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Towards a sustainability-oriented religious tourism

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Abstract

Religious tourism and pilgrimages increasingly contribute to developing the social and economic growth of local economies and communities over time. The aim of the present study is to analyse the role of religious touristic routes as sites of pilgrimages and an opportunity to drive a pathway for sustainable tourism development. The study relies on analysing qualitative and quantitative data, through a questionnaire distributed in late 2018; the questionnaire relates to pilgrimages concerning the Camino de Santiago de Compostela and Via Francigena as religious touristic destinations that contribute to the social and economic sustainability of local economies. Indeed, these pilgrimages strengthen the importance of building collaborative processes by enabling religious touristic destinations to open up to better managing and by driving sustainability-oriented policies, thus enhancing social and economic growth within local communities.

KEYWORDS

communities, religious tourism, sustainability, sustainable growth

1 | INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism and pilgrimages should contribute to sustainable growth in terms of delivering a high level of tourist satisfaction, alongside meaningful and unique experiences (Lopez, 2013), and helping preserve natural resources and cultural heritage, as well as the traditional values of communities, thus ensuring long-term economic and social benefits. Promoting sustainability within tourism as critical system thinking helps to select an alternative view on tourism development by promoting effective practices and identifying new systems approaches (Jackson, 2001; Jackson, 2010; Roxas et al., 2020). This promotion relies on addressing critical thinking as a way to drive tourism towards sustainability (Boluk et al., 2019) and promote human–environment

relationships within the tourism ecosystem (Hall, 2019). Sustainable tourism relies on both strengthening collaborative and multi-actor processes and stakeholder involvement (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Boluk et al., 2019).

Religious tourism refers to travels to religious sites and destinations, which are motivated by religion and other factors (Santos, 2003). In particular, the dynamic relationship between religion and tourism enables religious tourists, as experience (spiritual and entertainment) hunters, to engage in the pursuit of the satisfaction of a travel career (Strausberg, 2011). In the digital era, information and communication technologies (ICTs) help sustainable religious tourism, thus enhancing travel experience co-creation and the perceptions of religious sites and traditions, opening up a new tourist destination brand image representation (De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016; Lemmi, 2020).

Pilgrimage as a form of human mobility and circulation relates to major religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Pilgrimage concerns 'some people's journey as being special and set apart from the profane world' (Digance, 2006, p. 45). Pilgrims and tourists move along the one secular knowledge-based route and the other sacred road of faith and belief coherently with an enlightened society (Smith, 1992).

Pilgrimage helps support sustainable tourism development as a holistic and systemic approach (Roxas et al., 2020). It relies on following a multi-stakeholder approach that strengthens collaboration and organisational capabilities among private and public organisations as stakeholders setting policies, which meet the touristic expectations (Henderson, 2011). Pilgrimage, as a form of religious tourism, helps to create a relationships-oriented view for tourism development (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011), relying on a multi-actor collaboration for planning the routes and improving the quality of life within communities (Fernandes et al., 2012), following both a sharing view of the value creation processes (Espejo & Dominici, 2017; Gazzola et al., 2019a) and an organisational intelligence framework for enabling action for sustainable change (Bratianu et al., 2006). Pilgrimage tends to elucidate the dynamic relationship between spiritual and emotional knowledge and enhances knowledge dynamics as a transformational process where each form of knowledge can be transformed into another form of knowledge. Emotions and spiritual values are sources that enable dynamic knowledge processes (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2019; Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2020).

This study relies on creating an alternative view to construct social and sustainable development of mainstream growth driven by capital, the tourism industry, consumerism and economic gains (Sharpley, 2000; Sharpley, 2020) through rethinking human–environment relationships to solve problem of sustainable tourism (Hall, 2019). Although some studies and research refer to both the field of sustainable tourism and that of religious tourism, still few studies elucidate the impact of sustainable tourism development (Sharpley, 2020) and interrelate the role of religious tourism as a means for rethinking the sustainability-oriented vision as a strategy of land development (Henderson, 2011).

The aim of the study is to analyse the role of religious tourism, especially with regard to the pilgrimages as an opportunity to drive and support a pathway that enables sustainable tourism development. The project relies on analysing qualitative and quantitative data related to pilgrimages concerning the Spanish Camino de Santiago de Compostela and Via Francigena, as successful and increasing religious and touristic destinations that contribute to promoting the sustainability of local and touristic ecosystems development within territories where multi-actor cooperation drives social and economic growth within local communities; the ultimate purpose of this is to rediscover the potential of sustainable development in terms of social and public value creation and sustainable policies. To understand these aforementioned concepts, a survey was developed and distributed to gather the opinions of former pilgrims on two different itineraries. The study comprises two sections: a theoretical section and an empirical and descriptive analysis section. In Section 2, data pertaining to the pathways concerning the Camino de Santiago and Via Francigena are reported in order to understand the meaning of choices regarding religious walks as a form of religious tourism, the differences between them, and advanced hypotheses about religious tourism as a means of developing sustainable tourism pathways. The dataset concerning the Camino de Santiago is reported by 'Informe estadìstico Año 2017 Oficina del Peregrino', whilst the dataset regarding Via Francigena is drawn by Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene (2020). Moreover, a subsequent descriptive analysis, using survey data, is provided.

2 | RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND PILGRIMAGES AS SOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Religious tourism should help drive sustainable tourism development. Religion prompts people to move from certain places and travel in search of meanings, values, beliefs, experiences, and themselves, whilst some also experiment with self-enrichment within cultural, touristic and religious sites. Tourism is an important medium for religion in the contemporary global world, because of the growing number of travellers involved in pilgrimages. Despite increasing enlightenment and consumerism, religions continue to exert influence on the beliefs and lives of people, and holidaying is intimately linked with religions. Visitors seek out certain religious sites in search of historical and cultural meaning, not only as places of worship (Ron, 2009). Tourism destinations are developing at increasing speed as a result of their connections to sacred people, places and events. As stated in a satisfying definition, 'religious tourism is that type of tourism whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons' (p. 52) and 'includes the visit of religious ceremonies and conferences, above all the visit of local, regional, national, and international religious centers' (Rinschede, 1992, p. 52). In particular, the

development of religious tourism is both a historical and worldwide phenomenon, and 'religiously motivated tourism is probably as old as religion itself and is consequently the oldest type of tourism' (Rinschede, 1992, p. 53). In this vein, religious tourism is tied more so than expected, to holiday and cultural tourism, as well as to social and group tourism (Rinschede, 1992). Promoting religious tourism as critical system thinking is leading to new open, emancipatory and transformative systems approaches and practices (Boluk et al., 2019; Jackson, 2001; Jackson, 2010; Roxas et al., 2020), whilst it also helps drive sustainable tourism, taking into account the future impact on visitors, industry, environment and communities, and restoring the hope that a human–environment-driven prosperity can be achieved (Hall, 2019). Promoting sustainability within tourism relies on 'a holistic and systemic approach, one that allows individuals, businesses, and organisations to integrate sustainable practices in their daily operations and functions' (Roxas et al., 2020, p. 28). Thereby, addressing critical thinking in tourism helps open up new views on sustainable development. In particular, sustainable tourism development implies committing humanity to prosperity within the limits of the environmental ecosystem (Hall, 2019). Sustainable religious tourism relies on both strengthening a relationships-oriented perspective (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011), and building an organisational intelligence as a sustainable framework to drive social and business changes (Bratianu et al., 2006), fostering interaction among companies, stakeholders and users following a sharing view on value creation and innovation processes within communities (Gazzola et al., 2019a). This kind of development also implies developing multi-actor collaboration with public authority driving policies, which makes it possible to plan and manage the routes for economic benefits and quality of life within communities (Fernandes et al., 2012).

A tourist–worshipper *continuum* is emerging, whereby people are some combination of both (Dowson et al., 2019), and move from tourism in religious spaces to religious tourism and pilgrimage (Heidari et al., 2018), whereas 'a "pilgrim" is a tourist (religious tourist) who is motivated by spiritual or religious factors' (Timothy & Olsen, 2006, p. 7). Traditionally, religiously motivated travel refers to pilgrims who usually visit a site where a miracle took place or where one is expected to happen in the future, so as to fulfil a religious requirement, obtain forgiveness for sins, pray, or seek a cure for illness (Timothy & Boyd, 2002). Spiritual needs emerge as a significant issue of the visitor's experience at religious heritage sites for faith/testimony and restoration benefits (Bond et al., 2015). The needs of tourists become an integral part of the hospitality product (Weidenfeld, 2005). Openness to

values and beliefs and socialisation drive the motivation of visitors of religious sites (Scaffidi Abbate & Di Nuovo, 2013; Vătămănescu et al., 2018). The motivations of these visitors rely on developing emotions and experiencing spiritual values as sources for understanding knowledge generation as knowledge dynamics and transformation. Pilgrimage is a kind of tourism that helps to enhance rational, emotional and spiritual knowledge integration and transformation following a knowledge dynamics view. Pilgrimages contribute to favourable emotions and recognising spiritual values in the experience, thus enabling pilgrims to deal with emotional and spiritual knowledge as a transformative, iterative and interactive process that helps to enrich the whole experience, subsequently leading to new knowledge generation (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2019; Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2020). Worship-oriented attendees contribute to tourism sustainability. In particular, sustaining the authentic experience of pilgrims helps to support managerial development in terms of effective experiential relationships (Lee et al., 2020). Religious tourism aids in enhancing the slow land framework, thus giving rise to sustainable hospitality organisational patterns that support community involvement and cultural managerial policies in alignment with travellers' expectations (Gazzola et al., 2018; Gazzola et al., 2019b; Grechi et al., 2015). Moreover, new technologies and social network platforms as the pillars of the digital era of communication help to both enhance travel experience co-creation and rediscover a slow view for addressing sustainable religious tourism development, subsequently enabling tourism agencies to identify a new tourist destination brand image representation (Lemmi, 2020). ICTs aid in reshaping the tourism experience, as they have a strong influence on how the religious sites, customs and traditions are perceived. ICTs also enable travel agencies and organisations managing religious sites to listen to tourists' voices and opinions (De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016). In particular, the motivation driving the visit influences the perception of ICTs and religious and spiritual experiences need to be kept personal (De Ascaniis et al., 2018). With regard to Via Francigena, multimedia tools and new technological platforms help to promote the pilgrimage experience in an original way by enhancing the destination brand image and local tourism systems (Lemmi, 2020).

3 | CAMINO DE SANTIAGO AND VIA FRANCIGENA AS ROUTES FOR RETHINKING SUSTAINABLE-ORIENTED TOURISM

The Camino de Santiago de Compostela and Via Francigena as relevant sites of pilgrimages and cultural,

historical and religious places attract tourists from everywhere. Tourism is a broader term, and pilgrimage is a narrower term. Pilgrimage is a sub-type or form of tourism (Ron, 2009). Pilgrimages are considered as a 'typical' form of journey undertaken for religious or spiritual purposes (Dowson et al., 2019). Following a working definition, 'Christian pilgrimage as a journey motivated by religious or spiritual causes to a place that is sacred to Christianity' (Ron, 2009, p. 289). As reported by Ron (2009), Christian pilgrimage was essentially started in the fourth century AD, by Constantine, the Byzantine emperor. The main destination of the early pilgrims was the Holy Land, with itineraries that focused on sites mentioned in the four gospels of the New Testament. There are several religious motives: a request for a miracle, atonement for a sin committed, uncovering oneself, or devotion. Pilgrimage refers to interior changes that affect the mind, the soul and the spirit of an individual who decides to start a pilgrimage. In the Christian culture, the main pilgrimage centres are Rome, Terra Santa and Santiago de Compostela where Jubilar years and Gratia years are periodically celebrated. History and culture exert influence on the impact of religious tourism because they contribute to attracting both traditional tourists and pilgrims (Zhang et al., 2007). Contemporary pilgrims' motivations seem to relate more to 'time' or 'relation/event' than place with regard to external manifestations of faith as temples and shrines, and so forth. (Roszak, 2020). The pilgrimage route itself has become a historical phenomenon and relevant element of religious heritage (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). In particular, religious, spiritual, cultural, new experiences-driven and nature- and sports-oriented motivations should drive policy makers and managers to rethink ad hoc policies and services, so as to meet the needs of pilgrims (Amaro et al., 2018).

The length of the Camino de Santiago is approximately 800 km but due to the fact that it is made up of several itineraries, it is particularly difficult to give a precise measure of the median pilgrimage. The route can be divided into three main sections: the French way, the stretch in northern Spain, and the Portuguese section. Each has different stages and paths. After this consideration, tourists know that it is possible to start from any point, follow a path at their own discretion and stop wherever they want, all of which are key aspects of respect. In fact, a pilgrim should travel at least 100 km on the Camino de Santiago, which is necessary to obtain the Compostela (a certificate of showing participation in the Camino). Overall, the most important cities through which the route passes are Pamplona, Logroño, Burgos, León and Astorga. With regard to the previous consideration, due to the presence of different itineraries, it is not

possible to provide an exact estimate for the pilgrimage. The Italian stretch of Via Francigena, specifically that which goes from Gran San Bernardo to Rome, is approximatively 940 km long. Concerning the travel time, considering an average of 20 km of walking per day or 60 km by bicycle, it would range from a month and a half for those who move on foot to 15 days for those who ride a bicycle.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The methodology is based on descriptive statistics. This is the branch of statistics that studies the criteria for the collection, classification, synthesis and representation of data learned from the study of a population or part of it (Diamond & Jefferies, 2002; Paruolo, 1999).

To carry out this analysis, we have used, for the first overall part, secondary data that are represented by the re-elaboration of public information related to the flows and the most relevant information related to tourists about the two pilgrimages in recent periods. The data were found through certain websites (European Association of the Vie Francigene; *Oficina del Peregrino*) and have allowed for the comparison and processing of information, so as to provide a complete overview of these two religious tourist realities. Subsequently, a questionnaire was created in Google Forms and administered via e-mails and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn.

The data have been elaborated on by the authors in order to be able to offer the main survey elements and subsequently describe the routes taken by pilgrims, the most important peculiarities of the travel and the hospitality features; this makes it possible to paint a clear picture of the respondents. Finally, the demographic characteristics of tourists and their motivations relating to pilgrimage have also been analysed.

5 | ANALYSIS OF THE TWO PILGRIMAGES: MACRO DATA OVERVIEW

5.1 | The Camino de Santiago de Compostela

The evolution of tourism related to historical and religious walks and pathways is a complex process that relies on a system that monitors touristic flows and features related to the religious touristic pathways to be designed and implemented. According to the Council of Europe (1987), the Camino de Santiago de Compostela

was emerging as an effective paradigm to follow in order to plan and design policies for European cohesion and integration, in terms of history and culture, as well as a Christian cult place and universal symbol of the European community, because many pilgrims cross it, coming from all the parts of Europe. In 1993, the Camino de Santiago entered into UNESCO humanity cultural heritage.

The Camino de Santiago has been evolving over time, moving from being a spiritual and religious pathway to becoming a place of interest and attention, as both a cultural heritage site and a leisure and recreation destination. With regard to pilgrims on the *Portuguese Route do Santiago de Compostela* leisure/recreation and culture and landscape drive pilgrims to travel the route (Fernandes et al., 2012).

The Camino de Santiago de Compostela is one among the three routes of pilgrimage in the western Christian world. As reported by the data of *Oficina del Peregrino*, 2017 and *Informe estadìstico Año Santo* 2010, in these 2 years a total of 301 036 pilgrims arrived at the Office of Pilgrim in Santiago de Compostela. The flows and motivations of the pilgrims emerge in the following tables, which present a comparison between the years 2010 (the Saint Year) and 2017. Generally, there were more male than female as pilgrims. Thereby, whilst in 2010 there were 151 706 males and 120 429 females, in 2017 there was an increasing presence of females (148 867) in comparison with male pilgrims (153 169). Of the pilgrims, 55% were between 30 and 60 years old, whilst 17% were over 60, and 28% were under 30.

In 2017, it is registered that 142 662 pilgrims with religious motives (44%), 130 831 pilgrims with other motivations in addition to religion (47%) and 27 543 people without any religious motives (9%) began the walk. In 2010, the Saint Year, 148 964 pilgrims had religious motives, 109 380 pilgrims had other motivations in addition to religious motives and 13 791 had no religious motive.

In 2017, 278 490 pilgrims chose to undertake the walk (92.51%), 32 926 pilgrims selected the bicycle (7.29%), 1315 pilgrims opted for the horse (0.14%) and a very small portion chose the pram (0.01%).

Completing the Camino de Santiago by foot helps to enhance the experience of pilgrims willing to explore rural landscapes, visit little villages and access to monuments along the pathway of Compostela. Most of the pilgrims were likely to arrive in Santiago and receive the Compostela even if they had encountered, during the pathway, certain injuries such as headache, tendinitis and wounds on the feet because of intense, physical efforts due to constantly living in the nature. Of them, 64.89% had a job, as follows: employees (25.65%), professionals (11.01%) and knowledge workers (10.66%); 18.76% were students and 12.59% are retirees (*Oficina del Peregrino*, 2017).

As reported by *Informe estadìstico Año* 2017 and *Oficina del Peregrino* and with regard to the importance of Giacobbe ways (French Walk, Portuguese Walk, North Walk, Primitive Walk, English Walk, Via della Plata and other minor walks), in terms of the percentage of pilgrims who walk, the French Walk is the main access view for Santiago. In 2017, 60.04% of pilgrims (180 736) followed it. Thereby, the percentage of pilgrims taking the French Walk is decreasing over time. It stood at 63.37% in 2016 and was 69.54% in 2010. The appreciation of the Portuguese Walk is increasing over time. It stood at 19.68% in 2017, was 17.83% in 2016 and was only 12.55% in 2010. Other minor walks are also increasing in terms of the percentage of pilgrims who select them: the Primitive Walk (4.55% in 2017 and 4.35% in 2016) and the English Walk (3.76% in 2017 and 3.49% in 2016).

In 2017, only 44.01% of the pilgrims came from Spain, whilst 55.99% of the pilgrims came from outside. The Italians constituted 8.99%, the Germans 7.72%, the French 2.21%, people coming from United States 4.30%, whilst the Portuguese represented 4,30%, the Irish (2.21%), the British tourists from the UK 1.70%, and Brazilians and South Korean people 1.70% (*Oficina del Peregrino*, 2017).

5.2 | Via Francigena

Via Francigena is one of the major Italian cultural itineraries and world touristic destinations and flows (Lemmi, 2020). Historically, Via Francigena comes from France with regard to the pathways that were coming to Italy arriving from the west. Today, there are two main pathways that pilgrims take to negotiate the walk: the first is the pathway followed by pilgrims going to, or coming back from, the Camino de Santiago. Pilgrims arrive in Vercelli entering from the step of Monginevro, which is the most important step in virtue of historical and devotion aspects; they then follow the Val di Susa and the city of Turin. Pilgrims coming from Northern France arrive in Vercelli through the step of Gran San Bernardo and Aosta. As soon as they arrive in Vercelli, the path develops along the itinerary that concerns Pavia, Piacenza, Fidenza, the step of Cisa, Pontremoli, Lucca, Siena, Bolsena, Viterbo and Rome. There is also a third pathway following the coast of Liguria moving from Ventimiglia and connecting to the main itinerary of Francigena at Sarzana.

From Rome, the road follows along the South Via Francigena and continues through the Via of Acri;

—WILEY | **391**

indeed, this route has been reopened to pilgrims in order to promote and develop the pathway. In 2006 the Italian Ministry of Culture and Tourism (*Ministero italiano dei Beni Culturali e Turismo* or MIBACT) and local autonomies and associations designed and planned the pathway along 1031 km between the Passo de Gran San Bernardo and Rome crossing 140 municipalities and seven regions (Valle d'Aosta, Piemonte, Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Toscana and Lazio) in order to drive the Via Francigena economy by promoting tourism opportunities for territories and villages; indeed, such a drive leads to the development of sustainable economic growth coherent with the need to preserve the natural environment, which in turn helps slow tourism management so as to improve the accessibility of pathways, infrastructures, information and hospitality services for pilgrims.

Since 2004, Via Francigena as a centre of cultural renaissance and opportunity for cultural and sustainable development has received increasing interest in terms of its development and growth. In 2004, Valle D'Aosta, Piemonte, Lombardia, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Lazio developed a common project in order to redevelop the pathway of Via Francigena. The issues of tourism in Via Francigena concern 2700 accomodations and 81 000 beds; every year there are 150 000 nights. Only 54.1% of accommodation facilities explicitly refer to pilgrim tourists, and only 15.1% offers special prices to pilgrim tourists (Figure 1).

Even if 70% of pilgrims come from Italy, Via Francigena as the international pathway is becoming a very popular and attractive cultural and religious tourism destination in Europe. Via Francigena is also becoming an attractive itinerary for pilgrims from all over the world. The other pilgrims or walkers come from France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Norway and Austria, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. Generally speaking, with regard to 2015–2016–2017, there were more male (58%, 56%, 53%) than female (42%, 44%, 47%) pilgrims even if the percentage of pilgrim women is constantly increasing over time.

Via Francigena is an intergenerational walk. As illustrated by Figure 2, in 2017, the number of teenagers and young and senior people was increasing as a kind of tourists interested to select it. Distribution of travels and the year of pilgrimage are presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4. The way and the days of travel are elucidated in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

People prefer to walk (86% in 2017, 80% in 2016, 76% in 2015) as opposed to taking a bicycle (24% in 2015, 20% in 80%, 14% in 2017). Thereby, with regard to selecting a bicycle, it is important to develop this means of travel, and so it is vital to rethink the pathway in a sustainable way. In 2017, pilgrims preferred to form a group or stay in a couple to start the walk.

The walking is the first push factor for travellers; the second is the destination. Thereby, important aspects include spirituality, one's own knowledge, the search for contact with a natural environment and the cultural aspect of the walk in terms of historical pathway through European culture over time. In 2017, spirituality and spiritual experience sharing contributed to qualifying the travel. Food and wine constitute another important motivation that leads the tourist to uncover local traditions and specificity.

Despite the fact the warmth makes walking difficult, most of the departures occurred in the summer season in August and July, because these months are holiday or vacation periods for people. In spring and autumn, there were more pilgrims coming from outside. Via Francigena is consistent with the slow walking style and takes 7–8 days (50%). Many choose to undertake the walk at the weekend in the spring season. 20% of the pilgrims were moving for more than 15 days. Tourists select cities such as Fidenza, Lucca, Siena and Viterbo as places to start the travel.

Via Francigena is related to tourists' internationalisation. It is an intergenerational pathway involving both young and senior people. Services and businesses are born to support the religious touristic pathway, encouraging communication among territories and stimulating the belongingness of local communities.
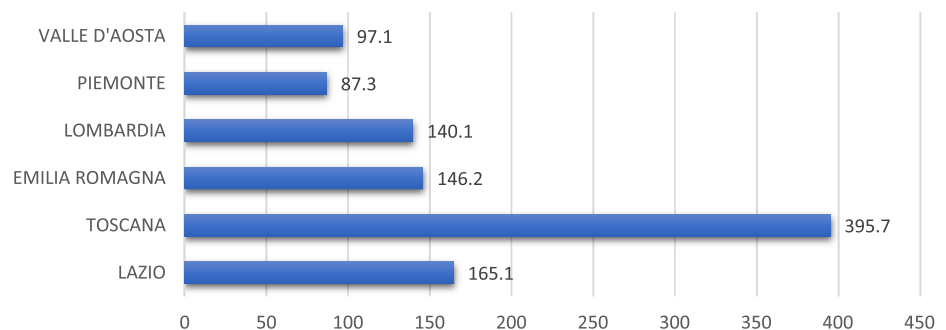

FIGURE 1 Length of Via Francigena pathway within regions interested. Source: re-elaborated from 'Bilancio di missione' dell'Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene, 2010 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
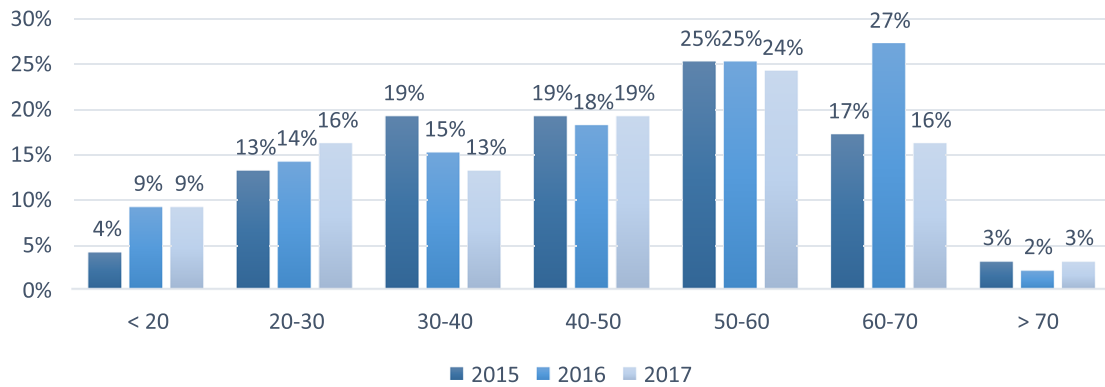
FIGURE 2 The age of pilgrims (2015–2017). Source: Report re-elaborated poll filled in by *Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene* [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
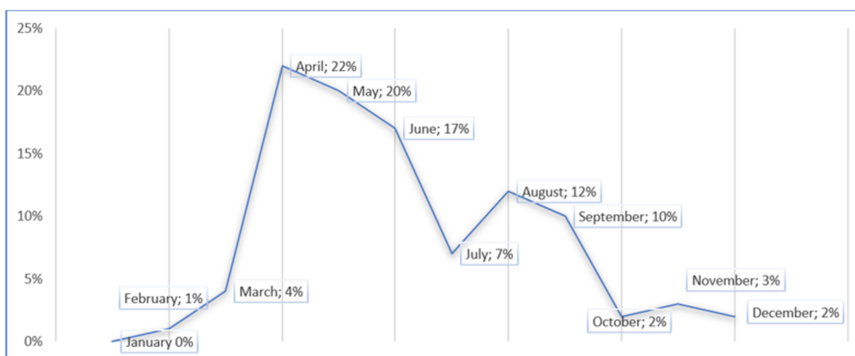
FIGURE 3 Distribution of travels in 2017. Source: Re-elaboration of poll by *Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene* [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
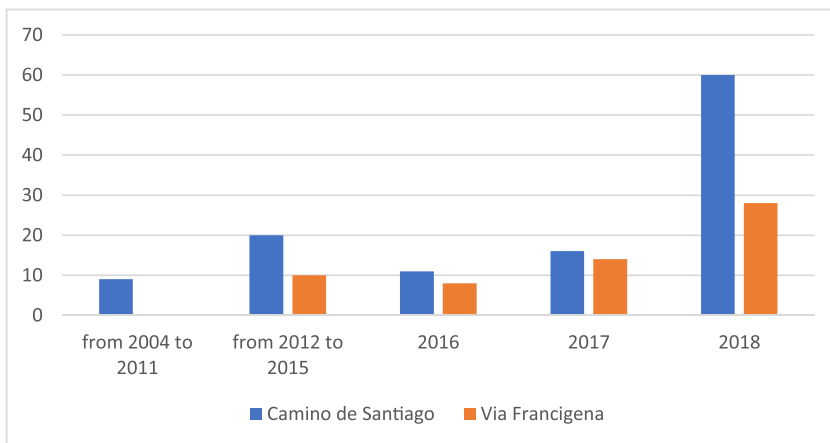
FIGURE 4 Year of pilgrimage. Source: Personal elaboration from survey data [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Via Francigena and other related walking routes have become excellent platforms that contribute to engendering employment flows for cultural, accessible and sustainable themes and activities.

## 5.3 | Analysis of the two pilgrimages: Survey

To better understand and outline the profile of the pilgrim tourist who decided to embark on a pilgrimage experience, two questionnaires (regarding the two itineraries) were submitted in late 2018 to understand the extent of this phenomenon, the differences between the two journeys, and the reasons why the individuals chose their trip. We have collected 116 answers regarding the Camino de Santiago and 58 regarding Via Francigena, all belonging to subjects of Italian nationality.

5.3.1 | Demographic characteristics

With regard to the personal profile of the pilgrim tourist, the questionnaire yielded the following results: 56% of

FIGURE 5 Way of travel. Source: Personal elaboration from survey data [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
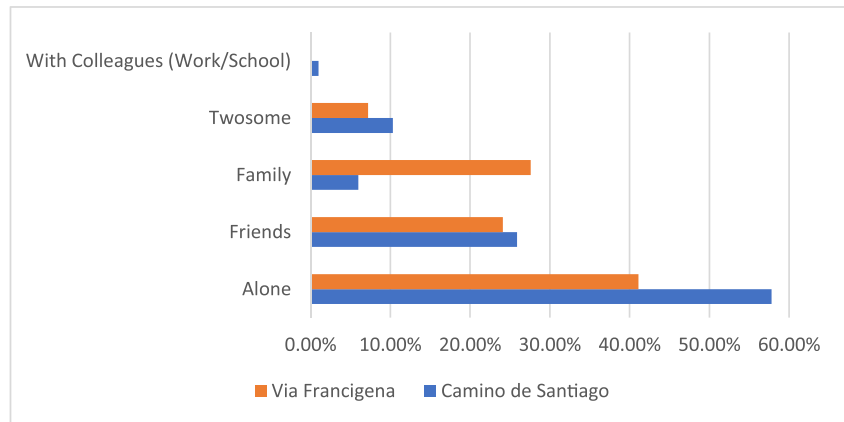
FIGURE 6 Days of pilgrimage. Source: Personal elaboration from survey data [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
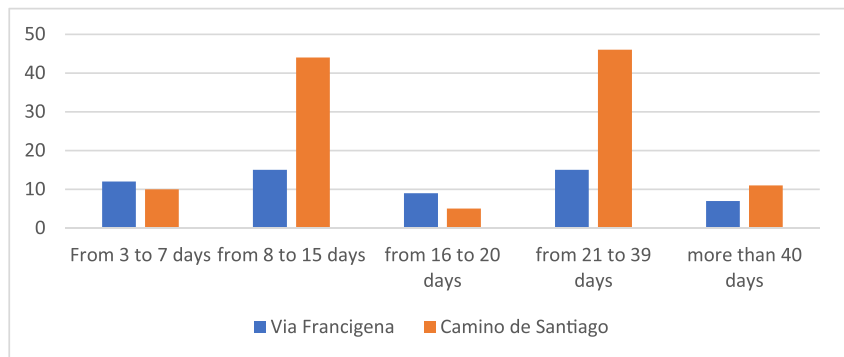
the travellers on the Camino de Santiago were women, whilst on Via Francigena the percentage was 50%. Considering the age, the majority of the sample was represented by people under 45 years old (66.4%) for the Camino, whilst for Via Francigena there was a clear majority of people from 46 to 60 years old (53.4%).

The highest percentage based on the declared job was that represented by the employee for the two itineraries (51.3% for Santiago and 60% for Via Francigena).

The questionnaire also presented a question related to the period of pilgrimage; the answers are represented in the following graph.

5.3.2 | Travel characteristics

Considering the methods of pilgrimage, after looking at the results in Figure 5, it can be said that, in both cases, the greater percentage was that relative to those who decided to leave for the journey alone.

The modes of transport were mainly those of a typical pilgrimage; in fact, only a small minority decided to travel the itinerary by bicycle (1.7% for Via Francigena and 4.3% for the Camino de Santiago). The remaining portion chose to make the journey on foot.

A typical factor of a pilgrimage is the travel time, which is studied in depth in the graph below.

The distribution of the travel time in this survey makes it clear that, in the two itineraries, the ideal period for the pilgrimage was from 8 to 15 days and from 21 to 39 days.

The last two elements of the survey are related to the costs and the hospitality sector.

As can be seen from Figure 7, the average cost per night was higher in the accommodation facilities on Via Francigena. 42.2% of the Santiago pilgrims affirmed that their daily sleeping cost was between 0 and 8 euros, compared with 5.2% for Via Francigena. Furthermore, the percentage of those who spent more than 25 euros was much higher on Via Francigena.

Finally, the daily expenditure on food was around 10/20 euros per person in both cases.

5.3.3 | Motivation features

An interesting fact concerns the reasons for the pilgrims' choices. From the study, it emerged that a large percentage of those respondents who filled in the questionnaire on Via Francigena affirmed that they had previously
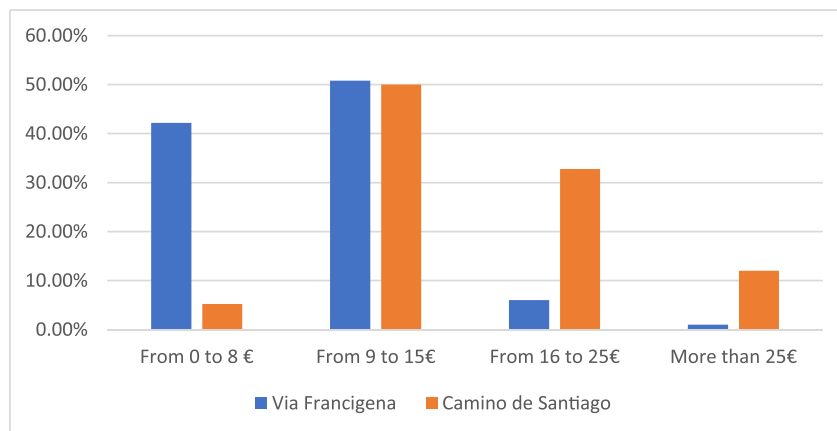
FIGURE 7 Daily cost for hospitality. Source: Personal elaboration from survey data [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

made the Camino de Santiago trip. These same people highlighted how, unfortunately, compared with Spain, in Italy there is a lack of accommodation facilities suitable for welcoming the pilgrims. At the same time, the reasons expressed by the pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago were primarily related to the huge number of hospitality facilities, which are cheaper and more widespread in the considered territories.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Religious tourism and pilgrimages help to drive the sustainable tourism development and social and economic growth of touristic destinations in sacred sites. Today, religious tourism is becoming an important source for social and public value creation processes within communities by enabling territories and local economies to strengthen cooperative processes and collaboration for sustainable development.

The Camino de Santiago and Via Francigena help rethink sustainable organisational and strategic approaches to land growth to benefit local communities. Via Francigena is at the beginning of its development following the paradigm provided by Camino de Santiago in the 1990s. Via Francigena and the Camino de Santiago, as international and cultural sites, are developing across more countries. The touristic potential of Via Francigena is relevant for enabling low-cost reception and hospitality, as well as for driving touristic growth that is sustainable, responsible and effective. The number of travellers is continuously increasing. The site is becoming attractive for international tourists. Thereby, the development of Via Francigena, as emerged from the surveys, calls for reception structures and more beds, because at present, there are not enough. As indicated by the surveys, despite the fact that the number of respondents was not so high, some differences between the two

itineraries did emerge. As an attractive touristic site, the Camino de Santiago is playing a relevant role within local and urban economies. Following a sustainable view for Via Francigena development, designing and implementing both availability and access to hospitality and accommodation facilities helps to revitalise de-urbanised spaces and semi-abandoned places at the same time as promoting sustainable growth.

Rethinking pilgrimages as critical systems thinking (Jackson, 2010) aids in driving sustainable tourism development and supports the social and economic growth of local economies and urban areas by improving both the organisational and managerial capabilities of stakeholders involved in multi-actor collaboration, so as to enhance social and economic value creation processes. In this study, there are theoretical, managerial and social implications. Planning and managing religious tourism and pilgrimages helps to strategically define the roles and tasks of all the stakeholders within a multi-collaboration framework. Developing hospitality infrastructures and support for pilgrims implies rethinking managerial capabilities and orientation in building relationships with visitors by meeting their needs satisfying those needs. Understanding pilgrimage as a driver of sustainable tourism development enables the social dimension of community development by involving all the stakeholders, so that they can contribute to social and economic value creation processes within territories (Boluk et al., 2019; Hall, 2019). As emerged from previous works, religious tourism can also be an element of development used to obtain, in different territories, an increase of a branch of sustainable tourism.

This paper tries to combine the sustainable tourism phenomenon, relating to the journey made by tourists, with the religious component. The comparison between the two itineraries, previously described from a theoretical and data point of view, offers the starting point for future comparisons with other itineraries, using the same

descriptive methodology. In this way, other scholars, but also practitioners and policy makers can start from the present work to compare other possible case studies or can develop similar routes to combine the tourist developments of a territory that can have a potential religious vocation.

In this study, some limitations emerge. Indeed, a limited research sample was identified, whilst a small number of cases were considered. In terms of further research perspectives, it is important to improve the sample by increasing the number of respondents and to refine the research with regard to the behaviours, attitudes and motivations of pilgrims, whilst also proposing a comparison between the two itineraries investigated and other religious touristic destinations situated within and outside Europe.

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