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### The Via Francigena Salentina as an Opportunity for Experiential Tourism and a Territorial Enhancement Tool

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#### ABSTRACT

The essay presents the results of a 10-year archival and on-field study, carried out by a research group (bringing together archaeologists, geographers, medieval historians and art historians) of the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Salento University, who have rebuilt the Via Francigena Salentina following ancient pilgrim routes heading to the Holy Land. The researchers have mapped and catalogued natural and cultural highlights along the route, also analysing tourism services on a local scale and the environmental impact of human activities.

After presenting a short assessment of the adequacy of cultural routes in meeting the new requirements imposed by the tourism demand the research analyses the Via Francigena Salentina's main features, also taking into account goods and services provided by the territory and the capability of local professionals and administrators to drive and boost effective relationships among stakeholders, also activating enhancement processes and organic and unitary promotional initiatives and always respecting both visitors' needs and the environment.

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**Keywords:** Via Francigena Salentina; Pilgrim Routes; Responsible Tourism; Territorial Development

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## Introduction

Integrated in the contemporary landscape and its peculiar, multilayered background, cultural routes have proved to be extremely useful tools of heritage recovery, also supporting the development of a slow and experiential tourism as well as territorial enhancement. A hoped-for-role in the future of the Via Francigena Salentina (VFS), a pilgrimage itinerary heading to the Holy Land, which has recently received the attention of researchers (Trono, 2012; Trono, Leo Imperiale, Marella, 2014), politicians, local stakeholders and intermediaries. The VFS is the final section of the route, or, more precisely, the route network that gave new life to the ancient road system dating back to the Romans and turned it into the core of the pilgrimage tradition, which was extremely popular during the Middle Age and after the First Crusade. Following the ancient Via Traiana, the VFS starts in Egnazia (Fasano, municipality of Brindisi) and ends in Otranto (in the municipality of Lecce), in most cases branching into *diverticula* and crossing ancient pilgrim routes. The path, highlighting both cultural and natural features, proceeds to Capo Santa Maria, following internal routes of popular religiosity. For its most part, the route stretches along the ancient Via Traiana – in some tracts *Via Francesca* and *Via Francigena*<sup>1</sup>, and follows the itinerary detailed by the Anonymous pilgrim of Bordeaux in 333 A.D.

Rich in cultural and natural highlights and interestingly interconnected thanks to a local-scale project, the VFS route has been painstakingly studied and mapped by the researchers of the Salento University, as well as tested by hikers. The itinerary is increasingly popular with tourists flocking to Apulia and Salento in search of sun, sea, beaches, good food and the warm hospitality of the local people. The landscape typical of interior and marginal areas is also highly appreciated. The section of the Via Francigena winding its way along Apulia's southernmost tip represents undoubtedly a good opportunity for local territorial development, but also highlights the undeniable shortage of services and accommodation structures, not to mention the degradation of the environment by illegal waste dumping and the lack of awareness, on behalf of the local community, of the value of its own cultural heritage. A major threat is also posed by an increasingly voracious tourism, which should be, on the contrary, turned into a more sustainable and respectful activity, aligned with the principles of a green economy.

### 1. Responsible tourism and cultural routes

According to Marcel Proust “the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new territories, but in having new eyes” (1978). An aphorism that fits perfectly for the allocentric tourist, as defined by Plog: a curious, adventurous and extroverted individual, appreciating new discoveries and experiences. A tourist longing for originality and increasingly skeptical of cultural “serial reproductions”, also searching

for alternatives to the traditional cultural offer. This type of tourist is interested in understanding the cultural heritage of local communities by means of experiential learning, active participation and involvement. By plunging into the new territory, the visitor is allowed to establish an empathic relationship with the locals. Other distinguishing features include the awareness of environmental issues and the degrading of natural resources as a result of the impact of human activities – with tourism as one of the main culprits, both at a local and a global scale. Eager to practise sustainable activities, these travelers show a remarkable appreciation for an increasingly sustainable-oriented landscape. The latter issue has been reconsidered in recent times, with the integration of tourism in national and international initiatives aimed at promoting the so called *green economy* (UNEP, 2015) and the conservation/enhancement of the rural landscape (see also EAFRD regulations in the Common Agricultural Policy, 2014-2020<sup>2</sup>).

The rural landscape is regarded as a true resource, with a high potential to benefit local communities themselves and fulfil a function of preservation of historical and cultural resources, thus making the anthropisation process increasingly sustainable over time. The focus is once again placed on the rural landscape, as glorified by nostalgia, past memories and the rediscovery of ancient lifestyles. Faded memories are infused with new life thanks to a tourist placing a high value on traditions, the rediscovery of the past and the serenity of the countryside, also keeping in mind sustainability meant as an “evolution model for the human society, suitable to lead to conscious choices ensuring a long-lasting future for mankind by protecting our environment” (Tinacci Mossello, 2014, p. 273). The crucial role of sustainability, “meant, in its broadest sense, as a key concept useful to conceive strategies of tourism development in Italy” is underlined in the final report drafted by the Stati Generali del Turismo (a general assembly on tourism). The document assigns to tourism a “cross-cutting role”, with the purpose of “linking together and integrating different production activities”, and as such requiring a proper management of inbound flows and, most of all, the adoption of a “tourism development model suitable to support a sustainable economic growth, taking into account our vulnerable system, made up of cities of art and interior lands boasting a rich yet mostly unknown heritage. A heritage which must be protected, in order to preserve its beauty and authenticity”. The Final Report provides “an all-round vision of sustainable tourism, both in terms of environmental consideration and mobility. It also evaluates economic sustainability, accessibility, usability and the touristic product developing method, linking together territory and authentic values” (Stati Generali del Turismo – Documento Finale, Pietrarsa, 2015). Tourism must be respectful of the environment and cultural traditions of the hosting community, which holds a prominent role in the whole process and has the right to be the true protagonist of a long-lasting and sustainable development. As the warden of its own territory, the local community is not only guaranteed “participation” and “co-design” opportunities but also, most of all, the rights to its own cultural heritage, that is the conservation and sustainable use of all assets with a recognizable identity.

The cultural route/itinerary is the main tool to ensure that the historical-cultural heritage is preserved and that the local community is allowed full participation in projects of territorial conservation and enhancement. Both old and new routes follow

linear, and sometimes network- or spiral-like itineraries, along a *road* made up of assets reflecting relationships and cultural influences shared over time by different communities. The analysis of the route/itinerary and its network implies an assessment of the capability to protect and enhance the *milieu*, or, in other words, the system including specific and unique economical, social, cultural and environmental resources in its broadest sense. Understanding the relationships among all involved stakeholders (both public institutions and private organizations, companies and institutional and scientific entities) is also instrumental to pursue a tourism development strategy. The cultural route is not only a *geographic itinerary*, but also a *mental process*, hinged on existing and newly-conceived elements. Following a well defined thematic context, the itinerary is intersected with specific heritage resources located at a specific point and/or area (*nodes*) or aligned along an axis (*lines*), within a systemic interaction of cultural, economic, political and social features and stakeholders. The itinerary fully meets the requirements of those individuals eager to live an experience ensuring authenticity, real emotions and off-the-beaten-tracks adventures; a journey allowing tourists to truly experience and assimilate the visited place, with a deep understanding of the local culture and natural environment, also taking a break from our modern and frenetic lifestyle. The route unleashes the visitor's creative potential, with his/her participation in educational experiences developed within the local cultural context. The cultural route has been entrusted by the UNESCO with the task of protecting and regulating strong identity and cultural exchange values, with the aim to enhance and foster the integration among different communities. Its value lies in the capability to link together multiple factors of tourist attraction, with special reference to marginal and neglected areas. When considered individually, indeed, such factors may seem to be irrelevant and inadequate to persuade the tourist to invest time and money in the visited place and, most of all, unfit to ensure the respect of the cultural integrity and sustainable development at the local scale.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), a UNESCO advisory board, was among the first to acknowledge their value. *The Charter of Cultural Routes (2008)* has highlighted their instrumental role in "offering an exceptional setting for a culture of peace based on the ties of shared history as well as the tolerance, respect and appreciation for cultural diversity that characterizes the community involved". Cultural routes improve communication and comprehension among different peoples, and have proved to be an excellent instrument of cultural heritage preservation. They are "resources for a durable social and economic development". The *European Council* considers them as an effective tool of dialogue, intercultural cooperation and European identity reinforcement. The programme *Cultural routes of the Council of Europe*, launched in 1987 and linking together seventy nations across four continents (Africa, northern and southern America, Asia and Europe), aims to protect and enhance (also in touristic terms) the European cultural heritage. Officially approved cultural routes are linked to a historical itinerary, a cultural concept, a personality, or a phenomenon with a transnational relevance and meaning, which is essential to understand and respect European values, the promotion of an intercultural dialogue and the appreciation of different cultures. In order to be successful, the itinerary must not only be supported by a solid historical background, permeated by culture and

focused on building a European cultural identity, but it should also ideally induce tourism development by stimulating economic interests. In this sense, most notable examples are the Camino de Santiago de Compostela and the Via Francigena, the most ancient and longest medieval pilgrim route winding along Roman consular or military roads. The Via Francigena, actually a network consisting of several Vie Francigene, plays a relevant role not only in cultural and historical terms, but also as an economic resource and a tourism promotion tool for territories located in the interior. And this is exactly what is happening to the areas located along the route section leading to Rome. A prospect also yearned for by southern Italy while waiting for the already announced itinerary extension to Brindisi and, hopefully, Santa Maria di Leuca, situated in the Lecce municipality area.

## 2. The Southern Via Francigena

Apulia has always played a relevant role in linking the East and the West, with its ports serving as strategic crossroads in the Mediterranean area: places of arrival and departure for pilgrims either heading to or coming from Jerusalem. In most cases, they would reach Constantinople by embarking to Durazzo and crossing Albania, Macedonia and Thrace along the ancient Via Egnatia (Cardini, 2008, pp. 2526). As Cardini points out, at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Apulian ports were also a meeting point for believers returning from the Holy Land and heading to Rome: “They often used to stop here to visit the Sanctuary in Santa Maria di Leuca, other significant religious buildings located along the Adriatic coast or the sanctuary of sSan Michele in the Gargano area (Id., p. 39)”. In particular, as Dalena (2003) explains, “when coming back from the Holy Land, the *Burdigalense* pilgrim stopped in Otranto and embarked again in Benevento along the Via Traiana “ (p. 71).

When traveling to the Holy Land, the Via Appia provided the most important connecting route with Apulia’s ports - at least as far as Capua. The evidence for this is reported in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* written by an anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux and “resembling, as a whole, the *Itinerarium Antonini* and the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. It’s the earliest and most complete *itinerarium*, a sort of guidebook for pilgrims to use when traveling to Jerusalem in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, a time that witnessed the great popularity of Christian pilgrimage from Europe to sacred places” (Dalena, 2008, p. 41).

In order to reach Apulia from Rome, pilgrims mostly relied on the Via Appia Traiana, the road built at the orders of emperor Traiano, linking Rome to Brindisi and Otranto. However, as Dalena underlines, “pilgrims also used secondary and interior roads, known for their shortness and the presence of religious sanctuaries along the way” (Id. ibidem). Starting in Rome and following the Via Appia Antica or the Latina-Casilina, the traveller finally reached Capua. From here, the large imperial road led to Benevento, where the route split into three directions (the Angel’s routes), all ending in San Michele. The northern section passed by San Severo in Apulia, and from there to San Michele Arcangelo, in the Gargano area; the median route reached Lucera, whilst the

southern itinerary passed by Troia, a key junction along the way (Paolucci, 2008, pp. 20 and 22). “The junction in Benevento split the Via Appia in two sections: the first one, the Via Appia itself, reaching Brindisi across an interior route after passing by the port of Taranto, and a Via Appia Traiana initially heading east-north-east and then south-east crossing Canosa, also leading to Brindisi following a semi-coastal route” (Cardini, 2008, p. 27).

The Via Traiana, with its two variant routes following respectively a coastal and an interior itinerary “was not only identified with the Appia-Traiana consular road, but also with the Litoranea Adriatica (from Siponto to Bari), the Regi Tratturi and sheep tracks (or unpaved roads) (see also Copeta, Marzulli , 2012, p238). From Egnazia, the route made its way to Brindisi (Via Traiana), and from there to Otranto (Traiana “Calabra”), branching into a network of “*diverticula*” across the whole Salento and also intersecting with other ancient pilgrim itineraries. Finally, there was another pilgrim route, the Sallentina, which followed the coastline from Otranto to Capo di Leuca passing by Castro and Vereto. From Capo di Leuca, the road crossed the eastern side of Salento, going past Ugento, Alezio, Manduria and Taranto (see also Uggeri in Dalena, 2003, p. 71).



**Figure 1:** Fasano (Brindisi). Roman cart-tracks along the Via Traiana in Egnazia  
Source: Photo by Fabio Mitrotti

### 2.1. The Via Francigena Salentina

Following the ancient roman route called Traiana “Calabra”, the Via Francigena Salentina winds along the eastern side of Apulia’s southern tip, from Fasano to Otranto. This is Italy’s easternmost point: from here, when the weather is fine, the Acrocerauni mountains, the Karaburun promontory and the isle of Saseno, in the near Albania, are all visible in the distance. The route intersects with a few local devotional itineraries and proceeds as far as Santa Maria di Leuca, crossing the rolling hills of the Serre Salentine. Among the many travel accounts written by pilgrims visiting Apulia in their journey to the Holy Land, the *Itinerarium Hierosolimitanum* or *Burdigalense* by

the Anonymous from Bordeaux (333 A.D.) was selected as the *Francigeno* route. Some changes and detours have been necessarily imposed by the current infrastructural and residential layout – areas with shopping centres, as well as officially authorized landfills, were for example excluded from the itinerary. Furthermore, in order to ensure the traveller's safety, heavily trafficked roads were also avoided (state and provincial highways, side roads included). The focus was on paths and roads situated in the countryside, without crossing, whenever possible, private properties. Secondary roads coinciding with the itinerary were also favored, with some of them already equipped at a local scale, such as a section of the trail in the megalithic park established in the nearby of Giurdignano. Particular attention was given to the Mediterranean landscape and its natural, cultural and historical distinguishing features. A rural world, shaped by a traditional lifestyle, with just a few main elements survived to our times. The project has thus taken into account archaeological complexes and natural and environmental highlights, as well as historical and architectural features such as olive-oil mills, millstones, peasants' houses (*pajare, caseddhe*) and manor farms - impressive monuments of the rural culture, which have been restored and turned into charming and comfortable hotel accommodations.

In this section, the Via Francigena crosses the ancient *Terra d'Otranto*, a flat land which is typical for the Salento area. On the horizon, the southern slopes of the Murge plateau and the Serre Salentine, low mountains formations stretching into the interior territory of Brindisi and Taranto and finally merging, as a "triple" range, into Salento's southernmost tip, in the municipality of Lecce. Along the way, the local limestone dominates the landscape. The white stone is commonly used to build low walls, shelters, fences or as a support in terracing structures. In the past, the local community also relied on limestone to erect megalithic monuments or simple architectural structures. Stones and nature are the main features from Egnazia (an ancient Messapian centre and prominent archaeological park), and in Brindisi.

Here, surrounded by centuries-old olive oil trees, woods and Mediterranean scrubs (Bosco di Lamacornola), stand the earliest megalithic monuments built in the Salento area, such as the Dolmen in Montalbano. Shrouded by mystery, these sites were probably used to perform magic rituals or as primitive astronomical observatories. Whatever the purpose, they symbolize the degree of civilization and technical skills of the local people. Not to be missed along the way, the Shrine of Madonna del Pozzo, situated in the historical centre of Pozzo Faceto (a small village in the nearby of Fasano), the close-by church of Seppannibale, one of the few proofs of the Longobard domination in Apulia (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) and the three hypogeal churches: two of them were consecrated, respectively, to San Lorenzo and San Giovanni and are decorated with fine frescoes. The area also boasts the presence of fortified manor farms, although in most cases these structures were provided with cave oil-mills – like Li Santuri (a name that refers to the sacredness of the area) and Ottava Grande. Next to the latter we find the medieval Church of San Pietro, dating back from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century. It was mentioned for the first time in the bull written in 1180 by Pope Alessandro III to the bishop of Monopoli, listing lands, hamlets and churches subject to his jurisdiction. (Carriero, 1999)

Other highlights include the magnificent cathedral in Ostuni, and the Church of

Sant'Anna and the castle Dentice di Frasso in Carovigno. Proceeding towards Brindisi, the Sanctuary of Madonna di Belvedere, an important pilgrimage destination, and the hypogeal crypt of San Biagio, enriched with a beautiful cycle of frescoes (fig. 2), also deserve a visit. The city of Brindisi provides significant evidence of the presence of chivalric orders in the Church of Santa Maria del Casale (fig. 3) , where the Templars of the Reign of Naples stood trial in 1310, as well as in the Temple of San Giovanni al Sepolcro, renown for its peculiar round-shaped layout – an interesting reproduction of the *Anastasis* of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, owned by the Jerosolimitan order (fig. 4).



**Figure 2:** San Vito dei Normanni (Brindisi). Hypogeal crypt in San Biagio  
Source: Photo by Fabio Mitrotti



**Figure 3:** Brindisi. Santa Maria del Casale  
Source: Photo by Luigi Oliva





**Figure 4:** Brindisi. San Giovanni al Sepolcro

Source: Photo by Fabio Mitrotti

From Brindisi to Lecce, the plain is the undisputed protagonist. Here, pilgrims and travelers can walk long distances, nearly effortlessly. The landscape is extremely interesting, with both cultural and natural highlights: beautiful vineyards, making this land famous for the production of DOC wines, alternate with wide pastures and centuries-old olive groves, dotted with oaks and carob trees – remains of the ancient forest that once surrounded Lecce. Past the Bosco di Tramazzone and the archaeological site of Valesio, in the Torchiarolo countryside (an important Messapian centre destroyed in the Middle Age), we reach Lecce, a major city and tourism resource. Known for its many religious buildings, Lecce still retains limited evidence of pilgrimages and the presence of chivalry-religious orders in the church consecrated to San Niccolò and San Cataldo, next to the Padri Olivetani monastery. In the surroundings, the landscape features thousand-year old olive groves, crossed by ancient cart roads built by the Romans, and is also enhanced by massive fortified manor farms with impressive hypogeal olive presses. Pilgrims especially treasure two religious buildings, which were known already in the Middle Age as worship and resting places: the Italian-Greek Abbey of Santa Maria di Cerrate and the Church of Santa Maria d’Aurio (both from the 12<sup>th</sup> century) (figs. 5 and 6).



**Figure 5:** Lecce. Abbey of Santa Maria di Cerrate  
Source: Photo by Loretta Martella



**Figure 6:** Surbo (Lecce). Church of Santa Maria d'Aurio  
Photo by Fabio Mitrotti

After leaving Lecce and the close-by fortified hamlet of Acaya, with its famous castle from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we reach the so called *Grecìa salentina*, one of the most interesting areas in Salento in terms of cultural heritage and tourism highlights. Rich in natural and cultural resources (with special reference to languages, music, archaeology, architecture and arts), the territory can be exemplified by three main elements: water, olive oil and stone, standing out as symbols of the local “*salentinità*”. These elements are raised to eternity by the *pietra* (stone) used to build the houses with the typical inner courtyard, shelters and megalithic buildings - such as the two dolmens *Gurgulante and Placa* and the menhirs *Grassi and Staurotomea*. *Water* scarcity is addressed with an ingenious system (perhaps invented by the Byzantines) called *pozzelle*: this is because the territory lacks in superficial hydrography, but is rich in subterranean water sources. *Olive oil* dominates the landscape and production activities, with its story, made up of ups and downs, told by ancient oil mills and modern olive presses scattered across the whole territory. In the heart of *Grecìa* we

find remains of the ancient Calimera woods and the small Church of San Vito. After proceeding for nearly 600 hundred metres along cart-roads between Martano and Carpignano Salentino, the visitor can appreciate the medieval farmhouse in Apigliano, today an archaeological park, as well as numerous worship places and pilgrim destinations (e.g. the Monastery of the Cistercians, the Sanctuary of the Madonna della grotta and the crypt of Santa Cristina in Carpignano Salentino (fig. 7).



**Figure 7:** Carpignano Salentino (Lecce). Crypt of Santa Cristina

Source: Photo by Antonio Carluccio

Heading in the direction of Otranto and following the ancient pilgrim route, the main highlights include the fortified manor farm in Torcito, in the Cannole countryside, the Anfiano manor farm, built after the abandonment of the homonymous medieval farmhouse, and the Sanctuary of Madonna di Montevergine (Palmariggi) – still today a pilgrimage destination. When crossing the megalithic park stretching across the territory of Giuggianello and Giurdignano, scattered with dolmens and menhirs (e.g. the dolmen Stabile and the menhir San Paolo), the route passes by the Quattromacine manor farm and the hypogeal oil press known as “Trappitello del Duca”, before reaching the Valle dell’Idro and, finally, the city of Otranto.

### *2.1. The devotional route from Otranto to Capo Santa Maria di Leuca*

The final section of the *cammino* having Leuca as a final destination enhances the local natural and cultural landscape: it’s a sort of *greenway*, linking the seaside with the interior and retrieving old memories. The cultural and landscape heritage can be thus appreciated in all its magnificence thanks to a slow mobility. It’s a new itinerary that

winds along the coastline and the hills of the eastern side of the sub-region called Serre Salentine, mostly passing by small villages and following old, municipal or vicinal roads. Outside the urban area, across a tangled network of paths and countryside roads, either paved or unpaved, the landscape alternates endless olive groves, vineyards, fields and occasional vegetable gardens. Once ancient centres of local life and crop production, manor farms have recently been turned into agritourism structures, accommodations for tourists or agricultural businesses, whilst dry-stone architectures liven up with their peculiar shape sun-drenched and solitary landscapes. Small and sometimes even tiny urban centres have renewed the cuisine tradition with the opening of new restaurants and cozy *trattorie*. The ancient hospitality network has been updated too, with the establishment of b&b and small-sized accommodation facilities, in some cases hosted inside historical houses. The main route attractions, nowadays prominent tourism centres, overlook the Mediterranean sea and are situated at the opposite ends of the itinerary: Otranto, *the city of martyrdom*, with its two Marian sanctuaries, and Santa Maria di Leuca, *de finibus Terrae*, with the sanctuary on the “*promontorio di Maria*” (the Virgin Mary’s promontory).

With the exception of Cocumola, the remaining stop-overs are all located in the *Costa Otranto-Santa Maria di Leuca e Bosco di Tricase* Natural Park, the largest regional park in the municipality of Lecce. The Park features prehistoric remains, cave settlements, coastal towers, manor farms, dry-stone low walls and *paiare*, eclectic villas, endemic plants and karstic formations, among which the so called *canaloni* and coastal caves. A peculiar cultural and environmental heritage, which must be protected through eco-compatible fruition practices.

A melting pot of different cultures and ethnical groups, *Otranto* is the place where the East and the West meet. The evidence for that is found in the byzantine Church of San Pietro, in the ruins of the Monastery of San Nicola di Casole, a cultural centre with its *schola scriptoria*, as well as in the cathedral and its floor mosaics (1163-1165)- where biblical, mythological, historical and literary episodes intersect in the tale of the tree of life. The church is the final resting place of 800 saints, beheaded during the siege of 1480. The martyrdom site is located on the Minerva hill, where the Sanctuary of Santa Maria dei Martiri also stands.





**Figure 8:** Otranto (Lecce). Cathedral.

Source: Photo by Stefano Cortese

From Otranto, the route penetrates the remote interior, a land rich in traditions still honored in the local modern culture. A quiet and silent atmosphere, both in the countryside and urban centres. In *Cocumola* (in the suburbs of Minervino di Lecce), the cult of San Giuseppe lives again thanks to the so called “*tavole*”, (tables), a tangible concept symbolizing solidarity but also a vow or a received grace. The devotees set up the “*tavole*” in their own houses and in the squares; the typical local cuisine and the Saint’s effigy revitalise and perpetuate memories that strengthens religious and fraternity values. *Vitigliano* (a small village next to Santa Cesarea) is known for its monumental and mysterious cave, the *Cisternale*, possibly a chamber tomb dating back to the pre-Messapian age (Maggiulli, 1910) or a water reservoir in Roman times (Arcuti, 2007-2008). The Church of San Michele Arcangelo, the chapel of San Rocco and the Church of Confraternita dell’Addolorata, a former pilgrimage destination (Arcuti, 2007-2008), are also of great interest. According to Arditì, *Vignacastrisi* (in the suburbs of Ortelle) hosted “most of the vineyards of the close-by Castro”. Also thanks to an excellent air quality, the area began to attract “settlers and visitors” after the destruction of the city in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Arditì, 1879, p. 649). In this small hamlet, as Cosimo De Giorgi defined it in 1882, religion was extremely important to the local communities. In 1777, there were six religious buildings in Vigracastrisi, among which the seat of the Congregazione della Beatissima Vergine del Rosario (Congregation of our Lady of the Rosary), which counted, after one century after being established, 378 associates (Cerfeda, 2006, pp. 90 and 91). In *Marittima* (a small village nearby Diso) we also find the cove of Acquaviva, where the English ship *Travancore*, transiting from Alexandria to Brindisi with the English company India Mail, shipwrecked in March 1880 (Boccardo, 1983; Mastrolia, 2010).



**Fig. 9: Original postcard detailing the route of the India Mail**

Source: G. Membola's collection

*Andrano* features the noteworthy Chapel of Madonna *dell'Attarico* with the homonymous cave settlement. Past the former abbey consecrated to the Italian-Greek cult of Madonna del Mito, probably dating back to the Byzantine age (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century), and the intricate maze of countryside paths in the territory surrounding *Tricase*, we reach the octagonal Church of Madonna di Costantinopoli, also known as the Church of "Diavoli" (demons), as a hint at the legend of the devil forced to build the church overnight (Paone, 1978). Corsano, with its extremely valuable natural area, is situated after *Sant'Eufemia* (in the suburbs of Tricase), renowned for the famous crypt of *Madonna del Gonfalone*, and *Tiggiano*. It is the land of the labyrinth-like "Vie del Sale" (salt roads), multiple circuits used to climb up the rugged coastline, where salt was sold and smuggled (Russo 2011). From *Gagliano del Capo*, especially known for the *Padri Trinitari* complex and the Baroque Church of San Francesco da Paola, erected where the Church of Sant'Elia and the ancient farmhouse of Plusano (Arditi, 1879) once stood, the itinerary ends at the sanctuary and basilica of Santa Maria *de Finibus Terrae* in *Leuca* (fig. 10), where according to the tradition Saint Peter landed between 42 and 44 A.D.



**Figure 10:** Castrignano del Capo (Lecce), Sanctuary and basilica Santa Maria De Finibus Terrae

Source: Photo by Stefano Cortese

Heavily restored in the years around 1700, under the episcopacy of Giovanni Giannelli, the church became, especially in the modern age, the most popular local destination for pilgrims like Giovanni Giuseppe Lavre in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The subcoastal route just passes close by – or even excludes some centres of the *leucadense* pilgrimage, such as Barbarano di Morciano di Leuca, better known as *Leuca Piccola*, which was equipped with hypogeal accommodations and resting services catering for travellers in the modern age; Giuliano di Castrignano del Capo, with its byzantine Church of San Pietro, and Patù, known for the megalithic monument of Centopietre, the early Christian Church of San Giovanni Battista and the archaeological site with the Messapian city of Vereto.

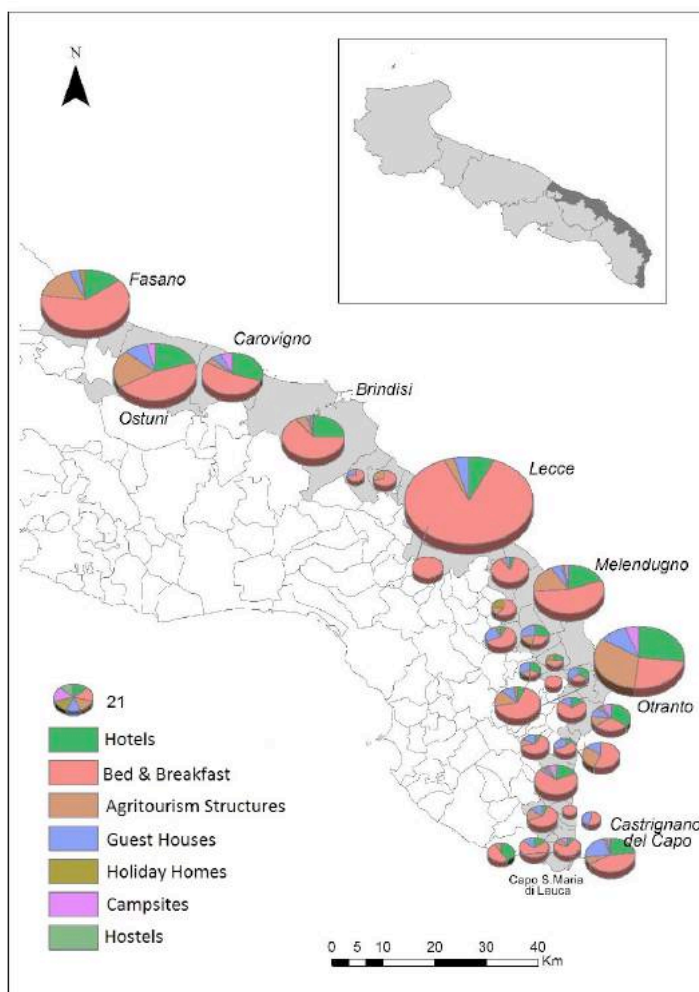
### **3. Sustainability, facilities and promotional network of the Via Francigena Salentina**

If the territory is a system, seen as the result of the interaction among environmental, cultural, economical and political elements, its sustainability inevitably pertains to the complex relationships linking economy, society and environment. The latter is one of the most relevant aspects in sustainability, requiring not only the respect for the ecosystem, but, most of all, the environmental awareness of the local community, a network of eco-compatible means of transportation (with particular reference to bicycle and public transports) as well as planning initiatives carried out by local and regional authorities. Although admitting that the concept of sustainability must be adjusted to the local context, and that every place must identify the strategies that best fit its peculiarities, the applicability of the sustainability paradigm cannot neglect the main basic principles of territorial management. According to Elliott (2013, p. 2),



such territorial management should be “ecologically sustainable; technologically feasible; feasible in technical, administrative and economical terms; socially desirable /tolerable; permitted by law; politically convenient; ethically acceptable (morally correct); inclusive in cultural terms; actually heritable”.

An approach which is mostly unknown in the Salento area, where landscape degradation due to unauthorized building, especially along the coastline, seriously affected by land erosion phenomena (Trono, Trombino, 2015), is often associated with a widespread issue of illegal waste dumping. Garbage can be found virtually anywhere: on public or privately owned areas, under bridges, along main and secondary extra-urban roads, in the countryside. This is one of the main obstacles that hinders the proper fruition of the local Via Francigena, that crosses or passes by degraded areas filled with waste. The poor functionality of the (few) newly opened cycle lanes is another major issue: the paths are difficult to use and often unsafe. Finally, we can observe the lack of accommodation capacity and quality along the route, with tourist facilities still relying on traditional patterns and essentially concentrated in the two main cities and most popular coastal locations (Otranto, Melendugno, Vernole; cf. fig. 11).



**Figure 11:** Local tourism accommodations per typology (%).

Source: Pugliapromozione. Agenzia Regionale del Turismo (2014)



Aside from traditional tourism accommodations (“Houses and apartments”, “Tourist villages” and “Hotels”), which are scarcely appreciated by pilgrims, usually spending just one night at a time in low-cost facilities, the supply includes many less expensive b&b, guesthouses, holiday homes and few religious buildings. Although cheaper compared to traditional accommodations, the whole scenario cannot match tourism facilities (*albergues*), either public or privately owned, situated along the Camino de Santiago, boasting a widespread network of low-cost options.

Adequate tourism facilities for pilgrims, as well as the organization and creation of relationship networks with local institutions, are instrumental to ensure the success of the project. Consequently, all local stakeholders, either public and private, having an interest in taking part in the initiative and providing related services need to be properly informed and trained. Indeed, apart from benefiting from economic profits, these stakeholders will also play a relevant role in preserving and transmitting local values and traditions, giving the wayfarer/tourist the opportunity to experience an extraordinary adventure.

The project of the Via Francigena Salentina, traditionally linked to the medieval custom that guided pilgrims to sacred sites and the Holy Land, will necessarily imply the production of maps and signs and will also have to offer a warm welcome, a good hospitality and adequate organizational skills, typical of a complex system. At the moment, the VFS is a merely scientific and political issue, also supported by the laical and religious environment. The project is more or less known to public institutions and local communities as well as much debated: however, words are not actions, and the itinerary still lacks a proper planning. The stage including preliminary studies, on-field surveys and mapping has been successfully completed by the researchers of the University of Salento. Next steps will include the selection and characterisation of the itineraries, as well as the executive planning of the routes. A subsequent stage will see the creation of the “touristic-cultural product” and the relative promotion plan and route management, taking into account the “system” made up of specific assets and their resources. The whole process will necessarily require the activation of a synergy between stakeholders and local resources; the launch of uniform and unitary enhancement processes and promotional projects; the routes management and the promotion of the new “tourism-cultural” product. A complex strategy, requiring an adequate coordination, which is necessary to enliven and implement the relationships network driving the enhancement plan.

Some attempts are currently in progress thanks to the support of few local cultural associations (Associazione Via Francigena Pugliese, Arci Lecce, Fondazione Moschettini, Associazione Cammini di Puglia and Rete Civica per la Tutela del Paesaggio e del Patrimonio Artistico e Archeologico di Puglia), with the establishment of an Organising Committee of the “Vie Francigene of southern Apulia– for the creation of a Hosting Community”, with the involvement of the municipalities located along the route. The main aim of the Organising Committee is the establishment of a network of services and structures especially catering for wayfarers walking along the Southern Vie Francigene (also including the Salentina section) eager to visit the most significant local religious sites before reaching the Holy Land. The commitment is, however, far

stronger and also includes other activities, from the road markings of the route to the collection of documentary and scientific evidence along the way from Brindisi to Santa Maria di Leuca. Noteworthy is also the participation of local public and private institutions, both laical and religious ones, to carry out a “mapping of cultural assets in relevant sites”, arrange the “cultural and touristic offer in places of interest (hospitality, enogastronomy, feasts and religious events, folklore, folk traditions, etc.)” and disclose contents of cultural and touristic interest in digital format; finally, to provide visibility to data-banks developed by individuals and participants (or candidates), resulting in a shared information network. The Organizing Committee wishes to create an equipped itinerary along a marked path, standing out for unitarity, the absence of interruptions and safety. A route to be ideally enjoyed with a slow mobility and sustainable tourism practices, along an uninterrupted and equipped trail, marked by signs and also safe and fully accessible by the disabled thanks to alternative paths and especially furnished sections. The multiple Vie Francigene should be uniform and share a common signage. The supply of affiliated tourist facilities and accommodations, with agreed-upon rates and distributed along the short-medium distance, is also imperative. Finally, the route should be based on principles inspired by social cohesion, economic convenience and the sharing of cultural and natural resources within a common and integrated view of the cultural heritage, attention to the service quality and cost-efficiency - suitable to obtain adequate economies of scale and attractiveness capability.

## Conclusions

The cultural route/itinerary is a tool of territorial development suitable to enhance the local cultural and economical heritage and promote intermodal policies by integrating different transportation systems linked to slow mobility, outdoor activities, hiking, green tourism. It starts development processes based on the full promotion of resources and territorial features, fostering and supporting forms of active participation and/or expressions of the collective will.

A possible extension of the Via Francigena to the Salento area will provide a connection between the historically relevant ports of Brindisi and Otranto, in line with the recent national and regional re-qualification and re-assessment planning of their respective port infrastructures. In addition, it is likely to support the enhancement of rural areas located in the interior, which are already the focus of a number of projects launched by different local authorities (GAL, Unioni di Comuni, SAC): these initiatives have seen the creation of cyclotourism itineraries, in most cases already connected to the Via Francigena.

However, it's a territorial *project* we're talking about. A complex and ambitious idea, requiring a technical and scientific committee, the recourse to innovative technologies, a respectful attitude towards landscape and the local heritage. A good development, management and promotion strategy, taking into account implications when planning economic and tourism activities, is also imperative. The potential of relevant sites and territory will have to be assessed, alongside the necessities of the beneficiaries, the

commitment and offer capacity provided by each individual and the whole touristic product promotion system (circuit, information and promotion, marketing and management). The network of alliances established at different levels of territorial management between public institutions and private parties will play a crucial role. A special attention must be paid to the network ensuring the *governance* along the route. And that's not all. As the route connects to an important international itinerary, the project will have to invest in acquiring a good reputation in terms of quality of the cultural, residential and environmental product, highlighting productive skills and environmental awareness. A good conceptual basis and a democratic management, ensuring the active participation of all involved stakeholders is also paramount. The initiative requires a multidisciplinary approach and a solid financial basis, which is essential to secure the carrying out of the activities and the long-term survival of the route. Finally, but not less important in the route creation and promotion, is law compliance, the respect of ethical and moral values, and intellectual honesty. This obligatory and complicated path implies the accountability of all institutional stakeholders, and the seriousness, reliability and honesty of local operators in respecting history, local traditions and quality.

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<sup>1</sup> “According to Du Cange, “*francese*” (French) is the meaning of the adjective “*francigeno*” . Consequently, “Via Francigena” [...] has the same name and meaning of the road, or, more precisely, the road network, that crosses the north-western alpine passes, linking Rome with the *oltralpe* areas” (see also Arlotta, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The latest reform of the Common Agricultural Policy has renewed the attention on the development of rural areas, which is now a paramount issue according to the so called Agenda 2000 reform. Funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the new policy for the 2014-2020 period aims to foster sustainable development and balanced agricultural practices in rural areas, with environmental protection, competition and innovations as main priorities.