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Museums and Shrines: Reflecting on Relationships and Challenges

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Cover Page Footnote

This paper is the result of joint reflections by the two authors. Lorenzo Bagnoli wrote the final draft of the section on aims, objectives and methodology as well as the case studies on Imbersago and Genoa, and Rita Capurro dealt with the final draft of the case studies on Garesio and Rimini and the discussion section. The introduction, conclusion, and recommendations were written together. The authors wish to thank the participants at the 9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference held at Lake Orta, Italy (June 28 - July 1, 2017) for their questions and feedback on our presentation of this topic.

Museums and Shrines: Reflecting on Relationships and Challenges

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The aim of this paper is to introduce a method for analysing a specific kind of contemporary tourism positioned between two different traditional customs: visiting museums and going to pilgrimage sites. The case studies provided are focused on Italian shrine museums where it is difficult to ascertain whether visitors are cultural tourists or pilgrims or a combination of both. Regardless, the tourist flows and networks created by Italian shrine museums can provide promising elements for local development. Four case studies that are representative of different regions in Northern Italy and have specific features in common have been chosen: shrines dedicated to the Holy Virgin; museums that exhibit different types of objects; and smaller museums and shrines.

The case studies are the Shrine of the *Madonna delle Grazie* in Gressio (Piedmont), the *Madonna del Bosco* Shrine in Imbersago (Lombardy), the *Madonna della Misericordia* Shrine in Genoa (Liguria) and, the *Santuario delle Grazie* in Rimini (Emilia Romagna). Each of the case studies is significant not only for how it illustrates both the different ways in which shrines and museums can be connected, but also how they impact on the cultural enhancement of the territory. The method we illustrate also makes it possible to evaluate different kinds of connections between other tourism institutions and experiences, with the aim of introducing well-defined actions capable of enhancing tourist experiences elsewhere.

Key Words: shrines, museums, tourism, pilgrimage, territory, cultural enhancement

Introduction

All twenty Italian regions contain a very rich heritage in the form of Roman Catholic shrines. These shrines are – according to the definition of shrine we are using – places of worship attracting pilgrimages of both ancient and more modern traditions. A census of Roman Catholic shrines in Italy shrines between 1998 and 2003 (see www.santuaricristiani.iccd.beniculturali.it) puts the number of sites in Italy at more than 2,500, including the world-famous Holy House of Loreto in the region of Marche (which receives approximately about 3 million visitors annually) and the Madonna of Pompeii in Campania (which receives approximately 1.5 million visitors annually). Also well-known among these shrines are those at Caravaggio in Lombardy and Oropa in Piedmont. These shrines vary in terms of size and artistic value, and also encompass different kinds of places of worship, like cathedrals, basilicas, chapels, and grottos. They all attract a wide range of worshippers, from the

international to the strictly local and from the religious pilgrim to the cultural tourist (Cracco, 2006).

Many of the shrines have their own onsite museum with varying levels of connection to the sacred site and its history. Shrine museums are by no means a secondary presence in the panorama of Italian ecclesiastical museums, given that there are approximately 1,000 of them evenly distributed over the entire country (Fumagalli-Carulli & Chizzoniti, 2008). Among these museum are two hundred members of AMEI-Italian Association of Ecclesiastical Museums, which organisation was created in 1996 (see www.amei.biz). Like Italian ecclesiastical museums in general, shrine museums usually belong to an ecclesiastical entity, although at times they belong to the shrine itself or the diocese, parish, or confraternity, or even a private citizen. The collections within these shrine museums vary in their artistic/religious, territorial, and ethno-anthropological collections ranging in importance from artistic masterpieces to objects of everyday use. As such, each shrine museum has a different cultural and

socio-economic impact on the territory in which they reside as well as the identity formation of said territory (Santi, 2012).

Aims, Objectives and Methodology

The aim of this study is to analyse case studies on Italian shrine museums in order to reflect on their cultural and tourism effects on their location.

Our first objective is to contribute to theoretical knowledge regarding both museological and geographical methodologies. It is important to remember that typical museum methodologies, such as cataloguing, scientific conservation and restoration, and the creation of narratives and temporary exhibitions (Buggeln, Paine & Plate, 2017), are common ways of constructing and interpreting shrines. At the same time, actions associated with pastoral care, such as art, catechist guided tours, and the ‘musealization’ of votive offerings given to fulfil vows (‘ex-votos’) (Stausberg, 2011), often take place in museums. A second objective of this study is to pinpoint the professional skills needed to successfully run museums and shrines for tourism purposes. Successful tourist analysis and cultural planning must start from the postmodern concept of ‘territory’ not only as a base but also as the result of flows and networks (Bagnoli & Capurro, 2012). The third objective is to offer possible lines of research on the relations between museums and shrines that may be in similar situations where the strict links between institutions and tourism are acknowledged (Sturani, 2009; Bagnoli & Capurro, 2013). For example, the same methods can be applied to the study of relations between different cultural institutions (libraries, archives etc.) and other kinds of social spaces (enterprises, public offices etc.), which bring into being new networks (Painter, 2009).

To achieve these objectives, two research questions were posed for this study. First, do people who visit a museum also visit the shrine - and vice versa? Given that religious tourism is on the increase at the cost of traditional pilgrimage (Mazza, 2007), perhaps the dividing line between the two modes of experiencing places of worship is weakening. Second, do shrine museums draw local visitors or visitors from further afield? We can initially surmise that this dichotomy between local and visitor is weakening, given that there is often both a strong regional and non-territorial religious dimension present at individual sites.

To meet these objectives and answer these questions, four case studies of Italian shrine museums that share some common features are examined. Each case study site is dedicated to the Holy Virgin, exhibits different types of objects, represents different Northern Italian regions, and is small in size and therefore minor pilgrimage and tourism destinations. This last characteristic reminds us that it is not possible to talk of tourism without considering elements of sustainability on a very local scale (Dallari & Mariotti, 2006). In the case of minor religious destinations that are closely linked to local worship and identity, all tourism development action must be carefully planned to ensure environmental, economic, and social (host-guest) sustainability (Trono, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to stress that with the new trend for proximity (slow / local) tourism (Buratti & Ferrari, 2012) and increasing interest in Italian heritage (Emiliani, 1974), religious tourism is well positioned to promote local forms of tourism. The four cases here provided represent the typology of shrine museums positively, even if precise figures on visitors and/or tourists are not readily available. Moreover, though these shrine museums have only experienced minor success in terms of tourist numbers, they provide good examples of the importance of the quality of social and cultural enhancement for both the local community and tourists.

Methodologically, the authors took a qualitative approach, first examining the existing literature about religious museums and shrines, and then doing direct field surveys, discussing the sites with the Italian Association of Ecclesiastical Museums, holding informal interviews with site managers and volunteers, different religious associations, and site visitors/worshippers, and performing formal interviews (conducted via phone because of the COVID pandemic) with the rectors of the different shrines (i.e., the priest who performs religious services). The interviews with the rectors were especially important, as most of them were elderly or retired, meaning that they have a good knowledge of local history, the local community, the case study sites, and challenges / problems of the local area

The Case Studies

The four Italian museums of shrine chosen as samples are the *Museo Storico del Santuario* (Historical Museum of the Shrine) in Garesio, Piedmont; the *Museo del Santuario della Madonna del Bosco* (Museum of the Shrine of the Holy Virgin of the Wood) in Imbersago,

Map 1: Location of Case Study Sites



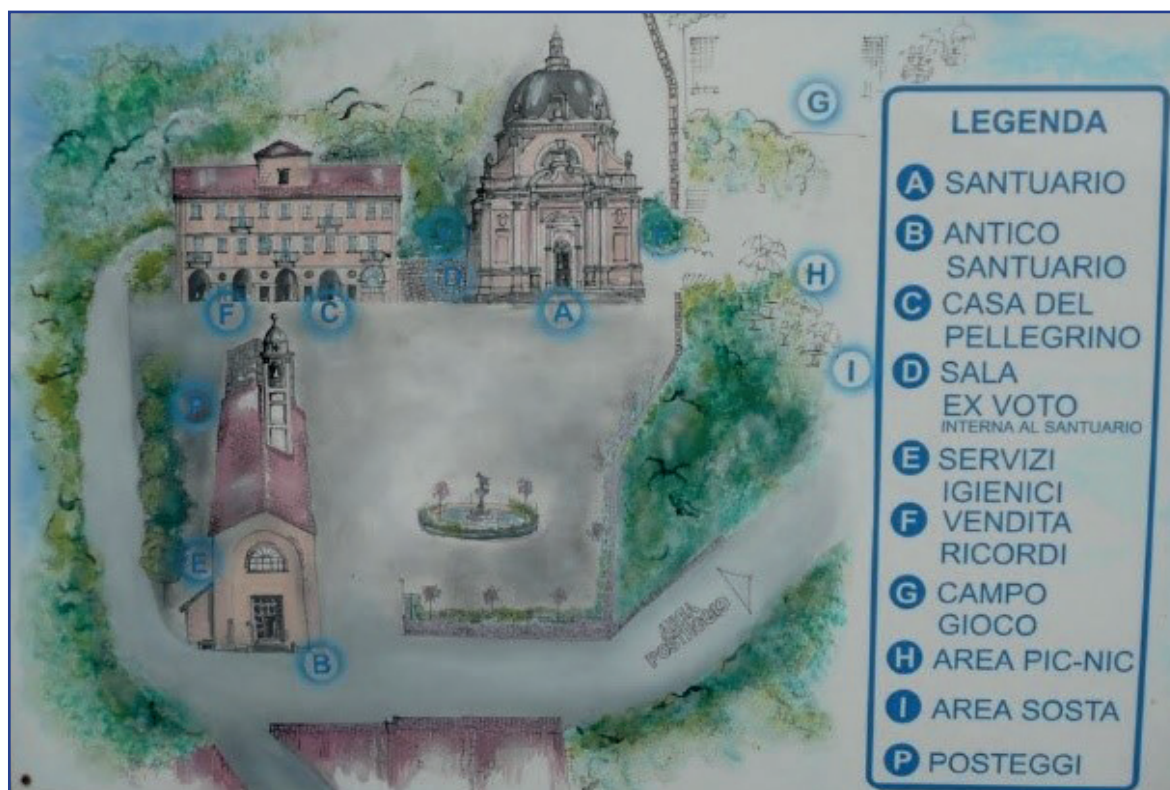
Based on https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/36/Italia_settentrionale.svg

Lombardy; the *Museo di Speleologia Monte Gazzo* (Speleological Museum of Mount Gazzo) in Genoa, Liguria; and the *Museo degli Sguardi* (Museum of the Gazes) next to the *Santuario delle Grazie* in Rimini, Emilia Romagna.

The Museo Storico del Santuario, Garessio, Piedmont.

The location. The shrine of the *Madonna delle Grazie* is situated on the top of a small hill in Valsorda, on the outskirts of Garessio, a village with a population of 3,000 on the Piedmont side of the Ligurian Alps.

The shrine. The shrine was built in the 15th century to thank the Holy Virgin for the end of a plague epidemic. The first building was a small stone-built oratory with an open front. The only meaningful religious sign was a fresco representing the Madonna seated between two saints. In 1653, the oratory was expanded, and has since become one of the most beloved sites of worship in the south Piedmont region of Italy. At the end of the 19th century, the area of the shrine was further expanded with the addition of some accommodation (*Casa del Pellegrino*) and a fountain (Amedeo, 1962). As the oratory became too small to fulfil its role, it was replaced by another sacred building, designed to take over its religious functions. The new shrine, designed by Pier

Figure 1: The Shrine *Madonna delle Grazie*, Garessio

Photograph by authors of site location map

Giuseppe Mazzarelli and consecrated in 1915, protects the fresco of the old oratory which had been carefully detached and relocated. The new shrine was completed in 1925 with an impressive dome and entirely encased in reinforced concrete (Preve, 1934) (Figure 1).

The museum. A museum was built in the old oratory dedicated to Santa Maria delle Grazie in 1962. The museum is known as the *Museo Storico del Santuario* (Historical Museum of the Shrine) where ex-votos and other objects recalling of the history of the shrine are on display. The collection of ex-votos is particularly interesting, both for the number of the objects and their age. As is evident also from the name, the museum is mainly dedicated to the site's heritage, which is reinforced by its collocation.

Today's visitors /audience. Today, the shrine and the museum are visited by tourists from all over Piedmont and the surrounding regions. Many of the tourists visit the site because it is fairly well organised for hosting groups or individuals in search of a spiritual place suitable for activities like prayer or religious meetings. Many worshippers visit the site in May (which month is

traditionally dedicated to the Holy Virgin), particularly on May 1st, when all the parishes in the valley make a solemn pilgrimage in the presence of the Bishop of Mondovì. Worshippers traditionally start out early in the morning and walk to the sanctuary reciting the Rosary on the way, arriving in time for the mass at 7.30.

According to the rector Father Giuseppe, the Shrine of Garessio is mainly visited during the high season by some hundreds of locals and émigré pilgrims who are interested in the traditions of the territory – including processions, rituals, and other aspects of intangible religious heritage connected with the life of the shrine – as well as for family reasons. The rector also confirmed that visits to the museum are usually combined with visits to the shrine, which functions as a completion of the experience of the holy place, connecting the past to the present and lost traditions to renewed ones. In the official presentation of the places of interest in Garessio made by the village council, the shrine is indicated as an example of its heritage with a very strong cultural identity for the local community, while the museum is only mentioned as the former shrine with no reference to its collection. This is the proof that the museum is most

often perceived of as an integral part of the shrine and is given no autonomous identity.

The Museo del Santuario della Madonna del Bosco in Imbersago, Lombardy.

The location. The shrine of the *Madonna del Bosco* is located in the hilly part of the Brianza area of Lombardy. It is slightly to the north of Milan – one of the most developed regions in Europe.

The shrine. The history of the shrine of the *Madonna del Bosco* began on May 9th, 1617, when three shepherd boys claimed to have seen the Holy Virgin in the woods. Subsequent miracles motivated the local community to build a chapel there in 1632 (Risi, 2006). Since then, this place of worship and its surroundings have undergone several improvements on a local level (Brivio, 1988). When the shrine was officialised by the Archbishop of Milan in 1900, pilgrims began to arrive from all over the diocese, with the priests needing to make adjustments to provide accommodation for them. Visits to this site came to a halt with the two world wars, but visitation began again after WWII (Perego, 1979). The pilgrims were especially encouraged by John XXIII (1958-1963), who never

made a secret of his devotion to the *Madonna del Bosco*. To face the upsurge in pilgrims, a 330m² (c.3550 square feet) restaurant named *Casa del Pellegrino*, complete with a souvenir shop and reception room, was built in 1965 (this was subsequently closed down in 2001). (www.madonnadelbosco.it).

The museum. What motivated the opening of a small museum in the mid-1950s was the special devotion felt for the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster (1880-1954), who was particularly fond of the *Madonna del Bosco*. The cardinal's bedroom furniture was moved from his official Milanese residence to a room next to the shrine, which then became the core part of the new ecclesiastical museum. A number of ex-votos, paintings, and religious objects belonging to the shrine were also put on show (Perego, 1993). However, since its building the museum has always received fewer visitors than the shrine. It only registered an increase in visitation on the occasion of the beatification of the aforementioned Cardinal Schuster, which took place in Rome on May 12th, 1996. The sanctuary, in contrast, has always attracted visitors – mainly from Lombardy and the Swiss Cantons of Ticino and Grisons, followed by other North Italian regions (Bagnoli & Capurro, 2009). Peak

Figure 2: The *Charta Peregrini* of the *Cammino di Sant'Agostino*



Photograph by authors

visitation occurs in the summer months, with two or three organised groups of pilgrimages visiting the site every day, each group bringing in hundreds of participants.

Today's visitors/audience. Following the example of other similar best practices, a new and successful initiative was developed in Imbersago with the opening of the *Cammino di Sant'Agostino* (The way of Saint Augustine) on May 17th, 2009 (www.camminodiagostino.it – see Figure 2). This network of c.346 km of pathways based on the famous *Camino de Santiago*, connects 30 shrines, including that of Madonna del Bosco. Due to its success, the path was extended and connected with other 'Ways', thus connecting this site with Malpensa, Bergamo airport and Pavia. According to the path suggested on www.camminodiagostino.it, Imbersago is a place where hikers are invited to overnight. As such, there have been attempts to open or renovate youth hostels or small hotels. Despite this localised development, links between the museum and the *Camino* are practically non-existent, leading to lost opportunities for the museum. In fact, as the rector Father Giulio reports, there has been no noticeable rise in visitors to the museum. The standard visitor to Imbersago is still a pilgrim visiting the museum only as extra value-added activity, and there are almost no visitors coming purely to visit the museum.

There has been no evident increase in visitors from outside the region and no younger visitors, as was expected after the creation of the *Camino*. No connection between the museum and the territory has been forged, and the timid reference to Cardinal Schuster, who so loved the shrine, is confirmed as being of little importance. Since there are no plans for a new exhibit or a new interpretive structure at the museum, opportunities for relaunching it and contributing to enhancing the culture of the territory are not presently on the immediate horizon.

The Museo di Speleologia Monte Gazzo in Genoa, Liguria.

The location. The shrine of the *Madonna della Misericordia* is situated on Mount Gazzo, which stands 421-metre-high in the Sestri Ponente quarter of Genoa (Figure 3).

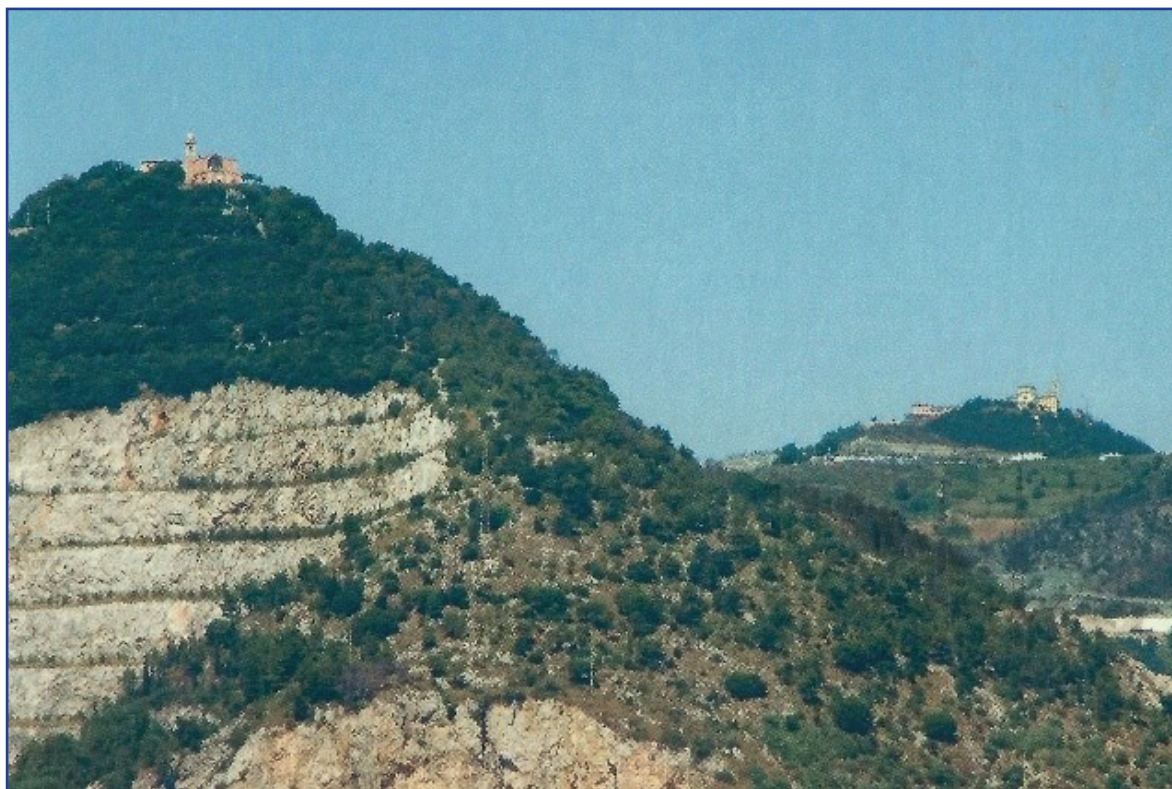
The shrine. This shrine is not connected with an apparition or miracle. Rather, on May 13th, 1645, a local parish priest erected a cross on the top of the mount in order to protect the population, reminding his parishioners to pray and transformed the mount into

a place of pilgrimage. A century later, in 1557, after a serious epidemic of plague, a statue of the Holy Virgin replaced the cross, and three years later a little chapel was erected. As pilgrimage increased, other buildings were constructed to accommodate pilgrims (Ravecca, 1992). The pilgrimages to the Madonna del Gazzo have always been very local, mainly from Genoa or from its western districts (Sestri Ponente, Pegli, Bolzaneto). Pilgrims flocked to this site during the pontificate of the Genoese Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922), who as a young boy was living in Pegli (next to Sestri Ponente), and often visited the shrine.

The museum. To understand why a speleological museum is located in a shrine, it must be noted that Mount Gazzo is composed of both of limestone, which has been extracted since prehistoric times, and dolostone, which has been industrially mined since the 1950s. At the beginning of the 20th century, the many grottos scattered up the hillside – some partially or totally destroyed by the mining – attracted the curiosity of a group of English visitors. However, it was only after the Second World War that these cave grottos were explored by local speleological groups, who in 1968 asked the rector of the Shrine for permission to create a museum (Anon, 1982). The museum was subsequently renovated in 1998 and houses pieces of typical Mount Gazzo rock, stalactites and stalagmites, the reconstruction of an ancient oven for lime-cooking, troglodyte animal skeletons, and other interesting objects related to the region (www.santuariomontegazzo.it).

Today's visitors/audience. While there are no visitor statistics, the rector Father Giorgio reported high attendance for both shrine and museum on Sundays all year round, with people of all ages coming from Genoa and surrounding regions. The local restaurant with 80 tables is profitable, and the youth hostel takes in groups of boy-scouts and other visitors every weekend. No distinction can be made between pilgrims and museum visitors because tourists visit both sites. For example, school groups that visit the museum usually also visit the shrine, and parish pilgrimages to the shrine also include a visit to the museum. Up until a few decades ago there was a sense of local ownership of the site, with local associations and youth groups carried out important works to the church and its road. However, in the last few years, two important changes have been instituted to increase a more commercial / tourist interest in the entire area. The first change was the 'sacralisation' of a

Figure 3: Mount Gazzo with *Madonna della Misericordia* at its top, Genoa



Photograph by authors

part of the museum. This has involved the creation of sections devoted to historic ex-votos paintings (Giuliani-Balestrino, 2010) and to the memory of visits by illustrious pilgrims, ranging from Benedict XV to the German Imperial in 1879 to the Empress Sissi in 1893. The second change was the institution of the *Urban Park of Mount Gazzo* (213 hectares) revolving around the shrine and its museum, proposed by Genoa Town Council. One of its aims is to protect the natural environment of the area while also valorising its cultural aspects. This recent project is a very good attempt to enlarge partnerships and include other stakeholders. The signatures on the visitors' register show increasing visitation from beyond the region, but, increased visitation seems to have had little economic or touristic effect on the territory for the moment. Apart from the restaurant, all activity at the site is still conducted on a volunteer basis.

The Museo degli Sguardi and the Santuario delle Grazie (Rimini, Emilia Romagna).

The location. The shrine of the *Madonna delle Grazie* is located at Covignano, Rimini, on a hill overlooking the famous seaside resort, offering scenic views of the entire area.

The shrine. According to tradition, in 1286 a shepherd living in Covignano created a statue of the Holy Virgin. Two angels ordered him to put it on a ship and take it to Venice, where the statue is still venerated in the Church of San Marziale. In order to preserve the memory of the miraculous event, a small chapel was built in Covignano, which was replaced in 1391 by a larger church which was expanded several times in the 15th and 16th centuries and then again in 1860 (Gasparini, 1997). The local community has always given intense support to the shrine, even with the secularisation of Italian society during the last century. The history of the shrine is closely linked to the Order of Franciscan Friars Minor, who have resided in the Rimini area since 1215 and have been guardians of the shrine since 1396. The Franciscans also created a Way of the Cross that starts from the base of the hill and ends at the church to symbolise the close links between the holy space and the town itself (Morri, 1954).

The museum. An annex housing the *Museo Missionario* was inaugurated in 1928 in order to display an interesting collection of ethno-anthropological objects brought to the shrine by the Franciscan missionaries who had travelled to different parts of the world. The idea for creating a

museum came from the International Exhibition held in Turin in 1898, where for the first time the Franciscans were given a specific space in which to display objects from their missions. During WWII, bombs hitting the shrine damaged the historical eighteenth-century villa hosting the museum. The property of Rimini Town Council, *Villa Alvarado*, an historical house built in 1721 situated just in front of the shrine, had to undergo complete restoration at the end of the war. In 1951 the ecclesiastical museum reopened, but closed again in 2002 due to the decision by the Rimini Town Council to create a centralised museum, the *Museo degli Sguardi* (Museum of the Gazes), to house all the different ethno-anthropological collections in the city in order to create a meaningful example of museum of cultures. The Town Council chose Villa Alvarado to be the museum (Mengozzi, 1960) (Figure 4). As such, only a part of the original collection is still on display in the Franciscan convent, with a focus on the Franciscan Chinese mission, which included past friars from Rimini and Father Elia Facchini who died a martyr in China in 1900. There are presently no plans to add to this collection. The current guardian of the convent, Father Yuri, highlighted to the authors the fact that the experience of visitors is limited to a link between the local place of worship and the

global mission of the Franciscan friars, for whom the whole world is their cloister.

Today's visitors/audience. The shrine is presently viewed as a spiritual success despite some interesting peculiarities. For example, the site is not the official shrine of the diocese, but is nevertheless commonly known as the Shrine of the Rimini people. In addition, there are no specific images or relics that are used as objects of devotion, as pilgrims to the shrine only take part in the mass and the sacrament of reconciliation. Also, the shrine does not offer specific celebrations on special days in the holy calendar.

Returning to the *Museo degli Sguardi*, this was planned under the supervision of a scientific committee directed by Marc Augé, former director of the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* in Paris. The museum that was created presents a very original museum-narrative tracing different points of view of different cultures (Montorsi, 2004). Presently, the museum is often closed, opening only for special events or temporary expositions. As such, visiting the museum is a rare event. Dr. Maddalena Mauri, manager of the Department of Museums for the Municipality of Rimini, emphasises that the audience of the *Museo degli*

Figure 4: Religious objects on display at the convent of *Santuario delle Grazie*, Rimini



Photograph by authors

Sguardi is mainly students. There are about 1,000 annual visitors to the museum (1,786 visitors were recorded in 2014), and even in July and August when Rimini hosts hundreds of thousands of tourists, only a few dozen (124 in July and August 2014) visitors are able to visit the museum. On the tourism website of Rimini (rimiturismo.it), the *Santuario delle Grazie* is noted for its historical, religious, and artistic importance, while the presence of the *Museo degli Sguardi* is only mentioned in passing because of its close proximity to the sanctuary. The experience of pilgrims and visitors to the museum are therefore very separate, while the visit to the shrine collection is linked to both worship and as an optional cultural experience.

Discussion

The four case studies presented here illustrate how the presence of a museum in its widest meaning can create opportunities to enhance tourist experiences at a religious site with a strong original vocation (in this case devotion). In the specific case of these shrines, the main problem seems to be the challenge of combining the needs of the pilgrims with those of other tourists without compromising the religious importance of the worship services (Cracco & Cozzo, 2006). Three specific issues concerning the topic will be discussed below in relation to museum collections, the identity of the sites, and the ownership (or the management) of the institutions.

The museum collections

There are two issues related with the museum collections in the case studies above. The first issue is when the collection of an ecclesiastical museum is closely linked to the tradition of worship at the shrine itself (*Museo Storico del Santuario*, Garesio); the second issue, usually the opposite case, occurs when the museum collection seems to have nothing to do with the shrine (*Museo del Santuario della Madonna del Bosco*, Imbersago). While museum collections linked to worship rituals are usually ideal for attracting tourist interested in visiting a shrine to engage with devotional practices, displays and explanations of the historical heritage or cultural aspects of the devotion to visitors (Colazzo, 2019), problems can still arise. In fact the presence of the museum can enhance the religious experience of the site for the pilgrims, but, it may have very little value for other non-religious tourists. Similarly, the second issue usually

fosters an evident separation between the pilgrims and other tourists because the weak link between shrine and museum does not always encourage a comprehensive, holistic experience of the site. In this case, the resulting relationship risks appearing unnatural, or even out of place, if the operation is not conducted in a highly professional way.

The identity of the site

For some people, shrines are stereotyped as very pious religious places with a museum full of churchy ex-votos and liturgical objects or dusty ancient books and decaying documents. However, as is now evident, shrines can be composed of many different elements, not all religious—such as the fact that a shrine museum can be speleological (*Museo di Speleologia Monte Gazzo*, Genoa) or ethno-anthropological (*Museo degli Sguardi*, Rimini) in nature, making an association between museums and worship in some way. The question that arises is whether these kinds of museums obfuscate the sacred identity of the site or not. The answer to this question involves consideration of the ways in which these museums are interpreted. If museums are focused on religion, they tend to be better integrated into the site, but if they house multiple collections and therefore identities, the risked loss of a sense of identity is very high due to weaker connections with the religious site (Fiore, 2010).

The ownership of the institutions

The last issue that can affect tourism and the effectiveness of a shrine museum is related to the ownership or management of the two institutions. As can be seen from the case studies above, there can be conflicting ownership and management between shrines and museums. In some cases, a shrine and a museum belong to the same owner (e.g., *Museo Storico del Santuario*, Garesio), whereas in other cases, the shrine and museum have different proprietors (e.g., the *Museo degli Sguardi*, controlled by Rimini Town Council and the *Santuario delle Grazie* run by Franciscan Friars). In instances where there are two different owners, difficulties can only be resolved through effective coordination or planning of different activities. It is therefore important to engage in a high level of coordination between the different institutions and their managers to forge a bond that is useful not only for themselves, but also for the region as a whole (Bucci *et al.*, 2009).

Conclusions

The case studies in this paper confirm the difficulties in distinguishing religious from tourist purposes in minor Italian shrine museums, and that it is difficult to assess whether the appeal of these museums is for the local community or tourists. In particular, the Shrine of the *Madonna delle Grazie* in Garessio demonstrates a case where the collection held in the museum is closely linked to the traditional worship of the shrine itself, but at the *Madonna del Bosco* in Imbersago, the shrine museum is only loosely linked to the place of worship. The situation is not different at the *Madonna della Misericordia* in Genoa either, where there is nothing religious in the museum. In the case of the *Santuario delle Grazie* in Rimini, the *Museo degli Sguardi* has a different owner which could risk the ‘musealization’ of the shrine and/or the ‘sacralisation’ of the museum. This connectivity between museum and sanctuary is further complicated by the presence of personnel lacking professional training in either museology or religious tourism – in fact very often the staff are volunteers, who lack insight, awareness or skills to navigate these challenges.

The limitations of this study clearly lie in the fact that only four examples were included, and in addition the examples were all from Northern Italy. However, these case studies do suggest the beginnings of a typology for small shrines and museums, which may be useful for further investigation. This paper adds to the study of museology, showing that religious museums can operate as a cultural hub where appropriate interpretative tools interconnect the different elements characterising a specific territory (Jalla, 2017), particularly if they are linked to the religious sites in the area. Furthermore, in linking up museology and tourist studies, it should be kept in mind that a museum can offer diverse narratives capable of catering to the interpretive and experiential needs of a wide variety of audiences, not just to pilgrims (Capurro, 2013). This study also suggests the importance of multi-disciplinary / inter-disciplinary / or even trans-disciplinary (Lisowski, 2011) methodologies (tourism / religious studies / museology etc), which are typically engaged via the broad area of geographical science (Raffestin, 2005).

It would be interesting to broaden out the disciplinary fields in this kind of research, to engage with cultural planning, on the one hand, and more precise knowledge of contemporary museums and to merge this with fields such as heritage and conservation studies, to explore more

deeply the connection between shrines and museums, and their territorial communities and visitors (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Watson, 2007; Morris-Hargreaves-McIntyre, 2006).

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