

Olga Lo Presti and Clara S. Petrillo

# Co-management of religious heritage: An Italian case-study

## Abstract

*The flow of tourists to sites and sacred buildings increases exponentially in response to a growing demand for spirituality, authenticity and search of cultural roots. In this context, community and church institutions are representing a new role within the tourism system that is increasingly becoming the constellation of value - set of mutual relations among actors, both public and private, all with the common goal of meeting needs relative to their responsibilities and competencies. The ecclesiastical cultural heritage is an asset of absolutely inestimable value, particularly in Italy. It involves complex issues and huge responsibility to present relatively high cost of maintenance and enhancement of functions and the heterogeneity of the use related to them. Therefore the aim of this paper is to present the case study of the site that have successfully responded to these challenging circumstances and adapted well. The case study describes how the Association Oltre il Chiostrro in Naples has contributed to the restoration, reopening and showcasing some of the most important churches in the city centre, building in the process a complex network of relations and an innovative management system.*

## Keywords:

*ecclesiastic heritage; co-management; pilgrimage; cultural tourism; Italy*

## Ecclesiastic heritage: Activities and use functions

Visitors of ecclesiastic sites have very different interests, values, characteristics, behaviours, expenditure patterns: from very pious and seriously prayerful to purely secular and basically uninformed about the religious meaning of the place (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Cohen, 1996; Vukonić, 1996; Murray & Graham, 1997; Fleischer, 2000; Devereux, 2003; Fernandes, McGettigan & Edwards, 2003). Often religious interests overlap with cultural and educational motivations more strongly tied to cultural tourism along a continuum that goes from the sacred to the profane with almost infinite number of possible combinations (Smith, 1992).

Heritage tourism and, therefore, religious tourism is a phenomenon based on tourists motivations and perceptions rather than on a specific site's attributes and objective classification. In other words: the reasons for visiting heritage sites are linked to the

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tourists' perception of the site in relation to their own heritage and their willingness to be exposed to an emotional experience (Poria, Butler & Airey, 2004). If the religious motivation prevails over the cultural one, the visit is a pilgrimage defined in Christianity as "going alone or with other people to a sanctuary or another religious site for devotion, piety, vows or penance, and favouring a community life experience, the growth of the Christian virtues and a higher religious knowledge" (Episcopal Commission for Migration and Tourism, 1980, p. 37).

At the same time, religious tourism also includes large-scale gathering on the occasion of significant religious dates and anniversaries and tours or visits to important religious places and buildings within the framework of a touristic itinerary (Vukonić, 1996). The increasing search of human beings for different realities and meanings, driven by their increasing problems with self-identification and self-acceptance and their rejection of the current social system, is the underlying motivation for a particular form of the experience-based religious tourism (Savelli, 1992). It includes alternative vacations, mainly for young people, such as stay in areas hit by an earthquake, volunteer actions in developing countries, stay in spirituality houses or international meetings. Pope John Paul II, understanding this youth's intense need of spirituality, in 1986 initiated the World Youth Day (WYD) organized every three years in different places of the world. With the four hundred thousands of youth coming from almost every country of the world, the WYD has become an important meeting but also an occasion for tourism. Another example is the Camino de Santiago de Compostela which is, thanks to its popularity following the publication of Paulo Coelho's book, mainly visited by very young people.

Even in the case of cultural tourism, art is not the exclusive motivation of the visit; it also implies the experience of admiring a masterpiece in its original setting – a sacred site with its atmosphere and rites – giving a higher cultural value to the visit. This is the case of Italy where buildings and works-of-art of the Christian-Catholic Church have a prominent role: the variety, wideness and artistic, historic and cultural relevance of Italian churches and cathedrals are known world-wide (Table 1)

Table 1

**ECCLESIASTIC HERITAGE IN ITALY**

Type of heritage	Number
Churches, shrines, ect.	95,000
Monasteries	1,500
Shrines, sacred mountains, houses of spirituality, Viae Crucis, Bishop's Palace, etc	3,000
Libraries	5,500
Archivies	100,000
Religious museums	936
Artistic religious buildings	60,653
Pipe music organs	12,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>278,589</b>

Source: Primicerio 1991, C.E.I. 1993, Centro Studi T.C.I. 1996, Santi, Miari & Mariano 2001, Maresu 2003.

The large number and value of these assets generate considerable management problems, while numerous difficulties arise from the requirement to simultaneously meet the needs of two different type of use: a "religious" use (theological, liturgical and pastoral), and a lay use (educational, historic and aesthetic). The risk is that religious tourism is the result of the acceptance of secularisation, which means loss or decline of the religious function of the holy place (Costa, 1996a), turning it instead into a multi-purpose place.

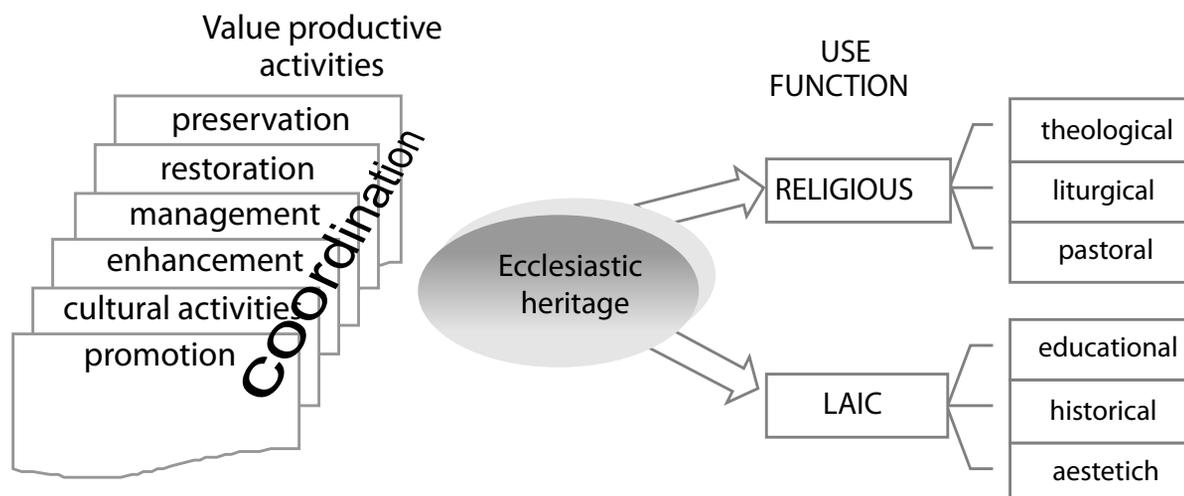
Thus, venerated places are now viewed as tourism resources that can be commodified for travellers interested in cultural and historic sites. Churches, cathedrals, pilgrimage paths, sacred architecture, and the lure of the metaphysical are used in tourism promotional literature, as highlighted by the marketing efforts for the year 2000 and its millennial religious connotations (Olsen & Timothy, 1999). As a result of marketing and growing general interest in cultural tourism, religious sites are being frequented more by curious tourists than by spiritual pilgrims, and are thus commodified and packaged for a tourism audience (Vukonić, 1996; Shackley, 2001; Olsen, 2003).

The coexistence of lay and religious values amplifies the conflict between collective and private interests that is common for heritage resources, and increases the level of management complexity: the religious heritage cannot be considered as similar to other cultural resources and become object of the usual economic management for tourism development (Shackley, 2002). Without an adequate plan, the risk is that tourism could alter the sites (whose primary aims are liturgy and prayer), while the heritage might be seriously damaged and the visit endangered.

In order to guarantee an efficient and satisfactory visit of the site, the site must be put at the very centre of a complex system – the value constellation: to fully express the value hidden inside the resource itself. At the same time, the role and expectations of all stakeholders must be considered - first of all the ecclesiastic institutions – in order to interactively co-manage the religious sites within the scope of their own competences and aims (Normann & Ramirez, 1994). The adoption of such an integrated system allows a wide visit of the goods both from the religious and the tourism point of view and, in the same time, for their enhancement and promotion through the externalisation and coordination of the activities. The diverse activities - "value productive and use functions" – (Figure 1) are useful each other and have a growing degree of complexity (Alvino & Petrillo, 1999).

Besides the primary activities of preservation and restoration, it is necessary to develop a complex organisation of material and human resources for an effective planning of activities, initiatives and actions aimed at upgrading heritage knowledge and promotion. These activities must be coordinated in an organic and harmonic system planned for the diverse use functions and fully integrated in the territory.

Figure 1  
**VALUE PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES AND USE FUNCTIONS**



Source: Alvino & Petrillo, 1999

A research developed by Irat-CNR in 2002 highlighted a number of solutions adopted in order to avoid and/or solve the potential trade-offs: from the introduction of an entry ticket to a gratuitous loan to private associations and/or firms. There are many good and encouraging examples: almost four out of five hundred 393 (over a total number of 512) monasteries, convents and abbeys are part of a tourism supply chain (Table 2). These activities were first developed in order to obtain funds for buildings' maintenance. Later on, it was implemented to open up these sites to the outside world (Maresu, 2003).

In other cases, church institutions delegated its heritage's management to cultural associations that place these assets at public and city's disposal. The safeguarding of the sites' religious function has been guaranteed by the rigorous planning of times and spaces while the cultural visit – always considered more important than the tourism activity – has been assured through the professionalism of human resources and the high quality of services offered.

The Irat-CNR research showed a range of initiatives promoted by the integration of ecclesiastic world, economy and culture (viewed as source of new entrepreneurship). Such a system is developed with an innovative and self-funded approach by enhancing creativity and is used as leverage for the sustainable development of the territory.

Table 2

**MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS**

Association	City	Number of resources	Ticket €	Visitors No (year)
Cultural Association Agrigento Viva	Agrigento	5	1.00 – 2.50	17,300 (2000)
Cooperative Ingegneria per la Cultura	Arezzo	1	5.00	95,000 (2001)
Superintendence Ferrara	Codigoro (Fe)	1	4.00	
Cooperative Areté	Codrongianos	1	1.00 – 2.50	70,000 (2002)
Ente Ordine Mauriziano	Cuneo	1	5.16	
Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore	Firenze	3	3.00 – 6.00	1,400,000 (2001)
Opera per Santa Maria Novella	Firenze	1	2.50	354,992 (2001)
Opera di Santa Croce	Firenze	1	3.00	
Church of S. Lorenzo	Verona	1	2.50	
Cooperative Idea srl	Lucca	2	2.00 – 5.50	132,488 (2001)
Association “Oltre il Chiostro”	Napoli	2	4.00	
Opera del Duomo	Orvieto	2	3.00	120,000 (2001)
Church	Padova	1	2.50	
Opera del Duomo + Opera della Primaziale di Pisa per gli altri monumenti	Pisa	4	2.00 – 17.00	
Curia	Ravenna	1	6.00	
Superintendence	Ravenna	2	2.00	400,000 (2001)
Cooperative La Pira	Ravenna	15	5.00	550,000 (2002)
Associations volunteers Sacra San Michele	Susa	1	2.50	
Church	San	1	3.50	224,800 (2001)
Cooperative Siena Viva	Siena	1	2.00	6,100 (2001)
Association Chorus	Venezia	14	2.00 – 8.00	280,000 (2002)
Association Sant’Apollonia	Venezia	2	1.60 – 2.60	
Association “Chiese Vive”	Verona	5	2.00 – 5.00	250,000 (2001)

Source: Irat-Cnr, 2002

**Co-management of religious heritage**

The careful analysis of the motivation underlying the visit to religious site has a critical value in strategic planning and management of the asset: the complexity of motivations may, in fact, create problems, sometimes substantial, if the religious building is regarded as any other cultural heritage and, as such, becomes the subject of economic management (Shackley, 2002).

As already alluded to, the religious sites perform, simultaneously, two different functions: the one linked to the religious one that is the theological liturgical and pastoral value, and the other to the secular which is focused on educational, historical and religious events. The coexistence of secular and religious values amplifies the contrast between private and collective interests, further increasing the level of management complexity.

The risk, in the absence of planned initiatives, is that tourism, if left unplanned, ends up putting stress on the appearance of sites as places intended primarily for the liturgy

and prayer and, in the absence of rules, cause severe damage to monuments and their reasonable enjoyment. There is a detectable increase in the frustration of many genuine visitors particularly at sensitive cultural or religious sites when they encounter rather vulgar and overt infrastructure introduced by the 'product providers' (McGettigan, 2003). Digance (2003) defined 'contested pilgrimage sites' as the sacred locations where there is contest over access and usage by any number of groups and individuals who have an interest in being able to freely enter and move around the site. Therefore, in the absence of consultation, conflicts may generate, which could lead to the abandonment of that asset.

In case that the churches are regularly exposed to a large number of visitors, the lack of proper managements might lead to them being permanently closed for visitations or an extremely rigid system of protection advocated by conservationists might be put in place especially in case of religious buildings that have a high artistic value (Costa, 1996b). In addition, new communication technologies and the creation of mega-events (for example, the Jubilee or the beatification of Padre Pio), may lead, if not properly managed, to distortion of the true meaning of the event, loss of the real motivation of religious tourists with the consequent "Disneyfication of the holy places" (Costa, 1996a).

Finally, but equally important, is to help tourists that are visiting the place to respect the values and codes of conduct appropriate for different functions and religious beliefs (Mazza, 1993, Shackley, 2001, 2002). Co-management involves understanding and respecting traditional values, in particular when they are organised in places of religion with significant tangible and intangible values and an important spiritual significance to traditional owners. In such cases, the presentations by the custodians directly or through an interpreter ensure that the material is correctly presented in the proper context and in a culturally sensitive manner (McKercher & du Cros, 2002, p. 92).

Numerous studies have examined alternative ways of managing cultural and religious heritage in attracting tourism (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Murray & Graham, 1997; Richards, 2001, McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Maresu, 2003). Common to these studies is the identification of the need to create a complex organisational system involving all stakeholders in order to rationalize the system of cultural supply and arrange the necessary services to enhance its quality. Strategies for the environmental management of religious tourism comprise policies for managing the impact (effects), in particular to minimise the negative impacts by limiting the pressures caused by the large influx of visitors (Shinde, 2003). According to the value productive activities, cooperation and partnership between public, private and ecclesiastical stakeholders needs to be strengthened in order to encourage development of a well defined organisational structure able to overcome the permanent problems of public management.

## **The role of ecclesiastic bodies**

The Church has recognized the importance of adopting new forms of communication for their evangelizing activities. The use of new tools and procedures for pastoral service was necessary as the society evolved from the word culture nowadays largely ineffective towards the prevalent image culture.

In the Declaration on Tourism (Section 4), the Church recognizes the centrality of tourism to the development of human being, the meeting among peoples and the growth of the international community beyond borders, language and nationality. The increase of leisure time has also enabled the promotion of Christian values (Cohen, 1996). Even cultural heritage assume a new role: ensuring to the believer or pilgrim an appropriate religious experience while giving to tourist a possibility to transform them from observers to active participants and thus enabling them to have a more deep spiritual experience during their visit (Devereux, 2003).

The Pontifical Commission for Cultural Heritage of the Church (2001) has even stated the urgent need for training interventions to overcome a certain indifference towards the ecclesiastical cultural heritage, upgrading the legal and administrative sector and stimulate the spirit of initiative. The buildings of worship become multifunctional meeting place for a discreet, soft, evangelization, especially for those who do not participate regularly and actively in other types of religious learning, supporting the simple aesthetic and cultural, spiritual availability a religious culture (Cheli, 1992). Furthermore, the promotion of enhancement influences the education and knowledge of art, and implies an increase in demand: the spread of cultural associations can potentially help widen the artistic consumption and erase the stereotypes of cultural consumption restricted to narrow elite.

The activism of ecclesiastic actors is supported by the other managers of tourism destinations and cultural heritage: the active participation in models of integrated management system optimizes and encourages the use of places of worship while restoring its proper role within the overall product that can be called the "city of art" (Mattiacci, 1998). Churches are evidence of culture that is a living part of the city in which they appear and then the path of knowledge of a city of art. The city, its form and its atmosphere enhance the cognitive and emotional value of the church, its meaning and content and vice versa.

Finally, the management system of the cultural heritage ensures fulfilment of another important social objective of ecclesiastical institutions: the creation of jobs and opportunities for volunteer work. The greater complexity and higher demands require, in fact, more advanced skills and assistance of qualified paid professionals or volunteer guides and specialists. Due to historical and artistic skills, the new catechism and their Christian culture serves to communicate the religious content of the good clergyman and it guides tourists along the ecumenical search for common values, symbols and marks left by previous generations.

## The Association Oltre il Chiostro in Naples

In order to illustrate the new orientation in managing sacral heritage sites in Italy, such as the one outlined above, the case coming from Naples offers a good example. The Association Oltre il Chiostro in Naples was founded in 1996. It was set up as an "association of people and projects". The management is constituted of an elaborate system of different stakeholders - cultural associations, businesses, universities, local authorities, museums, etc.. With the network set up, the Association manages some of the most important churches of the historic centre of Naples and its museums, cloisters and gardens. The Association employs 40 people, all members of the Association who are also actively involved in the parish. These young graduates often come from socially and economically disadvantaged families. Thus, the Association helps social and cultural integration of these people into community, what is extremely important given that Naples is affected by numerous social problems such as unemployment, high rate of crime and drug addiction.

The Association has strongly centralized coordination of numerous activities and promotion of many events and projects, although for their development and implementation it relies mostly on outsourcing. The most important activities of the Association since its foundation are: two websites and internet forums for the promotion of national cultural debate; a portable electronic guide in four languages; a museum tour guide and specific to children; three catalogues on CD-Rom; the Annual Epiphany Concert, an event of national importance, home to internationally renowned artists and is broadcast live by national television channels; 110 conferences, workshops and meetings; 37 training courses of different types and levels; 40 exhibitions with the edition of its catalogue and 70 concerts.

The Association has also conducted a study on visitor demand to the heritage sites under their management. According to the results, and in accordance with the studies reviewed in the preceding section, most visitors belong to the type of cultural tourists. In fact, they visit church especially in response to a cultural rather than a religious need. A large majority (93%) of them declare that they have visited the museum for cultural interest, while only 3.2% for an interest in religion. Only one third of visitors (34%) say that they follow the religious service regularly, 30.3% occasionally, without a specific commitment, 16.4% only during the official holidays. Majority (62.5%) had not participated in pilgrimages, 9.6% did so only once, 16.5% occasionally, 5.3% plan to do if they have an opportunity. Likewise, majority (84, 5%) of visitors said they agree on the use of cultural resources of the churches for social, cultural and recreational opportunities.

It can be assumed that in the near future there will be an increase in the segment of the faithful, because it was found that among respondents, young visitors, less than 25 years of age, are more likely to participate in pilgrimages and religious life; most of them are "new visitors" that have visited the museum for the first time at the suggestion of friends and / or relatives, while traditional promotion channels, such as brochures, newspapers, posters influenced only 16.2% of visitors and television 7.4%.

The level of satisfaction expressed is sufficiently high as 57.3% reported being very satisfied with the visit, while 30.5% to be satisfied. These percentages are consistent with the high values associated with the desire to return (89%).

The services most in demand were: the cultural guide, library and the cloakroom. Regarding the introduction of payment for tickets, 80% of visitors were in agreement but 50% are opposed to any increase in price. When asked "what should be the sources of funding for the maintenance and enhancement?", visitors have responded almost unanimously that it should be funded from tickets and state funds. Regarding the management of cultural property, 37% want it to be managed by the Church, while only 17% disagree with this option. Furthermore, 65.7% of respondents suggested that additional services can be operated by private companies.

To the Association, these insights into the market profile are invaluable for an informed decision making, especially in the area of improved visitor facilities (i.e. souvenir shops) and greater visitor involvement with the site, such as enabling library visits or a tour organised with the support of graduates in Conservation of Cultural Heritage. In summary, management objective of the Association is the educational, spiritual and emotional experience gained by visiting cultural sites and museums, rather than simply being focused on satisfying the needs of each group, such as customers, tourists, faithful or just curious.

## **Concluding remarks**

The case study described how the Association Oltre il Chiostro in Naples has contributed to the restoration, reopening and showcasing some of the most important churches in the city centre, building in the process a complex network of relations and an innovative management system. As the Naples' priceless heritage and history that has been entrusted to them and the Association has set itself to serve the city and society, while preserving the religious sites. The religious services were guaranteed by the strict devotion of time and space, while the interpretation of the cultural and religious aspects of these sites ensured through the proper management has given visitors deeper spiritual experience. The Association has also fulfilled its social function, especially in respect to training and employment of young graduates, through promoting the involvement of residents with their heritage and through engaging the city government and stakeholders from cultural sector in greater dialogue and cooperation.

This is a scenario that describes an open system of initiatives promoted by the integration between the ecclesiastical world, the economics and research (culture as a source of new entrepreneurship) and built with an innovative approach and self-funded management of cultural heritage (promotion of creativity), which finally is used as leverage for sustainable development of the city.

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