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MASTER'S THESIS
**AN INWARD JOURNEY THROUGH THE VALLE D'AOSTA:
STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABILITY AND
RESILIENCE ALONG THE VIA FRANCIGENA PILGRIMAGE
ROUTE**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABF – Association of the Bard Fortress

B&B – Bed & Breakfast

CAI – Club Alpino Italiano

CRB – Cannons Regular of the Hospitaller Congregation of Great Saint Bernard

COE – Council of Europe

CRCE – Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

EAVF – European Association of the Via Francigena Ways

EPA – Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes

FVF – the Friends of the Via Francigena Association

LAC – Limits of Acceptable Change

LCPA – low-cost pilgrim accommodation

ORDT – Office of the Regional Director of Tourism

Rio Earth Summit – United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNWTO – The World Tourism Organization

RDT – Regional Department of Tourism

TO – Tourism Office

WCED – World Commission on Environment and Development

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, sustainability and resilience have received increased attention in the field of tourism development, especially in the context of current tourism trends. With the growing popularity of the Via Francigena pilgrimage route over the past 20 years, stakeholders have begun to pay greater attention to the path's sustainable development. Prior studies have suggested that pilgrimage and trekking routes are conducive to sustainable tourism development, but research is lacking in the context of how such developments are perceived by stakeholders along particular sections of such paths and whether these findings could contribute to a greater understanding of the paths' developments at large. This thesis focuses upon Italy's Valle d'Aosta section of the Via Francigena to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability and resilience in the context of the route. Qualitative methods are utilized in the form of 25 semi-structured interviews as well as supplemental questionnaire responses to understand the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental implications that the Via Francigena has on the region, dynamics between stakeholders, and deficiencies that are areas of concern for the future prospects of the route. The results indicate that stakeholders believe the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta is increasing in popularity, but obstacles such as the prices in the region and lack of pilgrim accommodation options have prevented it from achieving its full potential. Benefits, especially in the context of socio-cultural implications, are prevalent due to pilgrim presence in the region, but economic obstacles are of particular concern to stakeholders.

Keywords: accommodations, performance, pilgrimage tourism, resilience, stakeholders, sustainability

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The Via Francigena is a 1,600-km route that connects Canterbury, England to Rome, Italy (Lucarno, 2016). Based upon a series of ancient Roman roads, the route was historically significant for commerce as well as the Christianization of Europe. In medieval times, it gained prominence as a path of pilgrimage to Rome, which along with Santiago de Compostela and Jerusalem comprised the three cardinal destinations of Western European Christendom's "peregrinationes majores" (Lucarno, 2016; Nigro et al., 2015; Trono, Ruppi, Mitrotti, & Cortese, 2017).

The Via Francigena of today retraces the steps of Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury, who in 990 AD documented the 79 stages of his return to England after having received his

pallium (investiture) from the pope (Bruschi, 2011; Ferrias, 2017; Lo Giacco, 2016; Lucarno, 2016). Since 1994, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (CRCE) program has recognized the Via Francigena's importance as a major cultural route (Conti, Iommi, Piccini, & Rosignoli, 2014). Created in 1987, the CRCE's primary goals are to preserve Europe's diverse culture and heritage, cultivate a greater understanding of the physical, intangible, and physical heritage of Europe, and increase public awareness of European cultural and historical diversity by developing a network of routes that celebrate shared European history and heritage; as of 2019, the Via Francigena is one of 38 cultural routes recognized by the CRCE (Council of Europe, n.d.; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011).

The development of sustainable tourism activities along CRCE routes is an opportunity to cultivate awareness of heritage while conserving and safeguarding the routes through revenue generation (De Marzo, 2016). With an awareness of the cultural (and economic) contributions of pilgrimage routes and destinations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) includes pilgrimage routes such as the CRCE's Camino de Santiago (also known as "the Camino") on its list of world heritage sites (Lo Giacco, 2016), and the Italian section of the Via Francigena has been on UNESCO's tentative list since January 2019 (UNESCO, n.d.). This recent development in the Via Francigena's UNESCO status is important, as the UNESCO network can further protect and enhance the world heritage found along the route (EAVF, n.d.b).

Due to the perceived potential for CRCE routes to substantially contribute to slow tourism and sustainable development (Conti et al., 2014; Nigro et al., 2015), research was conducted in recent years to quantify sustainable development along the routes. For example, a case study of the Via Francigena in Tuscany found that European pilgrimage routes are particularly sustainable economic drivers in rural areas, especially in contrast to mass tourism alternatives (Conti et al., 2014). Yet some of this research has exposed challenges that must be overcome. A joint study by the European Commission and Council of Europe (COE) concluded that, although the CRCE fosters innovation, small business creation, and products and services development for cultural tourism in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises, a major weakness of the CRCE is its lack of orientation toward definitive sustainable development standards (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011). The findings argued that there is a need to develop country- and region-specific sustainable tourism standards that could also fulfill general CRCE standards; since each destination is comprised of unique geographical, political, and socio-economic variables as well as a community of stakeholders with particular needs and agendas, local collaboration is paramount to successfully monitoring and implementing sustainable development (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011).

In 2014, a pilot initiative was undergone to determine the feasibility of developing a system of sustainability indicators to better measure the performance of the routes that

comprise the CRCE; in May 2016, the European Tourism Indicator System task force began evaluating seven pilot cultural routes including the Via Francigena, but according to the European Association of the Via Francigena Ways (EAVF) Director Luca Bruschi, the final findings of the research and analysis were never released to the stakeholders (L. Bruschi, personal communication, 8 February, 2020).

Due to the research gap in sustainability performance and indicators along the Via Francigena, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze the feedback and insights provided by stakeholders of a determinate span of the route in order to better understand aspects of the Via Francigena's sustainability and create a baseline for future sustainability studies. Italy's Valle d'Aosta region, where the 850-km Italian portion of the route commences (Gennari, 2014), is used as a case study in order to provide insights into region-specific needs that previous studies have deemed paramount to better understanding the challenges and successes of the route. While generalities applicable to the whole route may emerge from the findings, the primary scope of this study is intended to create a foundation for future studies to complement and build upon.

1.2 Research Question

The following research question will be investigated:

What opinions do stakeholders have about the sustainability and resilience of the Via Francigena pilgrimage route along the segment that passes through Italy's Valle d'Aosta region?

1.3 Structure

This thesis first discusses the concept of sustainability and differentiates the nuances between sustainability and resilience. Tourism development and sustainability models are highlighted in order to integrate practical applications with the theoretical foundations of sustainability and resilience. After outlining the historical origins of pilgrimage and its contemporary relevance, a concise history of the CRCE and Via Francigena is explained. The literature review concludes with a delimitation of the destination, stakeholders, and time dimension to be analyzed in the thesis.

In the second chapter, the methodology of the research is explained. The research paradigm establishes the ontological and epistemological framework of the research, and the research design, rationale, explanation of the process, and limitations are addressed.

The results section explains the findings of the research in regard to stakeholders' sentiments, perceived changes to the Via Francigena over time, future objectives, insights

about the management of the route, stakeholder engagement, goods and services offered to pilgrims, and reflections on components of sustainability and resilience.

The final section provides a discussion and conclusion of the research that links findings to the theoretical models and key concepts presented in the literature review. Limitations to the thesis are further discussed, as well as suggestions for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability

Sustainability in the context of tourism first gained prominence in response to the developments by the Brundtland Commission of 1986 and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Earth Summit) (WTO, 2004). Following the 1972 United Nations Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the United Nations Environment Program made a recommendation for the establishment of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED); in 1983, the WCED subsequently created an independent commission, chaired by Norwegian Labor Party leader Gro Harlem Brundtland, that was directly answerable to the United Nations Assembly (Hall & Lew, 2009). In 1987, the WCED published *Our common future*, colloquially known as the Brundtland Report, in order to establish a global agenda in response to natural and social degradation that was exacerbated following the developments of the Industrial Revolution (Butler, 1998; Hall, Gossling, & Scott, 2015; Hall & Lew, 2009; Lew et al., 2016).

In the Brundtland Report, the concept of sustainable development first entered the vernacular of the general public; it was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, Chapter 2, Section 1). The five principles of sustainable development, as defined by the Brundtland Report, are: holistic planning and strategy, preservation of essential ecological processes, protection of human heritage and biodiversity, intergenerational equity, and balanced fairness and opportunities between nations (Brundtland, 1987; Lew & Hall, 2009; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011). For the purpose of this thesis, sustainability will henceforth be defined as the principal that "underlines the core goals of protecting and maintaining natural and cultural resources for the future and mitigating undesirable change" (Lew et al., 2016, p. 21), with the understanding that economic interests must also be maintained (Purvis, Mao, & Robinson, 2019).

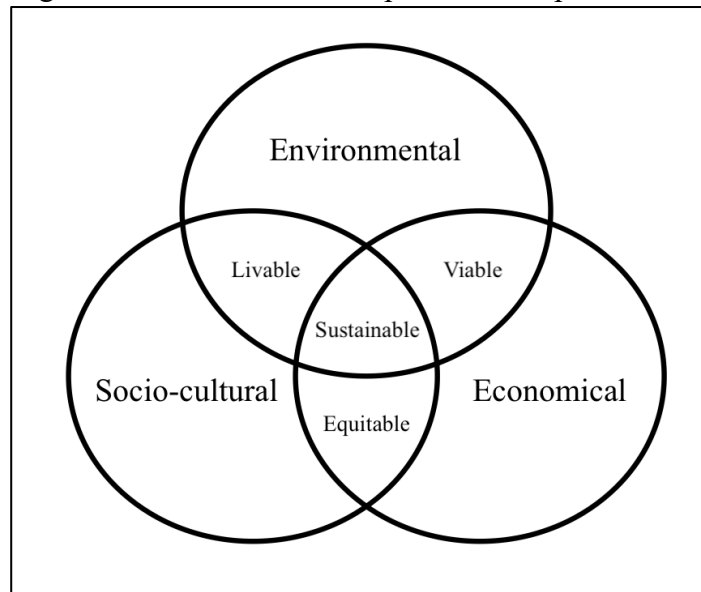
2.1.1 Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Development

Although the Brundtland Report never specifically applied the concept of sustainability to the realm of tourism, the idea of sustainable tourism was promptly integrated as a vessel for the sustainable development of activities associated with tourism (Place, Hall, & Lew, 1998), due in part to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Murphy & Price, 2005). The summit identified the potential that tourism had in playing a key role in the transition toward sustainable development (Murphy & Price, 2005).

However, while interrelated, sustainable tourism and sustainable development are not synonymous; rather, sustainable tourism falls into the sub-sets of tourism as well as sustainable development (Hall & Lew, 2009). While sustainable tourism adheres to the principles of sustainable development, the application of sustainability in the context of sustainable development concerns social, environmental, and economic change that is derived from the tourism industry, whereas sustainable development encompasses the full scope of human activity (Hall & Lew, 2009).

To achieve sustainability in the context of tourism development, nature, scale, location, and the manner of development must be sustainable in the long-run; additionally, economic, social, and cultural goals must be integrated while maintaining the environment's capacity to support other processes and activities, since tourism cannot exist independently of resource activities (Murphy & Price, 2005; Wight, 1997). According to Wight (1997), sustainable tourism development is achieved when community-based economics, conservation with equity, and environmental-economic integration are produced. Sustainable tourism development can be characterized as the successful achievement of "the equal distribution of maximized economic benefits, the minimization of the socio-cultural impacts on hosts and tourists as well as the protection and the enhancement of the natural environment through tourism activities" (European Commission, 2016, p. 7). The three pillars of sustainability (environment, society, and economy) (Purvis et al., 2019) are interconnected; Connelly (2007) expressed this relationship in a Venn diagram, whereby the overlapping sections represent the multiple competences under which a particular element falls, thus creating an indicator grid that demonstrates sustainability's achievement through the integration of all elements (Tanguay, Rajaonson, & Therrien, 2013).

Figure 1: Sustainable Development Conceptualization



Source: Adapted from Connelly (2007).

2.2 Resilience

The naissance of resilience as a conceptual framework was rooted in the areas of disaster management, ecology, and physics (Davidson, 2010; Davoudi, Brooks, & Mehmood, 2013; Lew et al., 2016). Resilience is an important aspect of sustainable development because it provides the scientific basis for understanding aspects of transformation and persistence in systems that are of a complex nature (Carpenter & Brock, 2008). While the term *resilience* has different connotations based upon the field of research (e.g., resilience from a business perspective varies from a more ecological approach), Lew et al. (2016) explained resilience as such:

It is about adaptation, including building human resource capacities to change in efficient ways, creating learning institutions that can address changing circumstances while maintaining core values, understanding feedback loops in dynamic social and environmental systems, and generally encouraging flexibility, creativity, and innovation in the culture of a community. (21)

Researchers are at odds with whether resilience and sustainability are one and the same; indeed, the terms are oftentimes confused for one another due to a lack of definitional clarity and difference of interpretation usually pertaining to the scope of sustainability (Lew et al., 2016). At one extreme of the sustainable development definitional spectrum is the Brundtland Report's inclusion of what is good for human society and nature and the assertion that, hence, sustainable development is development that ensures the well-being of people now and in the future (Brundtland, 1987; Lew et al., 2016). Conversely, the narrowest, more business-oriented definition of sustainability only encompasses that

which maintains the status quo and does not disappear; however, this interpretation neglects to adequately consider environmental concerns (Sayer, Campbell, & Campbell, 2003; Carroll, 2011; Lew et al., 2016).

This thesis adopts Lew et al.'s (2016) interpretation of sustainability and resilience as two distinct, albeit related, conceptual paradigms, as discussed and differentiated in previous publications (Anderies, Folke, Walker, & Ostrom, 2013; Juech & Michelson, 2011; McLellan, Zhang, Farzaneh, Utama, & Ishihara, 2012; Prasad et al., 2009; Tobin, 1999). The primary distinguishing factor between resilience and sustainability is that, whereas resilient action responds to change with adaptation, sustainability practices emphasize conservation and mitigation (Lew et al., 2016). Whereas sustainability is intended to mitigate change through the maintenance of resources, a resilience-oriented approach strives to return a situation to its desired state after having experienced a disruption (Derissen, Quaas, & Baumgärtner, 2011). The key differences in the two paradigms are largely rooted in their ontological foundations; sustainability assumes that stability and balance is the foundation of normalcy whereas resilience assumes that the world is in a constant state of change (Lew et al., 2016).

From a practical standpoint, sustainability relates to what a community seeks to protect and conserve without change, while resilience relates to what a community seeks to adapt and change into something new (Lew et al., 2016). In a case study concerning rural tourism in Taiwan, Lew et al. (2016) found that communities possessing strength in both sustainability and resilience are more dynamic than those that favor one of these aspects over the other; therefore, effective planning and development are contingent upon a sufficient understanding of sustainability *and* resilience.

2.2.1 Resilience Key Terms

Community resilience is “[a] process linking a set of networked adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation in constituent populations after a disturbance” (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008, p. 131). When evaluating community resilience, it is important to establish what a community is; communities are comprised of built, economic, natural, and social environments that influence one another in complex manners (Norris et al., 2008).

Ecological resilience can be classified as “a measure of the amount of change or disruption that is required to transform a system from being maintained by one set of mutually reinforcing processes and structures to a different set of processes and structures” (Peterson, Allen, & Holling, 1998, p. 10). With a basis in the biological sciences (Fath et al., 2015), the principle assumes that there are alternative states (rather than solely the original state) in which ecosystems can exist and achieve stability, whereas an alternative interpretation of resilience (*engineering resilience*) measures the rate at which an

ecosystem is able to return to a particular cyclic or steady state following a disturbance (Fath et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 1998).

Whereas engineering resilience is more suitable for monitoring the return to stability after small disturbances, ecological resilience is more equipped to contextualize large perturbations and gradual changes that shift the stability domain of a destination (Peterson et al., 1998).

In line with the principals of gradual change, *evolutionary resilience* is built upon the conceptual foundation that steady or stable states are non-existent since socio-ecological systems are constantly in a state of change (Davoudi et al., 2013; Fath et al., 2015). Whereas engineering resilience assumes a single, stable state of equilibrium to which a resilient system bounces back and ecological resilience assumes the possibility of multiple equilibria to which the system can bounce forth (Davoudi et al., 2012), the principle of evolutionary resilience interprets the ability for complex systems to adapt, change, and transform themselves as a response to stress and strain (Carpenter, Westley, & Turner, 2005; Davoudi et al., 2013). This shift in understanding has come with the increased acceptance in the concept of *social-ecological resilience*, which asserts that an interdependent system between people and nature exists (Davoudi et al., 2013; Folke et al., 2010).

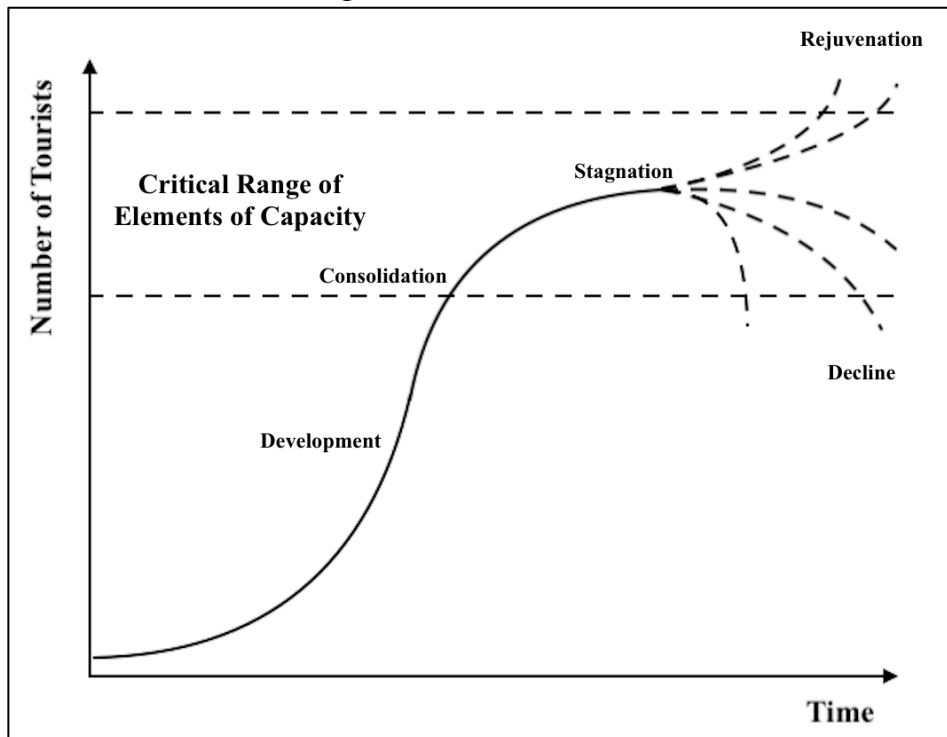
In order for social-ecological resilience to be achieved, *social capital* must sufficiently be present. Social capital refers to “the ability and willingness of community members to participate in actions directed to community objectives, and to processes of engagement” (Magis, 2010, p. 407). Social capital plays into the success of *social resilience*, which is “the ability of human communities to withstand and recover from stresses, such as environmental change or social, economic, or political upheaval,” without which options for future development are greatly limited (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2016).

2.3 Tourist Development Models

Butler (1980) postulated that there is a recognizable cycle in the evolution of tourist areas, which he represented in the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) curve. The principle of the TALC, an application of the concept of a product life cycle in marketing (Meyer-Arendt, 1990), states that the development of a tourist destination follows an S-curve; upon reaching the critical range of elements of capacity in regard to the number of tourists in a given destination, future possibilities for tourism growth include rejuvenation, stagnation, or decline (Butler, 1980; Butler, 2004; Meyer-Arendt, 1990). The original model (developed but unpublished in 1972) was intended to address growth and development’s spatial implications in the context of carrying capacity, especially once a given destination’s capacity is reached; over the years, however, the model’s focus of destination development shifted toward the development process and away from the principles of

growth and dispersion (Butler, 2004; Brougham & Butler, 1972). Additionally, Butler's original 1980 article was intended to point toward the degradation of destination quality as a result of improper destination management rather than the inevitability of destination decline (Butler, 2004). While critiques of Butler's model have been made, a quarter of a century after the original model's publication, key elements still discussed and debated in tourism literature included the principles of dynamism, process, carrying capacity, management, and the spatial component (Butler, 2004).

Figure 2: The TALC Curve



Source: Adapted from Butler (1980).

Carrying capacity (also known as limits to growth), one of the components of Butler's model, is overcome when destination attractiveness and economic efficiency reach a tipping point; the principle argues that once negative environmental impacts and insufficient return on investment occur, the carrying capacity of a destination has been surpassed (Butler, 2004). Since business entities tend to be more economically efficient when they are larger, the growth in infrastructure is desirable for enterprises but requires market growth or market share to expand in order to remain profitable. The cycle of development continues and eventually causes capacity to be surpassed, often resulting in Butler's TALC curve scenario of decline, as tourist numbers likely fall since decreased attractiveness of a destination oftentimes results from capacity overload (Butler, 2004).

The range of temporal and spatial variables influencing touristic circumstances have inhibited researchers from developing a pervasive quantitative definition of carrying capacity. The qualitative S-curve proposed by Butler serves as a useful framework

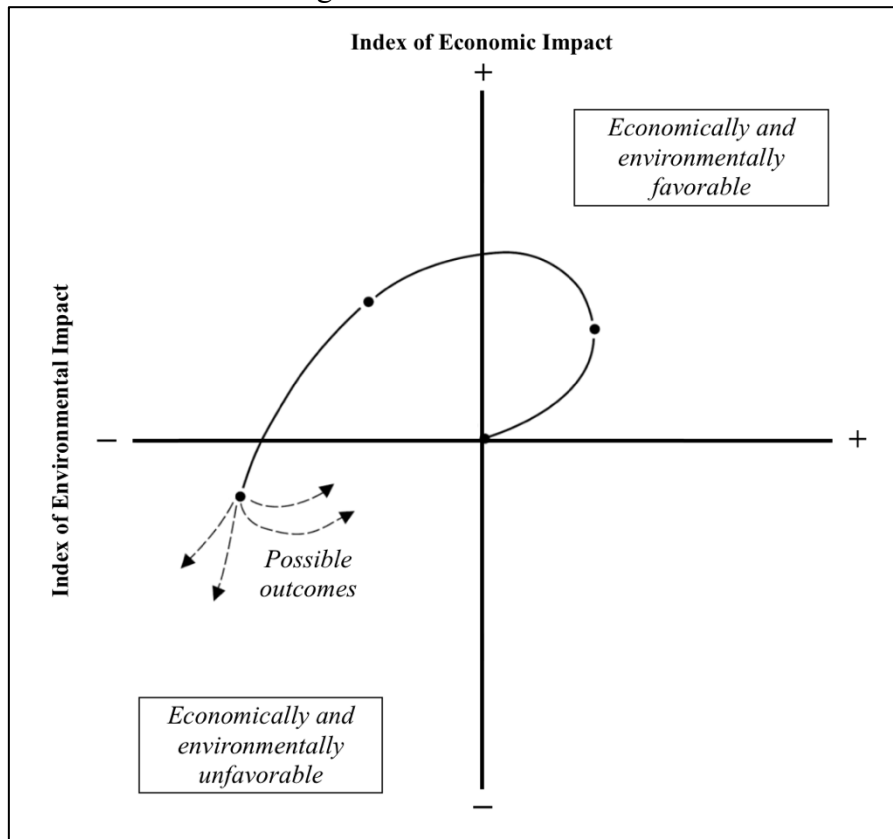
(Meyer-Arendt, 1990); however, since the 1990s, researchers have found the concept of carrying capacity to be overly simplistic for the complexity of tourism situations (Lindberg, McCool, & Stankey, 1997). Three major weaknesses of carrying capacity are the lack of guidance for practical implementation, false perception of objectivity in criteria selection, and focus on inputs (i.e., tourist numbers) rather than outputs, such as the quality of the experience (Lindberg, McCool, & Stankey, 1997).

The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) model (Stankey, Cole, Lucas, Petersen, & Frissell, 1985), a more useful framework, was originally created in response to American parks' and wildernesses' increased requests for the development of carrying capacity plans and subsequent realization that the concept of carrying capacity insufficiently addressed the complex, multivariable nature of recreational activities (Cole & Stankey, 1997). The LAC process is summarized by four major components: establishing acceptable and achievable resource and social conditions, understanding the relation of existing conditions relative to the conditions that are deemed acceptable, identifying management actions that will facilitate the achievement of these conditions, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the management (Stankey et al., 1985).

Congestion is one of many factors that influence LAC. In 2004, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined two types of congestion: permanent congestion is the phenomenon in which large, continuous levels of visitation occur in a given destination, whereas fluctuating congestion is defined as the presence of significant visitor activity during specific periods (e.g., summer). Congestion, and tourism in general, can have implications on a destination's physical environment, which itself is influenced by multivariable inputs; Cohen (1978) stated that the four major factors influencing environmental decline are: the intensity of tourism; ecosystem resiliency to tourism; the developer's time dimension; and recreational development's transformational character (Meyer-Arendt, 1990).

Following his research on the direct inverse relationship between urbanization in places of recreation and environmental quality (Wolfe, 1952), Wolfe (1982) proposed a model of the normative typology of tourist destinations (known as the Ellis Curve) that visually expressed positive-to-negative economic impacts on a vertical axis in relation to environmental impacts on a horizontal axis (Meyer-Arendt, 1990). The model expressed how economic and environmental impacts of tourism are initially positive (due to a combination of low visitation rates and the local vested interest to care for the landscape in order to attract tourists), followed by decreases in net benefits as a result of increased development (Meyer-Arendt, 1990). Although Wolfe's and Butler's models appear visually dissimilar, the phenomena that they express are in fact comparable (Butler, 2004).

Figure 3: The Ellis Curve



Source: Adapted from Wolfe (1982).

However, these models come with limitations. Since tourism on a global scale has changed considerably since 1980, destination development has not necessarily remained the same as it was at the time of the models' creations; destination development rates, tourism market growth, and the ability to travel faster to more destinations comprise only a small sample of these changes (Butler, 2004). Butler (2004) argued that due to tourism's dynamic nature and changes, increases in destination options, and changes in tourists' preferences in regard to what is deemed fashionable, the predictability of destination nature and scale has decreased over time; while destinations still are subject to the influences of product cycles and marketability, increased competition in the industry has caused tourism destination markets to become less predictable.

A more contemporary model, the adaptive cycle, is based upon the TALC curve and characterized by four stages: growth, equilibrium, collapse, and reorientation (Fath, Dean, & Katzmaier, 2015; Holling, 1986). The model extended beyond the TALC curve's scope by explicitly including the phases of collapse and reorientation, and it incorporated the contextualization of three significant variables, namely the connectedness of system variables, potential for adaptation and change to be effective, and resilience in regard to variable relationship maintenance (Fath, Dean, & Katzmaier, 2015), thus correcting some of the previous limitations to Butler's original model. Note that is during the reorientation

phase that high levels of resilience are present in response to restructuring and uncertainty (Davoudi et al., 2013).

2.4 Pilgrimage

In his work pertaining to religion in contemporary Western Europe, Radcliffe (2005) asserted that human nature is at the core of the yearning to go on pilgrimage. Farias et al. (2019) evoked the 600-year-old verse penned in *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1951, p. 19) that “nature pricks them and their heart engages/Then people long to go on pilgrimages” to articulate the desire for pilgrimage that transcends time.

Each year, millions of people worldwide practice the collective act of worship known as pilgrimage (Lo Giacco, 2016). With the notable exception of Protestantism (Barber, 1991), pilgrimage traditions are prevalent in all of the major religions and pagan traditions throughout the world (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Lo Giacco, 2016). *Pilgrimage* is commonly defined as a “journey both outwards, to new, strange, dangerous places, and inwards, to spiritual improvement, whether through increased self-knowledge or through the braving of physical dangers” (Barber, 1991, p. 1).

The phenomenon of pilgrimage with an orientation toward the divine is at least as old as the Greek era, when people would travel to seek knowledge from the oracles (Smith, 1992). However, the genesis of pilgrimage as it is understood today is the product of changing practices; while once a local phenomenon whereby people of different cultures throughout the world would journey to local shrines of importance, it was not until roughly the 5th century BC that pilgrimage became purely religious in nature and expanded beyond the practices of everyday worship (Barber, 1991).

The earliest documented pilgrimages in any religion recorded the journeys of high-ranking members of society; their educations afforded them the ability to chronicle their experiences, and the difficult and expensive nature of travel excluded other segments from engaging in pilgrimage (Barber, 1991). In time, pilgrimage practices of all religions followed the progression from being elitist in nature to becoming a form of mass movement that could sustain the common believer’s needs (Barber, 1991). In modern times, these masses of pilgrims are exemplified by the 2-5 million Muslims who annually make the Hajj in Mecca, 15-28 million Hindus who congregate in the Ganges at Prayaga once every 12 years, and 5 million people who visit the Catholic Marian shrine at Lourdes per annum (Barber, 1991; Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

Oftentimes, the commercial world facilitated the process of pilgrimage for travellers; old Roman roads originally used for trade ameliorated the walking experiences of pilgrims, Arab traders arranged for caravans to take the religious across the desert to Mecca, and

Venetian merchants escorted pilgrims to the Holy Land during the 14th and 15th centuries (Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

Pilgrimage has significant cultural, economic, social, and political implications, both in a historic and modern sense (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). In the past, pilgrims typically traveled on established routes that connected important sanctuaries but also corresponded with the medieval routes of merchants, thus facilitating the spread of cultures, ideas, and common identities (Lo Giacco, 2016), as will be discussed in the following section. In the case of Europe, Merovingian and Carolingian kings also used pilgrimage for political motives, as they worked to establish local cults that were autonomous from the centralized control of Rome (Lo Giacco, 2016).

2.4.1 The European Context of Pilgrimage

“Europe was born in pilgrimage and its mother tongue is Christianity.”

— Attributed to Goethe (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Fisichella, 2009)

Nomadism and movement are ingrained into the very identities of the Abrahamic religions (Lo Giacco, 2016), thus making pilgrimage inextricably intertwined with the beliefs and histories of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. These three monotheistic religions trace their origins to the patriarch Abraham, a shepherd who departed his homeland and journeyed to the Promised Land out of obedience to God in an act that fulfills the criteria of pilgrimage (Lo Giacco, 2016; Smith, 1992).

From the Judeo-Christian narrative, formalized pilgrimage is traced to the Old Testament, both in the books of Exodus (34:18-23 English Standard Version) and Deuteronomy (16:16), when the Israelites were instructed to observe pilgrim festivals in Jerusalem three times per year: during the festivals of Passover, Tabernacles and the Weeks (Barber, 1991; Lo Giacco, 2016; Smith, 1992). Pilgrimage entered into Christian traditional practices shortly after the foundation of the religion. Visitations to important places in the lives of Christ and the apostles, especially in Jerusalem and Rome, became widespread. As early as in the 2nd century AD, pilgrims began to visit and pray at the final resting places of the apostles Peter and Paul (Lo Giacco, 2016). Over time, these journeys expanded to sanctuaries that housed the relics of other saints and martyrs (Smith, 1992), but in the early stages, pilgrimage was still relatively limited (Lo Giacco, 2016).

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine, who made Christianity a licit religion in the Roman Empire, Christians' liberties expanded and pilgrimage numbers grew tremendously (Lo Giacco, 2016). With the growing importance of pilgrimage came the Christianization of the Roman Empire, although pilgrimage was only one of the factors contributing to the spread of Christianity (Lo Giacco, 2016).

Starting in the Middle Ages, Christianity played a significant role in the formation of a common European identity in the realms of politics, culture, art, and morality, and pilgrimage routes were one of the manners in which this shared identity spread (Lo Giacco, 2016). Along these routes, pilgrims as well as merchants, professors, and others spread thoughts and ideas that ultimately established a European society and identity founded upon Christian principles (Lo Giacco, 2016). With cultural diffusion also came the spread of styles from other regions; for example, influences from Burgundy came to be found in Italy's Po Valley, and Lombard styles were present south of the Apennines (Ferrias, 2017).

During medieval times, the roads traversed by pilgrims were primarily of Roman origin, in disrepair, and oftentimes unsafe to travel along alone. As an act of Christian charity, locals oversaw the maintenance of roads, bridges and facilities along the route, and local legislation was passed to facilitate pilgrim travel (Lo Giacco, 2016).

Europe's golden age of pilgrimage arrived during the Carolingian period, beginning with Charlemagne's journey to Rome in 800 AD, when he was crowned holy Roman emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas day (Ferrias, 2017; Lo Giacco, 2016). Politically, Charlemagne's unification of the northern Italian Peninsula, in addition to the many pilgrimages he made himself, helped facilitate the practice of pilgrimage to Rome (Ferrias, 2017; Lo Giacco, 2016). Pilgrimage elsewhere, namely to the Holy Land and the tomb of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela, flourished as well; Mullins (1975) and Digance (2003) stated that up to half a million pilgrims journeyed to Santiago de Compostela during the 11th and 12th centuries, while some estimates alleged that up to one third of the European population at the time made the journey (Smith, 1992).

Since the 4th century AD, the Church, in an effort to protect pilgrims, oversaw the construction of guest houses along major routes, and monasteries opened their doors to guests (Lo Giacco, 2016). These structures, known as *hospitia* in Latin, were reminiscent of the earlier pagan practice of providing dormitories for pilgrims traveling to shrines and temples (Ferrias, 2017; Imbert, 1947; Lo Giacco, 2016; Nasalli-Rocca, 1956; Peyer, 1997). The accommodations where pilgrims slept and ate were often run by hospitable networks such as the Order of Cluny, the Knights of Malta, and the Knights of St. John (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011). The hospital orders covered their costs of operation with legacies and donations (Ferrias, 2017). These structures welcomed pilgrims, who might have been traveling for months or years, free of charge; however, merchants and itinerant craftsmen who often travelled along the same routes were required to pay for board and lodging, although their contributions to the local economies were not substantial (Ferrias, 2017).

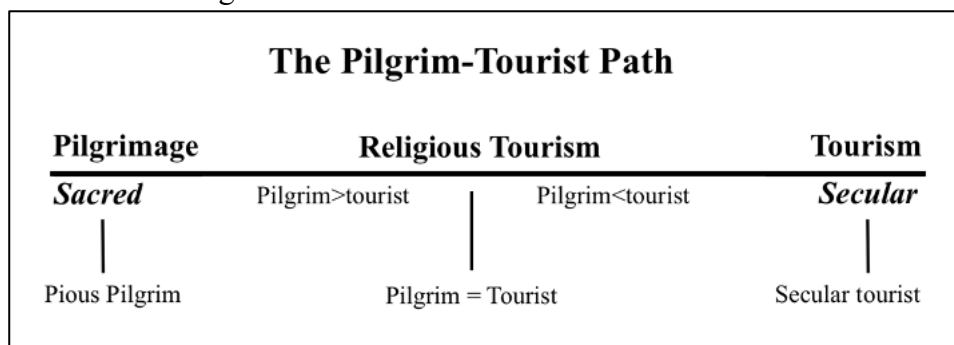
Pilgrimages could be devotional or penitential, but they could also be judicial in nature, i.e., they sometimes served as an institutionalized sentencing to atone for crimes (Barber,

1991). In fact, the growing prominence of judicial pilgrimage was one of the contributing factors of the end of the age of pilgrimage; as unscrupulous individuals took the place of the pious pilgrim, routes became more dangerous and less travelled (Lo Giacco, 2016). Other factors, such as Islamic rule in the Holy Land, shifted the center of focus to the more local western European religious sites that had gained relevance over time (Lo Giacco, 2016).

The golden age of pilgrimage in Europe ended with the Reformation, when the physical barrier of the Alps dividing northern and southern Europe transformed into an ideological one between Protestants and Catholics; the growing dangers of traversing safely from one region to another during the 16th and 17th centuries thus ended the open transfer of art, culture, ideas, and people (Ferrias, 2017). The rejection of the cult of Saints and the veneration of relics terminated the relevance of pilgrimage in Protestant denominations, and Christianity in general experienced a spiritual shift toward the concept of the “pilgrimage of the heart” in place of physical pilgrimage; religious processions also gained prominence, thus serving as a substitute for pilgrimage (Lo Giacco, 2016). Finally, with a shift in practices came a shift in public sentiment; pilgrims transformed into suspect itinerants whose need for charity translated into the criminal act of begging (Lo Giacco, 2016). European pilgrimage, with the exception of pilgrims destined for Rome during Jubilee years, faded into obscurity (Lo Giacco, 2016).

2.4.2 Pilgrimage vs. Tourism in Modern Times

Figure 4: The Sacred-Secular Continuum



Source: Adapted from Adler (1989a).

In line with a more traditional understanding of the concepts, Adler (1989a) placed pilgrimage and tourism at opposite ends of a travel continuum of motivations, where pilgrimage falls into the “sacred” terminus of the continuum and tourism falls into the “secular.” Travelers can be classified as pious pilgrims if their motivations are purely sacred or as secular tourists if they are non-religiously motivated, but they can also fall into a range somewhere in between whereby their motivations are predominantly sacred, predominantly secular, or evenly divided (Adler, 1989a).

Coleman and Eade (2004) asserted that the search for authenticity is a fundamental motivator for many modern tourists. Others (Lo Giacco, 2016) pointed to the role of pilgrimage in the quest for one's pursuit of identity, which is often a religious identity rich with tradition and ritual. Some researchers have suggested that the modern tourist, in a quest for authenticity in the secularized world is, in fact, a contemporary pilgrim; this quest for authenticity echoes a universal human interest in the sacred (Cohen, 1988; Coleman & Eade, 2004; MacCannell, 1973). Graburn (1977) argued that tourism is a pilgrimage in its own right because it serves as the type of non-ordinary, even sacred, break from everyday life that makes living worthwhile. Whereas the religious pilgrim traditionally pays homage to a sacred nucleus, the modern tourist focuses his or her gaze on "attractions," which symbolize modernity (Cohen, 1988); these attractions, however, are heterogeneous inasmuch as "pre-modern" phenomena, i.e., historical attractions, are also components of the contemporary equivalent of a traditional pilgrimage center (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1976).

The tourist who seeks an alternative to the society in which he or she lives, pursues existential experiences while looking beyond the confines of the physical world, and holds a deep concern for authenticity is most akin to the archetypical pilgrim (Cohen, 1988; Coleman & Eade, 2004; Turner, 1973). Like pilgrims of the major world religions who, regardless of socio-economic means, leave the ordinary context of their daily lives to make an ascent toward holiness and wholeness through their physical journeys, secularists can endeavor toward climactic existential experiences as well (Cohen, 1988; Turner, 1973; Turner & Turner, 1978); Turner & Turner (1978) distinguish the liminal (typically denotative of religion and obligatory actions) and limonoid, thereby expanding the significance of such journeys from the familiar to non-familiar and into the realm of leisure and modern tourism (Turner, 1973). Where the modern pilgrimage diverges from its medieval European context, however, is largely in the shift in the individual's purpose from being primarily penitential to transformational, thus reorienting the importance toward the experience and the journey in and of themselves rather than the destination (Coleman & Eade, 2004; Tomasi, 2002). Indeed, Feinberg (1985) found that many of the respondents to her survey on the Camino were on individual journeys to seek out spiritual meaning in the context of a secular world, and she concluded that travelers on the Camino transform into pilgrims through their experiences.

Cohen's (1988) anthropological study of tourism concluded that the tourist typology is heterogeneous and spectral, with the aforementioned "existential tourists" most resembling pilgrims (Coleman & Eade, 2004) and the distinction between pilgrimage and tourism (in the context of formal pilgrim centers and with the exception of popular pilgrimage centers) being "the direction of the journey taken ... [T]he pilgrim, and the 'pilgrim-tourist' peregrinate *toward* their socio-cultural center, while the traveler and the 'traveler-tourist' move in the opposite direction" (Cohen, 1992, p. 37).

As Adler emphasized, the differences between tourism and pilgrimage are not unequivocally distinguishable, nor should travel styles be temporally sequenced in a unilinear manner (Adler, 1989b; Coleman & Eade, 2004). Adler further elucidated that travel styles and preferences can be based upon previous traditions, such as the pre-Renaissance pilgrimage's influence on the 18th century Grand Tour. The expanse between tourism and pilgrimage is connected by the overarching concept of human mobility that is undergone for purposes of expression and communication rather than instrumental motives (Adler, 2002). The parameters of modern pilgrimage have been further blurred as destinations, particularly ones of religious significance, become linked to other types of tourism, especially cultural tourism (Rinschede, 1992).

Smith (1992) went so far as to claim that the terminology distinguishing pilgrim (as a religiously motivated person) from tourist (as a vacationer) is a culturally constructed polarity that does not always properly convey travelers' motives. When assessing the Latin derivations of the words (*peregrinus* can denote a foreigner, wanderer, exile, traveler, newcomer, or stranger while *tornus* represents a person who makes a circuitous journey for pleasure and returns to the point of departure), it becomes clear that the modern connotations are not inherent in the words' original meanings (Smith, 1992). Interestingly, even from a historical perspective, the religiosity of a pilgrim's motivations did not always conform to present conceptions of tourism; indeed, there was even a time when "vicarious pilgrims" (sometimes servants) were paid to make pilgrimage in place of benefactors; these benefactors, whose deceased relatives expressly requested in their wills that a pilgrimage be made for the intention of their departed soul, hired others to complete the pilgrimage for them (Lo Giacco, 2016). Others used pilgrimage as a guise to satiate their curiosity, experience the novel, and see for themselves whether the stories they heard of faraway places were true (Sumpton, 1975).

2.4.3 Theistic vs. Atheistic Pilgrimage

According to the concept of horizontal and vertical transcendence, phenomenological experiences of individuals can manifest themselves in similar manners, regardless of whether one ascribes to a theistic worldview. The difference, however, lies in the ontological framing of the experience; whereas religious experiences, i.e., vertical forms of transcendence, incorporate the supernatural and divine into the personal significance of an individual's experience, horizontal forms of transcendence orient the dimension toward naturalistic phenomena (Coleman & Arrowood, 2015; Farias et al., 2019). In a study that compared the motivations of theistic and atheistic travelers on the Camino de Santiago, Farias et al. (2019) found that there were no statistically significant differences between the two categories of people in regard to motivations of spiritual seeking, the search for life direction, closeness to nature, or sensation seeking; the only differences were in the context of community and religious growth.

The expansion of the scope of what constitutes pilgrimage in contemporary society is rooted in a shift in understanding from the traditional paradigm of pilgrimage to a post-modernist worldview; whereas the former paradigm assumed the centrality of religious elements in pilgrimage, more contemporary conceptualizations of pilgrimage assert that post-modernism allows for the inclusion of secular travel as a form of pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Some characteristics of pilgrimage from a post-modernist paradigm include the deconstruction of existing theories, emphasis of subjective rather than objective qualities, and augmented emphasis on individual experience (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). The “modern secular pilgrimage,” described by Digance (2003), is inclusive of non-religiously motivated travelers who seek out empirical knowledge.

Hence, while the contents of this thesis speak of the Via Francigena as a pilgrimage route, the term *pilgrimage* is used in a post-modern sense. While still acknowledging the historical past of the Via Francigena as a religious pilgrimage route, the analyses of this thesis seek to answer the research question in the context of the modern Via Francigena, with the inclusion of all travelers — secular and religious alike — in the nomenclature of the *pilgrim*.

2.5 The CRCE

Among other factors, the increased popularity of cultural and experiential tourism in recent decades led to the creation of the CRCE (Conti et al., 2014). Subsequent to a resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the COE (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011), the CRCE was created in 1987 with the initial purpose to identify and promote international routes as a means to reinforce European identity (Lo Giacco, 2016). Following the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the CRCE began to prioritize the promotion of lesser known cultural and natural heritage, especially in marginal areas, as a mechanism for sustainable development (Conti et al., 2014). The CRCE has worked for the provision of public funds for the cultural routes in order to promote and restore them so as to reinforce collective identity and construct a foundation for future development (Conti et al., 2014). Since July 1997, the European Institute for Cultural Routes, headquartered in Luxembourg, has spearheaded the development plans for the CRCE (Lo Giacco, 2016).

Responsible and sustainable heritage management are the cornerstones of the CRCE program, and an emphasis is placed on the economic growth and social wellbeing of local communities, protection of the environment and resources, and respect for diversity as well as socio-cultural authenticity in the context of cultural legacies and tradition (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2012). On a multinational level, the CRCE program strives to make stakeholders and organizations adhere to the charters, conventions, and recommendations of the COE, UNESCO, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2012).

Each particular route of the CRCE is based upon a historic route, cultural concept, figure, or phenomenon that holds transnational significance and expresses common European values (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2012). From the Atlantic to the Caucasus and from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, these 38 routes (COE, n.d.) span 70 countries (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011) and even as far as North and South America, Africa, and Asia (Trono et al., 2017). Each particular route must include a minimum of three countries on its itinerary to qualify as a part of the CRCE (Graf & Popesku, 2016); this requirement, along with other selection rules and criteria (established in the Resolution of 17th March 1988 n.4 of the Committee of Ministers of the COE and amended by the Resolution of 10th October 2007 n.12) outline what a route must possess in order to be considered a cultural itinerary; these rules and criteria also stipulate the need for such routes to have demonstrated the roles that they played in the formation of the European identity, their ability to engage younger people with knowledge of European history and culture, and the potential to offer sustainable development opportunities for cultural tourism (Lo Giacco, 2016).

As the European common identity was predominantly moulded by Christianity's influence over the centuries, UNESCO and European institutions alike have paid attention to European pilgrimage routes and pilgrims in recent years (Lo Giacco, 2016), starting with the official recognition of such routes. In October 1987, the Santiago de Compostela Declaration was enacted following the meeting of ministers of culture from the COE's member states (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011). In the declaration, the "Footsteps of St. James" (i.e., the Camino de Santiago route) was established as the first "European Cultural Route;" to date, the Camino remains the most well-known route in the program (Conti et al., 2014; Graf & Popesku, 2016). The COE also recognized the Via Francigena as a major cultural route in 1994, and in 2004 the Via Francigena's title was updated to "Major European Cultural Itinerary," along with the Camino that same year (Conti et al., 2014; Lo Giacco, 2016). Other pilgrimage routes, such as the Via Regia (which connected the Via Francigena to Russia), Saint Martin of Tours Route, and European Route of Cistercian abbeys have also gained recognition by the CRCE (Lo Giacco, 2016).

2.5.1 Road, Route, Path, or Way?

The literal Latin translation of "Via Francigena," sometimes referred to as "Via Romea Francigena," is "the road [or 'the way' (Anthon, 1865)] from France (to Rome)" (Lo Giacco, 2016). Although its name indicates a road, the Via Francigena never was, nor did it become, one singular road but rather a series of paths, tracks, and trails that diverged from Roman-era cobblestones and converged at significant geographical crossings as well as residential areas (i.e., the submansiones, or stops, that Sigeric recorded in his travels) that gave travelers the opportunity to spend their nights sheltered (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

How shall the Via Francigena be referred in this thesis in order to express the continuous connection between the destinations from Canterbury to Rome without misrepresenting this connection as one uniform entity? Is it a road, a route, a path, or a way? The lexicon of the Via Francigena shall be discussed presently.

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines a *road* as “an open way for vehicles, persons, and animals” and a *route* as “a traveled way,” “a line of travel,” and “an established or selected course of travel or action.” Akin to the latter definition of route, a *way* as “a course traveled from one place to another” and “a thoroughfare for travel or transportation from place to place” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). A path is “a trodden way” and synonymous with a “course” or a “route” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Hence, these words shall be used interchangeably when referring to the Via Francigena. The distinction to make, however, is that this terminology refers to the continuous path that pilgrims can walk upon, regardless of whether the substance of the path (cement, dirt, gravel, etc.) changes along the course of the way.

Use of the term *the Way* (or *the Via*), with a capital letter, shall be distinguished from the lower-case *way* in the sense that it shall act as a proper noun synonymous with *the Via Francigena* as a concept rather than as the specific physical path by which it is manifested.

2.6 The Via Francigena

French historian Jacques Le Goff referred to the Via Francigena as a “bridge of cultures” that connected Anglo-Saxon and Latin Europe (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Ferrias, 2017). The 1,800-km North Francigena route runs from Canterbury Cathedral in England to Rome, crossing France, Switzerland, and much of Italy along the way (Nigro et al., 2015). Originally, the route was unconsolidated and comprised of a network of roads (Trono et al., 2017) such as the Via Cassia, a Roman road constructed along trails dating at least as far back as Etruscan times, which connected Rome to Florence and Luni, a city near modern day La Spezia (Nigro et al., 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction, Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury’s 990 AD journey to and from Rome is the most famous historical account of a documented pilgrimage along the Via (Ferrias, 2017). The archbishop’s writings provide evidence that the Via at the time had become a well-defined and popular route lined with organized accommodation facilities (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). The ample accommodation options, a distinct feature separating the Via from locally important roads, were in part due to the influence of the Lombard kings of the 7th century, as they had developed royal abbeys along the route in order to facilitate communication and expansion policies (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

Although the primary route (corresponding to Sigeric's travels and recognized by the EAVF as the official modern Way) connected Rome to Canterbury via France, alternative routes historically fed into the main artery of the Via (or terminated in Rome), based upon the geographic origin of the travelers; pilgrims from the west could travel over the hills of Monginevro and Moncenisio in Piedmont, Germanic pilgrims from the center-north of Europe utilized alternative *vie Romee* ("roads to Rome") by way of Italy's Adige and Pusteria valleys near Verona and Treviso, respectively, and some less prominent roads extended into other regions of England, France, and Switzerland (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

Pilgrimages throughout subsequent centuries attest to the scope of the Via's notoriety in even more remote territories. For example, between 1151 and 1154 AD, Nikulas Saemundarson of Munkathvera, an abbot at the Icelandic monastery of Thingor, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land via Rome, which he reached after following in the footsteps of Sigeric and, in many cases, staying in the same submansiones as the archbishop along the Via (Ferrias, 2017). Accounts of other Scandinavians as well as eastern Europeans on the Via are known as well; these pilgrimage accounts succeed Sigeric's travels by a few centuries due to Christianity's slower spread to these areas (Ferrias, 2017).

With the passage of time, and especially in Tuscany, the Via's function developed economic and commercial significance in addition to spiritual function (Morelli, 2007; Nigro et al., 2015). By the 12th century, the quantity of merchants traveling along the Via transformed it into a commercial route between northern and southern Europe; between the 13th and 15th centuries, trade and commerce continued to expand, creating alternative routes that paralleled the Via, which ultimately diminished the original way's importance; the final death blow came after Florence's influence solidified the prominence of the Apennine trading route from Florence to Bologna and, aside from locals, rendered insignificant the Cisa Pass along the Via (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

In the 14th century, pilgrimage to Rome reemerged thanks to Pope Bonafice VIII's establishment of the Jubilee, a Holy Year that attracted pilgrims to the tombs of saints Peter and Paul in their quest to obtain a plenary indulgence through their devotional act; these Holy Years were typically celebrated once every 50 years (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

The Via was largely forgotten until the 1970s and 1980s, when the Camino's rising fame prompted the people of Italy to rediscover the cultural heritage of pilgrimage to Rome (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). In 1985, an anthropologist named Giovanni Caselli, beginning in Canterbury and walking from submansio to submansio until he reached Rome, carefully reconstructed Sigeric's travel path (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

The growth of the outdoor tourism sector on an international scale and the increased spread of travel literature both played a part in the Via's increased visibility (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). The Great Jubilee of 2000 brought some attention to the Via as well; during that year, a couple thousand pilgrims walked to Rome; in contrast, over 100,000 people peregrinated to Santiago de Compostela during that same time span (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). Due to the small design nature of the Via Francigena project, path usability, infrastructural levels, and lack of consolidated interest from the territories in which the Via is located, there were no indicators of growth following the jubilee (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017); in fact, whereas approximately 2,500 pilgrims walked along the Via in 2012, about 200,000 pilgrims travelled on the Camino (Nigro et al. 2015; Raju, 2014). In time, the Via has slowly gained higher levels of cultural, political, religious, spiritual, and touristic attention, and bottom-up engagement from associations, dioceses, institutions, research institutes, and enthusiasts has propagated the significance of the route (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

With the revival of the Via Francigena came concerns over appropriate hospitality facilities. The Via has brought local development to villages and rural areas to the benefit of privately-owned, profit-seeking facilities, and in doing so it has generated social, supportive, and ethical tourism (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al., 2011). Presently, accommodations along the route are run by hotel, bed & breakfast (B&B), and hostel owners but also various organization that strive to make the journey inexpensive for pilgrims: parish churches, welfare bodies, confraternities that have survived from medieval times, municipal authorities, and religious congregations (Ferrias, 2017). Some of these structures and volunteer-run hostels provide hospitality for a financial donation (known as an "offerta libera") at the discretion of the pilgrim; for the facilities that offer arrangements out of good will rather than profit (usually parishes and convents) but have other obligations, the increase in the number of travelers has at times put a strain on resources and jeopardized future operations (Ferrias, 2017). These lodgings have maintained the spiritual dimension integral to the Via's history, and to lose them would be to lose a part of the route's cultural heritage (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

Those who travel the Via carry with them a pilgrim's Credential (also known as the pilgrim's passport), which certifies that the individual is a pilgrim rather than an ordinary tourist in search of a discount; the Credential grants access to pilgrim-only accommodation structures and also allows for the procurement of discounted rates from other affiliated businesses, such as ordinary hotels or Trenitalia, which offers discounted train tickets on select routes (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Ferrias, 2017). Along the way, the Credential is imprinted with unique stamps from each stop to prove that the pilgrimage was completed; with evidence that pilgrims have completed at least the last 100 km by foot (or 200 km by bicycle), the Testimonium certifying the completion of the pilgrimage can be obtained upon arriving to Rome (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Ferrias, 2017).

2.6.1 The EAVF and Management of the Via Francigena

After the route was rediscovered, public administrations understood that the Via could contribute to development, and so the path gained importance in the public eye (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). Technicians from Italy's Military Geographical Institute utilized Caselli's 1985 reconstructed path to create a complete cartography of the route, and studies, research, and cultural projects were undergone in regard to the Via. In 1993, Italy's Department of Tourism officially endorsed the project as well as its promotional plans for the Great Jubilee of 2000, and the project was approved by the European Commission in its Community Action Plan to promote tourism; ultimately, these actions led to the Via's inclusion in the CRCE program (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). Various cultural and walking associations also began to pay attention to the Via; one of the first, the Association Internationale Via Francigena, was founded in Martigny, Switzerland in 1997 (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017).

On April 7, 2001, a cohort of 34 Italian municipalities founded the first association of the Via Francigena in Fidenza, Italy with the intention to promote, protect, valorize, and enhance the Way on an institutional level within Italy (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; L. Faravelli, personal communication, 3 February 2020; Nigro et al., 2015). In 2006, this organization officially became known as the EAVF (Nigro et al., 2015), and since 2007 the COE has given it the responsibility to safeguard, promote, and enhance the Via on a European level (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Ferras, 2017).

The EAVF's governance model engages all institutional levels: local, regional, national, and European (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). As of February 2020, 173 affiliate public municipal, provincial, and regional institutions were members of the EAVF (L. Faravelli, personal communication, 3 February 2020). Additionally, hundreds of privately-owned partners are affiliated with the EAVF. These partners are comprised of restaurants, accommodations, and other entities that, in exchange for visibility, agree to host pilgrims at discounted rates, provide pilgrim-specific services such as laundry, and pay an annual membership fee to the EAVF; for facilities that have less than 20 beds and host pilgrims for less than €20 per night, the membership is free. Extenuating circumstances notwithstanding, pilgrims are limited to staying at each discounted accommodation structure for one night in order to guarantee that they remain transient (L. Faravelli, personal communication, 3 February 2020).

In addition to serving as a linkage institution between stakeholders throughout the route and facilitating two general assemblies annually, the EAVF has also spearheaded the Via's UNESCO candidacy status (which began in 2015), initiated the "I Love Francigena" awareness and promotion project, and contributed to the Routes4U Project to valorize and promote the Alpine Macro-region of the CRCE (L. Faravelli, personal communication, 3 February 2020). The EAVF works with local entities to create the official stamps for the

pilgrim's Credential and created the Credential system itself, along with the official Via Francigena guidebook that is sponsored by the CRCE; however, a daughter organization of the EAVF, the Francigena Service, is responsible for the selling of the credentials and guides in order to maintain the EAVF's nonprofit status (L. Faravelli, personal communication, 3 February 2020).

2.6.2 The Via Francigena in Italy

The official, 45-leg Via Francigena journey through Italy is 1,004 km long (Ferrias, 2017); from the Great Saint Bernard Pass at the Italian-Swiss border to Rome, the Italian portion of the Via Francigena corresponding to Sigeric's journey traverses 140 municipalities in seven regions: the Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Tuscany, and Lazio (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017). Starting in 2006, the route was redesigned and reinterpreted by the EAVF with the collaboration of Italy's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and local authorities in order to account for modern safety, landscape dimensions, accommodation facilities and private land ownership (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Nigro et al., 2015). The official path was also designed to curtail heavily trafficked roads along the route in favor of secondary roads and paths through the countryside (Trono et al., 2017).

Southward, Rome was historically connected by a series of roads (by way of the Via Francigena Salentina, Via Appia, and Via Traiana) to the Adriatic province of Brindisi in the Puglia region and finally to the Sanctuary of Santa Maria di Leuca, and from both of these locations pilgrims could continue on to or return from the Holy Land (Nigro et al., 2015; Lo Giacco, 2016; Trono et al., 2017). In 2015, the EAVF Board of Directors officially approved the "Francigena of the South" route, which is currently in the process of further development (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; L. Bruschi, personal communication, 15 August 2019).

3 PRESENTATION OF THE CASE: THE VALLE D'AOSTA

(a) *The Destination Profile*

While the term *destination* can be interpreted in different manners, for the purpose of this thesis it shall be defined henceforth in accordance with the European Commission's (2016, p. 10) delineation as "a place or area where the visitor management process usually includes a range of public and private-sector stakeholders together with the host community." In the context of this thesis' research question, the "segment that passes through Italy's Valle d'Aosta region" is inclusive of the Great Saint Bernard Hospice, which is located on Swiss territory but is less than 500 m from the Italian border, because the first leg of the Valle d'Aosta section as stipulated by the EAVF begins at the hospice

(Ferrias, 2017), thus making it an integral liaison into the Valle d’Aosta and, by association, a part of the region.

Table 1: The Stages of the Via Francigena in the Valle d’Aosta

Stage	Length	Ascent	Descent	Difficulty
Great Saint Bernard to Echevennoz	14.9 km	60 m	300 m	Demanding
Echevennoz to Aosta	13.6 km	100 m	750 m	Average
Aosta to Châtillon	27.8 km	590 m	660 m	Demanding
Châtillon to Verrès	19.0 km	570 m	740 m	Demanding
Verrès to Pont-Saint-Martin	14.8 km	180 m	150 m	Easy
Total	90.1 km	1,500 m	3,600 m	

Source: Adapted from Ferrias (2017).

The Valle d’Aosta section of the Via Francigena, from the Great Saint Bernard Hospice to Pont-Sant-Martin at the border of Piedmont, is 90.1 km in length and marked by a series of yellow signs that point pilgrims in the correct direction (Ferrias, 2017). It is comprised of dirt roads and rural paths as well as asphalt historic trails and mountainous mule tracks (Ferrias, 2017). Pilgrims along the way traverse the Alps, ascending (depending on their direction of travel) to the Great Saint Bernard Pass 2,473 m above sea level or descending to Pont-Saint-Martin at an elevation of 345 m. The majority of the terrain is demanding, and a portion of the route’s accessibility is seasonal; the Great Saint Bernard Pass is impassable from October until May due to extreme snow cover and the threat of avalanches on the Italian side (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; R. Duchoud, personal communication, 20 February 2020).

At the Pont-Sant-Martin end of the Valle d’Aosta, the distance and altitude indicated above are measured to the parish church in the heart of the city center on Via Chanoux (Ferrias, 2017), not to the official end of the city at the Piedmont border; this is because the historical stop of Sigeric would have been in this section of the town, and the approximate 2 km from Pont-Sant-Martin to the Piedmont region is traversed in the next leg of the route that leads to Ivrea (Ferrias, 2017). For the purpose of this thesis, the small section from Pont-Sant-Martin to Piedmont is included in the destination profile of the Valle d’Aosta for the simple fact that it is within the official boundaries of the region.

Historical remnants of the past can be seen by pilgrims, beginning at the Great Saint Bernard Pass, where ruins of a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter as well as a proto-historical path used by the Salassi people and later transformed into a first century Roman road can still be seen (Ferrias, 2017). In many parts of the Valle d’Aosta, the path follows the historic rus, 13th to 15th century medieval irrigation canals that crisscross the alpine region (Ferrias, 2017). Toward the end of the valley, segments of the path are walked upon the first century BC Roman consular road of the Via delle Gallie outside of Donnas, and

the path also takes pilgrims over the 2,000-year-old and still-functional Roman bridge at Pont-Sant-Martin (Ferrias, 2017).

Pilgrims traveling through the Valle d'Aosta region also encounter living heritage, beginning at the Great Saint Bernard Hospice, which was founded in the 11th century by Saint Bernard of Menthon and has been continuously run by the Cannons Regular of the Hospitaller Congregation of Great Saint Bernard (CRB) for nearly 1,000 years; the religious order's vocation has been to shelter, feed, and even rescue travelers crossing the historically dangerous pass, which was the only navigable route from Switzerland to this part of Italy prior to the 1964 opening of the Great Saint Bernard Tunnel (Baudinelli & Bruschi, 2017; Ferrias, 2017; R. Duchoud, personal communication, 20 February 2020).

(b) *The Stakeholders*

Freeman (1984, p. 46) defined a *stakeholder* as “[a]ny group or individual who can affect or is affected by a development and/or the achievement of an organization’s objectives.” This term is nebulous without further clarification. For the purpose of this thesis, the scope of stakeholders considered for the research question are those who are affiliated with the Via in the Valle d'Aosta or involved with the Way in their professional or personal lives. Specifically, this includes the EAVF and its employees because their organization’s mission “to enhance the Via Francigena” (L. Faravelli, personal communication, 3 February 2020) applies to the Valle d'Aosta region. Secondly, the Regional Department of Tourism (RDT) in the Valle d'Aosta as well as the regional tourism offices (TOs) are considered in the research, as they actively seek to promote the Valle d'Aosta’s touristic offerings at large, including the Via. Lastly, municipal representatives, facilities and businesses such as accommodation structures and restaurants, and other organizations, namely the Association of the Bard Fortress (ABF), the Valle d'Aosta branch of the Friends of the Via Francigena Association (FVF), and the liceo (high school) of tourism in Saint-Vincent, are considered; as these stakeholders, aside from the EAVF representatives, live along the route in the Valle d'Aosta region, some of their experiences address the research question not only from the context of their represented organization but also from the perspective of a local. The geographic confines of the stakeholders are as follow: from the Great Saint Bernard Hospice to Pont-Sant-Martin and within the bounds of the 21 municipalities through which the Via passes (L. Proment, personal communication, 5 February 2020), with the exception of the EAVF representatives as well as one hospitality facility (Eremo di Perloz, to be addressed later) outside of Pont-Sant-Martin but registered nonetheless as a partner institution of the EAVF.

(c) *The Time Dimension*

The Via Francigena has a thousand-year history of constant change, but this thesis will focus upon changes along the Via in the past 10 years, current conditions, and future prospects.

4 METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the range of opinions that stakeholders have regarding the Via Francigena's sustainability along the Valle d'Aosta segment of the route. To achieve this objective, data were gathered through the use of qualitative methods in order to collect the various perspectives of stakeholders, engage these multiple realities, and develop inductive conclusions (Jennings, 2015) as to their overlying sentiments in regard to sustainability. Hence, the goal of this study is not to demonstrate universal stakeholder consensus on the status of the Via's sustainability in the Valle d'Aosta but rather to contextualize the situation from multiple perspectives and synthesize how these individual realities might be interrelated.

4.1 Research Paradigm

This thesis is intended to construct knowledge and understanding through the interpretive constructionist paradigm, which falls under the naturalistic field of research and is rooted in constructivism (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The ontology of constructivism is relativistic; knowledge is understood as a human mental construction that is contextualized by theoretical frameworks, without which there is no "reality" (Guba, 1990). Interpretive constructionism accepts that there is an existent reality but argues that it cannot be measured directly; rather, it can only be observed through the perceptions of people through the unique lenses of their prior experiences and understandings, thus rendering subjective what is known (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). As individuals experience these socially and experientially based constructions in their own particular manner, multiple realities exist (Guba, 1990). Since multiple realities exist, apparently conflicting versions of the same phenomenon can be true and exist concurrently (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Due to the nature of constructivism, the distinction between ontology and epistemology is rendered obsolete; the inquirer and the inquired become consubstantial, and findings are the created result of the interaction between the two rather than an independently existing truth (Guba, 1990). Methodologically, the goal of constructivist research is to hermeneutically depict individual constructions accurately and dialectically compare and

contrast the individual constructions in order to extrapolate consensus that can be generated into one or a few constructions (Guba, 1990).

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews

An in-depth interview method was utilized to collect qualitative primary data from experts in order to answer the research question (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). A semi-structured interview approach (see Appendix 1) was implemented for the purposes of maintaining general consistency in the interviews and guiding discussions through key areas of interest (namely the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental realms of sustainability and resilience) while allowing respondents to express their unique insights and focus on matters most important to them. During the data collection process, a combination of non-probability research methods were utilized in order to achieve an appropriate interview sample.

Chain-referral sampling was initially utilized in order to obtain access to Via Francigena-affiliated stakeholders through the social links of the initial individuals of the sample population (Bagheri & Saadati, 2015). The author interviewed representatives of the EAVF, who introduced him to Laurette Proment of the RDT in the Valle d'Aosta. Mrs. Proment has been involved in the development of the Via for over two decades, and she is the EAVF's point of contact in the Valle d'Aosta for regional developments along the route (L. Bruschi, personal communication, 14 August 2019).

Prior to the author's meeting and interview with the RDT, emails were sent to six accommodation facilities that were listed on the EAVF's official website as low-cost pilgrim accommodation (LCPA) options in the Valle d'Aosta region (11 accommodations were listed as low cost out of the 25 total options that also included touristic accommodations and private houses) (EAVF, n.d.a); the rationale was that, since these accommodations were pilgrim-only facilities, they would be better suited over facilities (that also host other types of tourists) to represent the context of the Via. Of these facilities, interviews were secured with Camping Tunnel Etroubles and Eremo di Perloz. The Pont-Saint-Martin hostel as well as the Franciscan Capuchins of Châtillon were contacted, but interviews were not confirmed until further actions were taken (as described below). No response was sent from two accommodation structures: Château Verdun in Saint-Oyen and Hostel Dortoir in Etroubles. Whereas the social visibility of the potential interviewees was relatively high, accessibility (particularly, responsiveness) was relatively limited (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) until the researcher secured the opportunity to collaborate with the RDT.

Following an interview with the RDT representative, purposive sampling was utilized in order to produce a representative sample of the population through expert knowledge (Lavrakas, 2008). Purposive sampling is considered to be appropriate when selecting small samples that are within the confines of a limited geographic area (Lavrakas, 2008), which conforms the profile of the Valle d'Aosta region and the thesis' purpose. Since the RDT is the regional entity responsible for overseeing the development of the Via in the Valle d'Aosta and has pre-existing rapport with the stakeholders in the region, the RDT's active involvement in securing interviews established credibility for the researcher and expedited the success rate of the interview solicitation process. The author and RDT collaborated to create a shortlist of a range of relevant stakeholders in the Valle d'Aosta region in order to make the study representative of a larger segment of the population: business owners, public institutions, tourism professionals, etc.

The RDT representative sent emails to the offices of the mayors of each of the 21 municipalities in which the Via is present and to each of the Valle d'Aosta's official "friends of the Via Francigena" accommodation options (not to be confused with the FVF), which, according to the official website of the RDT, is comprised of 71 facilities that offer one-night hospitality and pilgrim-specific services such as the provision of information about the route (Assessorato al Turismo, 2016). Some, but not all, of these accommodations are found on the EAVF website as well. The RDT also connected the researcher to a representative of the Great Saint Bernard Hospice in Bourg-Saint-Pierre. To orient potential participants to the study and to build the rapport of the researcher, a short presentation was made by the researcher (see Appendix 2) to explain the study's framework of sustainability and orient the potential interviewee to the nature and objectives of the study.

Of the interviews secured prior to the RDT's collaboration, Camping Tunnel Etroubles, part of the "friends of the Via Francigena" list, was confirmed by the RDT as a suitable interview option, but Eremo di Perloz was advised to be excluded because it did not meet the criteria of being within 1 km of the path. Ultimately, Eremo di Perloz was considered in the scope of the study because it is listed on the EAVF website and, although not within the 1 km range stipulated by the RDT and that the EAVF technically has agreed to (geographically, it falls within a kilometer of the Via, but it is only accessible by a route that is approximately 5 km long), provides services within the range because the representatives drive the pilgrims to the facility from the Via Francigena path.

Apart from the RDT's initiative, the chain referral sampling method was utilized in two additional instances: Hotel Crabun in Pont-Saint-Martin referred the Hotel Le Coeur du Pont in neighboring Donnas, and the Office of the Mayor in Châtillon introduced the researcher to the Franciscan Capuchins of Châtillon. Both of these facilities were later confirmed by the RDT as relevant stakeholders. Lastly, the two regional TOs (in Aosta

city and Pont-Saint-Martin) were referred by the RDT, but the researcher went directly to the sites for spontaneous interviews without prior facilitation from the RDT.

The organizations represented by the interviewees were classified into five distinct categories: Accommodation, Restaurant, Municipality, TO, and Other. These categories were not mutually exclusive, as some organizations encompassed multiple categories and some interviewees represented multiple organizations (see Appendix 3). A total of 24 individual interviews were conducted, and 33 individuals (14 males and 19 females) participated in the interviews; there were more interviewees than individual interviews because seven interviews contained the contributions from multiple representatives of the given organization: Camping Tunnel Etroubles (two); Eremo di Perloz (two); Hotel Le Coeur du Pont (two); the Office of the Vice-Mayor of Aosta (three); the Office of the Mayor of Châtillon (two); Scuola Tecnico Turistico (two); and the TO of Aosta (three).

Substantive considerations were taken into account when securing the interviews. The RDT and researcher, considering the geographic diversity and population variations of the region from the alpine villages to the lower valley, attempted to engage stakeholders throughout the range of the path. Within the Italian boundaries of the Valle d'Aosta itself, 10 of the 21 municipalities, all municipalities in which Sigeric's submansiones were located, and two of the five smallest as well as eight of the 10 largest municipalities along the route (Principali Città Regione Valle d'Aosta, 2019) were represented by at least one interviewee (see appendices 3 and 4).

The median interview duration was 30 min 34 s, and the interviews were conducted in Italian, English, or a combination of the two languages, in accordance with the capabilities of the interviewee. The interviewees verbally agreed to have the researcher audio-record the interviews, and these interviews were later translated when necessary and transcribed so that the key ideas from the interviewees' discourses were recorded.

4.2.2 Qualitative Questionnaire

In the official emails that the RDT sent to the municipalities and accommodation facilities on behalf of the researcher, stakeholders were requested to complete a Google Form questionnaire that was initially intended to familiarize the researcher to the individual stakeholders' general perceptions of the Via's sustainability; the primary purpose of the questionnaire was to establish a sense of how stakeholders believe their individual entities and the region in general perform in the context of the route's sustainability. The intent was to provide a foundation for the open-ended interview to follow so that the researcher would be better prepared to formulate pertinent questions for the specific interviewee's circumstances. The RDT assisted the researcher in translating the questions into Italian in

order to maximize the lexical accuracy of the questions and make the questionnaire more accessible to the population of interest, since not all of them spoke English.

The questionnaire's opening statement (see Appendix 5) explicitly noted that by completing the form, the respondent confirmed that he or she represented an entity located along the Via Francigena route in the Valle d'Aosta. The form queried respondents on their names, organizations' names, and municipal locations in order to allow the researcher to verify that the respondents in question fit into the aforementioned criteria in which a stakeholder was defined for this thesis.

Four open-ended questions were utilized (see Appendix 5) in order to avoid researcher-created bias through suggested responses and to encourage spontaneity, richness, and a breadth of responses (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, & Vehovar, 2003). These questions asked respondents about what their greatest sustainability concerns were for their own entity as well as for the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta as a whole, how they have seen the Via Francigena change in the region in the past 10 years, and if they had anything else to note.

A rating scale method (Wright & Masters, 1982) was utilized for 10 questions in order to understand how the entities' representatives would evaluate their individual organization's economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability performance, the sustainability of the Via in the Valle d'Aosta, and the performance of the EAVF and RDT in their involvement with the Via's development within the Valle d'Aosta. The questions were based upon the 10-point model of the Likert Scale (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015) in order to more precisely show the degree to which the stakeholders believed that sustainability had been achieved. These ratings were intended for comparative rather than quantitative purposes; the researcher was interested in observing the rankings of each individual entity in relation to the entity's other rankings to understand the relative weaknesses in sustainability from each respondent's perspective. The averages of the ranking responses were also intended to provide an understanding of what stakeholders generally view as weaker components of the Via in the Valle d'Aosta, as the aggregated relative rankings of each entity could demonstrate average sentiments of performance for each stakeholder category.

Item non-response (Reja et al., 2003) was avoided by requiring respondents to fill out all questions with the exception of the one concerning the entity's opinion of the EAVF's performance, which the researcher asked respondents to leave blank if they were unfamiliar with the EAVF.

A total of 12 responses were recorded (see Appendix 6 for the list of respondents). The initial purpose of collecting these data as preparation for the interviews proved to be ineffective, as many interviewees did not complete the questionnaire, and some questionnaire respondents did not return requests for interview; hence, the data collected

from the questionnaire recorded opinions that were from a wider pool of stakeholders than what was represented solely through the interviews. The stakeholders fell into the same five categories listed in the interview categorizations, with a notable addition in the “Other” category being the ABF, with whom the RDT had attempted to coordinate an interview for the researcher but was unable to secure due to time limitations. Although the questionnaire did not serve its initial purpose and had too few responses to prove meaningful from a quantitative perspective, the responses nevertheless provided additional data and insights that complemented the more comprehensive interview data.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

The researcher elected to base the data analysis process upon the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis was utilized because it facilitates the identification of patterns in a dataset and allows the researcher to describe and interpret the significance of common themes (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). Whereas some thematic analysis models embrace a realist or (post)positivist ontological framework for research (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015; Kidder & Fine, 1987) whereby rigid models and coding frames produce findings that are understood to be objective (Boyatzis, 1998), this research utilized Braun & Clarke’s (2006) framework that is compatible with the interpretive constructionist paradigm. A semantic rather than latent focus was adopted in the coding process, whereby the author primarily evaluated explicitly stated ideas rather than implicit ideas within the context of the interviews. While the nature of the thesis remains inductive, the analysis incorporated a degree of deduction in the sense that the researcher expected certain themes related to sustainability (and particularly in the context of the sustainability frameworks presented to the stakeholders) to be present in the findings.

The author familiarized himself with the data by reading through the interview and questionnaire responses and making notes related to his initial observations. Following this informal process, coding was utilized to systematically synthesize and categorize data trends (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). The semi-structured interview transcripts were manually labelled under one of 25 general thematic topics (Appendix 7), which were further refined (Appendix 8) and re-labelled in each interview transcript before formally becoming the final overarching themes, themes, and subthemes of the of the research (Appendix 9).

The seven overarching themes that were established included: “Time Dimension,” “Management,” “Goods and Services” (including accommodations), “Stakeholders,” “Sustainability,” “Resilience,” and “Miscellaneous.” However, the “Miscellaneous” category was primarily utilized to isolate non-relevant information and tangents from the auto coding process (discussed below).

The computer software program NVivo was utilized to help facilitate this process. Following the coding process, the theme development process was undergone to analytically organize codes into the different thematic components. NVivo auto coded the themes by heading format. The manually typed categories were formatted so that the software would automatically organize the data in order for each individual theme to be isolated and analyzed. The author dedicated approximately 10 hours to ensuring quality control, as not all formatting was processed correctly. Additionally, the software was utilized to run word frequency queries (with “stop words” that were automatically and manually programmed to exclude undesired results such as proper nouns or filler words), create word clouds, and automatically generate codes by scanning the data and identifying recurring themes and topics. Auto coded sentiments by speaker were processed and aggregated by sector in order for the author to identify whether certain stakeholders (both as individuals and as categories) tended to have more positive or negative sentiments in the context of their interviews. The ABF was excluded from the sentiment analysis because there were insufficient data, as all the ABF’s questionnaire responses were registered as neutral sentiments.

The selected data analysis technique was appropriate for the context of this study because it allowed for the inclusion of descriptive, interpretive commentary and potentially contradictory perspectives (which are possible in interpretive constructionist studies) to be represented (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015).

4.2.4 Limitations

Given that each Via Francigena stakeholder in the Valle d’Aosta faces his or own unique circumstances, opinions, and agendas, this study could not be and was not comprehensive in addressing all the actual opinions that existed in the stakeholder demographic. Acknowledging that each respondent’s reality was valid, the researcher accepted that the data collection at best provided a generalized understanding of stakeholders’ opinions. Additionally, perspectives could have been influenced by stakeholder exposure to the concept of sustainability. Those stakeholders who did not review the researcher’s presentation (Appendix 2) may have been less prepared to discuss sustainability, and those with greater interest with sustainability may have had more insights to contribute. However, it was impossible to calculate stakeholders’ levels of understanding with regard to sustainability.

With the non-probability nature of the data sampling, it is natural that the results would have at least a degree of bias (Bagheri & Saadati, 2015), especially in the case of the “Other” categories of respondents; the representatives of the ABF, FVF, and liceo knew the RDT coordinating representative on a personal level, and they were chosen although many possible “Other” options existed in the Valle d’Aosta.

The data were largely representative of the entities that are affiliated with the EAVF or RDT, and it is likely that other, non-affiliated entities that serve pilgrims along the Via in the Valle d'Aosta were not represented in the research. For this reason, the study more accurately represents the official facilities and affiliates of the EAVF and RDT rather than all possible entities. Additionally, the qualitative structure of the research could have resulted in non-response bias from respondents (Reia et al., 2003), as they could have been deterred from collaborating in a time-intensive open-ended questionnaire or interview.

The utilization of the NVivo software, while useful, had its limitations as well. In terms of the auto coded material, the categories were reviewed by the interviewer, who had to correct errors that occurred due to the system's limitations. As for the sentiment auto coding, due to time limitations, the researcher was unable to confirm that all 550 auto coded sentiments were accurate; although the sentiments were scanned by the researcher to judge the merit of the auto coding, it is likely that at least some of the codes were misrepresented due to NVivo's algorithms, which cannot account for sarcasm and nuances that may have only been discernible from the tones of interviewees.

While the interviews were successfully conducted, language barrier concerns (Squires, 2009) should be noted. The researcher was proficient, but not fluent, in Italian, and the same could be said for many of the Italian-speaking interviewees in relation to their English capabilities. While the interviewer encouraged the interviewees to speak in Italian when explaining complex concepts so as to more fluently articulate their thoughts, there were occasions (with non-English speakers) where the interviewer was required to resort to Italian and was able to adequately formulate his questions but was cognizant of the reality that the use of a non-mother tongue language was a hindrance to explaining the nuances of the intended questions.

5 RESULTS

In the following section, the names of the entities signify the responses of the entities' representatives (e.g., *Aosta TO* refers to the Aosta TO representative). Representatives who account for multiple entities (such as the municipality of Nus/Maison Rosset) shall be listed interchangeably (e.g., "municipality of Nus" or "Maison Rosset"), depending upon and denoting the capacity from which he or she spoke.

The percentages from Table 2 (below) reflect the number of sections of the data that were categorized into a particular overarching theme rather than the absolute percentage of data that fell under the theme (for example, seven sections per 100 of the accommodations' data were labelled "Time Dimension," but the actual text within that section could have represented a larger or smaller proportion of the data). The table provides a general

understanding of which stakeholder category placed more emphasis on particular overarching themes. For example, the prevalence of management topics was considerably higher for TOs (20%), and the FVF was more prone to discuss stakeholders (64%) over other topics.

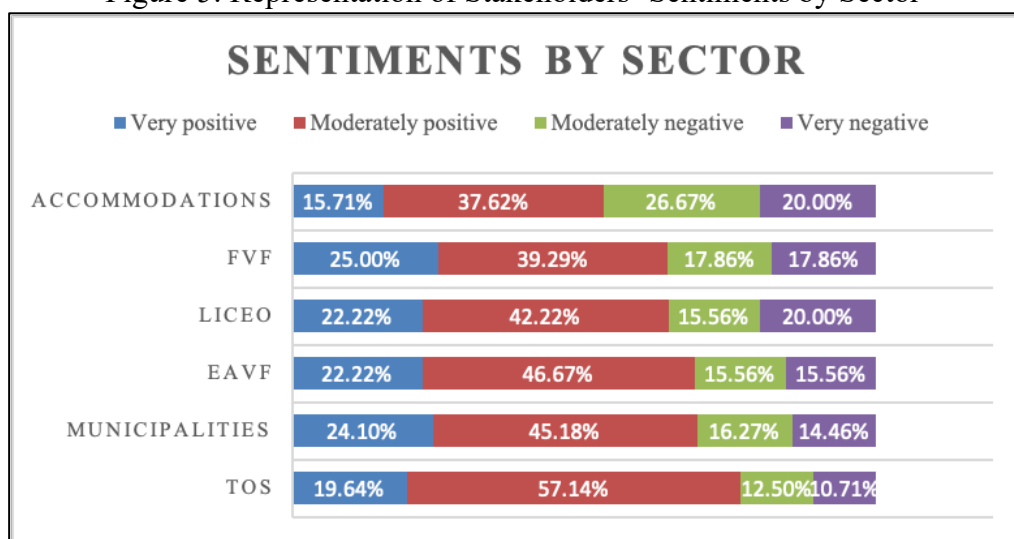
Table 2: Prevalence of Coded Sections

	Time Dimension	Management	Goods/ Services	Stakeholders	Sustainability	Resilience	Misc.
Accommodations	7%	1%	21%	17%	51%	2%	0%
FVF	9%	0%	0%	64%	18%	9%	0%
Liceo	5%	0%	3%	32%	50%	8%	3%
EAVF	4%	11%	15%	45%	26%	0%	0%
Municipalities	13%	4%	12%	28%	34%	5%	3%
TOs	9%	20%	11%	11%	37%	11%	1%
ABF	33%	0%	0%	0%	67%	0%	0%

Source: own work.

5.1 Auto Coded Sentiments

Figure 5: Representation of Stakeholders' Sentiments by Sector



Source: own work.

All sectors expressed a majority of positive sentiments; on the low end, 53.33% of accommodations' sentiments were very or moderately positive, whereas 76.79% of TO codes expressed positive sentiments. TOs, municipalities, and the EAVF had the highest rates of positive sentiments and lowest rates of very negative sentiments.

In Table 3 (below), the green boxes denote values that represented a higher percentage than the overall average sentiment percentage (e.g., the FVF's seven "very positive" sentiments out of 28 total sentiments, expressed as 25% in Figure 5, is higher than the

“very positive” overall average of 20.18%), and red boxes denote higher than average negative sentiments.

Table 3: Breakdown of the Number of Sentiment Codes Per Category

	Very Positive	Moderately Positive	Moderately Negative	Very Negative
Accommodations	33	79	56	42
FVF	7	11	5	5
Liceo	10	19	7	9
EAVF	10	21	7	7
Municipalities	40	75	27	24
TOs	11	32	7	6
Average of Totals	20.18%	43.09%	19.82%	16.91%

Source: own work.

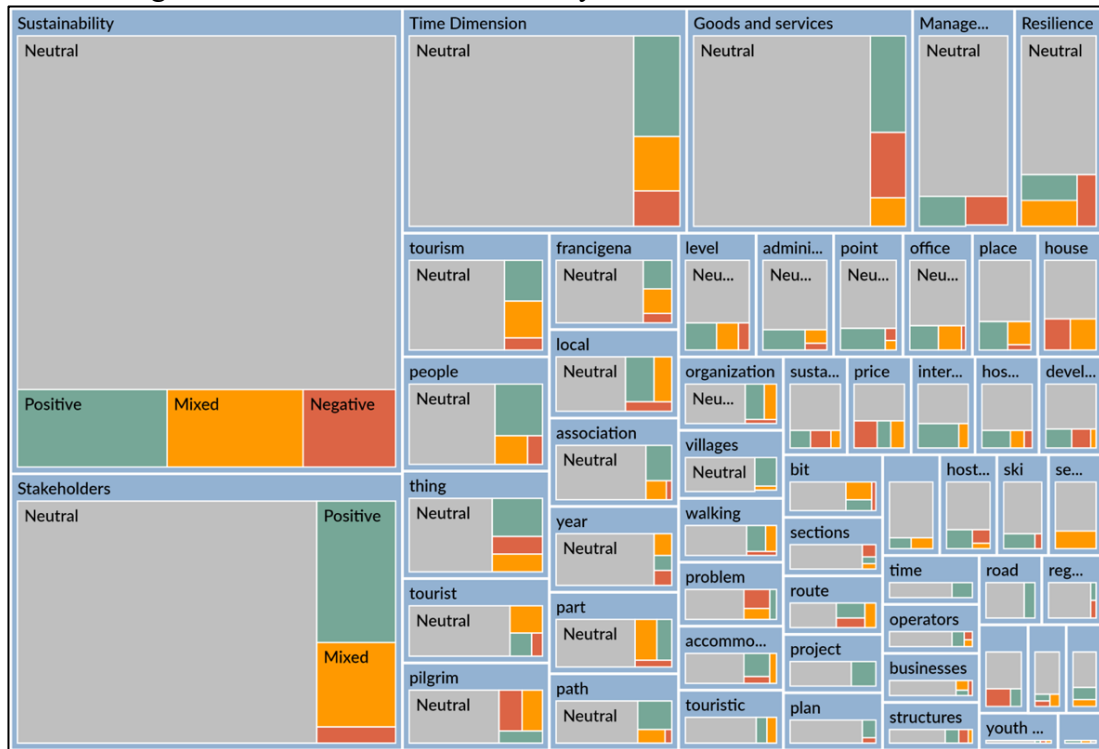
Figure 6: Auto Coded Sentiments by Individual Entity



Source: own work.

In Figure 6 (above), individual entities’ sentiments are represented with sizes proportional to their representation of the overall data. These data indicate that certain accommodation entities, such as Hotel Crabun, expressed predominantly negative sentiments, whereas others were more mixed. Certain TOs, namely the Office of the Regional Director of Tourism (ORDT) and RDT, expressed noticeably more positive sentiments compared to other TOs.

Figure 7: Auto Coded Sentiments by NVivo's Auto Coded Themes



Source: own work.

Figure 7 (above) is comprised of six overarching themes as well as the auto coded themes identified by NVivo. These data indicate that, generally, more positive sentiments than negative sentiments were expressed by each respondent, and the discrepancies are particularly noticeable for the “Stakeholders” and “Time Dimension” categories. For the auto coded themes, “tourism” is regarded more positively than negatively, whereas “pilgrim” is more mixed, and “price” is more negatively than positively regarded. These topics will be elaborated upon in the proceeding sections. Of all the auto coded sentiments, a word frequency query of stemmed words (i.e., words such as “need” and “needs” were consolidated) was utilized to better understand the most prevalent concepts by presenting the sizes of words relative to their frequencies (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Word Frequency Word Cloud of Auto Coded Sentiments



Source: own work.

Of the top 25 most frequent words out of the 100 words represented in each word cloud, the author, through his own discretion and in the context of the recurring themes he recalled from the interviews, identified “beautiful” and “good” (the 5th and 6th most prevalent words, with 33 and 32 occurrences) as key indicators of positive sentiments. As for negative sentiments, “need,” “difficult,” “price,” “problems,” “hostel,” and “hotels” (the 5th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 14th, and 24th words with 32, 23, 23, 22, 18, and 13 occurrences) were identified as key negative sentiment indicators. The term “hostel” also appeared in the positive sentiment word cloud as the 21st most common word (20 occurrences), indicating (as did NVivo’s auto coded theme identification software) that the topic was prevalent in the data at large. Additionally, “Santiago” (in reference to the Camino) was present in both word queries; it was the 28th most common word for positive sentiments (19 occurrences) and 26th most common word for negative sentiments (13 occurrences).

5.2 Time Dimension

5.2.1 Change in the Past 10 Years

5.2.1.1 Increased Usage of the Via Francigena

The word “increased” and its stems occurred 16 times (1.85% of the weighted total) within the “Change in the Past 10 Years” sub-category of the “Time Dimension” overarching theme, making it the third-most used word stem of this specific criteria; it was expressed by representatives of two accommodation structures (Hotel Crabun and Maison d'Ulysse), three municipalities (Aosta, Châtillon, and Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses), all four TOs, and the ABF. According to the word tree that was generated (Appendix 10), interviewees referred to the increase in pilgrim presence as well as information regarding the Via Francigena, thus indicating that the Valle d'Aosta segment is more frequented and known than it was 10 years ago. Estimates ranged from “doubling the number of clients from five years ago” (Pont-Saint-Martin municipality) to a tenfold increase in travellers, with the addendum that the current state of conditions is still “very, very far from” the goal that the Via could reach (Maison Rosset). The Aosta TO also noted an increase in involved structures along the route, while Eremo di Perloz noted somewhat fluctuating developments (in terms of travellers as well as hospitality), and Albergo Ristorante Italia expressed a “steady increase” in the use of the path.

The increased presence was believed to be a result of increased promotion of the path, as noted by B&B Augustus and the municipalities of Montjovet and Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses. The ABF noted an increased presence of information, while Eremo di Perloz expressed that signage has improved. The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses municipality observed

that the welcome of the pilgrim and layout of the route have also improved, thus making the pilgrim experience more convenient and enjoyable. The Pont-Saint-Martin TO noted that in recent years more municipal collaboration has occurred, which she believed to be an important factor in the management of the route.

5.2.1.2 Changing Pilgrim Motivations and Travel Practices

The Capuchin Friars noted that previously, those who traveled along the Via did so for religious purposes, but in the past few years motivations have shifted: “Now, [religious motivations] are secondary, and people are searching for themselves” when they travel along the path. The Pont-Saint-Martin TO observed a similar phenomenon, stating that motivations are more varied now. The TO along with Hotel Le Coeur du Pont, Maison Rosset, and Maison d’Ulysse stated that it is more commonplace for pilgrims to walk segments of the path (rather than committing to the route in its entirety), which has resulted in an increased pilgrim presence. Maison Rosset noted the Via’s contributions to the offset of seasonality, as older pilgrims and foreigners walk the trail during times of low tourist influx, and he as well as the municipality of Montjovet (who said that the Via Francigena is a “great, great idea”) noted the increase in the presence of foreign pilgrims. Lastly, the RDT noted that the Via Francigena experience has evolved in the past years to include more structured options, namely in the form of groups.

5.2.1.3 Economic Fallout

The Montjovet municipality (population 1,791) touted the success that the village has had with the route; in the past 10 years, 12,000 overnights were recorded. He expressed that the Via has brought benefits to the tourism sector even during non-peak seasons. From a wider vantage point, however, the ORDT noted that the structures along the Via have benefitted from hosting pilgrims but that this quantity has yet to significantly increase the touristic economy of the Valle d’Aosta.

5.2.2 Future Management

In regard to the CRCE and the Via Francigena’s UNESCO candidacy, upon being asked whether sustainability will become a more prevalent theme for the EAVF in the future, the EAVF said, “It should be. It definitely should be.” She believed that an increased focus on sustainability would be a good strategy for the future, but such a strategy had not previously been thought about by the staff. Another objective of the EAVF is to further develop affiliations with its four target audiences: communities, municipalities, international organizations and pilgrim and private partners. Currently, a strategic plan is being utilized in order to increase membership, visibility, information, and training through capacity building. Increased dialogue is hoped to provide pilgrims with access to

practical information. While these interventions target the Via in its entirety, they will have specific implications for the Valle d'Aosta, as well.

The ORDT asserted that, although other paths in the region exist and the Via Francigena does not receive special privileges or attention from the ORDT, the Via has potential to grow. However, she said, "it needs to be better known what is the type of pilgrim that we want to attract." She compared future prospects to her perception of the Camino in the sense that different tourists have different spending capacities, and she believed that it would be in the best interest of the region to determine the desired spending capacities for targeted pilgrims. The ORDT stated that there is no sustainability plan in place for tourism development, but most plans (including tourism, urban, and transport development plans) always contain elements of environmental sustainability.

The Pont-Saint-Martin TO believed the path will become "more and more touristic" but that interventions to curtail potential problems in the future would be contingent upon the Via's future development, i.e., she was unsure of what appropriate steps should be taken. Two Aosta TO representatives suggested that more structures should perhaps be created for the reception of pilgrims, more discounted accommodation options for pilgrims should be present, and locals should have more consideration for this form of tourism. They also suggested that the EAVF and other entities collaborate more, and one intervention could be the coordination of a bus line between Aosta and the Great Saint Bernard Pass that coincides with the opening and closing of the road.

The FVF maintained that slow tourism in the form of the Via has a future and possesses great development possibilities. In terms of future management, he noted that the city of Aosta lacks signage for pilgrims, and the Roman ruins, medieval history, and churches are not particularly promoted to pilgrims. He suggested that the city should be more inviting toward pilgrims and a pilgrim information point could be beneficial. Noting his experience on the Camino and how a warm reception in Pamplona led to his return visit as a generic tourist rather than a pilgrim/trekker, he believed that Aosta has greater potential to attract return visitors by making pilgrims feel more welcome. Maison Bibian expressed a need for greater publicity of the route and went further than the FVF's comparison with the Camino by stating that the region should "copy the Compostela initiatives [original punctuation included for emphasis]!!"

5.2.2.1 Future Desired Development Plans, Goals, and Interventions

While the city of Aosta does not have a tourism development plan, there is a strategic master plan that incorporates tourism (such as the Pila ski resort) into future development, but the focus is not on the Via. The municipality of Nus suggested that a series of hostels should be developed in order to allow for sustainable stops to be made for pilgrims in order to diversify accommodation options. Echoing the ORDT's sentiments, the

municipality of Montjovet discussed the value of slow tourism in the region and mentioned the presence of other Valdostano paths as well, particularly the Cammino Balteo. He believed that in the long-run, collective promotion of these paths, including the Via Francigena, will enhance the brand of the Valle d'Aosta as a whole. The municipality of Châtillon cited that there have been financial difficulties in recent years, but many mortgages will be paid off in 2021, allowing for greater investments in the Via. She believed that linking the Via as a product to the Camino could be beneficial.

The municipality of Nus stated that a culture of welcoming pilgrims can be further cultivated, but he was confident that the residents will respond positively. The municipality of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses argued that the first municipal intervention in Valle d'Aosta should be working to continuously maintain the path and make it clearly marked. Secondly, the path should be promoted both on the EAVF and institutional levels in order for more people to understand that it is present in the Valle d'Aosta.

Camping Tunnel Etroubles believed that a road sign system and information should be better implemented on the paths, especially from the section between Etroubles and Gignod (a town between Etroubles and Aosta). They stated that oftentimes they see pilgrims walking along the regional roads rather than the Via Francigena path through the woods. Maintenance, in their opinion, is essential, and it is an issue in the Valle d'Aosta but also applies for all of Italy. Again comparing the Via to the Camino, one of the interviewees stated that the Camino is better marked and that getting lost is more difficult.

Alternatively, B&B La Vieille Cloche stated that signage is good from the Great Saint Bernard Pass to Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses. Additionally, Maison d'Ulysse said that, although she has also seen pilgrims on the regional roads, she knows the path is well-marked because she has walked it multiple times. However, she said that she is quite familiar with the territory, and perhaps additional signs could help pilgrims in especially problematic sections of the path between Etroubles and Aosta.

Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria believed that there should be more specialization of tourist operators along the Via, and studying its incremental growth would allow for the route to be more decisively exploited in the future. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont suggested that guided excursion opportunities should become more present in order to allow pilgrims to better discover sections of the route.

The liceo teacher stated that it is fundamental that the number of beds for pilgrims increase and that this should be the priority, first and foremost. The student stated that signage must improve because pilgrims oftentimes get lost, and sometimes they walk along the highway, to which the teacher commented that the situation is difficult because there are certain impassable areas along the ideal trail, specifically due to landslide concerns. The student commented that the second course of action to take would be to sensitize locals to

the Via, as they may be familiar with the name but do not understand its value nor that a large quantity of people is interested in trekking along the route.

5.2.2.2 Reflections About the Future

The municipalities of Châtillon, Nus, and Verrès as well as the Aosta TO stated that they did not have concerns in regard to future development. However, the Nus and Châtillon representatives stated that “we haven’t even reached 50% of our potential” and “we could be much more than we are now,” respectively. All three municipalities believed there will be an increase in Via Francigena tourism in the future. The Verrès representative suggested that the economic contributions will also increase and the number of beds in the municipality can grow if pilgrim visitation booms. The only concern, per se, voiced by the municipality of Châtillon, was that certain climactic conditions (particularly landslides) should be more frequently monitored.

Corresponding to the municipality of Nus’ assertion, Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria said, “I would tell you that on a scale of 100, we are not even to 50 on a scale of operation.” Her greatest concern was that the Via has not maximized its potential and it will become a “missed opportunity” and “a waste” if people in the region do not become more aware of the flow of pilgrims.

While Camping Tunnel Etroubles acknowledged that increased usage of the Via could have environmental effects, they believed the positivity or negativity of those effects are the consequence of the values and actions of pilgrims. They argued that there will likely be a net positive benefit, as pilgrims are generally environmentally educated, “green” travellers. For example, if these pilgrims pick up garbage rather than create litter, their presence will actually improve the environmental sustainability of the Via.

According to Maison d’Ulysse, the Via Francigena will inevitably continue to rise in popularity, but the route is not a priority for the region. She said, “I have the feeling that no one cares, or at least very few,” particularly because the Valle d’Aosta administration focuses much more on ski and other forms of tourism. The Capuchin Friars, likewise, stated that he believes the Via will continue to develop on its own in the future but will not be a big phenomenon nor reach the level of the Camino.

Both municipalities of Verrès and Châtillon expressed that the Via brings nothing but good to the region. The Châtillon representative explained that she believed the path could become as popular as the Camino, but future prospects will depend a bit on the region’s ability to improve what currently exists and sensitize locals. She said, however, “we are on the right track, for sure.”

5.3 Management

5.3.1 Monitoring Plan and Statistics

Although stakeholders in the Valle d’Aosta agreed that there has been a general increase in pilgrim presence on the Via, there are insufficient data (with the exception of the hostel at Pont-Saint-Martin) to support this assertion. In 2019, 544 pilgrim’s Credential and 88 guidebook purchases in were recorded at the Aosta, Saint-Vincent and Pont-Saint-Martin TOs, but the ORDT acknowledged that these numbers only account for internal activity; they do not offer an idea of how many total pilgrims trek through Aosta. The data collection only accounts for purchases and does not include the personal information of the pilgrims (such as nationality and name) unless they voluntarily offer it. The RDT stated that the lack of data, specifically in the context of individual structures, is a problem, but small businesses along the route can give an impression of the economic contribution that the Via creates. The two Aosta TO representatives admitted that the statistics that they report to the EAVF are limited and more information used to be recorded, but they no longer have the computer program that was used for this purpose.

Other than the Pont-Saint-Martin hostel, which reported the passage of approximately 2,000 pilgrims per year, accommodation structures could only estimate the number of pilgrims who spend the night; facilities often receive pilgrims directly from the road and do not document the number, as explained by Hotel Crabun. The case of the Pont-Saint-Martin hostel provides the most accurate estimate of Via Francigena wayfarers and also collects data pertaining to demographics and motivations, but its limitation is that it only represents the pilgrims who stay the night at the hostel. While it seems that the majority of pilgrims passing through do, indeed, stay at the hostel, there is no definitive answer as to the true pilgrim presence in the region. The municipality of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses noted that it will install a person-counting device next year along a section of the route where only pilgrims and trekkers pass in order to obtain an accurate number of pilgrim passages.

5.3.2 Policy in Place for Via Francigena CRCE Visibility in the TOs

The Aosta and Pont-Saint-Martin TOs along with the ORDT stated that there is no special promotion of the Via Francigena as a CRCE route in the offices; it is simply promoted as a tourism product in the way that other Valdostano tourism products are promoted. The guide is sold in the office, but special CRCE logos are absent. One Aosta TO representative noted that the Via Francigena is advertised in the context of Aosta and the path to Rome, but the multinational scope of the Via is not mentioned. Additional information, however, can be accessed online through the ORDT’s newsletters and social media.

5.4 Stakeholders

5.4.1 Involvement

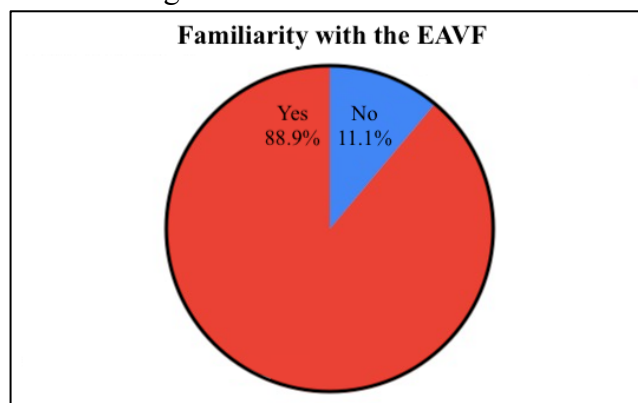
The web of involvement among stakeholders demonstrates the interconnectedness of the Via Francigena in the Valle d’Aosta. As previously established, some stakeholders are municipal representatives who also represent the accommodation sector. Additionally, other municipal representatives as well as the RDT and liceo teacher are members of the FVF. Some municipalities and accommodation structures are affiliated with the EAVF, while others have no familiarity whatsoever with the association.

5.4.1.1 *The RDT and the EAVF*

The RDT and the EAVF have been in a formal partnership since 2014, but their informal collaboration has spanned over 20 years. The RDT explicitly stated that its motivation to participate in the development of the Via is to promote the region, since the organization’s job as a regional tourist board is to produce economy. The RDT believes that the Via is beneficial because pilgrims do not behave solely as consumers but rather conduct research on the particular aspects of the region in which they find interest. The EAVF and RDT jointly send out annual questionnaires to Via Francigena-affiliated accommodation structures in the Valle d’Aosta to verify that they comply with regulations that must be met (such as the presence of washing facilities and discounted meals) in order to maintain pilgrim-friendly status.

(a) *Familiarity With the EAVF*

Figure 9: Percentage of Stakeholder Familiar With the EAVF



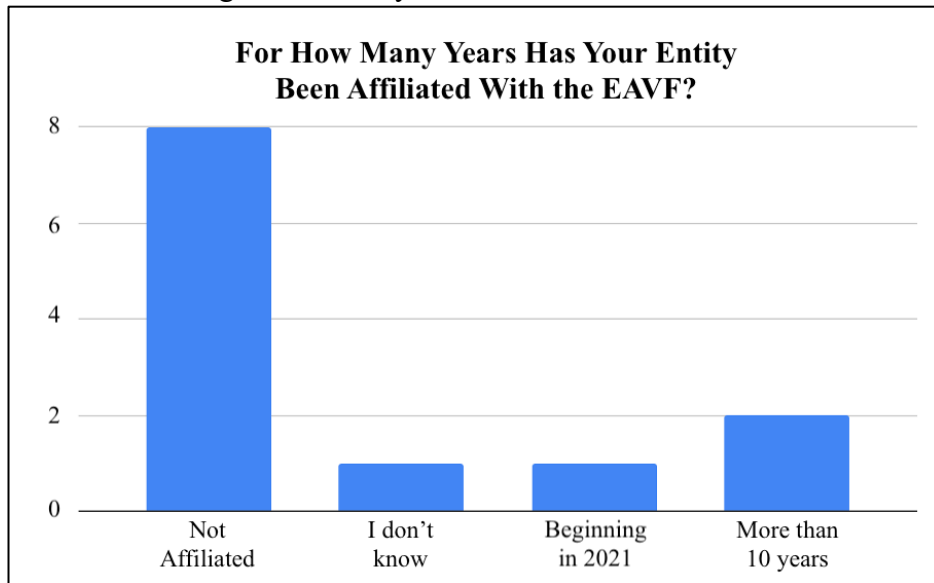
Source: own work.

Out of 26 respondents (the two EAVF representatives were excluded, and individuals representing multiple entities were not double counted), 23 implicitly or explicitly demonstrated that they knew of the EAVF. The three entities that answered in the negative

were the ABF, Capuchin Friars, and B&B Augustus. However, while each of the entities to claim familiarity with the EAVF discussed their involvement, on two occasions it was evident that the representatives were at moments confusing the FVF for the EAVF.

Of the entities that answered the questionnaire, the majority responded that they were not affiliated with the EAVF (see Figure 10 below). However, some of these respondents were present on the EAVF’s official website, thus contradicting their assertion.

Figure 10: Entity Affiliation with the EAVF



Source: own work.

One of the issues that an EAVF representative expressed in terms of capacity building was that many stakeholders do not have a clear understanding of the particular advantages of being affiliated with the EAVF, nor do they understand how the EAVF is unique among the hundreds of other Via Francigena associations. She stated that the four differences are that the EAVF is public, is the largest association, is the only one that is certified on the international level, and has the main objective of facilitation and sensibilization between the communities, pilgrims, international organizations, and private partners.

Notably, there were inconsistencies in the responses of the TOs. The ORDT indicated that her organization is not affiliated, but during the interview she clarified that it is the RDT, i.e., the ORDT’s supervisory agency, that is affiliated. The Pont-Saint-Martin TO responded with “I don’t know,” and the Aosta TO wrote in “More than 10 years.”

(b) Stakeholder Collaboration With the EAVF and RDT

The FVF stated that a relationship with the EAVF and RDT is helpful since they oversee tasks such as signage implementation and cleaning, but his organization is under autonomous management; the EAVF is intended to facilitate the collaboration between

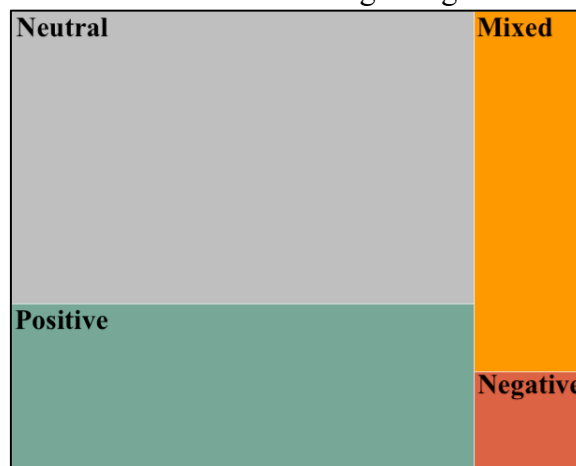
administrations rather than associations, so the FVF is a guest rather than an official member of the EAVF.

The Nus representative said that the RDT is a supporting pillar in the municipality’s Via Francigena plans, and the municipality looks to the RDT for direction. The municipality of Montjovet (represented by the “Beginning in 2021” category of Figure 10) cited the EAVF’s ability to garner visibility from abroad as the motive of actively working to become affiliated. Other entities cited passive engagement; for example, the municipality of Verrès pays the annual quota to be affiliated with the EAVF, and Eremo di Perloz stays up to date with the EAVF’s initiatives by reading their newsletters, but these entities have not collaborated with the EAVF. Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria noted that she maintains no official collaboration with the RDT, but there are high levels of Via Francigena engagement in her region on an informal basis.

(c) *Perceptions of the EAVF and RDT*

Overall, entities’ auto-coded sentiments of RDT- and EAVF-related data were many times more positive than negative (although it should be noted that data from the RDT and EAVF are included in the statistics, since each entity discussed elements of the other).

Figure 11: Auto Coded Sentiments Regarding the EAVF and RDT



Source: own work.

(i) *Impressions of the EAVF*

In general, interviewees had positive impressions of the EAVF. The association was described as “added value” (municipality of Châtillon), “very positive” (municipality of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses), “very good” (Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria and municipality of Verrès), “good” and a “well-organized association” (Eremo di Perloz), and “very active” (Hotel Le Coeur du Pont). The FVF said that they maintain a “strong” and “good”

relationship, and Camping Tunnel Etroubles stated that the EAVF “gives visibility” to the various accommodation options, which is helpful for pilgrims.

The municipality of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses said that is essential that there be an organization acting on a higher level that brings everything together, “because the Via Francigena is stronger if we are all together.” Eremo di Perloz noted that the EAVF “sustains a lot and makes the Via Francigena known,” and that many improvements, such as with signage, have occurred in recent years because of the association.

It is unclear as to whether Maison d’Ulysse was describing the EAVF or FVF when she said that they organize trips but that she does not believe they do other things such as promotion; she said that she is subscribed to them, but she believes that she is not so knowledgeable of the association. B&B La Vieille Cloche likewise stated that she is not so aware of the EAVF but has seen some information online; she did, however, mention that the FVF organizes walks along the route to familiarize locals with the Via.

In terms of issues, some entities described the distance that is felt between themselves and the EAVF compared to the RDT, which is more present. The municipality of Châtillon stated that whereas the RDT regularly organizes walks and meetings along the Via, with the EAVF they “don’t have good rapport; there is no continuous connection.” It is the RDT who intervened with the signs along the path, she says, and “so there is a substantial difference between the associations.” Hotel Le Coeur du Pont noted that despite the interventions of the EAVF, the Valle d’Aosta region is still not well-integrated, and some issues remain in terms of lack of sufficient signage.

Eremo di Perloz said that they could not think of any critiques of the EAVF, while the municipality of Pont-Saint-Martin said, “everything is improvable, everything is always improvable,” signifying that he was satisfied with the EAVF but it would be possible for the association to do more in the future. Hotel Crabun, clarifying that he did not have a negative impression of the EAVF, stated that the hotel was affiliated for two years but did not see the benefits of the affiliation, which the hotel paid for, so he discontinued the partnership. He had the impression that the EAVF members were using the association in order to feature themselves in newspapers and other publicity, which he did not like.

(ii) *Impressions of the RDT*

Camping Tunnel Etroubles claimed to have “good rapport” with the RDT; likewise, Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria described herself as “satisfied” with the RDT, stating that it is a “very good” organization that has close contact with stakeholders and periodically checks the signage along the route. The municipalities of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses and Montjovet described, respectively, the RDT’s good coordination and that the village does not feel overlooked by the RDT despite its small population.

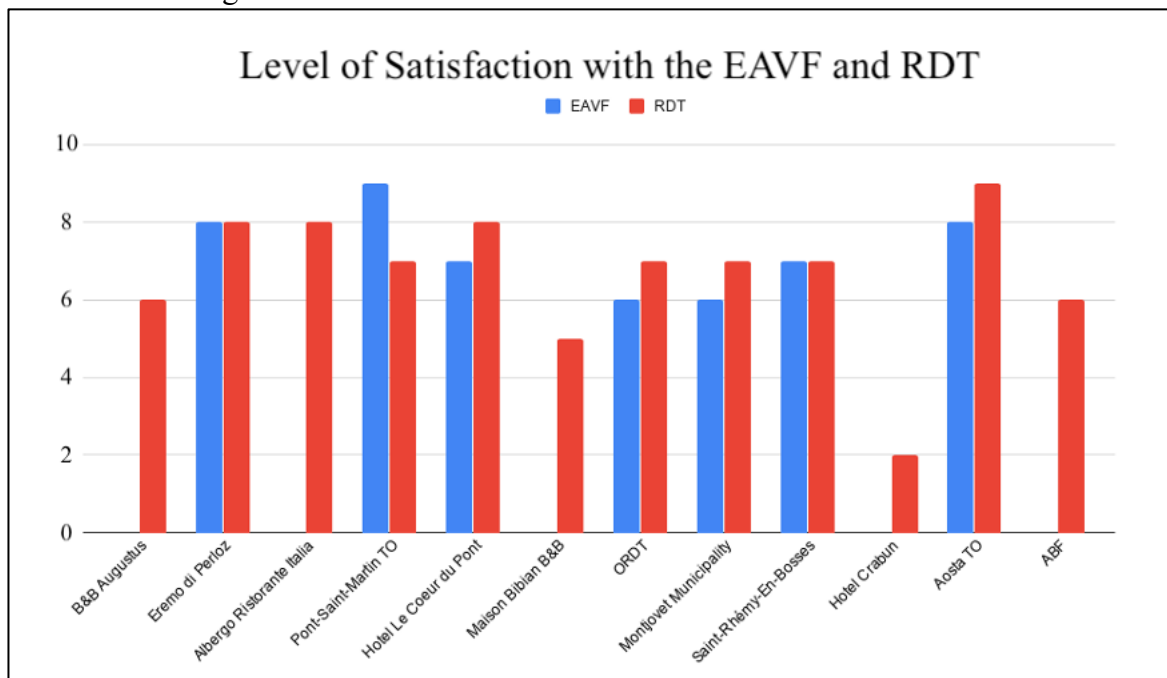
Other entities stated that the RDT is not as actively involved as it could be. The Capuchin Friars noted that at times he has tried to make contact with the RDT to no avail. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont explained that the RDT has engaged in interventions, but collaboration between the EAVF and RDT is lacking: “If the EAVF and the RDT were to collaborate, they would succeed in actually understanding what is needed in the zone for the valorization of pilgrims.” The municipality of Châtillon, on the other hand, stated that the RDT may be exerting its energy in too many trail projects to find great success in one. She said, “The problems are that you can manage it, but don’t try to make all these at the same time because then we have all the paths that are in the forest, so therefore it becomes extremely demanding.” Likewise, the municipality of Montjovet stated that he will know in two years whether he has any critiques of the RDT, because it is developing the Cammino Balteo, which corresponds to much of the Via Francigena path, but he wanted to see “if they go forward with it, that it is not just words.” Upon being asked whether it is often that planned projects don’t come to fruition, he laughed and said, “We are in Italy,” thus alluding to the non-completion of ambitious projects.

In terms of interventions that the RDT has made, Maison d’Ulysse was unaware of any, especially in the context of small villages along the route; she stated that, rather, it is the municipality that has staged interventions such as the improvement of the path. B&B La Vieille Cloche, however, stated that the RDT has sponsored many activities, organized meetings in Aosta to better understand how the Via functions and succeeds in other regions, and created opportunities for people like her to host pilgrims. The liceo teacher noted the many meetings that the RDT organized, but she cited the core of the issue being the division of competences between different governmental departments; sometimes, interventions fall into the sphere of responsibility of others, such as the department of forestry, and the RDT cannot intervene, thus leading to difficulties in coordination or negligence due to the request being lost at some point during the bureaucratic process.

(iii) Stakeholder Satisfaction

In general (and excluding the entities that opted not to rank the EAVF due to a lack of sufficient knowledge of the association’s contributions), individual entities’ RDT vs. EAVF satisfaction rankings are within one point (on a scale from one to 10) of each other. With the exception of the Point-Saint-Martin TO, the individual entities demonstrated that they were equally or slightly more satisfied with the RDT than the EAVF, although the EAVF’s average ranking of 7.29 out of 10 was higher than the RDT’s 6.67. If Hotel Crabun’s outlier of 2 is omitted, the RDT’s adjusted average of 7.27 is nearly the same as the EAVF’s average ranking.

Figure 12: Stakeholder Satisfaction with the EAVF and RDT



Source: own work.

(d) *Improvements to be Made by the EAVF or RDT Individually*

The municipality of Verrès maintained that his only suggestion for the EAVF would be to continue investing in marketing in the future. In terms of the RDT, the Point-Saint-Martin TO noted that additional support for the structures along the Via as well as promotion of additional activities such as baggage transport and cycling could enhance activity along the Via. The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses municipality said it would be helpful for the RDT to handle relations with the EAVF in order to develop regional plans and strategies because such interventions must be done at a higher-than-municipal level. Additionally, he believed that the RDT could internally stimulate the growth of the Via Francigena to a greater extent on the municipal level and that dissemination of knowledge (in the form of meetings with locals) could be beneficial.

(i) *Improvements to be Made by the EAVF and RDT in Collaboration*

The municipalities of Aosta and Châtillon cited the need for improved signage. Aosta's representatives claimed that the EAVF has not helped to economically facilitate the implementation of uniform signage, and the region dumps the task onto the municipality. Aosta argued that the regional authority should in some way guarantee the uniformity and typology of the signs, and more uniform dialogue in general could be better implemented. Châtillon's municipality stated that the signage in their region is satisfactory, but much time passed and many solicitations were made before the RDT intervened. Hotel

Suisse/Prosciutteria alleged that it is constant contact that is lacking, and meetings should be facilitated for stakeholders along the route.

Some stakeholders, however, suggested that the responsibility of future interventions rest elsewhere; the Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses municipality stated that it is the stakeholders who should ask more of the EAVF because the association acts when encouraged or requested to do so. The municipality of Nus said that the operators of the region do not sufficiently believe in the project, and that is the true issue. Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria suggested that those in the territory could do better, since they are the ones who receive the pilgrims and should have a better sensibility of the Via Francigena: “It is clear that the other organizations can make events, can supervise, but if the people who have open doors along the Way do not have a sensibility in that sense, it becomes very difficult.”

5.4.1.2 The FVF

The FVF stated that his association provides resources to the Via in the Valle d’Aosta because they notify local administrations of potential issues and concerns, such as excessive overgrowth. They also have encounters with communities that allow locals to learn about pilgrims’ cultural and economic impacts on the Via. Many local administrators take part in the association, and the FVF works to encounter citizens in the Valle d’Aosta and educate them about the Via. He noted that the nature of the organization makes it difficult to directly interact with pilgrims, but members sometimes have more contact with them because they are involved with Via Francigena-related businesses.

The FVF stated that one of its other purposes is to involve businesses and try to persuade them to have differentiated tourism prices and policies for wealthy tourists and pilgrims, although he noted that the general spending power of pilgrims is relatively high. To convince these businesses that they can earn more income from the Via and to convince parishes to host pilgrims who desire an economical option are among the other objectives of the organization.

Currently, a project is in the works to promote the visibility of the path by creating a spectacle that will travel from the Great Saint Bernard Pass all the way to Santa Maria di Leuca, covering the entirety of the Italian segment of the Via. In this sense, the FVF has connected municipal administrations throughout the Valle d’Aosta through the facilitation of the event, and the FVF also acknowledged the value that can be brought to the Valle d’Aosta segment of the Via through collaboration with the path as a whole. He cited frequent contact with other colleagues throughout Italy, especially the members of the Association of the Friends of Sigeric in Ivrea (the first stop in Piedmont) and the Friends of the Camino de Santiago, as resources for the creation of common projects that ultimately enhance the Via in his region.

5.4.2 Stakeholder Motivations

The RDT's objective to promote the Valle d'Aosta region through the Via Francigena is twofold: there is a desire to attract pilgrims to cultural sites during their journey through the region but also an objective to spread word-of-mouth publicity and compel pilgrims to return for future holidays. The Pont-Saint-Martin municipality also cited two objectives: to generate economic returns and improve the environmental conditions of the area along the path through the vested interest in keeping the trail clean for pilgrims. Contrary to the common belief that the Via Francigena does not generate much revenue, the hostel's statistics indicate that pilgrims spend between €20-150 per night, and this money benefits accommodation structures, restaurants, and other facilities.

In general, private stakeholders' motivations seldom included economic incentive. Camping Tunnel Etroubles' two representatives explained that they engage in the Via because it is "a very interesting form of tourism" that is "green," "beautiful," and "deep." They said the pilgrims' objectives are more profound than simply taking a vacation, and they explained that they enjoy the international dimension of the pilgrim demographic. Hotel Crabun, which provides 15% discounts to pilgrims, cited that their primary motivation is that they like the pilgrims and what the Via Francigena stands for in terms of religion and culture. Secondarily, the hotel cited the pragmatism in offering more competitive prices for a pilgrim's budget. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont, which also provides a 15% discount, began its engagement with pilgrims because the proprietor is passionate about paths and likes to host pilgrims who pass by, even if only for a tea in the afternoon.

Hotel Suisse's meal discount for pilgrims was implemented as a sensibility, as the representative stated that such an action is simply what one does for a person who is traveling across Italy and that prices in general are too expensive along the Via when compared to the Camino. The Franciscan Capuchins stated that there was occasion to become involved, as many pilgrims over the years asked for accommodations, so the friary equipped itself to serve them. Since their involvement, the Franciscan Capuchins have enjoyed getting to learn about the lives and experiences of others who pass through. Likewise, the two hermit nuns of the Eremo di Perloz host pilgrims because they wish to welcome and have encounters with others.

5.4.3 Municipal Collaboration

5.4.3.1 FVF and TO Perspectives

The FVF stated that municipal involvement in the Via Francigena is generally good, but certain municipal representatives, namely Mayor Corrado Jordon of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses and Councilman Ennio Pedrini of Pont-Saint-Martin, are greater promoters and

supporters of the development of the route than others. The FVF also stated that the municipality of Aosta could assist a private entity in the creation of additional LCPAs, but the city itself should not be the one to run the facilities.

Speaking in terms of the city of Aosta, the Aosta TO stated that the municipality should intervene by searching for a building in which to put a youth hostel. The Pont-Saint-Martin TO highlighted the importance of widespread municipal involvement; he stated, “I don’t think that one municipality [by itself] can do something. I think several municipalities together could make the difference.”

5.4.3.2 Stakeholder Perspectives by Municipality

(a) Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses

Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses has been directly involved with the Via Francigena for over 20 years, when the path between Martigny, Switzerland and the city of Aosta was being developed as a destination. From the EAVF’s inception, the municipality has collaborated with the association. In addition to the implementation of signage, the municipality has promoted the path through events and walks along the Via. The municipal representative stated that municipal involvement is especially high in the mountain communities (i.e., from the Great Saint Bernard Pass to Aosta) because they believe in the Via’s potential. Other mayors have subsequently become involved in the Valle d’Aosta because, from his perspective, they understand that the Via generates business and tourism; originally, however, these mayors did not believe that the Via would bring economy to the communities because they were under the impression that pilgrims don’t spend hardly any money. He is in regular contact with other mayors, and they say that they have seen the number of pilgrims increase, which incentivizes them. The tangible pilgrim presence has benefitted the development of the Via, he said, because it has made it easier for the municipal authorities to believe in the Via. B&B La Vieille Cloche said that more is being done in the municipality due to a greater flow of pilgrims. She mentioned the person-counter device that was explained in the “Monitoring Plan and Statistics” section. She also noted that the municipality has organized some evening events, such as a Via Francigena-related book signing.

(b) Etroubles

Camping Tunnel Etroubles’ representatives noted the tight rapport between the entity and the municipality, stating that the municipality’s presence is more felt than those of the RDT or EAVF. However, the female representative noted that both the RDT and municipality are quite helpful. Maison d’Ulysse stated that the previous administration

was quite active and that interventions were staged with the collaboration of the Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses mayor, who was “great” and put much effort into the development of the Via. She did not feel that anything substantial has happened in the last five years, but she cited municipalities’ financial difficulties as the cause to blame. She also noted that in Echevennoz (the next village over) the municipality gave a LCPA to a family who already owned a restaurant because one cannot live off of the revenues of one hostel from the short pilgrim season. She stated that the municipality could improve by organizing more Via Francigena-related activities such as trips, but it is difficult for them to do so as a public institution because it is outside of their competence. However, she stated that increased promotion would be beneficial.

(c) *Aosta*

The municipality of Aosta stated that it has looked at the possibility of creating a youth hostel in the city because it was seen as an opportunity to answer for pilgrims, but it has yet to succeed. A municipal property suitable for the hostel was identified, but there were issues with its sale to a private investor; the municipality claimed that in most Italian cities along the route, hostels are managed by private enterprises rather than the municipality.

In terms of demand, the representative stated that there has not been a huge number of requests by pilgrims to have a hostel, and she believed that the B&Bs and other hospitality structures have sufficed for pilgrims in Aosta. The two representatives stated that there is no problem of excess pilgrims in Aosta, hence the lack of urgency in creating a hostel. Rather than seeking to open a hostel to meet demands, the representative stated that the purpose would be to further boost pilgrim visitation.

Other involvement with the EAVF included the collaborative effort to develop an official pilgrim stamp for the credential and the maintenance of rapport with the association. She stated that the municipality engages by sending representatives to the EAVF meetings in order to demonstrate interest and remain affiliated, but these meetings take place in distant locations and sometimes cannot be attended due to time constraints or budget restrictions. Another “peculiarity” specific to Aosta in terms of administration is that the region rather than the municipality is responsible for the management of certain competences, such as the monuments and the historical parts of the city; this structural arrangement can inhibit the municipality from intervening in some senses.

(d) *Nus, Verrès, and Montjovet*

In Nus, the administration, through the interventions of Mayor Rosset, has worked toward the implementation of a hostel, but the representative noted that he has a small concern that the hostel’s presence could have impacts on B&Bs and micro accommodations in the

area. In Verrès, events take place to attract tourists (not only with regard to the Via), and the Via Francigena stamp has been developed in collaboration with the EAVF. In Montjovet, the representative stated that specific interventions are predominantly the initiative of individual businesses, and the municipality's role, in addition to trail maintenance, is primarily to communicate with and between the region and private enterprises.

(e) *Châtillon*

The municipality stated that their greatest resource is the involvement of locals in the territory; while the municipality lacks funding, there are many local associations that organize Via Francigena events.

The municipality has arranged some meetings (at the behest of the Capuchin Friars) with local restaurateurs and bar owners in order to encourage discounted prices to be offered to pilgrims. The Capuchin Friars also mentioned the municipality's assistance in intervening, but he said that, with the exception of two or three facilities, "the information enters through one ear and out the other," i.e., the requests were not heeded, and prices were maintained.

Châtillon's representatives discussed a municipal project (Rue de la Plaine) that improved the route and increased the amount of structures on the path from the La Verdettaz district of the municipality to neighboring Saint-Vincent, and they noted that the project was funded in part by the European Union. The restoration of the Tower of Conoz was also attempted by the municipality, but no investors made an offer. The female representative also noted that signage implementation was initially done by the municipality.

(f) *Pont-Saint-Martin*

The Pont-Saint-Martin municipality noted its five-year partnership with the EAVF and how rapport with the EAVF is important. Among the municipality's greatest contributions have been the creation of the hostel and collection of data that document pilgrims' demographics, spending habits, and travel motivations. The municipality, in collaboration with the EAVF, implemented a formation course for 15 residents who can now accompany pilgrims on the tract of the Via within municipal boundaries. As a municipality on the border of the region, Pont-Saint-Martin's rapport with neighboring Ivrea has facilitated the creation of events and a sense of continuity along the route.

5.5 Goods and Services

5.5.1 Pilgrim Accommodations

5.5.1.1 *Stipulations and Discounts*

According to the EAVF, the pilgrim's Credential grants access to two special forms of accommodation: official LCPAs that allow overnights solely for pilgrims and structures such as hotels that offer concession prices for pilgrims. The LCPAs only allow a one-night stay, and the concession price at normal facilities is also a one-night offer in order to prevent travellers from taking advantage of the hospitality and compromising the nature of the pilgrimage. The facilities are required to adhere to the EAVF's vademecum, which stipulates that the facilities will offer certain services to pilgrims.

In Montjovet, interventions were made in an attempt to encourage discounted hotel and B&B prices for pilgrims. However, these private facilities voluntarily participate, as the municipality is unable to regulate discounts. In other instances, as in the case of Camping Tunnel Etroubles, the size of pilgrim discounts is dependent upon whether it is high or low season.

Hotel Suisse (as well as other facilities) offers concession prices (€10) for meals and discounts for overnight stays. However, many facilities have economic limits that inhibit them from remaining profitable with drastically lowered prices. Hotel Suisse reiterated that it "is a hotel, not a structure dedicated to the pilgrims of the Via Francigena. Therefore, it is clear that we cannot ever give a pilgrim price." In Donnas, although there are two other B&Bs that offer discounted accommodations, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont is the only one to also provide discounted meals; still, the hotel claimed that it is economically unable to provide a "pilgrim price" that reflects the true budget of a pilgrim.

5.5.1.2 *EAVF vs. RDT Standards*

To adhere to the EAVF vademecum, the RDT sends out annual surveys to verify that accommodation facilities are willing and able to meet the requirements. The RDT also expressed that a distinction must be made between the RDT's and EAVF's official accommodation lists. She believed that the EAVF's online Visit Via Francigena list includes facilities that pay for publicity and that, given the presence of Eremo di Perloz despite its excessive distance (beyond 1 km) from the Via, perhaps there are structures on the EAVF website that do not adhere to the EAVF-established stipulations.

Some structures, although highly involved in the Via Francigena, are not officially recognized by the RDT. For example, Maison Rosset hosts many pilgrims but asked not to

be included in the official list, as the business does not wish to lower prices in exchange for publicity. Another reason why some facilities, including Maison Rosset, do not participate is because during the high season, the structures are already full of clients, so they do not want to be required to provide one-night stays.

5.5.1.3 Issues With the “Offerta Libera”

The contributions that pilgrims give to LCPAs running on the “offerta libera” system (namely, the Capuchin Friars and Eremo di Perloz) have ranged from 0, to a typical amount €10-15, to the rare €20 per head. While the Capuchin Friars can cover their costs even with small contributions since they do not provide food, Eremo di Perloz stated that the contribution is usually insufficient to cover expenses and that although they can afford it since they are hermit nuns, it still is not very right for pilgrims to behave in this manner; however, they said that it is rare that people do not contribute, and others can be generous.

The consequences of insufficient “offerta libera” contributions have been felt throughout the span of the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome. According to the EAVF, although the association has a code of conduct with recommendations for the appropriate donation, some of the structures along the route have had to close down because they could no longer afford to host pilgrims. However, the representative stated that there are usually no major problems with the “offerta libera.”

5.5.1.4 Presence and Diversity of Accommodation Structures

Some municipalities highlighted the importance of varied accommodation product offerings. In Châtillon, for example, the municipality noted the benefit of the Capuchin Friars’ LCPA option for those who do not wish to spend as much as they would in a hotel.

The ORDT stated that there are not so many Via Francigena-affiliated accommodation options in the Valle d’Aosta, and the city of Aosta is especially deficient in these offerings. The Aosta TO representatives stated that “we do not have proper accommodations for pilgrims” in Aosta nor in the surrounding area. The B&Bs and other options are insufficient for pilgrims who “want to spend absolutely nothing on accommodations” in Aosta, and pilgrims either continue on their way or, she believed, even sleep outside on a bench since the churches in Aosta do not have availability for pilgrims. They speculated that the seminary would possess the proper facilities to host pilgrims, but they reiterated that doing so is not the seminary’s duty. They said that perhaps religious pilgrims are occasionally housed by the Church, but not regularly.

In regard to a hostel in Aosta, one of the municipal representatives said, “The public body was absolutely interested in finding a structure. It was something that was accepted as

having potential and as an interest for the development of the city,” but the municipality simply could not obtain the proper building to fulfill the need. The municipality determined that their proposed youth hostel would be insufficient for pilgrims, as there would be too few rooms. Therefore, they informed the potential management not to proceed with the plans. The second hostel development option, as mentioned previously, could not come to fruition because there were no private investors who were interested in purchasing the property from the municipality. The representatives must wait to see if anything comes of the option during the next administration and hope that a developer will commit to the project, but they are doubtful because the costs of restoration are high.

Whether the Diocese of Aosta could intervene is something to be seen; the municipal representative, who is a member of the FVF, told the organization that she would ask the bishop whether an intervention could be made by the churches, but at the time of the data collection, she had not yet done so due to more pressing concerns. In Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses, some stakeholders also tried to get the property of priests involved in order to offer a LCPA option, but they were unsuccessful. The municipal representative noted this attempted intervention, stating that the vacant priest’s home had the potential to transform into a hostel. He claimed that social hospitality (such as a hostel) would be useful for pilgrims and young people, and he stated that Aosta and other places should have such structures. He noted that the diocese of Aosta owns many properties, and it should be able to open up a simple hostel in the city. He, the RDT, and others have spoken to the diocese about the possibility, but the results have not yet been obtained. Lastly, he explained that there have been other barriers, such as funding limitations in his municipality, to the creation of hostels.

The Hotel Suisse representative said, “After the Great Saint Bernard stop, the first stop in Italy is here. It is clear that we need to welcome these people,” but a more economical solution has yet to be achieved.

Along other sections of the Via, various stages of development have occurred for affordable accommodation options. Nus’ hostel project (which will contain at most 35 beds) is in development because the municipality recognized that hostel offerings do not exist along the stretch of the Via where they are located. The representative suspected that the absence of a hostel in Aosta is because nobody ever thought of creating one. The municipality voiced a lack of concern for the economic sustainability of the hostel-to-be in Nus because it would also be sustained by non-pilgrim youth tourists. He claimed that hostel tourism is something that young people like and that it creates an interesting form of experiential tourism, and the target price per night will be approximately €15 in order to attract youth and pilgrims.

In Pont-Saint-Martin, the 58-bed hostel has been open year-round since 2000. This hostel serves only pilgrims so as not to detract business from other hotels and B&Bs. The €10-15

price for accommodation targets pilgrims, especially younger ones, who have spending barriers.

One of the Hotel Le Coeur du Pont representatives stated that the hostel in Pont-Saint-Martin is fundamental, and one is missing in Donnas. She expressed that it is impossible to take part in the Via Francigena without considerable finances if hostels remain absent. In Aosta, the ORDT explained that it is difficult to suggest accommodation structures in the city since so few provide an appropriate price for pilgrims.

The liceo teacher also explained that some towns have a minimal possibility to welcome pilgrims, and Aosta is by far the least prepared because it does not have accredited pilgrim accommodation facilities. She believed that as long as there remains a lack of accommodation options for pilgrims, there will be no substantial growth in the economic benefits of the Via.

(a) *Sufficiency of Beds*

Certain sections of the path are more strained than others in terms of their accommodation resources. The Verrès representative stated that although there are not many beds for pilgrims within the municipality, the quantity is sufficient. Other entities are more adaptive; the three-bed Capuchin Friars facility, for example, which hosted 420 pilgrims last year, allows trekkers to set up tents in the garden when large groups come. The municipality of Châtillon stated that, in the event that pilgrim flows increase in the future, the Valle d'Aosta has a great capacity to receive pilgrims. According to her, the network of structures in her municipality, comprised of the parish, Capuchin Friars, and other structures, have substantial capacity (over 200 beds).

In Etroubles, Maison d'Ulysse stated that there *are* places to stay, but not enough. She cited an old, unused settlement nearby as a resource that she believed could provide sufficient beds for pilgrims in the future. Nearer to the Great Saint Bernard Pass in Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses, B&B La Vieille Cloche as well as the municipal representative asserted that there are no issues accommodating pilgrims, since most of them stay with the cannons at the Great Saint Bernard Hospice for the novelty. The B&B noted, however, that space is significantly more limited during certain periods such as August, when Italian families are on vacation; in these situations, it is difficult to host pilgrims for one night when other travelers are willing to stay for a week. Camping Tunnel Etroubles also noted the difficulty that pilgrims find in being hosted for one night, and the representatives stated that many pilgrims, especially those who cannot speak French or Italian, request for them to call facilities further along the route to see if there is availability. One of the representatives, in regard to these circumstances, said that a hostel in Aosta would be very important.

In Donnas, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont noted that the hostel in Pont-Saint-Martin is convenient, but when it reaches capacity, pilgrim concentration becomes congested and the need for beds is more felt. Specifically, in July there is such an influx of pilgrims that the hotel cannot host everyone who needs a place to stay, which she believed is an unsustainable situation. According to her, this situation has worsened in the past two years, as pilgrims have come in increasingly larger numbers. She cited the hotel's inability to control the peaks of influx as a major obstacle, as it makes it difficult to organize the facility.

5.5.2 Special Actions Taken to Accommodate Pilgrims' Needs

As a result of multiple requests, Hotel Crabun serves breakfast to pilgrims 40 minutes earlier than usual so they are able to have earlier starts and avoid the heat of the sun. The hotel also provides luggage transportation services, which especially benefits non-European travellers who sometimes combine their pilgrimage with other European activities, thus bringing a large amount of luggage with them. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont offers a similar service, and they also facilitate overnight repairs for pilgrims who travel the route by bicycle.

Many facilities try to assist pilgrims even when they themselves cannot host them. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont, for example, connects pilgrims with the parochial house in the village. Sometimes, however, if no beds are available, pilgrims must be taken all the way to Ivrea to sleep, and they skip the Pont-Saint-Martin stop.

5.5.3 Employment

Of the interviewed accommodation facilities, all of the employees and proprietors were locals or members of religious orders, and oftentimes these facilities were small family businesses.

5.5.4 Food

There is a trend in the Valle d'Aosta of offering local products to pilgrims and tourists in general. Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria explained that her entities serve only local products, many of which are from the town itself or from neighboring Saint-Oyen. Some of these products, such as prosciutto di Bosses, are DOC ("denominazione di origine controllata," or "controlled designation of origin"), which are only made in specific locations. Other meats made in the municipality are sold, in addition to various wines, honeys, and cheeses from the region. She and Maison Rosset claimed that this initiative is present throughout the region and is very much appreciated by travelers. The Maison Rosset agritourism

grows its own food and utilizes a practical form of composting: “The leftover food on the plate is fed to the pigs, and the pigs become salami.”

Likewise, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont works with only “Kilometer 0” products, meaning that the food originates in the region. The hotel also serves traditional food such as the zuppa alla Valpellinentse and modifies the ingredients based upon what is in season, which the pilgrims appreciate. Rather than providing a fixed menu for pilgrims, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont allows them to choose, and the lunch options that contain gnocchi and pasta go beyond the soup, water and dessert that other properties offer for €15, according to one of the representatives.

B&B La Vieille Cloche noted that, being a small structure, approximately 90% of the food served is made from scratch or from house products. Another small structure, Eremo di Perloz, grows produce, namely potatoes, tomatoes, zucchini, strawberries, honey, and cherries, in their garden. They collect chestnuts from the woods behind their home, and even their eggs are local, as they are purchased from their neighbors. Nearby, Hotel Crabun estimated that half of its food products come from the Valle d’Aosta.

The only facility that does not have Valdostano-based products is the Great Saint Bernard Hospice, which historically had a farm at Château Verdun in Saint-Oyen. Although the author of this thesis witnessed the purchase of a wheel of Aostan Fontina cheese by the cannon who transported him to the hospice, virtually all the food served at the hospice is from Switzerland, as the Swiss hospice is outside the boundaries of the European Union and there would be issues with importing Italian foods. The hospice, since it can only be accessed by snowshoe or skis in the winter, stockpiles food (about 950 kg) in autumn before the road closes. This food lasts until the beginning of March, when approximately an additional 650 kg are airdropped via helicopter.

5.5.5 Other Services

The Capuchin Friars noted that the religiously motivated pilgrim demographic (an estimated 40%) are welcome to attend Mass at 7 a.m., which they appreciate. Eremo di Perloz, likewise, has a chapel where guests are free to spend time, and the nuns drive the pilgrims to and from their home. At B&B La Vieille Cloche, instead of lowering accommodation prices that the representative said are already low, they try to meet the needs of the tourists, e.g., driving them to a restaurant or a pharmacy in a nearby town.

5.5.6 Other Issues

The majority of pilgrims, according to the structures, do not make reservations. However, Maison d’Ulysse pointed out that there is a problem with reservations; those who travel

long segments of the Via oftentimes have to cancel or move their reservation due to unforeseen circumstances, yet sometimes those who arrive without prior reservations (especially in July and August) do not find availability at her establishment.

Another issue noted, specifically by Eremo di Perloz, is that the Valle d’Aosta sometimes receives negative publicity on social media due to high prices. Pilgrims compare the Via to the Camino; according to her, the structures along the Via (B&Bs, etc.) are much nicer, but LCPAs are few. She was not sure of whether the prices truly are too high, as all the pilgrims she encountered were very happy with the region. The Nus representative also stated that although he has heard people who have done the Camino claim that the Via is much more expensive, they are happy with the path “despite the fact that it critically lacks more hospitality options.”

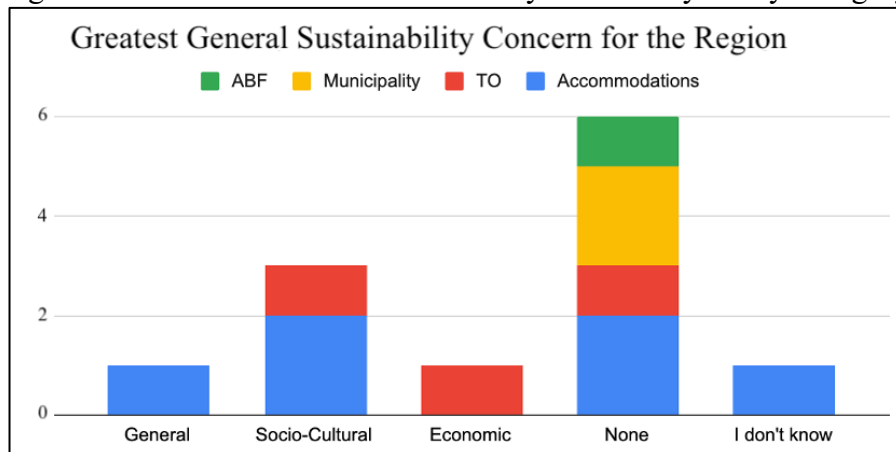
5.6 Sustainability

5.6.1 General Sustainability

5.6.1.1 Questionnaire Responses

(a) Greatest General Sustainability Concern for the Via Francigena in the Region

Figure 13: Greatest General Sustainability Concern by Entity Category



Source: own work.

Figure 13 (above) is derived from the free response answers submitted by the questionnaire respondents. Albergo Ristorante Italia (represented by “General”) cited that their greatest concern is the constancy of the offer. Of the remaining three respondents who did not participate in the semi-structured interview process, the ABF did not have a concern, Maison Bibian said, “I don’t know,” and B&B Augustus’ response was socio-cultural in nature. The structure cited that “maintenance and promotion of the Via

Francigena are the responsibility of public structures, which are not always effective and ready for action.”

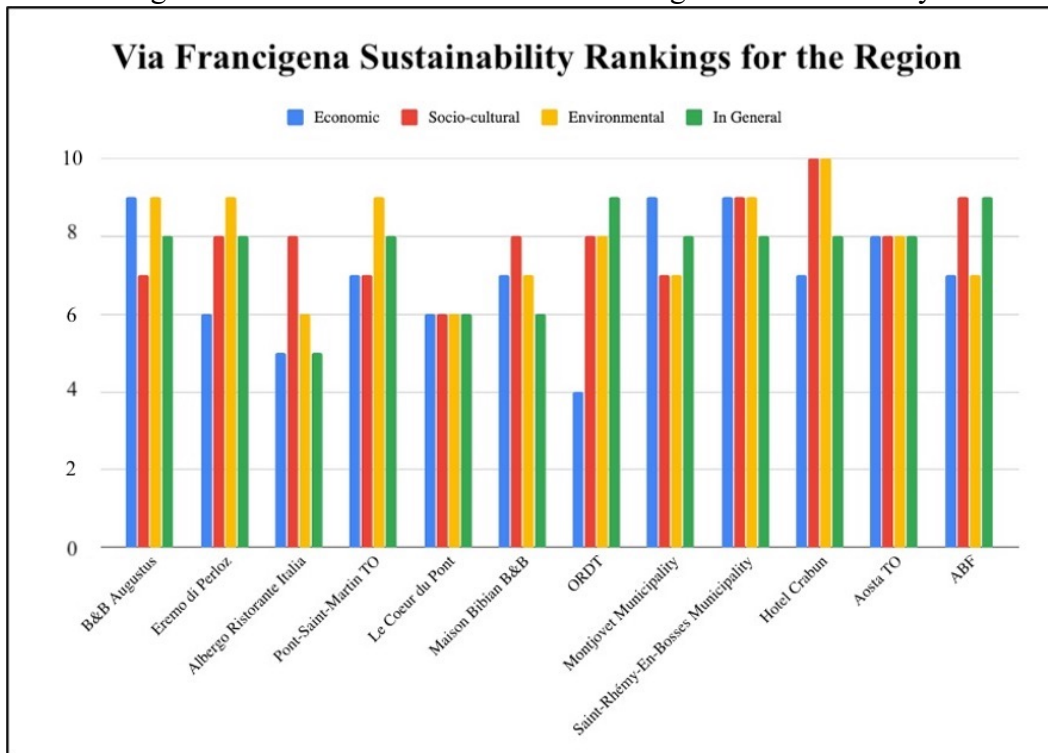
Among the other socio-cultural concerns, Eremo di Peloz expressed “the perception/belief by many travelers that the accommodation structures in the Valle d’Aosta are too expensive and that the ‘pilgrim hospitality’ facilities are too few.” The Pont-Saint-Martin TO’s concerns were twofold: that “the specificity of the Via Francigena is maintained” through the intervention of activities that can support pilgrims as well as the possibility for the concept of “slow walk” to be contorted. The ORDT was worried that the number of pilgrims will increase without adequate economic returns.

Of those who stated that they did not have a concern, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont expressed that she believes the Via can only have positive effects on a territorial level in regard to economic development. She stated that some secondary factors, such as the control of tourism development, must be considered but that this is not directly due to the Via’s presence. The Montjovet municipality noted that there are no concerns “in the case of adequate planning” in terms of interventions and promotion.

(i) *Sustainability Rankings for the Region*

1. *Individual Entities’ Rankings*

Figure 14: Entities’ Assessments of the Region’s Sustainability

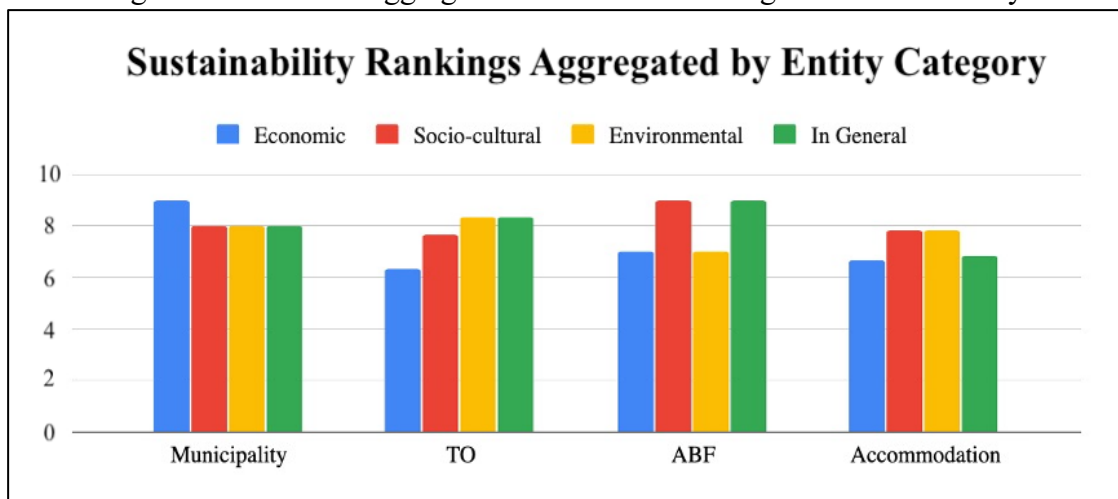


Source: own work.

In general, each entity’s individual rankings of the sustainability categories were relatively close (within two points) of one another. However, there were four instances in which entities (the ORDT, Eremo di Perloz, Albergo Ristorante Italia, and Hotel Crabun) ranked one category three or more points lower than their highest-ranked category; in each case, the lowest ranked category was the economic sustainability. The ORDT’s economic sustainability ranking of four compared to the ranking of eight for the other two categories reiterated that the Via’s economic sustainability is currently unsatisfactory for an entity whose primary motivation to participate in the Via’s development is economic in nature.

a. *Average Ranking by Entity Category*

Figure 15: Entities’ Aggregated Assessments of Regional Sustainability



Source: own work.

The average “In General” ranking by accommodations for the Via’s sustainability in the Valle d’Aosta region (6.83) was lower than any other stakeholder category’s; the second nearest “in General” ranking, on the part of municipalities, scored 1.17 points higher. When looking at the averages of the categories (in the Table 4 color scale below), the only other average scores less than seven were the satisfaction rankings of the Via’s economic sustainability by accommodations and TOs. In contrast to the economic rankings of the TO, ABF, and accommodations, the two municipality respondents both ranked the Via’s economic sustainability as a nine.

Table 4: Average Overall Sustainability Rankings of the Region by Entity Category

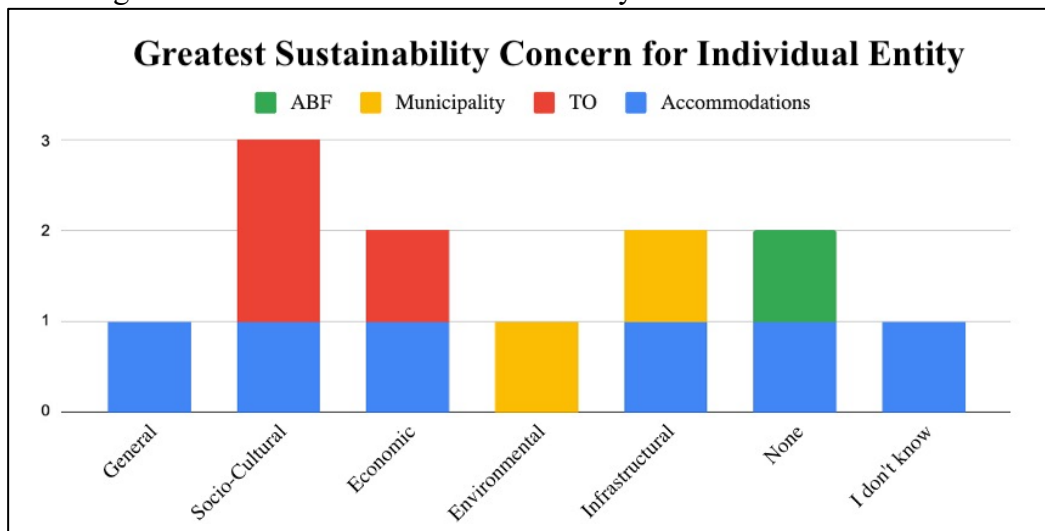
	Economic	Socio-Cultural	Environmental	In General
Municipality	9	8	8	8
TO	6.33	7.67	8.33	8.33
ABF	7	9	7	9
Accommodations	6.67	7.83	7.83	6.83

Source: own work.

Although they did not participate in the questionnaire, the liceo representatives and Maison Rosset/municipality of Nus were asked which elements of the Via’s sustainability were strongest and weakest in the Valle d’Aosta. The liceo representatives both agreed that the environmental sustainability was the strongest while economic sustainability was weakest; the teacher expressed that this situation is not the fault of the pilgrims but rather of the region, which “does nothing to create the [necessary] structures.” Maison Rosset/municipality of Nus expressed that there is not a substantial difference between the three categories.

(b) *Greatest Via Francigena Sustainability Concern Regarding Individual Entities*

Figure 16: Entities’ Greatest Sustainability Concerns for Themselves



Source: own work.

Reflective of the unique circumstances of each individual entity, the entity’s greatest individual concerns in regard to their own sustainability were wide-ranging. Five entities (the ORDT, Albergo Ristorante Italia, ABF, Hotel Crabun, and Maison Bibian) responded in a similar manner as they did with the previous question about general sustainability concerns: “The economic return,” “The constancy of the offer,” “There are no concerns,” “No issue,” and “I wouldn’t know,” respectively. ABF elaborated: as the fort possesses monumental characteristics, has welcome facilities located on the Via Francigena, and is located on a geo-site, it believes that its socio-cultural, economic, and environmental prospects are strong.

The Pont-Saint-Martin TO, citing that her office is not directly on the path of the Via Francigena, stated that “often those who walk it do not know they can have all the information they need here,” indicating that pilgrims lack familiarity with the office’s presence and implying that it would be beneficial for such pilgrims to be made more aware. The Aosta TO cited “not having a sufficient receptivity for the pilgrims.”

The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses municipality stated that diversified and adequate hospitality is his main concern, while Montjovet explained that climate change and increasingly unpredictable seasons have put certain sections of the path at risk in his region. He wrote that planned safety measures and prompt action in the case of emergencies are necessary, and the municipality has the duty to collaborate and communicate with the region as well as with private entities in order to make the Via visible and usable. In his interview, he added that landslides occur in the region, and it is oftentimes the locals who intervene with the restoration of the trail.

Eremo di Perloz stated that their primary concern is “meeting the needs of pilgrims and, at the same time, making our particular reality as hermits perceived and shared.” They stated that as a “pilgrim hospitality” structure, sometimes they worry about not feeling respected, which corresponds with their concerns relating to the “offerta libera” issues. B&B Augustus mentioned that the paths are not always well-marked, and knowledge of them is a concern. Lastly, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont wrote that the economic sustainability is their greatest concern in the context of Donnas because they are the only structure to offer special services to pilgrims, which limits pilgrims’ economic options.

(i) *Rankings Relative to Entities’ Assessments of Regional Performance*

Table 5: Entities’ Individual Sustainability Rankings Relative to Regional Rankings

	Economic	Socio-cultural	Environmental	In General
B&B Augustus	-1	1	1	0
Eremo di Perloz	1	1	0	0
Albergo Ristorante Italia	-1	-2	2	1
Pont-Saint-Martin TO	2	3	-2	1
Hotel Le Coeur du Pont	-1	0	0	0
Maison Bibian B&B	1	-1	0	1
ORDT	5	2	2	0
Montjovet Municipality	0	1	1	0
Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses Municipality	0	0	1	-2
Hotel Crabun	-2	-3	0	-3
Aosta TO	-1	1	0	0
ABF	1	-1	1	-1
Average	0.34	0.17	0.5	-0.25

Source: own work.

Table 5 (above) displays a color scale of the individual entities’ sustainability performance self-assessments compared to their perception of the region’s performance. Negative (red) numbers indicate that the entity ranked itself lower than the region, while positive (blue) numbers denote a higher perceived performance relative to the region.

The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses municipality, Hotel Crabun, and the ABF were the only entities that did not rank their general performance equal to or higher than the performance of the region. However, by comparing the entities’ self-evaluations of the three pillars of sustainability, it is clear that their “In General” rankings are not derived by calculation (e.g., mathematically, Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses’ “In General” average should be positive rather than negative) but rather by the general feeling the entities had about the region and themselves.

While the differences were generally close, some numbers stood out. For one, the ORDT ranked itself five points higher than it ranked the region in economic sustainability. During the ORDT’s interview with the researcher, it was explained that the rationale behind this assessment was that the ORDT is economically self-sufficient and is not dependent on the Via Francigena for funding, whereas other businesses that derive a greater revenue from the Via are affected considerably more. The Pont-Saint-Martin TO’s rankings for itself were positive relative to the region with the exception of the environmental aspect. The TO explained in a subsequent interview that she ranked the environmental sustainability low because the TO has little occasion to influence or be influenced by the environmental well-being of the Via, and it is the RDT rather the entity that can stage interventions in terms of utilizing more renewable energy for the day-to-day operations of the office. Hotel Crabun’s net sum of -2 for economic sustainability reflects some of the economic challenges that the entity faces (business has been in decline since 2010).

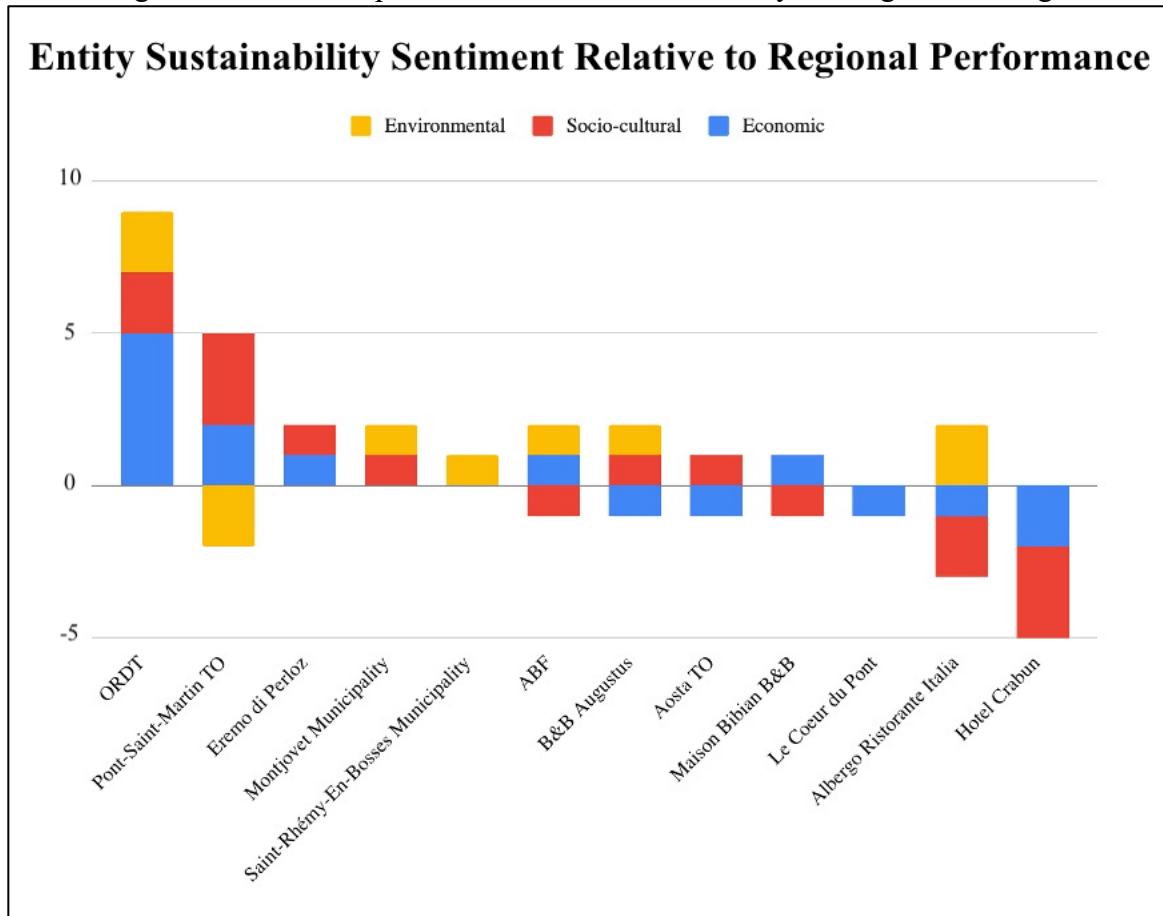
Two additional trends can be seen from the entity vis-à-vis regional performance. Firstly, the aggregated average rankings of the entities was higher than the region for all three categories of sustainability. These data indicate that entities, on average, believed that their performance was slightly stronger (within half a point) than the region’s in the metrics of sustainability, yet they perceived the region’s overall sustainability as slightly higher. The second trend (see Table 6 below) was that the average ranking of economic sustainability for the individual entities (7.33) was the lowest, as it was for the regional ranking; however, this ranking was the same as the entities’ “In General” category.

Table 6: Average Ranking Comparison Between Region and Individual Entities

	Economic	Socio-cultural	Environmental	In General
For the Region	7	7.92	7.92	7.58
For individual Entities	7.33	8.08	8.42	7.33

Source: own work.

Figure 17: Visual Representation of Individual Entity vs. Region Rankings



Source: own work.

Figure 17 (above) is a stacked bar graph that visually demonstrates the entities’ perceived performances relative to the region’s. Like the matrix, negative quantities demonstrate that the entities ranked themselves lower than they ranked the region, and positive quantities demonstrate higher performance relative to the region’s. The “In General” rankings are excluded to present a clearer visual of the three pillars of sustainability.

(ii) *By Entity Category*

Table 7: Entity Categories’ Sustainability Rankings Relative to Regional Rankings

	Economic	Socio-cultural	Environmental	In General
Municipality	0	0.5	1	-1
TO	2	2	0	0.33
ABF	1	-1	1	-1
Accommodations	-0.5	-0.67	0.5	-0.17

Source: own work.

Table 7 (above) indicates the differences in average ratings of the differing entity categories relative to the region’s. Corresponding with accommodation structures’

perceptions that economic sustainability is an issue in the region, these data indicated that the concerns are especially true in regard to their respective facilities (as they are on average ranked lower than the regional average). With the exception of the TOs, the entity categories ranked their general sustainability, on average, lower than the region's performance.

5.6.1.2 General Sustainability Concerns Expressed in Interviews

(a) The EAVF and Sustainability: An Undefined Term

An EAVF representative admitted that, while the organization promotes sustainability because the Via Francigena pilgrimage experience is an inherently sustainable form of travel, the EAVF does not have an official definition of sustainability; due to the staff's heavy workload, they have not been able to allocate the necessary resources toward the development of a definition for sustainability. However, she noted that the definitional aspect of sustainability is an issue on an even higher level. In 2010, the COE established the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA) as a managing body of the CRCE that is responsible for the development of guidelines and rules for the CRCE and accreditation of new cultural routes. In the EPA's most recent resolution, new criteria pertaining to sustainable tourism development were integrated, but the EAVF representative stated that the criteria are neither well explained nor sufficiently present. Since the CRCE is part of the COE (a human rights body) rather than a cultural or tourism body such as the UNWTO or UNESCO, she claimed that their orientation toward sustainability is much weaker. Since the EAVF perceived no clear vision of sustainability in the context of the CRCE and specifically in the case of the Via Francigena, she believed that the lack of clearly defined orientation toward sustainable tourism development's implementation is a major concern for the Via's future prospects as a sustainable entity. She stated that the EAVF has also recently become involved in the climate change movement, since the Via's objectives align with the movement. However, these incorporated elements of sustainability are not strategically and explicitly defined, and this interest in the climate change movement is still very new for the association.

(b) Legal Obstacles

B&B La Vieille Cloche addressed the complex nature of providing the appropriate facilities for pilgrims; she said that compared to other countries (and specifically to Spain and the Camino), there are many more regulatory laws in Italy that prevent structures from hosting large quantities of people.

(i) *Presence of Hostels*

The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses representative noted that about half of the pilgrims he encounters inquire about hostels, as they want to spend less money.

(c) *Indirect Interventions*

Some interventions have, in a sense, created positive externalities for the Via Francigena. In Aosta, the municipality (beginning in 1974) has worked toward pedestrianizing the city and continues to reduce the presence of cars. The representatives stated that the municipality hopes to pedestrianize the final squares during the next legislative session. Another soon-to-be completed project is the re-pavement of the cathedral square, which is the official arrival point for pilgrims in Aosta. Although these actions were primarily targeted to improve the socio-cultural and infrastructural sustainability of the city in general, they have, consequently, enhanced the pilgrim's experience in Aosta.

(d) *Non-Concerns*

The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses representative stated that the Via “can only get better and grow.” He believed that the phenomenon of travel along the Via will inevitably grow, and pilgrims will come regardless of whether services are improved, but he noted that such interventions would be helpful. He stated that the accommodation offerings should be varied, since pilgrims have a diverse range of spending habits.

The municipality of Verrès stated that he did not have any concerns about the future development of the Via in the Valle d'Aosta or in Verrès. However, he stated that it would be beneficial to create a hostel dedicated to pilgrims.

The Pont-Saint-Martin representative stated that the route is marked well in his region, it is impossible to get lost, and the signage is regularly checked (but he noted that further along in the Valle d'Aosta, this is not necessarily the case).

5.6.2 Economic Sustainability

5.6.2.1 *Economic Hardship's Role*

The Aosta municipality stated that the region has faced political and financial instability in the past five years and, although the regional administration has engaged in discourse with the municipality, these circumstances prevented the implementation of Via Francigena-related projects, including the improvement of proper signage. The representatives stated

that “it is always a question of money,” and although the Via is a beautiful project, its prioritization by necessity is subordinate to other funding needs, such as social services. One representative explained that the lack of interventions with the Via were not because the municipality did not care but rather because when there is a budget, choices must be made: “You have 100; you cannot spend 110.”

Regarding the cause of these economic difficulties, the representatives noted the external influence of the situation in Italy as a whole but explained that the negative repercussions were also the result of problems within the autonomous region of the Valle d’Aosta. The situation in the city of Aosta is influenced by the large amount of funding that comes from Rome but also the regional government’s funding decisions for the municipality.

The Châtillon municipality cited economic difficulties as the primary cause of non-interventions regarding the Via in the municipality. These difficulties have been augmented by landslides (two of which have caused a total of €173,000 in damage) and resulted in only small interventions for the Via. Other situations, such as the creation of multiple paths other than the Via Francigena, have dispersed funds, therefore making it difficult to perform proper maintenance for the Via.

On an institutional level, Maison d’Ulysse stated that being a small business is difficult in terms of taxation and discounts, as taxes must be paid based on the receipts that are made rather than the discounts.

5.6.2.2 *Economic Returns*

(a) *The Perception of Added Economic Value*

The FVF stated that, if not comparing it to the Camino, the Via Francigena has created economic benefits; however, good promotion of the Via in the Valle d’Aosta could create additional positive economic returns. From his perspective, there was an understanding that the Via is beneficial, yet it has not achieved its full potential, nor is it (currently) on the same scale of the Camino. He explained that the lack of infrastructure to support the flow of tourists is the result of businesses believing that this kind of tourism is not profitable, but he pointed out that if they look at what has happened along the Camino in Galicia during the past 20 years, “they would understand that 1 million people transiting for €20 makes more economically than 1,000 people paying €120.”

Likewise, Maison d’Ulysse believed that pilgrim numbers will inevitably increase, but further promotion could be done. She corroborated that the Via is “surely” a source of sustainable economy, although she did not speak for herself when she said so. She said that compared to other tourism offerings in the region, the Via does not generate an

enormous amount of business, and “it probably is not something that is certain to bring a lot of money.” The Aosta municipality agreed that promotion could be helpful, as this section of the path in the Valle d’Aosta is not as famous as others.

B&B La Vieille Cloche stated that the ever-increasing pilgrim flows bring economy to little towns like her own and, more impactfully, initial pilgrim visitation brings future economic benefits because many of these individuals return to the Valle d’Aosta with their families for vacation. Camping Tunnel Etroubles stated that pilgrims’ contributions to the economic returns of the region is little, but they emphasized that all things must begin, and “Santiago did not begin large. It started little by little and expanded.” One of the factors why the Via has not had such large economic returns, in their opinion, is that it has not been publicized for many years. Although there has been a “huge increase” in the number of pilgrims, they claimed that pilgrims still do not comprise a very significant percentage of tourism. Nevertheless, they found this form of tourism interesting and believed that it should be further cultivated.

For most facilities along the Via in the Valle d’Aosta, the economic contributions of pilgrims were cited as very low, relative to the other tourism segments. B&B La Vieille Cloche estimated that pilgrims comprise about 11% of business, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont estimated that the number was no more than 5-8% percent of the hotel’s business from April to September, Camping Tunnel Etroubles and Maison d’Ulysse estimated 5%, and Hotel Crabun did not believe that it comprised even 3% of total business.

The Pont-Saint-Martin municipality said that the Via benefits his community because it creates an important economic inducement; the traveller pays for accommodations and food as well as other services, e.g., medicine at the pharmacy. He said that in the past five years, hoteliers have begun to recognize the value in Via Francigena tourism and offer more discounts to pilgrims; these lower prices create a further inducement in the municipality.

(b) Neutral Economic Impressions

The Pont-Saint-Martin TO stated that she believes the region’s revenues derived from pilgrims is not so helpful, and pilgrims are not the tourist target group that spends much money. When asked whether this is a problem, she said that for some economic dealers it could be, but in general, pilgrims are simply an additional target market in tourism. Therefore, their lower spending is not a negative impact. In the context of its sustainability performance self-evaluation, the Aosta TO noted that economic sustainability is lower for the office than the other aspects because the pilgrim typology differs from the classic tourist, as they search for more economic and even free services. However, the TO stated

that it is not a concern for the office, but rather it could make the travel of a pilgrim more difficult, as it is difficult to find LCPA options.

Maison d'Ulysse stated that locals should try to host pilgrims, even though it is not necessarily profitable. She said, "You will probably be left with almost nothing in the end" due to expenses, and she does not consider it as a profit to host tourists, but she does so for the sake of hospitality because somebody must host them.

(c) *Frustrations with Municipal Administrations*

When asked for his thoughts about the Pont-Saint-Martin hostel charging approximately one third of his hotel's price, Hotel Crabun said, "No, it is not ok. But there are too many things [regarding tourism] that are not ok in Italy." When further prompted, he stated that each year the municipal hostel charges an insufficient amount to cover its operational costs, and the community's taxes, which he pays into, contribute to making up for the difference. Although he believed that the hostel should exist, he said "it shouldn't compete with a private activity when at the end of the year the community is always filling money to make the balance, you know, break even." He stated that to accommodate the needs of pilgrims, "competition is a better answer," but this situation "is an unfair competition."

5.6.2.3 *Issues Related to Costs for Pilgrims*

Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria, sharing similar sentiments of stakeholders' opinions as in section 3.4.1 (Pilgrim Accommodations and Services), stated that the costs of the offering for pilgrims is the greatest concern for the region, and she heard many times from the pilgrims that the Via Francigena in general is too expensive to travel along. B&B La Vieille Cloche also said that places with low prices for pilgrims are missing. The Capuchin Friars, echoing the insights of Eremo di Perloz, stated that pilgrims often have a negative impression because the prices are so high for them. He argued that they develop such an impression because many of them have walked the Camino and compare the prices between the two. The Great Saint Bernard Hospice indicated that Switzerland is an expensive country for people to travel through, indicating that the price issue in the Valle d'Aosta is a continuation of a problem that exists in the neighboring territory.

Occasionally, Maison d'Ulysse hosts young pilgrims for free at her house instead of charging them at her B&B because she understands that they have tight budgets that cannot cover their expenses, even when discounts are added. She mentioned that her neighbors sometimes do the same. Restaurants are very expensive, she claimed, so it is helpful for pilgrims to be treated to hospitality; however, these acts of kindness cannot occur regularly because it would put a financial burden on the hosts and take business away from restaurants, whose employees must live off of earnings. The Nus representative

had also heard stories of locals hosting pilgrims free of charge, but he did not mention any negative causes leading to these interventions.

5.6.3 Socio-cultural Sustainability

5.6.3.1 Contributions to Cultural Preservation and Knowledge

The Great Saint Bernard Hospice indicated that the resurgence of the Via's popularity has reunited the hospice with its original vocation to host pilgrims on their journey. Since the 1964 opening of the tunnel connecting Bourg-Saint-Pierre to the Valle d'Aosta, the hospice's original purpose became obsolete, so it adjusted by hosting guests who would come for a retreat in the mountains. Following a resurgence in the Via's popularity, both forms of travellers are now present at the hospice.

The municipality of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses stated that the Via Francigena shares the story of the Valle d'Aosta and the history of its people. However, the Châtillon representative stated that no special funding has been generated in her territory for cultural preservation as a result of the Via's presence.

In Pont-Saint-Martin, Hotel Crabun noted that a small chapel along the Via was restored, and when it was inaugurated, it was said that the motive behind it was the presence of the Via. Eremo di Perloz noted that little by little, the Via's presence influences the region's cultural preservation more. She cited the annual Via Francigena-themed festival that occurs in Pont-Saint-Martin as one of the demonstrable developments. The Pont-Saint-Martin representative noted that the Via encourages visitors to experience and familiarize themselves with the municipality's cultural heritage, such as the Roman bridge.

5.6.3.2 Changes in the Nature of the Route

Although the Pont-Saint-Martin TO stated that there has been a noticeable evolution in the Via Francigena from being religiously to touristically motivated, she believed that the change was not positive or negative; it is simply different. She believed that both the touristic and spiritual motivations could co-exist, and each of these aspects does not influence the other. The ORDT, upon being questioned about whether the cultural integrity of the Via was compromised by the commercialization of a once-religious journey, stated that it was not, as the historical path existed long ago; for the past 20 years, the Via has been a touristic rather than religious experience. She expressed that it is still a unique form of tourism, as these tourists enjoy solitude, self-reflection, and the search for the human experience. Likewise, the Great Saint Bernard Hospice explained that, although pilgrims were historically hosted free of charge, their modern need to pay has not caused

the history of the path to die. Due to financial reasons, the hospice charges pilgrims (but is flexible with prices if someone is unable to pay) and is subsidized by the Swiss government to remain operational, but to pay tribute tradition, they continue the practice of offering a free cup of tea to visitors.

5.6.3.3 Loss of History and Culture

The following changes are not direct results of the presence of the Via but, rather, they are indicative of the degradation of cultural preservation, which affects the quality of the pilgrims' experiences.

The RDT expressed her dismay in the recent change of ownership of Saint-Oyen's Château Verdun. For nearly a thousand years, the facility was operated by the CRB, and now "the history is no longer there." In Donnas, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont explained that along the Via Francigena, the village is virtually abandoned and that these houses from the 1800s are falling into disrepair.

The liceo student said that Valdostano traditions are being lost. The teacher explained that the regional administration has done much to preserve the history (in places like the archaeological museum and Bard Fortress), but the local population is not as interested. The student explained that in small villages, the traditions, including the usage of their local dialect, are stronger, but in larger towns such as Châtillon, these traditions are fading away. The student emphasized the need for a cultural reawakening, as the young generation is interested in the tradition, but she finds that the desire to know the region's customs has not been ignited in her parents' generation. The student said that this motivation must come from within the people, but the administration and the region in general could help by educating the population.

5.6.3.4 Language Barriers

Maison d'Ulysse expressed the "handicap of language," in the sense that the Valdostani know Italian and French, but locals generally have difficulty communicating with wayfarers who do not know those languages (This can be confirmed through the researcher's experience.). She said that the language barrier has inhibited her from communicating the region's history to visitors and providing them with insights. Eremo di Perloz also stated that it is simple to communicate with French and Italian speakers, but some people (like American English speakers) are less easy to understand. B&B La Vieille Cloche explained that although she does not speak English, both parties try to understand each other regardless.

5.6.3.5 Visitors

The liceo teacher stated that pilgrims engage in a sustainable type of tourism by partaking in the Via Francigena. She argued that their presence could only improve the sustainability of the territory, but she said that the region has a role to play in welcoming pilgrims and contributing to the richer cultural exchange than what is encountered with the typical ski tourist.

(a) *Limitations to Learning about the Valle d'Aosta's Culture*

The ORDT did not believe that the nature of the Via Francigena pilgrimage affords pilgrims the opportunity to appreciate the cultural heritage of the city of Aosta, since they only spend an evening (at most) in the city. The short duration of their stays, she said, also has implication on the economic returns that these visitors generate. In Châtillon, the representative believed that pilgrims become acquainted with the area during their travels, the focus is on spiritual self-growth, and other than occasionally stopping at a sign along the path that shares cultural insights, pilgrims do not have time to learn. She, however, said that this is a cue for pilgrims to return to Aosta in the future. The Pont-Saint-Martin representative mentioned that, although people who already have plans leave town the next day, those with more flexible schedules may remain for a longer duration and explore the series of small museums in the municipality.

Another factor influencing pilgrims' cultural encounters is their own awareness; for example, certain specialty goods, such as prosciutto di Bosses or Fontina cheese, are only purchased when pilgrims have prior knowledge of these items, as the locations where they can be bought are not indicated along the route. B&B La Vieille Cloche noted that her clients always tell her that they plan to visit Aosta because they are interested in seeing the historical sites. However, considerably less people (perhaps half) are aware of the castle that is located in Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses, and consequently it is less frequented.

Hotel Le Coeur du Pont stated that the region's unpreparedness to welcome pilgrims is a hinderance toward the visitors' opportunities to learn about the local culture. She explained that many pilgrims tell her that, on the tract of the Via from Verrès to Donnas, they were unable to visit the churches and historical cloister because nobody was there to grant them access.

(b) *Limited Demographic Interest*

It was consistently mentioned that pilgrims are typically older (retired), and it is less common to see younger people on the route, especially in comparison to the Camino. The

stakeholders speculated that this is because retirees have more free time and can afford the more expensive nature of the Via.

5.6.3.6 *Locals*

(a) *Local Familiarity with the Via Francigena*

The RDT explained that it is crucial for locals to be familiar with the Via Francigena, as the route passes the homes of villagers. She said that locals need to be educated about the route, its significance, and its value for the region.

The liceo student said that before taking part in her Via-themed class project, she was under the impression that nobody walked the Via. She expressed that the experience of walking a section of the path as a part of her coursework gave her an appreciation for the value that the Via brings to the region, and it educated these young students who, in general, were unfamiliar with the Via. Others, such as the Nus representative, stated that a culture of walking is being developed, and now locals are also beginning to actively walk the Via. The Montjovet municipality noted that the increased presence of pilgrims has made Valdostani and Italians in general more familiar with their own territory.

(i) *Changing Perceptions*

The Pont-Saint-Martin municipality expressed that there has been a positive change in inhabitants' perceptions of the Via, which was cultivated as a result of increased familiarity with pilgrims. Previously, the wayfarers were viewed with some apprehension since locals did not know who they were nor from where they came. Now, locals have a greater understanding of the Via, and pilgrims have been received more warmly in the past five years. The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses representative explained that it is now understood that pilgrims spend money, whether for accommodations, food, or souvenirs, and the Via creates a form of tourism that demands less than the ski sector.

(ii) *Local Interest and Involvement*

The Pont-Saint-Martin TO stated that sometimes locals do not care much about the Via Francigena, and she suspected that it is because they are desensitized to the nature, history, and culture around them, since for them it is commonplace. However, she said that, in general, locals show more interest when pilgrims engage them in questions. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont said that locals are unfamiliar with the Via, but perhaps they know a bit more now than they did in previous years.

The FVF said that not so many people in the region are involved with the Via, so his association seeks to raise local awareness in order to facilitate the route's expansion and enhance its future prospects. The Aosta TO representatives stated that involvement is limited: in general, older people and few hotel structures are invested in the project. Both the FVF and Aosta TO mentioned that Via Francigena involvement in the Valle d'Aosta starkly contrasts the levels of involvement on the Camino. However, the Aosta TO did not believe that the lack of engagement was necessarily a problem but stated that perhaps it might be for pilgrims.

Some municipalities, such as Châtillon, stated that the Via is a priority for them because, advantageously, it corresponds to the town's main street, so the benefits that the pilgrims bring directly influences the town. The municipal representative cited that some stakeholders, such as a local bartender, even walk the path because they are interested in understanding the pilgrim's journey.

The Capuchin Friars, who enjoys the opportunity to have conversations with guests, stated that in general, he believes locals are not particularly interested in the Via, nor do they see it as an opportunity; those with whom he interacted in Châtillon are accustomed to charging higher prices to tourists, so they are resistant to offering lower prices for pilgrims. Eremo di Perloz expressed that there is not much interest in the Via among the Valdostani, especially when compared to other regions, such as Tuscany, which have invested far more into the Via's development. They also believed that the lack of interest, in part, is because the majority of the Valle d'Aosta's economy comes from the ski resorts, so the Via is not economically enticing.

Hotel Suisse/Prosciutteria, citing a lack of services, explained that she does not believe the populations of Saint-Oyen nor Etroubles appreciate the presence of pilgrims very much, in the sense that they are not aware of the context of the pilgrims' needs. In Donnas, Hotel Le Coeur du Pont said that 90% of other accommodation structures do not want to host pilgrims, since it is economically impossible to host them for one night at pilgrim prices, but she emphasized that a discount would be possible to cover operational costs.

(b) *Added Cultural Value*

The Capuchin Friars stated that hosting pilgrims is a fruitful experience and engaging with them is a fundamental and true form of hospitality. He said that he does not treat pilgrims as numbers; he enjoys learning about their pasts and their pilgrimage motives, and he said that conversations with some pilgrims are very beautiful. The exchange is mutual; some visitors, for example, are quite interested in learning about his life as a priest.

Hotel Le Coeur du Pont expressed that hosting pilgrims is a beautiful thing that brings value to her life; from her perspective, the pilgrims are not tourists, in the sense that they want to engage on a more personal level, and one gains something through these interactions. Likewise, the liceo student explained that pilgrims are less superficial; they have a greater appreciation for the territory in which they travel.

B&B La Vieille Cloche and Eremo di Perloz both called it a “beautiful experience” to host pilgrims because pilgrims come from all over the world. Eremo di Perloz cited the exchange and sharing of life that occurs, and they also noted the added value that the Via Francigena experience contributes to the lives of the pilgrims.

(c) *Satisfaction with the Via Francigena’s Presence and Pilgrims*

The increase in pilgrims in the Valle d’Aosta could have a positive impact on locals, according to the Aosta TO. She felt that pilgrims tend to be more interested in the impact that they have in the regions where they travel. In her experience as a local, she said that the Via has had an absolutely positive influence on the region, and pilgrims are respectful of the territory. The ORDT said that the Via’s contributions to locals depends but has been more beneficial than not for local communities.

In terms of receptivity, three stakeholders (the municipality of Châtillon, Maison d’Ulysse, and Capuchin Friars) referred to the hosting or assistance of pilgrims as “a pleasure.” Châtillon, along with Pont-Saint-Martin, Montjovet, Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses, and Camping Tunnel Etroubles, stated that locals like pilgrims and/or they are happy about their presence. Montjovet expressed that pilgrims never create problems, and Camping Tunnel Etroubles emphasized the economy and advertising that is cultivated from the pilgrims’ presence. Hotel Crabun stated that pilgrims are friendly and very good clients. B&B La Vieille Cloche believed that the people of Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses appreciate the presence of pilgrims because the pilgrims are “always very kind” and adaptive to situations. She said that locals are kind to pilgrims and enjoy their encounters with them.

The liceo student, whose mother owns an accommodation structure, noted that the Via brings positive tourism, as it “deseasonalizes” (reduces the seasonality of) tourism in the Valle d’Aosta during autumn and could be a good response to the setbacks of the low season. Maison Rosset utilized the same word (in Italian: “destagionalizzare”) when explaining the benefits of the Via.

Not everyone is happy with the presence of pilgrims; Hotel Le Coeur du Pont noted that some people (of the few who remain in Donnas) are annoyed that so many people walk by, but she stated that these people are very old and do not understand that in addition to

economic benefits, pilgrims bring and share knowledge of the outside world. However, for her it was not a problem that these people do not appreciate the situation.

(d) *“Believing in” the Via*

As previously mentioned, the representatives of Nus and Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses cited that a major barrier in the Via’s development is that some people do not “believe in it,” in the sense that they do not see its worth and potential. The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses representative stated that passion for the path could make a difference; as it stands, some municipal or regional authorities stage interventions, but others (or officials who replace them in the next term) may not be interested, so the results are inconsistent and unsustainable.

The liceo student also expressed this concern, and she stated that the Via should be something that more consideration is paid to for tourism, since she did not believe that future development would carry substantial costs or be a great deal of work. The liceo teacher, in response, also said that people do not want to learn about the Via, and they as a region should believe in the Via Francigena more. She stated that the FVF hosted meetings with some cultural groups a few years ago in order to educate them on how to accommodate pilgrims; the people would get informed, agree that it would be a nice project, and then ultimately do nothing to put it into effect.

(e) *The “Italian/Aostan/Mountain Mentality”*

The municipality of Aosta (in the context of the pedestrianization of the city center and relocation of locals’ parking spaces about eight minutes outside of the city center) expressed that it is very difficult to change the mentalities of people in Italy; she juxtaposed their expressed frustration with having to walk more and the general culture of hiking and outdoor leisure in Aosta in order to identify the irony in what locals are reluctant to change. The representative of Montjovet noted that to understand the dissent in his region against regulating discounts for pilgrims, “you must know that they are mountain people, and we have a lot of people who are not open with the mentality.”

Hotel Crabun stated that, although locals in his village are friendly with pilgrims, for the region in general “I don’t think we are so nice with the pilgrims like the Spanish are. They are different. They are more welcoming to people than we are here.” He said that the cause is due to the character of the “mountain people;” the people in the Valle d’Aosta are not bad, but in their first encounters, they are usually not so friendly. He stated that this is not the right approach, and he said that the mentality of the people is an issue as well; they are not open-minded, and they do not think ahead to what things may be like in 20 years.

Maison d'Ulysse also stated that the locals should be more welcoming toward pilgrims. She said that the youth are better at providing a warm welcome and that it is a problem that people behave as if 99% of pilgrims would never return to the region; being welcoming is the right thing to do for pilgrims, especially since they make this journey to satisfy an interior need.

5.6.4 Environmental Sustainability

5.6.4.1 Recycling and Waste

One of the EAVF representatives noted the well-developed recycling system in Italy that separates waste into four distinct categories, and she stated that in the north of Italy (including the Valle d'Aosta), this system is especially effective. However, she said that there are not many waste bins along the Via Francigena path in general, but interventions would be the decision of the local municipality.

The Great Saint Bernard Pass faces unique obstacles in terms of waste management. Although their water source comes from a natural spring in sight of the property, the sewage must be stored in septic tanks; it is possible to connect a sewage line to Italy, but it could not be done for political reasons, as Switzerland is outside of the European Union. The representative explained that he was uneducated in the technical aspects of sewage management, but he mentioned that sometimes there is a disagreeable smell as a result.

5.6.4.2 Individual Entities' Contributions

At Camping Tunnel Etroubles, the management considered how it could reduce its environmental impacts through the use of meters, solar panels, and other measures. However, a technician made an assessment and calculated that such interventions would not be worth it for the old structure. They cited that they try to do their part in small ways, such as having a timed water system, but larger actions were not taken because they would risk not being able to complete them, and they worried about overextending themselves, as business is currently fine. The Great Saint Bernard Hospice also investigated the possibility of acquiring solar panels, but it was impossible due to the harsh climate atop the pass.

5.6.4.3 Route Maintenance

The EAVF explained that, unlike other countries that have associations overseeing the physical maintenance of the Via Francigena, Club Alpino Italiano (CAI) oversees maintenance of the Via in Italy, but equal attention is not paid to all regions; sometimes

the Via Francigena does not correspond to a CAI route; therefore, individual municipalities must take responsibility.

(a) *The Effects of Climate Change*

The Montjovet municipality explained that in the past three to four years, the fluctuating weather has made it increasingly difficult to maintain the Via Francigena path. He said that the “crazy weather,” which could include a few weeks of no rain followed by a week of heavy storms, has caused trees and retaining walls to fall down. He said that climate in general is a concern in regard to the maintenance of the path. According to the municipality of Châtillon, climate change’s impact on the mountains has increased the prevalence of landslides in the area, so greater attention must be paid to this phenomenon.

The liceo student explained that the diversification of tourism in the Valle d’Aosta through the Via Francigena would be beneficial, as it is a more sustainable form of tourism and the ski season is becoming increasingly shorter.

5.6.4.4 *Seasonality*

In the winter and spring, it is virtually impossible (and certainly unsafe) for pilgrims to enter the Valle d’Aosta by way of the Great Saint Bernard Pass, according to the ORDT, whose office discourages people from attempting such an action. With the closure of the road leading down to the Valle d’Aosta, during the extended snow season the first place where pilgrims can begin walking is in Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses, according to the RDT. She said that in the rest of the Valle d’Aosta, it is possible to walk the Via Francigena year-round, so pilgrims are not restricted to the same June to October (or November) timeframe that exists at the Great Saint Bernard Pass. The Great Saint Bernard Hospice, which can host pilgrims year-round (although they have to continue to the Valle d’Aosta by way of the tunnel during the winter) must be adaptive, as it is at the mercy of meteorological conditions; sometimes, it is impossible to visit the hospice during bouts of extreme weather. The weather is also a problem in the pilgrim shoulder seasons, as pilgrims sometimes arrive unprepared to trek through the snow, so the representative coordinates the acquisition of snowshoe rentals for them.

Although most pilgrims come in the summer months, she stated that some arrive in autumn because of the brilliantly changing colors of the trees. Accommodations, including Maison Rosset, Hotel Crabun, and the Pont-Saint-Martin hostel, stated that April to October is the general timeframe in which pilgrims come, with the majority arriving in July and August. During the winter, facilities near the pass, such as B&B La Vieille Cloche, do not receive pilgrims, but business is offset by the presence of ski season.

5.6.4.5 *Natural, Preserved Beauty*

Maison d'Ulysse explained that in the vicinity of the Great Saint Bernard Pass, there exists the advantage of the landscape not having been damaged by humans, which pilgrims find attractive.

5.7 **Resilience**

5.7.1 Improvements to be Made by and for TOs

As previously mentioned by the Point-Saint-Martin TO, knowledge of the TO's presence should be increased for the benefit of pilgrims in the event that they might need something. The more conveniently located Aosta TO, conversely, stated that more discounts could be offered to pilgrims. While these discounts can span different sectors, the male representative stated that pilgrim discounts for the monuments of Aosta could be offered at the TO, which currently does not offer such a discount. He stated that this action could help to improve the cultural offering of Aosta for tourists.

5.7.2 Improvements to be Made for the General Management of the Via

Hotel Crabun stated that better promotion of the route should occur. He cited the small overnight tourist tax of approximately 50 cents as something that leaves pilgrims with a bad impression after having already paid what was beyond their budget, and he suggested that pilgrims be exempt from the tax in order to facilitate better promotion of the route. Although this would be a small intervention, he claimed, it would help to make the community treat the travellers more as pilgrims: "It's nothing, but it's *something*." Hotel Crabun explained that in terms of promoting the route by lowering prices, the private entities can only do so much until it becomes unsustainable for business, causing them to close permanently; in his opinion, sometimes it is interventions from the region (such as the reduction of taxes) that could lower the overall price for pilgrims. Other ways to improve promotion, in his opinion, would be to keep the path in order and get locals to be friendlier with tourists. The Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses representative believed that all locals should be involved in the promotion of the path in the sense that their ability to assist pilgrims who are lost ultimately influences the pilgrims' experiences, which they share with others.

The Montjovet representative expressed that economic factors are not the root of the issue; rather, he said that economic efficiency, i.e., spending funds properly, could be improved. He also said that he does not believe a large amount of money is necessary for the success of a route; as a mayor or president of an association, one simply must take care of one's home territory for non-locals to have incentive to come.

In terms of decision-making, the Montjovet representative expressed that a greater degree of sharing should be implemented between the region and municipalities, and he suggested that the range of parties be more collectively engaged in the long-term implementation of the decisions. Likewise, the Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses representative explained that the system by which the Via Francigena develops is ineffective when decisions are made individually; he suggested that the region link different organizations together (from the regional, municipal, and association levels) in order for effective results to be seen.

The Verrès municipality specifically mentioned that further involving businessowners (in this case, within his own municipality) in initiatives, such as the provision of discounts, could be helpful. Additionally, the municipality could improve the signage and maps for pilgrims.

5.7.3 Aspects That are Missing or That Stakeholders Would Change

The following issues were identified by stakeholders when they were explicitly asked what is missing or what they would change or improve in the Valle d’Aosta in regard to the Via Francigena. While these responses create overlap with previous data, it is important to emphasize the following insights, as they indicate the most pressing concerns for stakeholders.

5.7.3.1 *Economic Development*

The ORDT stated that the office of tourism is a sustainable entity, but it constantly aims to further improve the economic sustainability of tourism in the region, which is vital since the foundation of the Valle d’Aosta’s economy is tourism. She noted that the office strives to preserve the environment and resources, and she expressed that the numbers of visitors (including on the Via) cannot grow indefinitely, but they must be substantial enough to contribute to economic development.

5.7.3.2 *Adequate Accommodations and Services*

The Point-Saint-Martin TO reaffirmed the difficulty that pilgrims have in finding accommodations for a single night, especially during high season, and she said that “it is one of the greatest problems.” Additionally, the female Aosta TO representative said that a youth hostel in Aosta is “what we are lacking,” “really missing,” and something that the municipality of Aosta should seek to implement. The Nus representative cited that he would like to improve the reception of guests and diversity of accommodation prices. Maison d’Ulysse reiterated the need for more hostels that provide basic services for

pilgrims. One of the representatives of Hotel Le Coeur du Pont explained that pilgrim's services, such as access to water fountains, are also missing at each stop. Like the FVF, she stated that Via Francigena information points (according to her, at every submansio) could improve the visibility of the route and services for pilgrims.

5.7.3.3 Adequate Signage

The Aosta TO representatives expressed that more signs should be placed specifically in the city of Aosta, as pilgrims get lost because such signs cannot be found.

5.7.3.4 The Need to Increase Involvement, Promotion, and Awareness

The FVF stated that more people need to get involved in order for the association to expand; the aim of the FVF is to promote the Via Francigena, which will ultimately benefit the region. An Aosta, municipal representative likewise stated that more promotion would be helpful, although such action falls into the competence of the regional administration, so the municipality cannot do much by itself.

The Nus representative explained that reinforcing the importance of the Via by making locals more aware could enhance the situation, especially since the Via plays a vital role in the diversification of tourism products in the region. The liceo student also stated that educating locals on the Via's importance as a form of tourism could be effective, but the teacher said that this is not enough; the region and municipalities must become more engaged, as they do not work enough to make people aware. She said that the mindsets of the politicians need to change more, and young people could help to facilitate this change.

Hotel Crabun expressed his disenchantment with the disconnect that the government has with private businesses. He said that it is important that people "come down from the sky" and talk to those involved in the Via Francigena (rather than talking through newspapers and other publicity mechanisms) in order for them to better understand the needs of the region. He stated that all levels of governance, from low to high, should engage more, and politicians should be more engaged rather than focused on remaining in office.

5.7.3.5 Cultural Site Accessibility

The Montjovet representative cited the Castello di Saint-Germain as a crucial part of the cultural heritage of Montjovet and the Valle d'Aosta as a whole, but the castle has been inaccessible for years because it is structurally unsound. In the early 2000s, the region invested in the development of the Bard Fortress, but the representative said that this castle

has been forgotten. The villagers are disappointed that the castle is still not opened nor valorized.

5.7.3.6 Garbage Facilities

The Montjovet representative noted a lack of garbage cans along the route and felt that it would be beneficial to strategically place some, as it is a problem if pilgrims do not have a place to dispose of garbage.

5.7.3.7 Bureaucratic Obstacles

Maison d'Ulysse said that the administration should make it easier for people who have available space to provide accommodation for pilgrims. She also mentioned that the taxes on accommodation structures "kill us." She explained that even making changes to her own entity, such as providing four of five beds in a big room upstairs for pilgrims, is full of obstacles and time-consuming due to Italian regulations, so she never intervened.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Interconnectedness of Three Pillars of Sustainability

In terms of concerns, data indicate a high level of intersectionality between the three pillars of sustainability. The overlap, corresponding to Connelly's (2007) Venn diagram, indicates an intricacy in the nature of sustainability and resilience along the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta. Oftentimes, one category influenced stakeholders' perceptions of the (un)sustainability of another category; economic and socio-cultural sustainability in particular were very much linked to one another.

6.2 Sentiment Insights

Accommodations' overall 53.33% frequency of positive sentiments fell 10.96% below the second-lowest frequency (i.e., the FVF's 64.29%), thus demonstrating a divide between the accommodations' and other sectors' sentiments. The contrast was particularly large between accommodations and TOs, as the frequency of negative sentiments was nearly twice as much for accommodations. The accommodations category was the only segment that did not have any higher than average positive sentiments and possessed moderately negative and very negative sentiments that were both higher than average, indicating that accommodations stakeholders were overall more critical of the situation than other segments.

The auto coded sentiments by theme indicate that stakeholders have conflicting feelings about the Via Francigena; while positive sentiments were generally more present than negative sentiments, the high frequency of mixed sentiments demonstrates the complexity of the subject matter for stakeholders, as they perceive positive and negative elements of in the context of each theme. One auto coded theme in which the negative sentiments were clearly more frequent than positive sentiments was for “price,” thus indicating that the cost-based concerns are particularly problematic for the region.

6.3 Express vs. Implied Sustainability Concerns

Although multiple stakeholders expressly stated in the questionnaire that they did not have concerns for the future development of the route, subsequent interviews made it evident that they had underlying or contingent concerns. Those who stated that they had no concern for the route’s future development but added a conditional statement, e.g., “but it would be helpful if ...” and “there is no concern if...,” implicitly demonstrated that they believe that the Via’s sustainability could be improved through resilient means.

In fact, many respondents indicate through their comments that their greater concern lies in what could be rather than what is; missed potential from a lack of promotion and adequate interventions preoccupies them more than current conditions, which means that many stakeholders’ concerns are oriented toward long-term resilience rather than current sustainability.

6.4 Stakeholder Categories’ Effects on Opinions

The data from the questionnaire responses indicate that municipal representatives may be outliers in terms of how they perceive the economic sustainability of the Via and, supported by the data collected from interviews, it is possible that the different roles, priorities, objectives, and municipal residencies held by the different categories of stakeholders have an effect on stakeholder satisfaction with various components of sustainability along the Via. The lower “In General” average ranking by accommodation structures than other stakeholder categories indicates that such facilities have a less favorable impression of the Via's sustainability because they witness the adverse elements of the Via more directly than managing and promotional bodies.

Accommodations were the most vocal about the socio-cultural benefits of pilgrim interactions and consistently argued that the presence of the Via is a net good for the region, yet they were also more likely to feel the burden of the economic challenges of this form of pilgrimage tourism. They frequently expressed that the path should be developed and promoted in order to attract more tourists, thus indicating their vested interest in the Via. The ORDT’s extremely low ranking of the Via’s economic sustainability for the

region indicated, as the RDT had previously stated in her interview, that the TOs and regional authorities are interested in the economic benefits of the Via and are unsure of whether tangible financial returns will be achieved in the future.

Despite their many concerns and issues, entities indicated that the Via Francigena induces more positive than negative effects on the region; stakeholders, therefore, believe that the Via is a worthwhile product that can and should be improved. Due to accommodation stakeholders' generally more altruistic rather than fiscal motivations, higher tolerance for economic sustainable issues were indicated, so much so that some were willing to compromise profit so long as they could break even with their contributions to the pilgrims.

6.4.1 Weaknesses in Sustainability: Who or What is to Blame?

In terms of the entity by category rankings relative to the region, the TOs' averages indicate that, while they have noted issues relating to economic sustainability, it is not their own entities that face such issues, as they on average ranked themselves higher than they ranked the region.

Since all entity categories' environmental performance rankings were, on average, ranked equal to or higher than the general environmental sustainability of the region, this may indicate that general environmental sustainability concerns are not traceable to specific entities but are rather caused by outside sources, or the entities believe that the weaknesses in environmental sustainability are the faults of other stakeholders rather than themselves. From the context of the interviews, the likely culprits of the lower environmental sustainability in the region are climate change, limitations due to the impassability of the Great Saint Bernard Pass, and geological issues affecting the maintenance of the Via Francigena.

6.5 The Via Francigena as a Component of the Valle d'Aosta

An interesting pattern arose from questionnaire responses relating to the greatest general concern for the region: of those who expressed no greatest concern for the sustainability of the Via in the questionnaire, in their subsequent interviews they highlighted issues in terms of the current state, municipal involvement, or future of the Via Francigena; hence, they expressed sustainability concerns, but the findings of the questionnaire indicate that, while these individuals did not express general concerns in response to the explicitly stated question, they did, in fact demonstrate that there were elements of sustainability that they felt were weaknesses in the Valle d'Aosta.

Since the entities generally ranked themselves higher in terms of case-by-case individual aspects of sustainability than the region but ranked the region higher in terms of general

sustainability, a discrepancy between particular sustainability aspects and a holistic view of sustainability was indicated; this distinction alludes to the need to understand sustainability in the context of a multidimensional and interconnected system, which alters one's overall sentiments when moving from the specific to the general.

TOs such as the ORDT had a wider scope of tourism foci in the region, particularly tourism that attracts higher-spending visitors. Therefore, they were less likely to prioritize the development of the Via over other forms of tourism, and they did not attribute the same level of economic value on the Via as accommodation structures expressed. On the other hand, municipal representatives of small communities (and especially the questionnaire respondents from the mountainous communities between Aosta and the Great Saint Bernard Pass) generally had inflated perceptions of the Via's economic sustainability, thus believing that the Via has achieved greater economic success than others (including interviewed stakeholders) perceived. The municipality of Aosta, however, tended to share more similarities with the TOs, While the municipality has made some efforts to intervene with the Via, it possesses more diverse resources as a city and tourism destination; at over seven times the population of Châtillon, the capital city is significantly larger than even the second-largest municipality along the route, and hence the Via is something that interests Aosta but has minimal effects on the city itself and is not a pressing concern. Conversely, some actions taken by the municipalities or region, such as the repavement projects in Aosta, indirectly enhance the Via. These implicit benefits to the Via that lack Via-centric intentionality indicate that certain stakeholders in the region do not actively push for the Via's development to have a sense of direction in the trajectory of sustainability. Because of this reality, to understand the complex nature of the Via's sustainability, it must be regarded as part of a whole system in certain contexts. It becomes more evident that stakeholders perceive the Via as an element of development rather than its zenith when understanding that they seek to diversify business in the case of the hostels; although they perceived the hostels as essential for the development of the route, many stakeholders indicated that they sought to attract youth in general to these hostels. Therefore, the route can be regarded as a supplement to tourism rather than an isolated opportunity. Likewise, whereas the summer season attracts pilgrims to areas that typically host more tourists during the winter ski season, the Via's inducement on business would be insufficient if its pilgrims comprised the primary source of business year-round. It is the combination of varying peak seasons by segment that make the Via a complementary element to the Valle d'Aosta's tourism sector.

Beyond the confines of the Valle d'Aosta, interregional collaboration on the part of some stakeholders (especially the Point-Saint-Martin municipality and FVF) indicate that in a larger sense, it is important to understand their tract of the route as a component of the complete Via Francigena, as the overall cohesion of the route could have effects on its image; from their understanding, the perception of Via Francigena as an overall brand can have implications for the route's future popularity in the Valle d'Aosta.

The contrasting understandings between stakeholders do not contradict one another, but rather they indicate that the success of the Via must be understood in the context of individual stakeholders' agendas and prioritizations. While differing views are not problematic in and of themselves, these varied perceptions have contributed to dissonance in terms of moving toward a collective goal, and stakeholders with wider ranges of responsibilities have not felt the same level of urgency to stage interventions as Via Francigena-focused stakeholders, who have more at stake.

6.6 Feedback Loops

Entities (especially municipalities) cited the benefits that arose from increased discount options offered by stakeholders who came to understand the correlation between discounts on increased business; in essence, they saw the pilgrims' inducement of business as incentive for more businesses to offer discounts, thus attracting more pilgrims and creating a cycle of further inducement that benefitted the community.

Adverse feedback loops were also perceived to exist or potentially exist in the Valle d'Aosta; those who expressed the need for hostels in the region had a fear that excessive prices and scarcity of accommodation options would negatively affect future Via Francigena visitation, thus reducing the sustainability of the route; the implied consequence of high prices was that pilgrims would be dissatisfied, which could ultimately affect the Via's image, particularly as a result of negative comments and reviews online.

6.7 Dissatisfaction in Light of the Camino de Santiago's Success

The topic of stakeholder satisfaction with the Via Francigena's sustainability and success relative to the Camino, although not prompted by the researcher, frequently arose. The stakeholders' choices to (negatively) compare the Via to the Camino indicates that they perceive the Camino as the gold standard of pilgrimage tourism. With their ability to compare the two routes came the aggravated frustration they have with the lack of pilgrim infrastructure, affordable prices for pilgrims, and pilgrim-friendly legislation. The concern encompasses many levels of socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural sustainability, as stakeholders mentioned how the Camino is better marked and marketed. While some stakeholders reflected upon the Via as an opportunity to be like the Camino, others dismissed the possibility that the Via could ever achieve the same success, due to the particular nature of the route and the region. The success of the Camino seemed, for some, to be the motivation behind the development of the Via, while others saw the Camino as competition that detracts younger, less wealthy pilgrims from traveling along the Via; stakeholders acknowledged that pilgrims who have done the Camino and the Via are prone

to comparing the experiences and prices of both routes, which could further damage the Via's reputation in terms of economic offering.

Perhaps the most interesting feedback (from the Châtillon municipality) that the author received in regard to the two routes was the idea that the Via should attempt to link itself as a product to the Camino. Naturally, such a process would have to come from a higher place of authority: perhaps the RDT but, more likely, even from an EAVF or CRCE level. This potential involvement highlights the importance of social capital for the further development of the route, as will be discussed shortly.

6.8 Seasonality and Congestion

Temporary congestion in the Valle d'Aosta was seen as both a symptom of and solution to seasonality. Stakeholders understood the Via's potential to reduce seasonality by providing an option for tourists during the region's low seasons of spring and autumn (between the summer holidays and ski season). However, the already present temporary congestion of traditional tourists as well as pilgrims that occurs in July and August has made the accommodation situation unsustainable for pilgrims. While the Via is able to extend the tourist season, it has failed to regulate excess demand during the summer months, and it has yet to attract sufficient tourists during the low season to offset decreased tourism demand. Although it is impossible for the path before Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses to accommodate winter travel, there remains a general understanding that the Via underperforms during the winter months in the locations that are walkable.

In the Great Saint Bernard Pass region of the route, concerns over seasonality are more present because they have more direct effects on the stakeholders. It is understandable that Albergo Ristorante Italia listed the constancy of the offer as the greatest concern on the regional and entity-specific levels; since the hotel is completely closed during the winter months, the seasonal limitations of the structure are more extreme.

6.8.1 Ecological Resilience

Multiple stakeholders cited concerns over climate change in regard to the Via Francigena, but the liceo student went so far as to suggest that the Via's diversification of tourism offerings could play a vital role in the future of the Valle d'Aosta. Since the region is heavily reliant on the ski sector but each ski season has become shorter due to increases in average temperature, the student identified that a shift in interest toward the Via could better equip the long-term issues that the Valle d'Aosta may face as a result of a permanent shift in the climate. The sentiment that the development of the Via is necessary, therefore, takes on a dimension that transcends socio-cultural, environmental, and economic boundaries, as all aspects of sustainability and resilience (for the route and the

region in general) are interconnected. The allure of the Valle d'Aosta for tourists is highly influenced by the natural beauty of the mountainous terrain, and thus the liceo student understood that socio-ecological resilience can play a crucial role in the future as tourism is reoriented to meet the capacities and changes of the physical territory.

6.9 Current Limitations to Social Resilience

The municipalities indicate from their feedback that the region's social resilience is weak in regard to financial strains and budget limitations. Some stakeholders indicated that improvements could be made in resource allocation and efficiency, thus reducing the economic stresses that require social resilience in the first place. However, other choices, such as the concurrent development of multiple trails in the region, exacerbate resource scarcity and increase the difficulty in overcoming economic limitations. Social resilience, however, is stronger in certain communities such as Montjovet and Châtillon, where locals have staged interventions in spite of inadequate assistance from the region.

6.10 The TALC Curve and LAC

The repeated observation that the number of pilgrims on the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta has grown indicates that the Via would be categorized into the TALC curve's "Development" phase.

Future prospects for the route were mixed; as some stakeholders did not reflect upon the critical range of capacity given the current circumstances of the route, they suggested a continued growth without end, regardless of interventions. To disregard the critical range of capacity in the context of pilgrim flows, these stakeholders must have either predicted the future of the path within the context of a limited time dimension or were confident that the region would be able to adjust to future growth.

Those who cited insufficient sleeping facilities for pilgrims demonstrated their concerns about the stagnation or decline of tourism along the route. These concerns indicate that they believe the LAC have been crossed; resource conditions are unacceptable, as pilgrims do not receive the services that they desire, and social conditions (specifically, the pilgrims' experience in the Valle d'Aosta) have caused negative consequences for the image of the Via. Hence, stakeholders who maintained that the region lacks accommodations for pilgrims believe that the proper management action to take would be to create more options for pilgrims in order to facilitate acceptable conditions that are conducive to pilgrimage tourism.

The ORDT's concerns over the potential for a disproportionately large number of pilgrims in the future and minimal economic returns indicate that she fears LAC, as she

understands them, could be surpassed in the future. Her argument for the need to better define and understand the desired pilgrim segment that the region would like to attract validates the TALC curve's original purpose of expressing that proper management can shift the critical range of capacity and shift a destination's trajectory from a state of decline or stagnation to rejuvenation.

For the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta, the concerns over decline were in the context of the socio-cultural experience and economic returns rather than environmental degradation. The situation corresponds to the same pattern seen in the Ellis Curve, but the current and potential causes are infrastructural rather than environmental (However, Hotel Crabun noted the Via's presence creates incentive to maintain and keep clean the path, as doing so leads to better promotion, which results in economic benefits that are derived from increased environmental favorability. His comment corresponds with the traditional Ellis Curve's pattern of increased environmental and economic benefits.).

If the Y-axis of the Ellis Curve were to be modified to reflect the infrastructural-economic situation, the curve would indicate initial benefits for the economy and structures within the region, followed by the forecast of negative socio-cultural impacts as a result of congestion, whether temporary or permanent. These adverse consequences would cause many possible outcomes of the curve to trend toward the negative, both economically and socio-culturally. However, in light of Butler's (2004) indication of changing tourism markets, the future direction of the curve will also be influenced by the reality of actual touristic preferences rather than the belief of stakeholders that trekking and pilgrimage tourism will continue to grow in popularity.

Another LAC point of concern revolves around cultural preservation; stakeholders, particularly the liceo representatives and Hotel Le Coeur du Pont, indicates that the region is in jeopardy of permanently losing some of its tangible and intangible heritage. Education and interventions are important actions to be taken if the region desires to combat these problems.

6.10.1 Relation to the Adaptive Cycle

Stakeholders had differing perceptions, based upon LAC and current situations, as to where the status of the Via in the Valle d'Aosta falls in the context of the adaptive cycle. Many believed that it was still in the growth phase, but those who were concerned about prices and accommodation options would argue that the Via is heading toward collapse. They would suggest that the variables of price and current capacity have negatively affected future prospects of the route. While they see a need for adaptation, the region's adaptation capacity is indeterminate for them, as they have yet to witness effective actions.

6.10.2 Evolutionary Resilience

The repeated, expressed need for diversified and abundant accommodation options and beds indicates that stakeholders understand that evolutionary resilience should be achieved for the future success of the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta. However, the evolution in pilgrim demand has challenged the region to adequately meet the needs of visitors. Some municipalities were confident in their capacity for evolutionary resilience in the context of the increase in beds for pilgrims, while others were more adamant about the difficulties of the present and future barriers that exist.

6.10.2.1 Adler's Sacred-Secular Continuum

Although stakeholders perceived a shift in pilgrim's motivation toward the touristic end of Adler's Sacred-Secular Continuum as well as an overall shift of the Via Francigena toward non-religious tourism, they viewed the change in light of evolutionary resilience; rather than voicing adverse opinions toward this change in what was once the historical norm, they understood it as a neutral reality that makes the Via relevant to the intrinsic needs of modern society.

6.11 Community Resilience

Calls for the development of pilgrim hostels throughout the Valle d'Aosta demonstrate the stakeholders' desires for community resilience. Stakeholders expressly stated that they are better off when they work together, and collective rather than independent action could make a difference. Limited presence of LCPAs prevents substantial development from being achieved, as the network of stakeholders has not successfully worked toward the common goal of establishing appropriate options throughout the route.

The stakeholders indicated that the expansion of pilgrim services would be beneficial for future development. Simple interventions, such as baggage delivery services, have been implemented with ease by some stakeholders as a response to demand; therefore, some adaptive capacities for positive changes are present but would be strengthened through the engagement of additional stakeholders.

6.12 Social Capital

Stakeholders' attempts to increase the involvement of locals along the Via Francigena indicates that already active entities recognize the value of social capital in fortifying sustainability and resilience. At the core of their statements, stakeholders demonstrated that the region is deficient in the adequate social capital and capacity building needed to successfully implement necessary changes for the promotion and development of the Via.

Certain entities, namely the FVF and liceo, demonstrated their orientation toward the development of social capital and appeared to be best equipped to cultivate awareness for the route.

One of the greatest barriers to the successful achievement of social capital for the Via is the widespread misconception that pilgrims are not economically profitable for the region and do not spend much money. Stakeholders demonstrated through their insights that two factors could mitigate the issue of non-engagement: education and evidence of deliverables. Stakeholders demonstrated that the best way to influence others to engage in the Via is to show concrete examples of the Via's benefits. Education, although useful, has been problematic in the sense that it does not necessarily translate into implementation; hence, the resolve of potential collaborators must be strengthened, which could be accomplished by creating more support from coordinating bodies or by individually incentivizing stakeholders by proving economic benefits.

However, a deficiency in quantitative statistics (rather than general, non-numeric observations) is a major hinderance toward achieving recognition for the Via's current and potential benefits and convincing people to "believe in" the route. Interventions from Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses and Pont-Saint-Martin indicate that, on a municipal level, the value of pilgrim data is beginning to be understood, but until more interventions are made, it will continue to be difficult to sway reluctant potential stakeholders.

Another limitation relates to funding and promotion; certain initiatives in the region have not been achieved because investors could not be attracted, and those who desire more promotion for the Via from locals also indicated that locals should be more engaged in general. The only way to achieve these desired results is through the cultivation of social capital.

Rapport is weak between actively engaged stakeholders and potential stakeholders with the capacity to decisively intervene. The most crucial relationship to develop is between the region and the Diocese of Aosta, which would be able to substantially expand LCPA options through already present infrastructure and potentially fill the accommodation void that stakeholders believe has hindered the growth of the Via.

In terms of socio-cultural social capital, the stakeholders frequently demonstrated a strong orientation toward supporting local food products, which provides secondary economic benefits and familiarizes pilgrims with the culinary traditions of the region. Other initiatives, such as the Aosta TO's proposed pilgrim discount for the monuments of Aosta, would further integrate the capacity for pilgrims to learn about the region and might curtail the difficulty in engaging pilgrims, whom stakeholders believed do not learn as much about the region as they could. If the ORDT were to be receptive to such ideas, social capital would be enhanced.

6.12.1 Specific Barriers to Social Capital

6.12.1.1 Psychological Limitations

The most difficult obstacle of social capital to overcome is the shift in local mentalities and receptivity to change. It can be difficult to override the interviewee-described “mountain people” mentality of the Valle d’Aosta or Italian stubbornness that keeps some people set in their ways. Frustrations that locals are not as friendly as their counterparts on the Camino or unwilling to change price policies cannot be resolved unless those parties experience a shift in worldview, which can be encourage but cannot be enforced by others.

6.12.1.2 Wariness Toward the Public Administration and Authority Figures

Partially influenced by the perceived lack of governmental efficiency in Italy (and specifically in the Valle d’Aosta), stakeholders do not necessarily believe that the public administration will serve their best interests, be responsive to their needs, or intervene appropriately. Resentment, frustration, and/or apathy toward the government was observed in certain circumstances, thus revealing a degree of tension, in some instances, between stakeholders and public bodies. These frustrations stem from a combination of perceived improper action, non-action, and lack of engagement with stakeholders.

6.12.1.3 Lack of Engagement and Knowledge

Unfamiliarity with the EAVF is a hinderance toward stakeholder engagement and participation, particularly amongst the stakeholders who demonstrated their confusion between the EAVF and FVF. It is possible that the respondents who confused the two associations misinterpreted the question of their involvement with the EAVF, but nevertheless the information indicates a disconnect from direct affiliation with the EAVF. The TOs’ responses in regard to EAVF affiliation indicate that there is not a uniform understanding among TO employees as to whether the individual TOs are affiliated with the EAVF, thus calling into question how responsive each TO should be to the EAVF.

In general, stakeholders believed that locals are unaware of the Via or its benefits and opportunities; therefore, sensitizing locals to the path is a critical step that must be taken in order for sufficient support to be achieved for successful future development. Passive engagement, such as official partnership or membership with the EAVF but lack of action in specific initiatives, highlights the weaknesses of the Via’s development scheme.

6.12.1.4 Lack of Direction

On all levels, sustainable development plans seemed to lack clear direction. As even the CRCE's sustainability agenda appeared to be ambiguous, the subsequent levels of stakeholders (from the multinational EAVF to individual entities) do not have a substantial basis in which to universally execute sustainable actions in a consistent manner.

Naturally, differences in stakeholder opinions have led to different perspectives on the best future course of action to undergo. Whereas some economically motivated stakeholders such as the ORDT believed that better understanding the target pilgrim demographic would help to facilitate proper sustainability and resilience measures in the future, others interpreted diversification of current offerings as the proper answer to the situation. The varied opinions highlight the weakness of individual discretion and indicate that a more cohesive strategic plan should be developed to maximize future success.

6.12.1.5 Distance Between Levels of Stakeholders

Non-TO stakeholders in the Valle d'Aosta frequently cited the need for more meetings and collaboration between stakeholders on all levels. The disconnect and distance that some felt indicates that they do not believe all levels of management, whether municipal, regional, or EAVF, have performed optimally, and these deficiencies and lack of cohesion are seen as general weaknesses working against the achievement of a stronger Via Francigena product. While the individual stakeholder satisfaction with the EAVF vis-à-vis the RDT was found to be comparable, a slightly higher individual satisfaction with the RDT was likely influenced by the perception of closeness to local stakeholders.

6.12.1.6 Lack of Continuity

As the Via Francigena's development in the Valle d'Aosta varies from municipality and depends upon individual government officials' interest in the route, stakeholders identified concerns for the continuity of long-term development. They understood that the viability of the route is jeopardized when it relies on independent initiatives and personal interest rather than collective effort; therefore, long-term planning coordinated by oversight bodies (such as the EAVF, ORDT, or regional government) and region-wide collaboration are manners in which stakeholders believe issues could be overcome.

6.12.1.7 Competences

Institutional burdens reduce the ability of stakeholders to intervene in the Via Francigena. Particularly, the basis for non-action in many cases, whether for signage or maintenance, was that the action was not in the institution's "competence." This rigid structure and

allocation of responsibilities inhibits stakeholders from effectively collaborating to elevate the Via's sustainability.

7 CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability and resilience for the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta. Based upon the qualitative data that were collected and analyzed, it can be concluded that individual stakeholders have mixed views about route's sustainability and resilience capacities, and perspectives are influenced by the type and unique circumstances, motivations, and interests of each stakeholder. Whereas economically driven stakeholders such as the TOs expressed scepticism toward the future financial benefits of the Via's presence, municipalities, especially those of smaller communities, were often extremely optimistic about the path's inducement for the local economy. Accommodations were more prone to expressing satisfaction with the added cultural value that is brought to them through meaningful pilgrim interactions but acknowledged the fiscal difficulty in accommodating the needs of pilgrims while remaining profitable. In terms of location, stakeholders in the high mountains near the Great Saint Bernard Pass were more likely to discuss seasonal limitations due to the closure of the road, while those in the Montjovet and Châtillon area of the valley expressed concerns over climate change-influenced landslides.

Stakeholders viewed the general sustainability and resilience of the route as a whole differently (and generally more negatively) than they perceived their individual performances, indicating that there is a distinction to be made between the performance of individual entities and effectiveness of the system as a whole. These sentiments are understood in the context of whom stakeholders hold responsible for the facilitation of proper change; indeed, the findings indicated that there was a lack of consensus among stakeholder in terms of who is responsible for certain interventions.

Municipalities oftentimes expressed that certain interventions did not fall into their competence, whereas accommodation structures or TOs indicated that the RDT or EAVF should be responsible for certain actions, such as the implementation of signage and additional promotion. Certain stakeholders, such as the liceo, FVF, and Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses municipality pointed to the need for locals to take further initiative in the development of the Via. Stakeholders, such as Camping Tunnel Etroubles, who investigated the possibility of implementing additional sustainable practices, were cognizant of the barriers to improving what they could control but also more readily able to identify issues for which they did not hold responsibility.

The EAVF and RDT were generally perceived as positive entities that have enhanced the Via, although some stakeholders were unfamiliar with the EAVF or felt that the

organizations could do more to intervene in the improvement of the route. Stakeholders had predominantly positive impressions of the Via, with municipal representatives and TOs expressing the highest percentages of positive sentiments and accommodations expressing the lowest. However, stakeholders indicated that the route could be improved with proper interventions, although they had differing perspectives as to who should be responsible for such interventions. They recognized that the route has brought added value to the region in each of the three pillars of sustainability but voiced their concerns for elements that they believed are hindrances toward the path's overall sustainability. Namely, increased visitation, while having the potential to offset the region's tourism low seasons and contribute to the economy, has augmented issues of congestion along the path in terms of LCPA options. While not all stakeholders believed that there was a deficiency of beds for visitors, the majority acknowledged that these facilities do not necessarily fulfil the needs of pilgrims, as they remain outside of many pilgrims' budgets. In short, stakeholders perceived great potential for the future of the Via, but many of them believed that the region is not adequately prepared to meet the needs of the growing flow of pilgrims in the years to come.

Whereas the ORDT and other TOs were more oriented toward concerns related to the economic returns that the region reaps and municipal representatives were more likely to approve of the economic sustainability of the route, accommodation stakeholders had a higher propensity to discuss sustainability concerns for pilgrims, such as insufficient accommodation options and dissatisfaction with prices. Accommodations were also more inclined to express the difficulty in maintaining profitability while accommodating the lower-priced needs for pilgrims, which resulted in their frequent calls for the creation of hostels and LCPA facilities along the route. Only the municipal representative of Nus voiced a small reservation in the creation of a hostel because of its possibility to increase competition for accommodation structures. All other stakeholders in the Valle d'Aosta expressed support for the development of hostels. Even Hotel Crabun, who voiced frustration with the hostel in Pont-Saint-Martin, conceded that a hostel is important to have; however, he stressed that the hostel should be created in the form of fair competition. Although the overwhelming support for hostels may appear contrary to the interests of the current accommodation structures, three factors must be considered in order to understand why accommodation structures are supportive of the project. Firstly, the percentage of pilgrims comprise a small percentage of overall business and, therefore, revenues. Secondly, accommodation facilities, due to the intrinsic value they place on the route and pilgrim-host interactions, largely participate in the Via's initiatives in the spirit of charity rather than profit, as the discounts they provide are oftentimes just enough to cover the costs of hosting pilgrims. Lastly, it is widely understood that pilgrims are dissatisfied with the high costs associated with the Valle d'Aosta, so stakeholders understand that the need to diversify accommodation offerings could improve future pilgrim satisfaction, and hence the image of the Valle d'Aosta, which could serve as valuable publicity.

In terms of environmental sustainability, the research indicated that stakeholders are not concerned with the effects that pilgrims have on the physical environment but rather climate change, seasonal limitations, and weather-related geological damage to the route.

Socio-culturally, stakeholders indicated that the mentality of locals and lack of interest in the route prevent positive change from occurring. They expressed that locals should be educated on the Via's many benefits in order to motivate them to participate in the initiatives that enhance the route, and they recognized barriers to development that occur as a result of insufficient social capital, collaboration, and collective planning.

7.1 Contribution

This research has created a baseline understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Via Francigena's sustainability and resilience in the Valle d'Aosta. It has established that the stakeholders in question hold favourable views of the Via's future development prospects but are concerned about issues relating to the region's capacity to host pilgrims in a manner that both parties can afford. Particularly, this thesis highlighted the common understanding that prices are too high for pilgrims in the Valle d'Aosta and that hostels would benefit the region because they would provide diversified accommodation options.

The data have highlighted the complexity of the stakeholder network and demonstrated the important role that social capital must play in order for the Via to be effectively, cohesively, and sustainably developed in the region. Collective action, rather than individual initiative, amongst all levels of stakeholders was established as an ideal mechanism for further development. Lack of interest on the part of potential collaborators, difficulties in educating locals about the benefits of the route, and a deficiency in demonstrable statistics were determined to be obstacles to convincing others of the merits of the route.

This information will allow for future insights to be gathered in regard to stakeholders' needs and can be referenced in further Via Francigena sustainability studies along other sections of the route in order to better understand the recurrent vulnerabilities of the route as a whole. In the context of the Valle d'Aosta, the information can be utilized to demonstrate to the varying stakeholders, included and excluded from this study, the complexity of stakeholder perspectives and interests, which can allow them to better understand how they can contribute to the route.

7.2 Limitations

As the research was conducted in a qualitative manner, the sample pool was limited and could not indubitably reflect upon the sentiments of stakeholders as a whole. Additionally, the questionnaire responses, while serving as a baseline understanding for the beliefs of stakeholders, was insufficient in meeting the threshold that would make it usable for quantitative analysis. The research's scope was also limited in the sense that local perceptions were reflective of stakeholders representing official entities, when it could be argued that non-affiliated locals are stakeholders as well and could possess different perspectives. Indeed, the writer of this thesis, who walked the majority of the path during his stay in Aosta, has reason to believe that locals along the route may not be as pleased with the path as the stakeholders in this thesis' scope; the researcher regularly saw "Private Property" and "No Trespassing" signs on the properties along the route, especially in the low end of the valley. Likewise, pilgrims, who may be startled by the many barking dogs or occasionally even feel unsafe from an unleashed canine pursuing them beyond its owner's property lines (as the researcher experienced a handful of times), were not considered, partially because the research was conducted during the winter season and the researcher did not observe any pilgrims on the path, and partially for the sake of investing into more deeply understanding local stakeholders' perspectives.

The researcher concedes that the understanding of environmental sustainability and resilience on the part of the stakeholders is particularly limited. Firstly, these stakeholders were more sociologically than scientifically focused in their responses. The Great Saint Bernard Hospice's responses concerning septic tanks demonstrated that not much consideration is paid to such issues, as the establishment's primary mission is to welcome visitors.

Stakeholders' insights on environmental sustainability were largely constricted to their immediate surroundings. Aside from the Hotel Le Coeur du Pont, which cited a need for facilities such as water fountains along the route, none of them mentioned a deficiency of bathroom facilities or the implications of human waste on the environment. During his hikes, the researcher faced bathroom- and drinking water-related issues (there were many water spouts along the route, but it was unclear as to whether the water was potable or on private property), and he even witnessed a day trekker urinating into one of the historic ruins, so it is possible that pilgrims or landowners along the route may be aware of additional environmental sustainability concerns that did not come to the interviewed stakeholders' minds.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research regarding visitors' perceptions along the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta and along the path as a whole could be useful in understanding the demand-side perspectives of the Via and validate or refute the concerns that stakeholders voiced in the context of pilgrims. Local residents could be included in future research in order to better understand perceptions of the path in the context of those who live near to it. Insights from these additional stakeholders could shed light upon concerns that the stakeholders in the thesis did not express. Additionally, scientifically focused studies to better understand environmental impacts, such as soil erosion and waste management, could provide valuable insights that are excluded from this thesis.

In light of the fact that the four lowest RDT satisfaction rankings were given by entities that chose not to rank the EAVF's performance, further studies to understand whether a correlation exists between familiarity and satisfaction with the EAVF and RDT could help to better understand stakeholders' perceptions and expectations. Quantitative studies could be conducted in the Valle d'Aosta to expand upon the findings of this thesis and provide numeric data that could influence the overall understanding of stakeholder perceptions as well as economic prospects. Lastly, studies could be conducted in order to better understand how the Via Francigena as a product can be enhanced through interregional collaboration or affiliation with the Camino.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How has the Via Francigena changed in the past 10 years?
2. What are your opinions on the EAVF?
3. Are there any aspects of the EAVF that you are critical of, and do you have any suggestions to improve the relationship?
4. Regarding the Via Francigena, what have the EAVF and the RDT done in the Valle d'Aosta that has been good? What could they do to improve?
5. Do members of the community appreciate the Via Francigena's presence?
6. Are the pilgrims respectful?
7. Do you enjoy your interactions with the guests? Are they respectful of you, other locals, and the Valle d'Aosta in general?
8. Do you believe that the Via Francigena's presence has added cultural value to the Valle d'Aosta, and has Via Francigena visitor presence contributed to cultural preservation?
9. Do you have any concerns about the sustainability of the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta? What is your greatest concern?
10. Do you have any suggestions on how the Via Francigena could be managed better?
11. Have the demographics of tourists along the Via Francigena changed?
12. Are goods and services purchased locally in order to meet the needs of your establishment? Are goods and services imported from outside the Valle d'Aosta?

APPENDIX 2: PRESENTATION TO VIA FRANCIGENA STAKEHOLDERS

The Via Francigena Stakeholder Study on Sustainability

By Dominic Gialdini

Master's Candidate in Tourism Management

Purpose

- **To identify** the most prominent **sustainability concerns** for the Via Francigena in Aosta
- **To assess how sustainability can be improved** through stakeholder collaboration on a regional and local level
- **To develop benchmarking** for the Via Francigena that will assist in future development plans

- How: by interviewing Via Francigena stakeholders in the Valle d'Aosta
 - Accommodations, tourism boards, municipalities, etc.
- The Focus: Sustainability from Stakeholder's Perspectives

- Collaborators:
 - European Association of Via Francigena Ways (EAVF)
 - Assessorato Turismo, Sport, Commercio, Agricoltura e Beni culturali

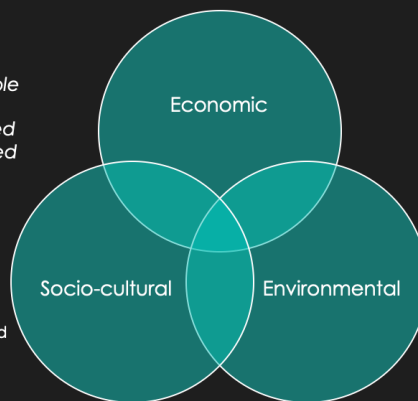
Sustainable Tourism Development

- “[P]ublic and private tourism actors need to consider the equal distribution of maximised economic benefits, the minimisation of the sociocultural impacts on hosts and tourists as well as the protection and the enhancement of the natural environment through tourism activities.” - (European Council, 2016, p. 7)
- **Sustainability:** Underlines the “core goals of protecting and maintaining natural and cultural resources for the future and mitigating undesirable change.” - (Lew, et al., 2016)
- **Resilience:** “It is about adaptation, including building human resource capacities to change in efficient ways, creating learning institutions that can address changing circumstances while maintaining core values, understanding feedback loops in dynamic social and environmental systems, and generally encouraging flexibility, creativity, and innovation in the culture of a community.” - (Lew, et al., 2016)

Sustainable Tourism Development: 3 Pillars

The three pillars of sustainable are interconnected, and optimal results are achieved when all three are integrated

- **Socio-cultural**
 - Respect for culture and authenticity
 - Contribution to cross-cultural understanding and respect
 - Conservation of traditions and heritage



- **Economic**
 - Fair distribution of socioeconomic development
 - Stable employment
 - Poverty alleviation
- **Environmental**
 - Responsible and efficient resource use
 - Conservation of natural heritage, flora, and fauna
 - Maintenance of ecology and natural systems

(Adapted from Tekken & Kropp, 2015)

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APPENDIX 3: LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND REPRESENTED SEGMENTS

Location	Organization	Accommodation	Restaurant	Municipality	TO	Other
Fidenza*	EAVF**					X
Fidenza*	EAVF**					X
Bourg-Saint-Pierre	Great Saint Bernard Hospice	X				
Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses	B&B La Vieille Cloche	X				
Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses	Hotel Suisse/ Prosciutteria**	X	X			
Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses	Office of the Mayor			X		
Etroubles	Camping Tunnel Etroubles	X				
Etroubles	Maison d'Ulysse	X				
Aosta	ORDT				X	
Aosta	RDT				X	
Aosta	TO				X	
Aosta	FVF					X
Aosta	Office of the Vice-Mayor			X		
Nus	Office of the Mayor/ Maison Rosset**	X	X	X		
Châtillon	Office of the Mayor			X		
Châtillon	Capuchin Friars	X				
Saint-Vincent	Scuola Tecnico Turistico					X
Montjovet	Office of the Mayor			X		
Verrès	Office of the Mayor/Collegiata di Saint Gilles**	X		X		
Donnas	Hotel Le Coeur du Pont	X	X			
Perloz*	Eremo di Perloz	X				
Pont-Saint-Martin	TO				X	
Pont-Saint-Martin	Hotel Crabun	X	X			
Pont-Saint-Martin	Office of the Mayor/ Point-Saint-Martin Hostel**	X		X		
Total:						
Locations	Organizations	Accommodations	Restaurants	Municipalities	TOs	Others
13*	27**	12***	4***	7	4	4****

Source: own work.

Notes:

* Two locations (Fidenza and Perloz) are not municipalities along the path connecting Bourg-Saint-Pierre to Pont-Saint-Martin. Therefore, of Bourg-Saint-Pierre and the 21 municipalities that the path crosses in the Valle d'Aosta, 11 municipalities are represented.

** Although 24 interviews were conducted, 27 organizations are represented. This is because two interviewees represent the EAVF, three individuals doubled as representatives of their municipality's office of the mayor as well as an accommodation (or accommodation/restaurant) facility, and one interviewee doubled as a representative of a hotel and independent restaurant.

*** Three accommodation structures house a restaurant within their facilities; for this reason, they are double counted in the "Accommodations" and "Restaurants" totals to show that they represent each sector, but they are counted as one entity each in the "Organizations" total.

****The "Others" are comprised of two representatives from EAVF, a representative of the local chapter of the Friends of the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta, and the technical tourism high school. Therefore, four interviews corresponded to the "Other" category but represented a total of three organizations.

APPENDIX 4: VIA FRANCIGENA MUNICIPALITIES AND POPULATIONS

Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses	331
Saint-Oyen	198
Etroubles	493
Gignod	1,714
<i>Aosta</i>	<i>34,361</i>
Saint-Christophe	3,441
Quart	4,061
Nus	2,979
Verrayes	1,304
Chambave	939
Saint-Denis	374
<i>Châtillon</i>	<i>4,753</i>
Saint-Vincent	4,620
Montjovet	1,791
Issogne	1,368
<i>Verrès</i>	<i>2,644</i>
Arnad	1,269
Hône	1,176
Bard	117
Donnas	2,533
<i>Pont-Saint-Martin</i>	<i>3,833</i>

Adapted from Principali Città Regione Valle d'Aosta (2019).

Notes:

- Municipalities represented by at least one interviewee are highlighted and in boldface.
- Submansiones are italicized.

APPENDIX 5: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire will be used for research on the sustainability of the Via Francigena in Valle d'Aosta. By completing the questionnaire, you acknowledge that you represent an entity/activity located along the route of the Via Francigena in Valle d'Aosta, voluntarily fill in the questionnaire and authorize that this information is used for research purposes.

1. What is the name of the entity that you are representing in this questionnaire?
2. In which municipality is the entity located?
3. What is your name and title?
4. How long has your entity been affiliated with the European Association of the Via Francigena Ways (EAVF)?
5. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the sustainability of your facility's individual performance in regard to economic sustainability of the Via Francigena?
6. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the sustainability of your facility's individual performance in regard to the socio-cultural sustainability of the Via Francigena?
7. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the sustainability of your facility's individual performance in regard to the environmental sustainability of the Via Francigena?
8. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the overall sustainability of your facility's individual performance in regard to the general sustainability of the Via Francigena?
9. **(Free response)** What is your greatest sustainability concern in regard to the Via Francigena for your specific facility, and why?
10. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the sustainability of the Valle d'Aosta region's performance in regard to economic sustainability of the Via Francigena?
11. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the sustainability of Valle d'Aosta region's performance in regard to the socio-cultural sustainability of the Via Francigena?
12. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the sustainability of Valle d'Aosta region's performance in regard to the environmental sustainability of the Via Francigena?
13. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being not sustainable at all and 10 being 100% sustainable), how would you rank the overall sustainability of Valle d'Aosta region's performance in regard to the general sustainability of the Via Francigena?
14. **(Free response)** What is your greatest sustainability concern in regard to the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta region as a whole, and why?

15. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being completely dissatisfied and 10 being completely satisfied), how satisfied are you with the EAVF's performance in improving the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta?
16. On a scale from 0-10 (0 being completely dissatisfied and 10 being completely satisfied), how satisfied are you with the RDT's performance in improving of the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta?
17. **(Free response)** How have you seen the Via Francigena in the Valle d'Aosta change over the past 10 years?
18. **(Free response)** Is there anything else you would like to comment about?

APPENDIX 6: LIST OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS

1. ABF
2. Albergo Ristorante Italia
3. Aosta TO
4. B&B Augustus
5. Eremo di Perloz
6. Hotel Le Coeur du Pont
7. Hotel Crabun
8. Maison Bibian B&B
9. Montjovet Municipality
10. ORDT
11. Pont-Saint-Martin TO
12. Saint-Rhémy-En-Bosses Municipality

APPENDIX 7: CATEGORIZATIONS OF INTERVIEW CONTENT (FIRST DRAFT)

- Q1. Questionnaire responses
- Q2. Economic benefits (economy)
- Q3. RDT and the EAVF
- Q4. What could be improved (about entity, offices)?
- Q5. Monitoring plan and statistics
- Q6. Policy in place for visibility
- Q7. What would you change (what is missing)?
- Q8. Change in past 10 years
- Q9. Concerns for the future
- Q10. Local quality of life
- Q11. Municipal collaboration
- Q12. Sustainability concerns
- Q13. Environmental impacts
- Q14. Pilgrim accommodations (and services)
- Q15. Goals for the future (plans)
- Q16. Stakeholder involvement
- Q17. Seasonality (climate)
- Q18. Culture
- Q19. Visitors
- Q20. Future management (how it could be improved?)
- Q21. Your motivation
- Q22. What could be improved about management
- Q23. FVF
- Q24. Miscellaneous
- Q25. Local food

APPENDIX 8: CATEGORIZATIONS OF INTERVIEW CONTENT (SECOND DRAFT)

- Q1. Questionnaire Responses
- Q2. Economy
- Q3. RDT and the EAVF
- Q4. Individual entity improvement
- Q5. Monitoring plan and statistics
- Q6. Policy in place for visibility
- Q7. What would you change (what is missing)?
- Q8. Change in past 10 years
- Q9. Concerns for the future
- Q10. Locals
- Q11. Municipal collaboration
- Q12. Sustainability concerns
- Q13. Environmental Impacts
- Q14. Pilgrim accommodations and services
- Q15. Local management
- Q16. Stakeholder involvement
- Q17. Climate
- Q18. Culture
- Q19. Visitors
- Q21. Stakeholder motivation
- Q22. What could be improved about management
- Q23. FVF
- Q24. Miscellaneous
- Q25. Local food

APPENDIX 9: FINALIZED OVERARCHING THEMES, THEMES, AND SUBTHEMES

- I.** Greatest concern (from questionnaire)
- II.** Time Dimension
 - A.** Past
 - 1.** Change in the Past 10 Years
 - B.** Future
 - 1.** Future Goals, Plans and Management
 - 2.** Concerns for the Future
- III.** Management
 - A.** Monitoring Plans and Statistics
- IV.** Stakeholders
 - A.** Municipal Collaboration
 - B.** Motivation
 - C.** Involvement
 - 1.** RDT and EAVF
 - 2.** FVF
- V.** Goods and Services
 - A.** Pilgrim Accommodations and Services
 - B.** Local Food and Products
- VI.** Sustainability
 - A.** General Sustainability Concerns
 - 1.** Socio-cultural
 - a)** Visitors
 - b)** Locals
 - 2.** Environmental
 - a)** Climate
 - 3.** Economic
- VII.** Resilience
 - A.** What Would You Change/what is Missing?
 - B.** What Could be Improved About Management?
 - C.** Individual Entity Improvements
- VIII.** Miscellaneous

APPENDIX 10: "INCREASED" WORD TREE GENERATED BY NVIVO

