA), which – though they mention religious tourism – do not yet appear to have financed any specific actions in this regard (Rizzo L.S. *et al.*, 2012).

⁷ For a definition and exhaustive description of the concept as well as about the various types of heritage attraction see: Timothy and Boyd (2003, chap. 1); Dallari (2009: 65); Minca and Colombino (2012, chap. 9).

⁸ Minor compared to the usual tourist sites. They are therefore, on one hand, “minor” in a narrow sense because they are small, off the beaten track, little-known or simply unheard of and, on the other, because they are not generally perceived as “artistic and cultural assets”. This is the case, in fact, of the majority of parish churches, which are sometimes real treasure troves containing works of art of great merit. They are also all precious “assets” in themselves, because they can be appreciated for the “other” resources and qualities that they are able to express: silence, harmony, peace, etc. These are churches that are only visited by locals, and then only for mass and other services.

⁹ To which we add – only in the case of the more detailed itineraries – other minor ecclesiastical sites: country parish churches, abbeys and oratories.

¹⁰ About which those who live in the places in which they are to be found often express indifference, which leads to neglect and scarce knowledge of them and of the way they interact with their surroundings.

¹¹ To the Via Romea from Stade (in Germany) to Rome one finds references in 14th century Latin texts and in maps from the following century kept in the British Library. Delineated in the 13th century by Abbot Albert von Stade, the route – one of the most important in the Middle Ages, which linked the North Sea, Rome and the Holy Land (Caselli, 1991) – is made up of at least three main thoroughfares, along with various ramifications. In March 2007 at Ochsenfurt – during a meeting between the world of academia (represented by Professor G. Caselli) and representatives of the German municipalities crossed by the itinerary – it was decided to give preference with regard to a possible “rediscovery” to that from Stade towards Würzburg (the most direct) and towards the Brennero Pass (the oldest – apparently – linked to the Ottonians and to Frederick I and Frederick II of Hohenstaufen). In Italy – because of the cultural links between the Saxon sovereigns and the bishops – it passed through Arezzo (as documented in the archives of that city’s Curia). This itinerary is now the subject of historical research – and logistical “predisposition” – by associations in both Germany and Romagna. The route, apart from crossing the German territories mentioned above, touches these others, listed here by country: Austria (Innsbruck) and Italy [Bressanone, Bolzano, Trento, Feltre, Belluno, Vittorio Veneto, Padua, Venice, Chioggia, Ravenna, Forlì, Meldola, Bagno di Romagna, Alpe di Serra, Campi di Bibbiena, Subbiano, Arezzo, Castiglion Fiorentino, Ossaia, Castiglion del Lago, Città della Pieve (S. Pietro Acquaeortus), Acquapendente, Orvieto, Viterbo

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and Rome]. Our itinerary might well connect with the Venetian “hub” and lead – starting from there – to greater knowledge and new experiences. For details, see the following websites: www.retecamminifrancigeni.eu; www.gioannicaselli.com.

¹² For exemplative details on the Province of Verona see: Rizzo R.G. (2004).

¹³ Sea, lakes, mountains, cities of art and spas.

¹⁴ The same has been done for Vicenza and will be done for the other Provinces we analysed.

¹⁵ The theme of sanctuaries has been the subject of detailed research by historians in the last fifteen years (Vauchez, 2000; Cracco, 2002; Scotto, 2011). The census of Christian sanctuaries in Italy dates back to 2003, as does the website <http://www.santuari cristiani.iccd.beniculturali.it/>, which involved thirty universities. Cf. Bonaccorsi, 2008. For this present research other minor sanctuaries have been found apart from those catalogued on the website just mentioned. University geographers have dedicated themselves to religious assets in a wider sense in the “CNR Cultural Assets Project: Religious itineraries and places from the past to the future: a sustainable development project regarding various Italian Regions”, coordinated by Nunzio Famoso (two CD roms, 2002).

¹⁶ For greater details on procedures and sources of information used associated with this approach see: Rizzo L.S., Robiglio and Trono (2012, section 4) (a paper in which greater space is devoted to the illustration of these elements).

¹⁷ This is, however, part of a larger database of religious assets, to which L.S. Rizzo has contributed within the scope of the European RECULTIVATUR project. This database – which reflects the need to organise (and catalogue) complete, up-to-date and geo-referenced information, essential for promoting economic and social policies that are more evidence-based – includes around 700 records just for the Provinces of Verona and Vicenza.

¹⁸ Examples of videos are those regarding the following projects: a) the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (http://giottoaglisrovegni.it/visita/mappa_a.htm); b) the Arena in Verona (<http://verona.arounder.com/en/theatre/arena-di-verona/the-arena.html>).

¹⁹ For a highly interesting example – even if it dates from 2008 and focuses on archaeology – see Cutri, Naccarato and Pantano (2008); M. Paradiso, speech given during the 31st Italian Geographical Congress (Milan, 11-15/06/2012).

²⁰ See, as an example, the Registry of the Ecclesiastical Cultural Institutes (Ufficio nazionale per i beni culturali ecclesiastici) whose internal search engine offers pages relating to archives, libraries and museums, with the possibility of visualizing their locations using Google Earth or Virtual Earth (cf. www.chiesacattolica.it/anagrafe).

²¹ Whose areas do not correspond, it should be remembered, with the administrative boundaries of the Provinces.

²² For example: www.vaticano.com; www.viaggispirituali.it; www.collegamentonazionali santuari.com [the site of the National Sanctuary Liaison Group (CNS)]; www.chieseitaliane.it; www.santuari cristiani.iccd.beniculturali.it.

²³ As some sanctuaries are also parish churches.

²⁴ Important entities with sometimes millions of devotees.

²⁵ <http://www.santuari cristiani.iccd.beniculturali.it/Common/dettaglio.aspx?idsantuario=1823>.

²⁶ The church, commonly referred to as Madonna della Strà, is dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel; for detailed information see the following link: <http://www.santuari cristiani.iccd.beniculturali.it/Common/dettaglio.aspx?idsantuario=2083>

²⁷ Almost completed. However, since the sanctuaries are spread out throughout the territories of the dioceses, it is not possible to construct a single route. On one hand, we will provide tables at a diocese level (though not in this paper); on the other (as we have just said) we shall indicate a basic West-East itinerary and then a South-East one.

²⁸ For an interesting reflection on this theme see: Lazzaretti (2005).

²⁹ For each of the sanctuaries cited in the text there exists a specific literature that we shall not quote here for reasons of space.

³⁰ Galati D. et al. (2011) *Verona minor Hierusalem. Alla riscoperta di un antico percorso*. San Pietro Incariano (Verona): Il Segno di Gabrielli Editori.

³¹ See, for example, the initiative of the CTG in Verona with its summer programme “Chapels open to the public and religious itineraries in the Province of Verona”, fifth edition from 14/07/2012 to 30/09/2012 on

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<http://www.tourism.verona.it/> and http://www.tourism.verona.it/it/scheda_evento, with a detailed downloadable programme: *Chiesette Aperte 2012 download pdf 31340*. The diocesan journal “Verona Fedele” has published articles on “religious itineraries in the territory of Verona”, reprinted and added to in the two volumes edited by C. Tomezzoli (2007, 2008). The Diocese of Vicenza published during 2010 in *La Voce dei Berici* the insert “In the shadow of the campanile: on the churches of the diocese of Vicenza”. This material has been collected in the 2-volume publication of the same name (Gobbo, 2011).

³² Interesting in this regard is the paper given back in 1994 by Francesco Vallerani.

³³ For a summary see G. Richards (2012) [and the speech entitled “Cultural tourism and local development” given on 7/06/2012 during the Conference “Crossroads of Europe. Cultural and religious itineraries” (Pavia, 6-10 June 2012), organised within the first fair aimed, on one hand, at promoting cooperation and exchanges and, on the other, at increasing awareness of the potential of new forms of tourism such as those dealing with culture and religion].

³⁴ A concept only partly summarized in the expression “Special Interest Tourism (SIT)”, a ‘phenomenon’ that emerged in the 1980s (Read in Hall and Weiler, 1992: 5) and which has been the subject of debate for some time. For an overview, an examination of the evolution of the phenomenon and of its intrinsic ambiguity, as well as a reflection on the complexity that is one of its characteristics, see – for example, in view of the rich bibliography produced in the last few decades: Weiler and Hall (1992); Douglas *et al.* (2001); Trauer (2006).

³⁴ Similar initiatives can also be found elsewhere in Italy. For an example, see the website: www.ripenia.com.

³⁵ On this front, notable interest is being aroused by free apps such as the Jeko guides, an example of a platform developed by Società Jeko S.r.l. which allows territorial stakeholders/citizens to generate tourist guides regarding their particular area and tourists to make use of them on their smartphones. These consist of a system made up of: 1) a web interface (an authoring tool) for the generation of the guide; b) an online store/bookshop dedicated to containing it; c) the app itself. For more details, see the video of Session 1 “Wiki, WEB and IG 2.0” (ASITA 2012 Conference) and the presentation entitled: “Jeko guides. An editorial geo-platform for the generation of tourist guides consultable on your smartphone” (Olivieri) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYE6TqXHb6A>).