

“MULTI-SERVICE PILGRIMAGE AREAS”: IDEAS AND NEW SOLUTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM

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Summary

The study takes into account the Tuscany course of Francigena Way. As part of a project funded by Tuscany Region, the Department has been involved in the revision of Tuscany course, in order to propose solutions at the main problems and to make the way usable with different means of transport: by foot, by horseback, by bike. The main objective of this research is the improvement of services for the tourist-pilgrim who travels by foot, by horseback, by bike, by car or camper along the Tuscan Francigena. The project involves the construction of special areas, called “multi-services pilgrimage areas”, which may include a number of useful services for tourists passing along the Francigena but also to those seeking information on the track, the services and the various initiatives that revolve around the project Francigena.

The creation of “multi-service pilgrimage areas” allows tourists to find structures for the temporary parking (picnic area, horse buildings, camper area and bike service) and obtain various information (info-point). All these structures will be designed according to the concept of environmental sustainability (water saving, solar energy, ecological toilets). To ensure design standards at regional level, a unique design methodology for the identification, planning and implementation of these areas has been defined. During the study, hypothesis of constructive solutions for structures and infrastructure were defined. Possible areas for the realization of the stop points along the path were also identified. The variants to the course have been defined and eleven possible multiservice stop points have been located along the way.

The research has allowed to define the methodology for the localization, the design and the realization of the multiservice areas, which must be equipped with various structures, such as an info-point, ecological toilets and special wood buildings for the relax of the pilgrims.

Keywords: Francigena Way, rest areas, horse shelters, information point, environmental sustainability

Introduction

The study focuses on the Tuscan section of the Francigena Way. The Francigena Way is the best known of medieval pilgrimage routes, which led to Rome, one of the three great pilgrimages, together with Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela. Hailing from the French territories,

from which takes its name, the Francigena today officially identifies the route from Canterbury to Rome according to the testimony left by the bishop Sigerico in the year 980. The Tuscan section is 394 kilometers. It starts from the Passo della Cisa and enters in Lazio at Ponte a Rigo, crossing territories of special beauty and important cities, some of which were born and developed thanks to this Way.

Tuscany region offers a significant opportunity to rural tourism development, both for its craft traditions, history and culture, and for the richness of the landscape and the environment. The Tuscany Region, as the European referent of Francigena project, has put great attention to the valorization of this important pilgrimage route, promoting rural and religious tourism. The Via Francigena assumes a fundamental role in tourism promotion and development of territories, mainly due to its considerable historical value.

As part of a research project funded by the Region of Tuscany, the Department of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Systems (GESAAF) of University of Florence has been involved in reviewing the Tuscan track, in order to propose solutions to the main problems of safety measures, making the path usable in different ways: by foot, by horseback, by bike.

In parallel, a main objective of this research was the improvement and enhancement of services for the tourist-pilgrim who travels on foot, on horseback, by bicycle along the Francigena in Tuscany.

More in detail, the objectives of the research were as follows:

- to identify new sustainable wood construction types, serving the rural tourism, to be included as standard elements along the Francigena;
- to promote the use of the Francigena also with other forms of sustainable movement, such as the horse and the bicycle;
- to create temporary shelter facilities along the Via Francigena, equipped with water point and free internet access (free Wi-fi);
- to promote multifunctionality and environmental sustainability in the tourism sector, in order to ensure a complete, innovative and competitive tourist offer.

Materials and methods

The project involves the construction of special areas, called “pilgrims multi-services area”. The project aims to create a series of contiguous structures in which tourists can find shelter for a temporary stop to rest / relax and at the same time have a number of additional services. All these facilities will be designed according to the concept of environmental sustainability (saving water, solar energy and ecological toilets). These areas include a set of useful services for pilgrims passing along the Francigena and for those who want information on the track and on the various initiatives related to the Francigena Way.

A main building, complemented by a set of service facilities, and the structures will be prepared for pilgrims and tourists:

1. main structure (called “the navel of the world”)
2. relax area
3. natural toilet
4. other possible facilities (for example, horses temporary stop area)

The structures will be made of glued laminated fir wood, using metal supports where necessary.

The structures are completely made of wood and there are no concrete platforms. In this way, the facilities are sustainable and totally reusable.

For the temporary stay of the riders passing along the Francigena, special fences will be prepared. Riders can stop the horses to make use of the area for a short stop. In the same way also the bikers have access to the bike rack where to fix their own bikes.

During the study, various hypotheses of constructive solutions to achieve have been defined. The final solution must be adaptable to different local needs, representing constructive solution standards at regional level.

The design of structures focuses mostly on the local environment and accessibility for the disabled, providing the presence of parking, toilets and dedicated tables.

Main structure

The main structure aims to facilitate intercultural exchange among the pilgrims traveling through the Francigena, where to spend time for relaxing and knowledge. The structure called “navel of the world” (*omphalos* in greek, *umbiliculus* in latin), is the meeting place between people of different cultures and religions.

Symbolically, it is designed in a circular shape with a central circular table to represent the totality and equality between people who sit around.

Within the facility the “book of the expressions” will be placed where everyone can bring his own experiences and impressions as well as shows the famous song by Jovanotti (famous international italian singer)

...omissis...

Questo è l'ombelico del mondo,
è qui che c'è il pozzo dell'immaginazione
dove convergono le esperienze
e si trasformano in espressione...

This is the navel of the world,
that is where there is the well of
imagination
where converge experiences
and become an expression ...

To enter inside the facility it is necessary to remove footwear, bare-foot staying. This for religious, spiritual and cultural reasons, bringing



Fig. 1- Rest area: shoe rack and fence horses stop detail



Fig. 2 - Rest area: bicycle rack detail



Fig. 3 – Rest area: entry detail



Fig.4- Rest area: backrest for backpacks detail and footboard for foot massage detail

people to a deeper dimension that grounds the common roots in belonging to the mother earth.

A foot massage can be provided to stimulate the circulation, compromised after long hours of tiring journey. The wooden footboard is located below the central circular table and is composed of a wooden board with ledges for the reactivation plantar.

The notice board will report information on the Francigena Way and related to the historical-cultural and environmental aspects in the surrounding area. The main structure rests on a stabilized ground on the natural self-locking floor and does not require the use of slabs of reinforced concrete.

The dimensions are: maximum width (coverage) 8 m in diameter, maximum height 5.5 m, base width 7 m in diameter.

The circular wooden structure with a roof will be fitted with circular table with a hole in the center (“navel of the world”); benches, equipped with backrest for backpacks; shoe rack; footboard for foot massage; coat hook; notice boards; bicycle rack; fence for horses stop; disabled access ramp; drinking fountain (external).

Natural toilet

Hygienic service designed only for urine, made of a special flower-bed, based on the principle of urine phytodepuration. A container with soil absorption for flower essences cultivation (acidophilic plants) is arranged. This technique allows significant energy savings, and produces no pollution and unsightly odors. In fact, many soil bacteria possess an enzyme called urease, which can hydrolyze urea into ammonia and carbon dioxide according to the reaction $(\text{NH}_2)_2\text{CO} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{CO}_2 + 2 \text{NH}_3$; in this way, nitrogen gas is available to plants.

The structure is also accessible to people with disabilities, thanks to access ramp, adequate size and predisposition of handles.

Relax area

Round structure designed for pilgrims relax, equipped with roof, small brazier, benches to lying down. The structure is designed to give the opportunity to rest (both in sitting and lying down) to pilgrims traveling along the Francigena Way. The relax area offers a shelter to use in bad weather situations. In addition, this area offers the possibility to have a mitigated environment by the external temperatures (for those traveling in the colder months), thanks to the circular conformation and to a special brazier in the center. The construction can be open to “slice” or completely closed in its circular development, with access through a door (to increase the number of seats and maintain a warmer environment).



Fig. 5 – Natural toilet: entry detail.



Fig. 6 – Natural toilet: flowerbed detail.



Fig. 7 - RELAX AND REST



Fig. 8 - RELAX AND REST: Benches and brazier detail.

The dimensions of relax area are: maximum width (coverage clove) 7.1 m in diameter, maximum height 3.2 m, base width 6.5 m in diameter.

Conclusions

The great historical and cultural value of the Francigena Way has attracted the interest of many local administrations, as well as the Tuscany Region itself. The numerous projects and local initiatives regarding the Francigena aim at the recovery, enhancement and improvement of services along this important route. In recent years the Francigena Way has acquired an important meaning in terms of the tourism sector, in addition to great historical value as an important way of religious pilgrimage.

Tuscany is a region that offers an exceptional opportunity for development of rural tourism, both for the richness of its landscape and environmental heritage, and for the craft, historical and cultural traditions. Rural tourism is a growing segment, with interesting development opportunities arising from the ability to respond to some of the emerging trends in tourism demand. Rural tourism tends to reward less massive fruition and more attentive to the values of nature, culture, landscape and rurality. So, the attention given to the Francigena route becomes a concrete opportunity for tourist and economic development in territories often economically marginalized.

In this context, the improvement of services for tourist-pilgrims along the Francigena Way becomes fundamental. A selection of services should be directed not merely to the pilgrims on foot, but also to different target of use, such as by horse and by bicycle.

The creation of “multi-service areas” enables tourists to find facilities aimed at temporary stopping (picnic area, camper and shelter-placed horses) and obtaining various information (info-point). The realization of “multi-service areas” is intended to ensure to Francigena Way users a complete and exhaustive information on the path and on the local specialties.

During the study design hypothesis for facilities have been outlined, ensuring a complete offer to different target fruition.

A univocal methodology at regional level for the identification, design and realization of these areas has been also defined, in order to ensure the project standards. In addition, identification of a standardized methodology gives the possibility to reproduce the project in various situations and to make it adaptable to the many historical and religious paths.