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**PILGRIMAGE AND HOSPITALITY ALONG THE VIA FRANCIGENA:  
REVITALISATION OF RURAL AREAS AND THERAPEUTIC MOBILITIES**

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**RIASSUNTO:**

Il contributo esplora la moderna esperienza, secolare e religiosa, di pellegrinaggio sulla via Francigena nel perseguimento di benessere attraverso la mobilità lenta, l'interazione con il paesaggio e l'ospitalità. Simultaneamente si introduce il punto di vista dei locali, particolarmente degli ospitalieri, nel loro profondo coinvolgimento con il rinnovato flusso culturale. Essi, pur rimanendo stabili, si legano alla mobilità terapeutica e vanno oltre i paradigmi del turismo commerciale. Particolarmente nel rapporto tra ospitalità e pellegrinaggio, si possono delineare dei caratteri distintivi tra turista e pellegrino che evidenziano incongruenze sul percorso. La ricerca, svolgendosi in due aree studio rurali in Italia, dimostra come il transito di pellegrinaggio sulla via Francigena sia un'opportunità di rivitalizzazione anche socio-culturale per le aree marginali del territorio. L'indagine è stata condotta attraverso il metodo quantitativo, qualitativo e la ricerca etnografica.

*Parole chiave:* Pellegrinaggio, Ospitalità, Mobilità, via Francigena

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**ABSTRACT:**

The paper explores the modern experience, secular and religious, of pilgrimage along the via Francigena in the pursuit of well-being through slow mobility, interaction with the landscape and hospitality. Moreover, the locals' point of view is introduced, particularly that of the hosts, in their deep involvement with the renewed cultural flow. While being stable, they are linked to therapeutic mobility and go beyond the paradigms of commercial tourism. Particularly in the relationship hospitality-pilgrimage, distinctive characters can be outlined between tourist and pilgrim that highlight conflicts on the route. The research, taking place in two rural study areas in Italy, shows how the pilgrimage transit on via Francigena is an opportunity for socio-cultural revitalisation for the marginal areas of the territory. The survey was conducted through the quantitative, qualitative methods and ethnographic research.

*Keywords:* Pilgrimage, Hospitality, Mobilities, via Francigena

# PELLEGRINAGGIO E OSPITALITÀ LUNGO LA VIA FRANCIGENA: RIVITALIZZAZIONE DELLE AREE RURALI E MOBILITÀ TERAPEUTICA

## 1. Premise: pilgrimage, slow mobility and well-being

The modern phenomenon of pilgrimage along the via Francigena has developed substantially since the early 2000s. This, if associated with the growth of slow tourism, has had a significant socio-economic and cultural impact in the territories crossed, especially in rural areas. More broadly, there has been a growing interest in Cultural Routes in Europe and in Italy as well, large-scale investment and the proliferation of new cultural trails, not all of which have been recognised by the Council of Europe, that are found throughout the country (Beltramo, 2010, p. 355). The outlining of a common (European) cultural identity is certainly a challenge that interests the European institutions, which find in cultural itineraries the ideal tool to advocate their goal regardless of barriers and borders. With respect to the via Francigena, the historian Le Goff had already argued that the via Francigena represents the clear manifestation of the cohesion and diversity of Europe (Le Goff, 1996).

In this sense, nowadays pilgrimage becomes a common thread between cultures of various countries. Religious journeys have become widespread in recent decades, occupying an important segment of international tourism (De Salvo, 2015). Therefore, the studies on pilgrimage, also address the tourist dynamics of the phenomenon, difficult to define because of a paradigmatic dichotomy between tourism and pilgrimage, conceptually opposites but with various similarities (Badone & Roseman, 2004). Pilgrimage is also a major industry promoted by commercial organisations, not only by religious authorities; hence, it is difficult to clearly separate pilgrimage and tourism. Tourism and cultural heritage have become a central marketing theme in many contemporary pilgrimage contexts (Reader, 2015). The forerunner role of the first innovative theories was covered by Turner (1973) then taken up also by Urry (1990), to compare the two different experiences, and by Cohen to better analyse the components of pilgrims and tourists (Cohen, 1992).

Chiefly, this study looks at the practice of pilgrimage as a path “extraneous” to the usual tourist characteristics. It rather becomes a moment of estrangement from modernity, appropriating slow rhythms, in symbiosis with the landscape crossed and in relation to the local actors encountered. In particular, the pilgrimage leads to an inner pursuit of well-being that is also reflected in the local actors, stable, but involved in the itinerary. Virtuous processes of revitalisation are initiated in the centres of the rural communities involved and, in so doing, we tend to go beyond the tourist logics of the journey: if on the one hand the phenomenon of pilgrimage includes part of the tourist experience, at the same time it constitutes itself a paradigm both from the point of view of fruition and hospitality.

Studies on the phenomenon of modern pilgrimage have undoubtedly increased also by virtue of the presences that multiply along the paths every year. Part of this literature deals with the relation with therapeutic, or healing, dimension to a pilgrimage journey (Warfield, Baker, & Foxx, 2014). Besides the pilgrimage context, slow mobility, that is the act of walking, and its relation with well-being and health is explored and theorised as “therapeutic mobilities” (Gatrell, 2013). But among the pilgrimage paths, in their relationship with physical and mental well-being, it is the Camino de Santiago that arouses more investigations still underway with the aim of measuring the physical and mental well-being of pilgrims (“Proyecto Ultreya”)<sup>1</sup> and as opportunity to be prescribed as an outdoor therapy (“green prescription”) alongside/instead of medicines (Jørgensen, 2017).

More specifically, within pedestrianism, mobility is conceived through the act of walking as the quintessential feature of what we take to be a human form of life. In this way, walking, that is a profoundly social activity with health functions (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). As a matter of fact, the

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<sup>1</sup> It is an ongoing study conducted by the Universidad de Zaragoza. Retrived from: <https://www.caminodelcambio.com/camino-de-santiago/>

nature trail represents a privilege device of educational and leisure activity walking through rural areas (Matless, Watkins, & Merchant, 2010).

As one of the forms of population mobility, pilgrimage creates trades, cultural exchange and political integration. It inevitably necessitates spatial movement; hence, it stimulates geographers' concern with distance and its effect on behaviour (Collins-Kreiner, 2009). It is of particular interest to analyse the phenomenon not only from the point of view of those who travel along the itinerary, but also looking at the socio-cultural repercussions on local actors resulting from the encounter with pilgrims, and more generally with travellers, linked to the *via Francigena*.

## 2. Methodology

Movements from one place to another, and thus the road network, ancient or modern, become a privileged perspective for understanding human organisation of space, social relations and an extremely effective reading key for the landscape. Contemporary society is reconfigured compared to how people connect with places and each other (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006) and mobilities rework places and landscapes on an ongoing and incessant basis. Landscapes change, viewpoints shift, and people inhabit and move through their surroundings in different ways (Merriman, 2012). The road becomes the place of an itinerant research to understand the dimension that is created through slow mobility in the experience of pilgrimage. Furthermore, it is of interest to determine the socio-cultural impact that the flow of pilgrimage has on the local actors involved. If, as has already been said, the literature on pilgrimage deals with the theme of well-being with respect to those who set out on a journey, to a lesser extent the theme has been treated from the perspective of hospitality: what repercussions the pilgrim's path of well-being and spirituality have on the locals met along the way? What role do the landscape and the historical context play in the pilgrimage along the *via Francigena*?

The research was therefore carried out by looking at the two main categories of actors along the itinerary: the users of the route (*outsiders*), that are pilgrims, walkers, hikers, tourists; secondly, residents of the areas crossed (*insiders*) who were involved in activities related to the pilgrimage and tourist phenomenon of the *Francigena* (tour operators, restaurateurs and other shopkeepers of commercial activities), with particular regard to the hosts of the affiliated structures such as parish hostels, private hostels, B&B, lodgings.

The survey was carried out in two study areas in comparison along the tourist itinerary of the *via Francigena* in Italy (fig. 1), as approved by the Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe, including variants and locations that have remained unrelated to the path but historically interested by the medieval road network. Both the areas are characterised by the rural dimension, where the impact of pilgrimage and slow tourism is more perceptible and represents an important development opportunity.

The first case (C1) considered the area distinguished by the crossing of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, that is the historical area known as Monte Bardone, between the Val Taro in Emilia-Romagna and Lunigiana in Tuscany. The Cisa Pass represents the main passage (1041 m); Bardone, Terenzo, Cassio and Berceto are the villages in the Parma province; Montelungo, Succisa, Previdè and Pontremoli are Tuscan villages in Massa-Carrara province.

In the second case (C2), the hilly crossing of the Val d'Orcia and Val di Paglia, in southern Tuscany and upper Lazio, is characterised by the presence of the volcanic cone of Monte Amiata. On the Siense stretch there are the centres of San Quirico d'Orcia, Castiglione d'Orcia, Bagno Vignoni, Gallina, Abbadia S.S., Radicofani, Ponte a Rigo; on that of Viterbo, in Lazio, those of Centeno, Proceno, Acquapendente.



Fig. 1 Map of the two case studies (C1 e C2) along the tourist itinerary of the via Francigena (cartographic elaboration of the author).

Methodologically, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used and, lastly, an ethnographic survey. First of all, a questionnaire<sup>2</sup> with multiple-choice questions, according to the Likert scale and open-ended questions, differently elaborated for *insiders* and *outsiders*. It was distributed in the two study areas. Mainly, the questions concern the type of business with respect to the itinerary for *insiders*, the travel arrangements for outsiders, the practicability of the itinerary, the relationship established between locals and travellers, the perception of the historical and landscape context. With respect to the qualitative survey, 23 semi-structured interviews<sup>3</sup> were conducted with *insiders* and 23 with *outsiders*, some of which in groups.

An itinerant ethnographic survey was conducted between the places of the study areas along the via Francigena. This implied a self-involvement in the pilgrimage experience by walking between the stages of the itinerary, alone and in the company of other travellers, staying overnight in the hospitality facilities affiliated with the route, therefore parish and private hostels, B&B, lodgings and camping. This allowed sharing time not only with travellers and pilgrims, but also to create a bond with the locals who deal with hospitality, volunteers and local administrators. Field ethnography has proved particularly effective in fully investigating the phenomenon of pilgrimage and hospitality in the realities under consideration. It is essential to share the same places and activities to establish a mutual trust with a full range of local people and, as in this case, by travelling with the users of the via Francigena. Participating in the pilgrim's day, it is possible to observe and obtain information without digital filters (recorder, camera) that could contaminate and limit the answers.

Some pilgrims tend to have a rigid schedule. Furthermore, a large number of them are on a spiritual, introspective, in some cases painful journey. Coming from outside, it may be difficult to find the right time for an interview while proposing punctual interviews could disturb their activities, leading to collect partial or distorted information. However, in the atmosphere of travel and especially of pilgrimage, there is much availability, openness and even interest in collaborating. Through the direct observation in their natural environment, what they say can be directly observed as it unfolds. It provides a deep understanding of the feelings and environment of a particular experience (McCall & Simmons, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> The field survey was conducted between 2019 and 2020. Therefore, part of the questionnaires was distributed and collected on site. Others, due to the regulations from Lockdown, were disclosed via Google Form. However, regarding the *outsiders*, it was not possible to reach an adequate number for the sample given the temporary interruption of tourist movements. 110 questionnaires were collected about the *insiders*, whose results analysed proved to be useful on an overall level. Nevertheless, the qualitative method and ethnographic investigation were privileged for this contribution.

<sup>3</sup> On average, the length of time of each interview is about between 30 to 90 minutes. All the interviews reported here were held in Italian and translated into English by the author.

### 3. Discussion on the *outsiders'* results: pilgrimage and users of the itinerary

Nowadays, pilgrimage is currently in a stage of rejuvenation and is therefore in the process of losing some of its unique attributes, which constituted the original basis of its identity as a distinct type of tourism and is simultaneously developing new identities, such as secular pilgrimage and spiritual tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2020, p. 146). The attention towards the pilgrimage has recently been highlighting discrepancies between the old paradigm, which only valued the religious elements of the pilgrimage and the more recent studies that favour the affirmation of secular travel models. The important changes that travel has undergone in recent decades, including the search for a renewed physical and psychological well-being and the affirmation of new tourist experiences that enhance the cultural and spiritual dimension of travel, are also contributing to changing paradigms and theories on pilgrimage and religious tourism (De Salvo, 2015).

According to Turner's anthropological approach, pilgrimage can be conceived as a "rites de passage". A ritual process that involves the physical movement from one stage to another and a stage of liminality resembling the transitory process between two established social statuses (Turner & Turner, 1978). In fact, even in pilgrimage we can distinguish the states of separation, the moment of *communitas* and then the meaning and significance of the re-aggregation within the pilgrimage event. Travelling allows to detach yourself from everyday life in the direction of a special and/or sacred place (Terrin, 2014). The journey, in addition to being a physical movement, is also a process of mental change.

[outsider FS, C2] "In my opinion, walking for so many days means entering another dimension, leaving the dynamics of everyday life, entering a more peaceful, calmer context, the priorities suddenly become different: eating, drinking, finding water. [...] Therefore, to enter a dimension where you relate more to what is the deepest part of you."

The pilgrim is not simply the stranger, but expresses strangeness and estrangement. The term itself (from the Latin verb "*peragere*") is extremely rich in meanings: from "moving with restlessness", "without respite" to being a foreigner. In fact, one does not go on pilgrimage but one is a pilgrim; life itself becomes a condition of pilgrimage (Cardini & Russo, 2019). There is an almost archetypal relationship with pilgrimage as conceived in the Christian tradition: the true homeland of the Christian was heaven, to which he was called and to which he had to tirelessly strive. The extraneousness to this world was therefore a way, a journey to the other world (Luiselli, 2005).

Here it resumes the dimension of the journey on foot, whether it is linked to religious or secular elements. These itineraries are linked to a profound historical-cultural sense, where the pilgrimage was born which still represents a way to find oneself today. Travelling means getting involved. It is an inner test made up of individual goals that takes place within a shared destination. The path stimulates meditation and allows focus on personal goals. It increases self-awareness, self-esteem and the ability to focus on the present.

[outsider MR, C2] "I returned with much more confidence, it gave me self-confidence, a sort of general self-esteem. There is a challenge... they (*i cammini* = the ways) are helping me to get out what I am."

Often, but not always, there is a reason for malaise or crisis that finds a reason for care in the idea of pilgrimage. A sense of uneasiness rooted in everyday life that seems to be resolved only through a radical detachment. Walking becomes the most immediate solution: physically move away and leave everyday space behind, reconsider yourself and your choices.

[outsider FM, C1] "I quit my job and left. I had reached the limit of the limit. I didn't want to continue my life like that! I wanted to be alone, disconnect, take some time for myself. Free me from everything, be with myself. That was enough. I was saturated."

[outsider SR] “The reason why I’m walking is that I’m not very well lately, I’m not that hungry, so... I mean, I’ve been eating little for a few months, I lost 11 kilos. A bad period! I decided to walk, a little for this reason, that maybe walking makes me hungry. It’s a situation where you have to do something, you get tired, you don’t think...”

[insider SR. C1] “Let’s say that the Francigena, or the way (*il cammino*), I say it’s like a hospital [laughter], to the hospital you go to cure yourself... I see that upstream there’s always a motivation to drop everything and to leave... that’s way it lets me think such as clinic in which we can recovery from anything.”

In this sense, the pilgrimage overturns the needs of life and forces us to get closer to the basic needs of life (finding places to eat, water sources, moving with your physical possibilities from one stage to another, finding hospitality). The priorities of life, first settled in the course of the daily routine, are called into question. The Scottish novelist R. L. Stevenson, in his personal pilgrimage experience, he wrote “I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel’s sake. The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly. [...] And when the present is so exacting, who can annoy himself about the future?” (Stevenson, 2001, pp. 46-47). The backpack itself has a profound symbolic value, it is a metaphor for priorities: considering the essential and free yourself from the superfluous.

[outsider EC, C2] “Then here, once you move around... It is a way of life that gets inside you, you realise that you can stay out for a month and you have your own backpack and you have your whole home.”

If the possibility of spending part of the time alone, with oneself, and therefore of being able to reflect on one’s needs is an identity characteristic of the pilgrimage, at the same time the encounter with the other, hence the socialisation and sharing that takes place along the path are an equally fundamental component. So much so as to determine the choice of places for shared hospitality. In fact, only a minimal part of the interviewees declared that they favoured pilgrim hospitality for economic reasons, but rather for the possibility of meeting people who are sharing the same experience.

[outsider PU, C2] “I must tell you, the first year I chose more B&B and stuff like that. The problem is that the B&B, it is true it is more comfortable, you get bored a little because then you are alone, instead in the hostels for good or bad you find people you already have found the day before, maybe on the route, you can share...”

[outsider AP, C2] “Even the budget it’s important, because in my opinion if you spend a little it is better. If you spend one hundred euro a day you live the life of a tourist, while the pilgrimage is also a moment of deprivation, precisely also of sociability. So I want to stay with other people, in a hostel and live in the moment... if I get my room in a hotel, that moment is lost!”

The fact of sharing the same path, the same landscape, often similar difficulties, involves an almost immediate sense of trust and friendliness towards the other. Often, travelling alone solitary facilitates this process, since pilgrims are more predisposed to socialising. What especially distinguishes the sociality in pilgrimage “from normal life”, as the interviewees often say to point out a detachment from their everyday life, is the socio-cultural transversality: aggregation takes place regardless of age, gender, nationality, social class. They all share the same experience (or rite). The relationship with the temporal dimension is another cornerstone in pilgrimage that emerged from the research. Walking, or moving slowly, imposes its own rhythm and continuity in crossing the landscape according to one’s needs, time expands. It can also be interpreted as a sort of rebellion against Modernity, which forces us to travel the road in haste by tying us to ever faster means of communication. Thus, the traveller seizes his time and affirms his sovereignty over the calendar, his independence from social rhythms (Le Breton, 2001, p. 19).

Being a research of a geographical nature that lays the foundations on the historical-geographic study of the complex medieval road system, with respect to the via Francigena<sup>4</sup>, both the landscape and the historical context have played an important component in the study of the pilgrimage experience. Both proved to be of particular interest. Walking pilgrimages create meanings through the interaction of people and place. It differs from both other types of long-distance trekking and pilgrim activities, provoking spatial researchers to further examine the specific dynamics involved (Scriven, 2021, p. 74). The landscape represents an important dimension amplified by the act of walking, not only as a frame, but on which to immerse oneself and interact. A relevant component of well-being is given by the bond especially with small villages and rural communities by virtue of this pursue a historical-cultural and natural landscape “outside the box” that facilitates an introspective journey and therefore possibly far from urban contexts. In Thoreau, it is the woods and uncontaminated nature that exercise the regenerating and purifying power on the individual as if “vegetal innocence had the magical virtue of making innocent the one who contemplates it” (Jovelella in Thoreau, 2009, pp. 5-6).

[outsider GC] “The landscape, you need the one outside the usual schemes, it is what keeps you away from the clamour of everyday life, there are beautiful landscapes and then you stop to admire them...”

[outsider IM, C1] “Seeing a well-kept landscape conciliates with the pilgrimage, also in terms of well-being. Especially going slowly. It is nice to see the advancement of nature, but also the care of the mankind!”



Fig. 2 (left) Apennine landscape of the Tuscan side from the tourist trail of the via Francigena near the Cisa Pass (C1, 2019). Fig. 3 (right) Hilly landscape over the Val di Paglia and Radicofani seen from the variant of the via Francigena that links Abbadia S. S. in Monte Amiata (C2, 2018, drone photo).

A frequent element that emerged during the interviews, which in a certain sense reconciles walking and pilgrimage, is the constant morphological variation of the landscape. Certainly evident in the Apennine crossing (fig. 2), wilder, but also present in the evolution of the clayey hills of southern Tuscany (fig. 3) where, although in part there is a process of re-wilding following the abandonment of the lands, the typical and harmonious man-made rural landscape of the Val d’Orcia arouses particular enthusiasm. By virtue of this, a sense of dissatisfaction often emerges, of greater physical effort and a feeling of prolongation of time along the way in flat landscapes, which do not have altitudes, such as in the Po Valley.

Nevertheless, the pilgrim accepts the unexpected commonly considered unpleasant or negative (traffic, asphalt, industrial area, etc.) that can be encountered and crossed on the way. And this is precisely one of the distinctive elements between pilgrim and tourist or hiker. Generally, the former

<sup>4</sup> This contribution was developed as part of a broader PhD research still in progress. Essentially, the geo-historical study of the territory crossed by the via Francigena is primarily addressed through a focus on the medieval road network. Subsequently, the process of determining the tourist itinerary and the modern use of the itinerary is investigated, not only with respect to the practice of pilgrimage, but also in the light of the important historical and cultural heritage scattered along the road network area.

accepts any kind of encounter, or view, as part of life itself; the other more traditional category is prone to have a lower tolerance given that specific objectives are pursued in a well-defined holiday.

[outsider SC, C1] “It is clear that you walk through the most beautiful and bad places, when you take a route of 1000 km... suburbs, cement factories... but you can have it in the journey, in the life you can meet anything. This is the difference with a trek. If you go on vacation, you go where there is only a beautiful landscape!”

Lastly, the historical value of the medieval itinerary in most cases adds relevance to one's path. It increases the awareness of belonging to something larger, stimulates discovery and imagination.

[outsider GC] “I always say that the ways (*cammini*) should be done at least twice: the first time you do it because you want to arrive, the second time because you want to know. The historical aspect adds value. How important are also the locals you meet in the villages, recounting you stories.”

[outsider PR, C2] “Today, when I walked on this paved road, I tried to understand in the landscape or even in the neighbouring walls what could have existed before the asphalt, if it could be a path previously used. Because walking on the asphalt almost gave me a sense of emptiness.”

The therapeutic effect for those who face the journey along the via Francigena is a common thread both among the sample of the interviews and among the pilgrims encountered during the field ethnography. Overall, it concerns other pilgrimage experiences, as it has been seen in the literature already addressed. The sum of the values discussed so far constitutes the richness of the pilgrimage and therefore of the long-distance journey, staying overnight for several days, thus without setting aside hospitality. Three-quarters of the sample had already made at least one other pilgrimage journey before, whether it is the Camino de Santiago, the via Francigena, other minor Italian paths. From this data and from the testimonies discussed, a “dependence” to the journey emerges, which “calls you again” after having completed one: the strength of the feelings and emotions concentrated within the journey is such as to be expressed as a sort of addiction.

In the analysis conducted here, the pilgrimage, whether secular or religious, represents a moment of break with modernity and with the rhythms it imposes. At the same time, an inner change is expressed, recognised in positive terms, from the conquest of the destination to the return to one's home.

[outsider AP, C1] “Every time I'm a pilgrim, when I go home I always change. I am not the same man, I change. I want to help everyone, and that's great. My wife always tells me: ‘every time you leave, you change.’ And for me it's beautiful, I feel better.”

[outsider GC] “If when you go back home, even if you have walked a bit of a journey, it hasn't put something inside you, it hasn't changed you... you haven't made the way (*cammino*). The Francigena, even if I do it again, to me when I return... there is something new that has put me inside.”

In the way back phase, of re-socialisation, the last step of the traditional pilgrimage paradigm is recognised (Gilli, 2018). The pilgrim returns to his previous life bringing with him changes that reappear in daily life.

#### 4. Discussion on the *insiders'* results: hosts and locals involved in the pilgrimage transit

The literature on pilgrimage has focused mostly on pilgrims' experiences and less on the hosting experience. There is a lack of discussion on hosts' religious experiences and their relationships with pilgrims (Gonzalez et al., 2019). However, a pilgrimage usually implies spending more than one day on the route to the destination, entailing interaction with hospitality services. It can be said that without welcome and hospitality, the pilgrimage loses part of its identity essence.

From the hosts and locals' point of view (*insiders*) involved in the pilgrimage dynamics, in this case of the via Francigena, the question that arises is: what impact does the pilgrimage phenomenon have on the rural areas crossed?

Considering the aggregate quantitative data between the two case studies, 57% of the respondents have a commercial activity involved in the transit of the via Francigena. With respect to the historical issue, when asked whether the Francigena was part of its local history, the almost absolute majority is unanimous (38.8% agree and 54.6% strongly agree). The via Francigena has become part of its historical and cultural identity, while, in many cases, until the 2000s it was barely known (especially from a tourist point of view).

When asked if they live their experience with pilgrims intensely, the degree of disagreement is very low (only 3.7% disagree). The majority expressed a positive opinion with 50% in agreement and 15.7% strongly in agreement. The degree of satisfaction with the experience of their business is largely positive (88%), compared to 12% who responded with a negative opinion.

In this research, especially the qualitative and ethnographic investigation, it emerged that, in addition to the logic of an economic gain, the socio-cultural impact is such that it represents the very motivation for involvement in hospitality on the via Francigena. In addition, especially the hosts, they prove to be real sentinels of their own territory, careful to preserve the authenticity of the places, enhance the villages and avoid excessive commodification of the itinerary.

[*insider* FM, C1] "We want to maintain it as a pilgrimage route, as it is. Without creating any kind of frill or like an amusement park. We've to be careful, we have to maintain it as it is."

[*insider* ML, C1] "In my opinion this kind of mobility it's a resource that has to be managed with great attention... it's like to give again the bloodstream to an organism that had got the arteries in bad conditions, and therefore it revitalises the territory. At the same time, you have to be careful to provide the same blood type... do not make a Disneyland the via Francigena!"

The impact on the communities crossed by the via Francigena is certainly also of an economic nature, partly the result of targeted territorial marketing, and literature is documenting the phenomenon on the Italian territory (Rizzi & Onorato, 2017), especially since the second decade of the 2000s with particular regard to the opportunity to develop sustainable tourism for the marginal areas of the country (Bambi & Barbari, 2015). It must be considered that a constellation of tourist supply and demand is created around the Cultural Routes; moreover, the pilgrim himself becomes a "beauty ambassador" of the places he passes through and often returns there in other guises.

The residents themselves witness evident improvements in their business, but also with respect to the urban planning of the centres and the reorganisation of the local pathways, which are often in the hands of local volunteer associations. However, these transformations are more evident along the stop stages of the itinerary, rather than in the intermediate settlements, and along the main stretches rather than in the variants of the route.

[*insider* FM, C1] "From the tourist point of view, we've been able to lengthen the tourist season."

[*insider* RF, C1]<sup>5</sup> "The community has improved... so much that the village's path has been kept clean, it's signposted... those that were the historical tracks, also securing them... then, that the inhabitants have to learn to adapt and open themselves up to this new flow it's undoubtedly true!"

Slow mobility, together with pilgrimage and the resulting tourist movement, revitalise and nourish like new life-blood many of those villages located in marginal areas. In the encounter with the

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<sup>5</sup> Note that this interview concerns an inhabitant of Montelungo, a village that at the moment is not crossed by the official path of via Francigena, but benefits from an informal transit as if it was a variant. This is because Montelungo represents a leg reported in the diary of the archbishop Sigeric (990), source used to determine the modern stages, and also represents a more direct and simple way to reach the next leg (Pontremoli) from the Cisa Pass.

other, in the movement of cultures from all over the globe, a renewed interest and cultural ferment is created among the local inhabitants. They become participants in the local cultural growth which becomes an integral part of the quality tourist offer.

[insider FB, C2] “It’s good that there are [pilgrims], they keep company, especially in the low seasons! They open up the closed-minded of this town. They have different attention and sensitivity than other tourists. They seek the authenticity of places.”

[insider MP, C2] “Conferences and debates have attracted those people that were here on vacation. It’s also important for the inhabitant’s culture... because this Francigena intrigues also locals. Until few years ago it was not that known. I remember that, when I put the signpost, a couple of Polish that works here around told me ‘but this is not the Via Francigena, this is Via Cavour!’ (that is the actual name of the city street).”

The pilgrim-host relationship is therefore usually very positive and affective. In fact, if initially it can be hypothesised thinking that the pilgrim tends to spend less than half a day on the arrival stage, it has been seen how in many cases a sense of community is created even with the hosts and part of the local inhabitants. Often, the hosts do their utmost voluntarily to support the difficulties that the pilgrim encounters along the way (for example when he gets lost and is recovered by car), they give information on local peculiarities, listen and collect stories. The hosts are deeply touched by the personal experiences of the pilgrims, they come into harmony with their lifestyle. It is a “therapeutic mobility” that also affects local residents.

[insider IA, C1] “The Francigena gives the idea that who passes looks for serenity, tranquillity. This is what the pilgrim instills once he arrives. He carries with himself this feeling. As matter of fact, for us to work with Via Francigena... it is a well-being also for us.”

[insider AG, C2] “The hospitality is integral part of the way (*cammino*), there isn’t way without hospitality. Here you rediscover the love, the contact, the togetherness, the dialogue... many people have the will to talk, I notice it. At first they are reluctant, but then they open themselves and this is amazing. We should ensure that... the hosts, the associations, that this remains. [...] Here the business is very low, there’s only lot of passion!”

[insider DO, C2] “We decided to begin the activity also because we enjoy to meet other people, exchange experiences, to host. Mainly these kind of people, pilgrims that carry with them stories and particular motivations.”

[insider DR] “This is the most beautiful thing, the most beautiful thing that gives me the strength, the courage, the help, the pleasure of continuing is precisely this welcoming relationship that when possible, unfortunately not always, I make myself available to pilgrims... the most important thing, the most important thing. More than anything else. The hospitality.”

The more heterogeneous offer and demand that is consolidating on the via Francigena (from a full-length pilgrimage journey, to the organisation of packages for 2-3 stages, to the conception of food and wine circuits that go beyond the itinerary itself, to weekend hiking) can raise inconsistencies in the overlapping of different users on the same circuits. Categorisations within the same figure of the pilgrim have been advanced with respect to the motivations: balance pilgrim, crisis pilgrim, time-out pilgrim, transitional pilgrim and new start pilgrim (Kurrat, 2019). The possible problem of a conflict in pilgrim-to-pilgrim interaction along the path to sacred places, and in the connected tourist and hospitality services, that emerge from the heterogeneity of motivations to go on pilgrimage, is recently debated (Casais & Sousa, 2020).

This is a question that has surfaced and observed during field ethnography, albeit rarely, with respect to pilgrims who brought with them motivations that were sometimes conflicting with each other. Instead, it frequently emerged that the problem was exposed by the hosts. Who, often motivated by good will, by the spiritual and religious mission for hospitality, by activity on voluntary work or in any case on non-profit management (therefore a donation), find themselves in

difficulty in managing an application heterogeneous, compared to the simple and frugal one of the pilgrim. To indicate this figure, a neologism frequently used in the pilgrimage jargon arose in the Camino de Santiago and now also on the Francigena: “*turigrino*” (“tourigrims”) (Gomes, 2020). It indicates, in a critical way, those people who make the Camino without fully accepting the concepts of hospitality, solidarity, company and sobriety which are, for many pilgrims and “*hospitaleros*” (pilgrimage hosts), the essence of the Camino. Indeed, the hybrid between “tourist” and “pilgrim”.

[*insider* GC] “On the way we embrace each other, we put heart with heart... that is the way (*cammino*); but when the tourists arrive it is very off-putting for me, they are also haughty and they are right... if one spends four hundred euro for three legs they also have their needs... and what needs do you want from me that I’m here as a volunteer? What do you want from me, the bathroom in the room?! [laughter] But go on, do a virtuous act, do not come to occupy the pilgrims’ places who travel with a backpack, with a religious or spiritual motive or one of his own.”

In Italy, during fieldwork, the issue emerged in a particular way during the summer of 2020, the year of the Lockdown from Covid-19, when proximity tourism was a necessary condition and many flocked to Italian sections of the via Francigena.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has examined the phenomenon of pilgrimage through the experience of the users (*outsider*), pilgrims and other types of walkers, and local inhabitants (*insiders*), with particular reference to those who manage accommodation for pilgrims. Subsequently, we wanted to investigate the socio-cultural impact that the rediscovery of slow mobility has on rural communities in two study areas along the via Francigena in Italy. From the survey conducted, common lines emerged on the practice of pilgrimage and among the hosts involved with the transit, which lead to the condition of therapeutic mobility that characterises the slowness of the journey on foot, the relationship with the landscape and the communities crossed and the sense of community that is created in the accommodation structures. Finally, there is evidence of a profound relationship between the pilgrim and the host; a condition that accentuates, in some cases, the distinction between pilgrim and tourist and the inconsistency between different tourist segments overlapping on the same route. However, the difference between traditional pilgrims and tourists will be fading, while numerous points of similarity will emerge (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, p. 445). If indeed pilgrims and tourists, or “tourigrims”, seen from the outside have hardly measurable differences (moving slowly between two places on the same path and staying in some of the same structures), the motivation that resides within them and therefore the mentality of travel involves important breaks in the way of interacting both with places and on an inter-relational level. As a matter of fact, pilgrimage motivations are quite connected to slow tourism push factors: relaxation, self-reflection and discovery, escape, contact with nature (Özdemir & Celebi, 2018).

The main value conditions of the pilgrimage, secular or religious, lie in the journey on foot, or slow movement, and in the overnight stay of several days. A close relationship is established with the variety of landscapes that follow one another. The nature inherent in movement represents the interaction with our environment (Ingold, 2007). In this, mobility establishes a sequential order that resolves the space orders into an experiential order of appearances that continuously evolve according to specific laws; the form of the path imposes a progressive ordering of reality (Leed, 1991, p. 99).

Pilgrimage, as one type of “circulation” that is a form of population mobility (Collins-Kreiner, 2010), along the via Francigena, as in the Middle Ages, resumes performing a role of cultural mixing and unification which, in this form of international transit, flows and revitalises the settlement system of the rural realities and villages crossed.

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