

University of Salento

Proceedings of the
International Conference

Tourism, Religion & Culture:

*Regional Development through
Meaningful Tourism Experiences*

Lecce, Poggiardo 27th - 29th October 2009

Edited by
Anna Trono

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The conference is aimed at examining the possibilities of taking advantage of the growing interest in religious and cultural tourism as leverage for developing peripheral regions. While the concept and practice of regional tourism development through tourism is well established, the opportunity to do so based on the theme of cultural and spiritual tourist experiences has not been thoroughly discussed yet. Moreover, religious and spiritual tourism have been mostly discussed from the tourist-pilgrim perspective. This conference aims at looking more into the supply side and, thus, wishes to examine to what extent the cultural and spiritual aspects of religious sites could leverage regional development. Hosting cultural and religious tourism in socially and culturally sensitive environments might put tourism development and operation in jeopardy. Furthermore, it could negatively influence the fragile cultural and social texture of the host communities. It is, therefore, the aim of this conference to look at the nexus between regional development and religious and spiritual tourism through the prism of sustainability and sustainable tourism principles.

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The Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia as alternative and sustainable experience for religious tourism

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Abstract

Sacred Mounts are nowadays a sort of living organisms in which intimately merge religion, culture and nature and in which it is possible to realize complex experiences. These integrate artistic and religious contemplation with environmental fruition and evaluation of local identity.

The Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia are registered since 2003 in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List and are also included in the system of protected areas of the two Italian Regions, that care for their historical and artistic preservation and maintain and safeguard the surrounding environment.

Starting from the analysis of the main characteristics of the Sacred Mounts and devotional itineraries in Piemonte and Lombardia, the paper aims to highlight how initiatives and projects of valorization and touristic promotion of these sites can play a significant role in the development of religious tourism. Some case study will propose to achieve this objective.

Keywords: religious tourism, Sacred Mounts, valorization and touristic promotion, questionnaire.

1. Introduction

As a cultural phenomenon, religion has a close relationship with tourism, and religious tourism is a form of activity whereby people of faith travel

¹ Although the paper is the result of a joint research, Raffaella Afferni edited paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and Figures 1 and 2, Stefania Mangano edited paragraphs 4, 5, 6 and all the Tables.

individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary and also for other tourist activities, such as traveling for sightseeing and recreation.

Timothy and Olsen (2006: xiii) reported that despite the pervasiveness and volume of religious tourism throughout the world – estimated in more than 300 million of pilgrims according to the World Tourism Organization – relatively little has been said about it in the religion or tourism literatures. However an important collection of journal articles has appeared during past 15 years, and two of the main's issues on the subject in *Annals of Tourism Research* (1992) and *Tourism Recreation Research* (2001).

In their articles, most researchers distinguish between different forms of religious tourism, based on time involved and distance traveled. This classification namely short- and long-term religious tourism; the first type involves travel to nearby pilgrimage centers or religious conferences, while long-term religious tourism involves travel around the world (Rinschede, 1992).

This article takes into consideration the first type of faith tourism and in particular tourism in Sacred Mounts, destinations attractive for people not only for religious or spiritual purposes or to have an experience with the sacred in the traditional sense, but also because their natural, heritage or cultural attractions are marked and marketed (Timothy and Boyd, 2003).

The guiding principle of this study is that the development and competitiveness of a religious destination, such a Sacred Mount, can be directed and improved through appropriate matches between specific resources and management strategies supported by tourism stakeholders, especially local government and tourism industry managers. That is why religious tourism will take a successful position in the tourism market depending on which and how religious, cultural and natural attractions develop value for tourists and how well destination resources are managed.

The purpose of the article is to highlight the role of initiatives and projects of valorization and touristic promotion in the development of religious tourism in a specific case study, the Sacred Mount of Varallo, and in its surroundings.

The article is thus divided into six sections. The introduction is followed by two section; the first on the importance of Sacred Mounts as alternative and sustainable experience for religious, cultural and environmental tourism and the second about the case study, the Sacred Mount "New Jerusalem" of Varallo.

After a general description of the research methodology and data, an analysis of the characteristic of the case study is given to test the research hypotheses.

The fifth section addresses the discussion about how initiatives and projects of valorization and touristic promotion managed by the Sacred Mount of Varallo Sesia Administrator's can play a significant role in the development of tourism of this site and of the whole Valsesia Area.

The article ends (Section 6) with an evaluation of the effectiveness of plans and projects concerning the tourism development of Sacred Mount of Varallo.

2. Sacred Mounts as alternative and sustainable experience for religious tourism

The expression "Sacred Mount" (or Holy Mountain) is nowadays used to indicate a religious complex which is the result of a vast spiritual, artistic and religious movement, whose climax was reached at the end of the fifteenth century.

As known the Sacred Mount is therefore not an extemporaneous artistic phenomenon but rather the result of an idea conceived by the Order of the Friars Minor, which consequently spread in the course of almost three centuries, stimulated by the spiritual renovation fostered by the Council of Trent against the Protestant Reform. The grandiose project of transposing the Sacred Sites of Palestine on catholic soil was initiated in Italy with the "New Jerusalem" of Varallo Sesia (VC) and that of Montaione (FI), and almost simultaneously with Braga in Portugal. Nowadays Sacred Mounts are extended to the other countries of the alpine range of Europe (Switzerland and Austria) and to several parts of the rest of Europe² and Southern America.

The Sacred Mounts are usually constituted by a series of buildings of dimension, form and style not always homogeneous, containing sculptural groups that display scenes of religious content inspired to a common theme, such as, to quote only a few significant examples in Piemonte and Lombardia³, the life of Jesus at Varallo, the Calvary at Domodossola, the Mysteries of the Rosary at Varese, Crea and with slight differences at Oropa, or the life of significant religious figures such as St. Francis at Orta.

The chapels are generally built on a declivity and can be reached by an interconnecting path; the pilgrim is thus guided from one building to the next, which allows him/her to follow the figural narrative that unfolds diachronically (Barbero, 2004).

The mountain is the grandiose natural stage for such religious experience mediated by architecture, sculpture and the visual arts. The purification ascent, the detachment from the sensible world, man's yearning for the transcendent are amongst the sentiments evoked by the mountain, which is often indicated in the Scripture as the connecting point between Heaven and Earth (Barbero, Massone, 2004a; Barbero and Singul, 2007: 20).

The original aim of this type of complexes can be retraced to the intention of evoking, through a powerful and tangible image, the Holy Land sites, that during the Middle Ages were the destination of pilgrimages that were an important part in the life of a Christian. The growing menace of the Turks rendered such travels rather dangerous. The direct consequence was the creation of "alternative" sites to let people obtain the indulgence through pilgrimage and charity.

² Sacred Mount are extended in Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, with sporadic examples in Hungary, Turkey, Russia, Croatia and Slovenia.

³ For an introduction to Sacred Mounts consult Langè, 1967; Caresio, 1989; Centini, 1990; Barbero, 2001; Zanzi and Zanzi, 2002a; Caresio, 2003; Winde and Zanker, 2003; Fontana, Lodari e Sorrenti, 2004; Caneparo e Polidori, 2005.

Although in these sacred places there is still now an air of permanency that transcends the contingencies of human mortality, Sacred Mounts do not remain static, they modify for internal dynamics and in acknowledging the contingencies.

Material markers of these places, whether they be naturally occurring topographic features such as mountains, rivers, etc., or built environments of human interactions such as buildings, make the sites distinctly recognizable, but their nature inevitably bring changes. Besides resources wealth are not enough for their tourism's success. So the attractiveness of Sacred Mounts can be maintained and increased only by appropriate and strong quality managerial efforts and enhanced through marketing activities. Destination management should take care in creating and integrating value in tourism products and resources hence the Sacred Mounts can achieve a better competitive market position.

In order to make Sacred Mounts continually reflect meanings and maintain the role of these places as geographical centers that orient the spatial worlds of religious communities, it would be necessary to sustain the conservation of the high environmental value of the sites, increase religious and cultural tourism and strengthen the integration not only between these sacred places but also between them and their local communities.

To achieve these targets some important actions were carried on by local government and tourism managers, such as the proposal of inscription of Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia (figure 1) in the UNESCO's List (accepted in 2003 by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee⁴), the development and the implementation of conservation programs of the environmental values, the proposal of activities for more diversified audiences, e.g. Research Center for scholars to gather information about the sacred places, tours and events for children, teens and adults and other initiatives to involve the local communities.

3. *The Sacred Mount "New Jerusalem" of Varallo*

The Sacred Mount "New Jerusalem" of Varallo is the oldest and the most important Sacred Mount of the alpine region⁵. It is located in Valsesia, in the

⁴ UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, during the session in Paris from the 30th June to 5th July 2003, included in the World Heritage List the Site called "The Holy Mountains of Piedmont and Lombardy", because they represent the successful integration of architecture and fine art into a landscape of great beauty for spiritual reasons at a critical period in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, they achieve the most exceptional expression of implantation of architecture and sacred art into a natural landscape of northern Italy for didactic and spiritual purposes and had a profound influence on subsequent developments elsewhere in Europe. The inscription of Sacred Mounts in the UNESCO's List was proposed by the Piemonte Region, the Piemonte Regional Superintendence and by the Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities, in collaboration with the Regional Superintendence for Lombardia, with the Lombardia Region, and the civil and religious authorities concerned. (Barbero, Massone, 2004b; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1068>).

⁵ The importance of Sacred Mount of Varallo is well known since early 1900's. Butler, the British author of Alps and sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino (1881) and *Ex Voto*

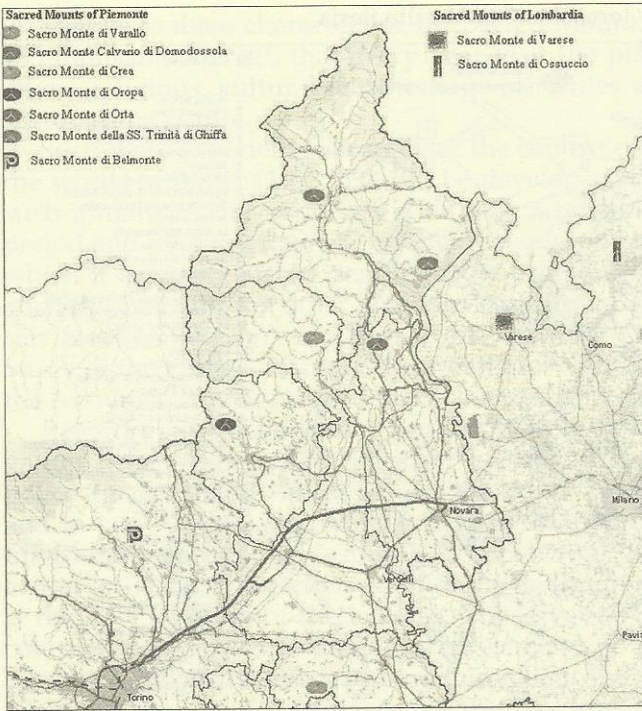


Figure 1: Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia

Source: elaboration on data
<http://www.sacrimonti.net/User/>

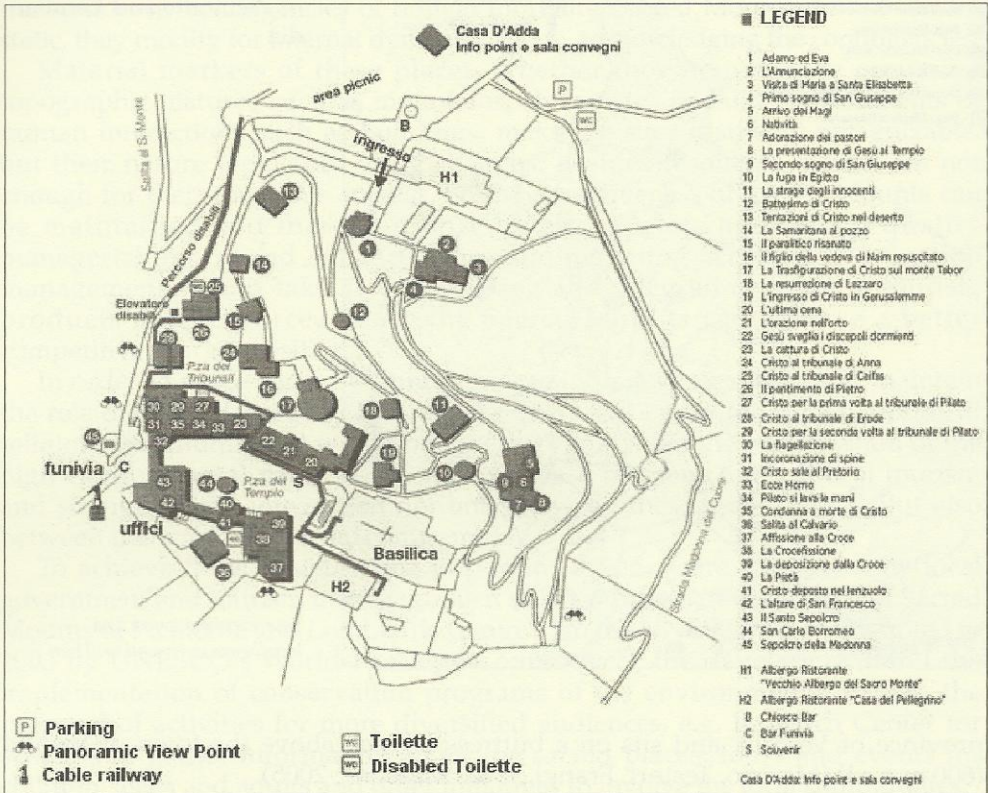
province of Vercelli, and sits on a buttress of rock above the town of Varallo (600 m a.s.l.) (Merisio, Testori, Frangi, 1982; Massone, 2005).

It was erected between the end of the 15th and the 18th centuries and is composed by a group of 45 chapels displayed in groups or in single buildings, and one basilica⁶ (figure 2), whose different iconographies underline social, religious and, above all, different historic influences in the representations (Gatti Perer, 1992).

(1888), described the "pre-alpino" territory not as the one of museums, cathedrals and art galleries, but that of those little mountain churches and chapels that are scattered on the slopes of the Sacred Mounts. The most important aspect of the work lies in the "realistic" cut with which the author orients his approach to understand the world of the Sacred Mounts and in how he pointed out this "realistic" key as the principal value of these works of art. To Samuel Butler, in modern times, we owe, without question, the most incisive action of international promotion and study of the Sacred Mounts.

⁶ The path starts from the Original Sin of Adam and Eve in the chapel n.1, extends across the slopes of the mound and finishes with a visit to the Basilica of the Assumption, passing 4,000 frescoed figures and 800 life-size statues, in wood and colored terra cotta. In each of the edifices is a highly realistic display of an episode from the lives of Mary and Jesus, from infancy to passion. The sculptural groups placed in the interior of the chapels constitute the core of the narrative and the very heart of the Sacred Mount

Figure 2: Sacred Mount "New Jerusalem" of Varallo Sesia



Source: modified from <http://www.sacromonteverallo.eu/>

The artists who worked at Varallo were numerous⁷, and yet their individual production is distinctive. Gaudenzio Ferraris⁸ was the main painter, sculptor and also architect employed at the Sacred Mount and his statues of ordinary people and the drawings of some chapels assume a natural attitude and display a spontaneity that allow the author to convey emotions such as joy, stupor and ecstasy (De Filippis, 2009, p. 22). The emotional and physical tension is so skillfully rendered that the statues seem to be on the verge of becoming alive (Zanzi; Zanzi, 2002b).

⁷ The significant artists active at Varallo were Gaudenzio Ferraris, Morazzone, Tanzio of Varallo, Giovanni d'Enrico, Dionigi Bussola and the architect Galeazzo Alessi, the author of "Libro dei Misteri" in which is contained the project (nowadays in part unfinished) of the transformation of the Sacred Mount in a site of wonders and tricks, organized according to the model of the Italian garden, with hedges, wooded areas, water play and fountains.

⁸ The characteristic traits of this artist, born to a family of Valsesia, is his realism and the power to evocate sentiments (Butler, 2008).

Thanks to these characteristic the Sacred Mount of Varallo offers to the 120-150 thousand tourist⁹, that every year visit the place, alternative experiences, where religious, cultural and heritage attributes are in equilibrium with the surrounding nature.

Such these experiences bring back the context of sustainable tourism that, in the words of Butler (1993: 29), can be developed and maintained in an area in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of the other activities and processes. To develop and maintain this form of tourism, as a dossier of ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, 2008) reported, the Administrator's of Sacred Mount carried and still carry out several actions.

Regarding the actions that aim to preserve landscape's and environment's values it has to be noted that they are consistent with Piemonte's regional policy for Protected Areas, that instituted in 1980 a Special Nature Reserve¹⁰ and in late 90s classified Varallo as "Cultural Heritage" and "Landscape and Environmental Heritage" subject to protection¹¹ (De Biaggi, 2001). The main action to sustain the conservation of the environment quality of Sacred Mount is the development of the existing Conservation Program, which includes a comprehensive risk assessment for all elements of the site. This program strikes a balance between conservation requirements and use implications in order to maintain the overall integrity of the site and incorporates the "Natural Landscape" with the "man made" elements of the Sacred Mount (sustainable plantation program to replace aging trees). Through Strategic Planning workshops the Administration of the Reserve has tried also to increase environmental and conservation consciousness¹² and to improve a unified vision and consensus on development strategies among all stakeholders.

In order to maintain the religious and pilgrimage character and use the Administrators of the Sacred Mount enhance communication with Christian or

⁹ Since July 2006 the Reserve counts visitors in the pedestrian precinct of the Sacred Mount. The Administration installed tourist counters in several entrance. Data are collected monthly by Statistic Sector of Piemonte Region, that checks the information and removes some movements connected with activities of people employed and applies other statistical calculus.

¹⁰ Sacred Mount of Varallo is managed by the Regional Authority "Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo". This authority was constituted by the Region of Piemonte under Act No. 28 of 30 April 1980 to safeguard the environmental and scenic characteristics of Sacred Mount, guarantee the care and conservation of the historical-religious complex and encourage scientific, cultural and educational projects. The Riserva aims to conserve and maintain the complex in terms of the history, environment and art of Sacred Mount with appropriate financial grants and thanks to the work of its employees. The Riserva takes care of site management, decoration and garden, path and structural maintenance services, as well as the maintenance and restoration of the chapels, research work and studies and improvements to the complex.

¹¹ This classification is due to Law Decree no. 490 of 29 October 1999.

¹² About the increasing of environmental and conservation consciousness consult Laws, Faulkner and Moscardo (1998).

Catholic bodies/organizations and invite them to hold religious meetings, events and exhibitions¹³ at the site.

Devise visitation plans, based on the site's intrinsic defining characters, were instead carried on to diversify cultural tourism. The Reserve Administrators proposed in the last ten years a great number of events to interest new audiences (e.g. sacred music festival, artistic/craft workshops and conferences), or specific activities for children and teens (e.g., interactive tours and involvement of youth groups in site maintenance). Other interesting actions were the development of specialized tours catering to targeted groups (e.g., opportunity for a specialized tour in costume and textile design in Chapel 37) and the offer of tours with other Sacred Mounts. Further significant initiatives are the creation of a Research Center on the site (for scholars to gather information about regional history, natural science or other specialties) and the development of an integrated tourist plan with the Nature Reserve.

As many researcher reported¹⁴, important variables of a destination's success are quality and quantity of services offered to visitors and the accessibility of the site.

To increase the appeal of Sacred Mount of Varallo in the last decades both public and private actors invested in improving recreation services (the bar and the gift shop with a new design and additional products related to art, history and nature) and facilities (new toilettes also for disabled, emergency health station and new fire extinguishers). To improve accessibility, the investments regarded the renovation of the cable railway in 2003 and the new signage to get better orientation inside the Sacred Mount.

For the purpose of this article it may be useful finally to highlight how Reserve Administrators tried to strengthen the integration of the site with the town of Varallo, increasing the opportunities for local community to participate and be included in the initiatives from the early planning phase and stimulating their involvement in the site (e.g. "one chapel-one family patronages"). An Interpretation Center was also created in Varallo to provide interpretation and exhibits on the region, the town, and the site.

In the end it is worth emphasizing that many of these initiatives are promoted by the websites of the Sanctuary and the Reserve Authority. In particular since December 2008 the Reserve has a new website that has two ambitious objectives, one to highlight the extraordinary historical and artistic heritage of the site and the other to offer information as a reference point for all the activities of the Reserve itself.

¹³ One of the recently important exhibitions was "Imago Fidei. Sacro Monte of Varallo Between the 15th and 17th Centuries" (13th-15th June 2008) centered around the history of Sacred Mount as illustrated by documents and images on the theme of religious pilgrimages throughout history and realized in connection with the art and religious festival Imago Veritatis.

¹⁴ Some of the researcher that highlighted the importance of these variables were Dawailly and Flament, 1996; Pollice, 2002; Costa, 2003; Lozato-Giotart, 2008; Bagnoli, 2006; Adamo, 2007; Bencardino and Prezioso, 2007; Timothy and Boyd, 2007; Innocenti, 2007 and Emanuel and Afferni, 2009.

4. Research methodology and data

The method used for the implementation of the questionnaire, which seeks to define the visitor type of Sacred Mount of Varallo and evaluate his/her level of satisfaction about the site, was that of random selection.

The survey was performed in 2009 between the end of May and the end of July. 250 copies of the questionnaire have been left in free distribution near the Cappella 20 (in proximity to the souvenir shop) and at the bar of the cable railway. 150 of them have been completed, with a percentage of return of 60%. The questionnaires, after being freely taken and filled of, were reintroduced in the appropriate boxes according to the instructions. The sampling has been done both during the weekends and weekdays; in both cases were not revealed prevailing behaviors.

The SPSS standard package for personal computers was used for data processing.

As regards the content, the questionnaire is divided into four sections concerning:

- 1) type of visit inherent the vehicle used to reach Varallo, the number of participants, the use of services, the lunch, the type of accommodation (Questions: 5-6 12-13-14-15);
- 2) awareness of the area (Sacred Mount and Valsesia), typology and grounds of attendance, manner of knowledge of the monumental ensemble (Questions 1-2-3-4-7-9-8-10);
- 3) evaluation expressed by visitors in relation to the state of conservation of Sacred Mount, to the improvement of the site in the last decade, to the services offered by the monumental ensemble (Questions 11-17-19);
- 4) interest expressed by visitors about the strengthening and improving of some services and/or infrastructures, the payment of a toll for improving the level of conservation of the Sacred Mount, returning to this site (questions 16-18-20).

Obviously the questionnaire also contains the File-Card.

In 1994 the Sacred Mount of Varallo was object of a similar sample. Even if this questionnaire was addressed to define the value of use and conservation of the Sacred Mount of Varallo, it contained information that could be compared with the present sample. The comparison regards the information of the File-Card and the socio-economic relationship between resources and territory, that are useful to understand how and if the characteristics of the visitors changed.

5. Discussion

The first result of the questionnaire is a well balanced sample in terms of percentage of sexes: of the 146 respondents 52% are male and 48% are female. The age groups most represented are those central – the one between 36 and the 50 years (31%) and that between 51 and 65 (23%). The over 65 are approximate 11% (in 1994 reached 10%) and the age group between 16 and the 25 reach a 19%, discreetly higher than in 1994 when these achieved a 10%.

The level of study of the visitors is enough different from 1994 to 2009. In both cases high school licensed have the greatest percentage of incidence (respectively 40% and 35%), instead the primary level school licensed passed from 17% to 8% as far as the graduates pass from 11% to 33%. The secondary level school licensed have been passed from 30% to 21%. In the present investigation 3% of the visitors has declared to possess other titles: in this case master and doctorates have played a role of primary importance. According to the profession or social status employees/teachers results prevail in both cases even if with different percentage: in 1994 they were 23%, in 2009 they are 28%. From the first to the second period have been increased the incidence of students (from 5,5% to 17%) and professionals (from 7% to 15%). Dealers (from 9% to 4%), housewives (from 12% to 5%), retired (from 21 to 17%) and workmen (from 16% to 4%) have an opposite trend. Unemployed suffer instead a slight increased from 2,3% to 3%.

As regards the origin of visitors on municipal level the situation is rather different than the previous survey. At the time almost 10% of the users of the Sacred Mount was from Varallo; nowadays the most of the visitors is by the major municipalities, such as Novara (8%), Milano and Torino (6% each), Roma, Genova and Alessandria (3% each). Between smaller municipalities, only Borgomanero (2%) exceed 1%.

From the point of view of the more representative provinces there are some differences between the two surveys. Now the situation is the following: the greatest incidence is up to Novara (15%) followed by Torino (11%), Milano (10%), Vercelli (6%), Biella (4%), Varese (3%), Roma (3%), Genova (3%), Monza and Brianza (2%). In addition, the study shows that a small part of the respondents comes from abroad, e.g. from Austria. In the past, the province that generated more visitors was Vercelli (30%) followed by Novara (20%), Milano (12%), Biella (7,5%), Varese (7%), Torino (5,3%) and Pavia (2%).

Today, as in 1994, the more used equipments are car or motorbike, even if (as in table 1) with different percentages.

Table 1: Impact of the equipment used to achieve the Sacred Mount

	1994	2009
car/motorbike	88%	76%
bus	5%	12%
train	1%	4%
bicycle / by foot	6%	8%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

Data show that 43% of the visitors made the excursion together with family, 36% together with friends, 15% in group organized and 6% alone.

Between the different services the cable railway is the most used, just under 50%. Other services used by a certain number of visitors are the souvenir shop

(25%), the picnic area (20%) and the catering service (19%). In the remaining cases the percentage stands at below 10% (table 2).

Table 2: Services used during the visit

	Absolute value	Incidence% of each item to total respondents (150)
sightseeing	5	3%
cable railway	71	47%
souvenir	38	25%
souvenir shop	29	19%
picnic area	30	20%
hotel service	13	9%
other	8	5%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

Between the visitor that had lunch (132), 51% achieved a picnic, while 23% went to the restaurant. The other way of lunch are less used, they vary between a maximum of 11% (nearby the Sacred Mount) and a minimum of 1% (in farmhouses).

Table 3: Where visitors had lunch?

	Absolute value	Incidence% of each item of the total visitors that had lunch (132)
restaurant	31	23%
nearby	15	11%
farmhouse	1	1%
picnic	67	51%
at home	18	14%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

The visitors who have declared information about the kind of visit they made were 132 and less than 70% are excursionists, 16% made a day trip during a holiday in Valsesia, 7% a day trip during a holiday in Piemonte and the same percentage a business trip at the Sacred Mount or in neighbouring cities. Only 1% made a day trip as part of a holiday in Italy.

42 are respondents who have made an overnight stay. Of these 24% were accommodated in the home of relatives and/or friends, 21% in hotel, 17% at the second home and 14% in Bed and Breakfast. The remaining 24% of respondents has stayed in farmhouses (7%), boarding houses (5%), religious institutions (5%), campers (5%) and camping (2%).

About the knowledge of the Sacred Mount, more than half of the 146 respondents of this question gave a positive answer.

The accustomed visitors of the site are 46 and the 51% of these said they visit the Sacred Mount several times a year, 28% once, 12% every two years and 9% on special occasions.

Visitors who usually visit Valsesia are 56 and, as in table 4, 29% declares historical and cultural interests, 23% naturalistic purposes and 18% are motivated by the proximity of the site to their second home.

Table 4: Motivation to visit the Valsesia

	Absolute value	Incidence% of each item of the usual total visitors of Valsesia (56)
natural interest	13	23%
trekking	9	16%
cultural / historical interest	16	29%
gastronomy	5	9%
second home	10	18%
skiing	1	2%
recreational interest	6	11%
other	7	13%
work	1	2%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

Over 62% of respondents (93 visitors) said they knew other Sacred Mounts; among them the most popular are Orta (60%), Oropa (29%), Crea (25%), Domodossola (8%), Ghiffa (6%), Ossuccio (6%) and Belmonte (4%). In addition to these sites, visitors indicated other ten religious places: four in the Southern of Italy (Viaggiano, Realmonte, Gelbison and Gargano) and six in the North (Graglia, Monselice, San Vivaldo, San Montatone, Calvario, Gracilia).

As in the 1994 study, religious, historical and cultural interest, as well as artistic, environmental and recreation purposes, are the ones that attracted the main number of visitors. However it is important to note that nowadays new motivations are imposing (table 5).

Table 5: Interests that drive to visit the Holy Mount

	Absolute value	Incidence% of each item to total respondents (150)
religious	55	37%
artistic	43	29%
historical/cultural	52	35%
environmental	33	22%
recreational	24	16%
love for the place	10	7%
proximity to places of residence / holiday	24	16%
others	15	10%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

In most cases, knowledge of the Sacred Mount is by word of mouth (44%) and thanks to its proximity to the main touristic resorts (21%). Internet (16%) still has some importance too, along with tourist guides (14%). Other means show smaller incidence (table 6).

Table 6: As has been known the Holy Mount

	Absolute value	Incidence% of each item to total respondents (150)
word of mouth	66	44%
magazines	8	5%
television	3	2%
local press	2	1%
newspaper articles	4	3%
tourist guide	21	14%
Internet	24	16%
proximity to places of residence / holiday	31	21%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

The 15 people who have known the site on the Internet have visited the homepage of Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia or Sacred Mount of Varallo (14), followed by the pages resulting from website like Google, Virgilio, etc. (3) and www.santuari.it (3).

The 63 visitors who took information before going to the Sacred Mount have used Internet (site of the Sacred Mounts of Piemonte e Lombardia, 37%), tourist guides (30%), Internet website of research (29%), press and magazines (19%) and other media (3%).

Visitors who evaluated the improvements of the Sacred Mount are very few: 23 think that there haven't been improvements, while 33 have noted an evolution in the maintenance of interior design of the gardens (48%), in accessibility (parking and cable railway) and in the conservation status of the site (36%). The majority of respondents believes that the Sacred Mount is well preserved: 101 visitors express themselves in this way and only 36 on the contrary (13 abstentions).

As can be seen from table 7, most of the visitors who have rated the overall services of the Sacred Mount (129) have a good opinion (43%); only 18% of cases a poor one.

Table 7: Evaluation of the Sacred Mount

	Absolute value	Incidence% of those who expressed an opinion (129)
good	56	43%
fairly good	35	27%
sufficient	22	17%
poor	16	12%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

Also in 1994, approximately 55% of respondents stated that the services offered were sufficient, and they do not wish any changes because they feared the loss of the religious image of the complex. The remaining 45% judged possible to improve the quality and quantity of services (by creating guided tours, as well as picnic areas) and the accessibility. Nowadays those services and improvement have been realized by the Administrators.

In the 2009 questionnaire 79 respondents are interested in improving and creating other new services and/or infrastructure. In 46% of cases tourist expressed an interest in organizing concerts of classical or religious music, while 30% of visitors require the realization of picnic baskets with local products offered at special price (30%). Table 8 shows the impact of every single item.

Table 8: Measures to improve the usability of the Sacred Mount

	Absolute value	Incidence% of those who expressed an opinion (79)
conferences, cultural initiatives	16	20%
improvement of tours	18	20%
concert of classic o religious music	36	46%
accessibility	13	16%
audio guide audio guides	15	19%
maps and files for Smartphone and GPS navigators	11	14%
picnic baskets with local products offered at special price	24	30%
other	6	8%

Source: based on data Questionnaire 2009

In order to improve environmental and cultural values of the site, 57% of respondents expressed an interest about the payment of a toll to finance initiatives of the Sacred Mount (133). The 84% of these people would pay up to 5 euro, while 16% would pay from 5 to 10 euro.

Visitors who think they will return to Varallo are 116, while 17 will not come back and other 17 abstained from answering. The artistic interest (44%), the amenity of the place (37%) and interest in religion (37%) are the main motivation to return to the Sacred Mount.

6. Conclusions'

A first result of the analysis of questionnaire addressed to outline the profile of the visitor type of Sacred Mount of Varallo. Secondly it allows to carry out a series of assessments¹⁵: by a hand on the effectiveness of policies adopted by the Administrators of the monumental complex, and on the other hand, about the validation of the theoretical postulates expressed on the development of religious tourism, that combines faith, cultural purposes and naturalistic interest.

The tourist type of Sacred Mount of Varallo is an Italian excursionist in the age between 36 and the 50 years, with high school license, who came from

¹⁵ The authors wish to thank Elena De Filippis and Stefano Aietti (Director and Researcher of the "Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo") for their support and help gathering the data.

province of Novara, uses car or motorbike to reach the site accompanied by his/her family, buys something at the souvenir shop and knows the place thanks to word of mouth.

His/her evaluation of the policies adopted by the Reserve Administrator's is positive. Most of the people consider them effectiveness. The shortcomings that had been observed from the survey of 1994 have been brilliantly exceeded. In particular have been judged solved the problems linked to accessibility and the lack of some services, as the limited presence of picnic areas and the absence of a service of guided visits. The renovation of the old cable railway (reopened in 2003) has allowed a significantly improving in the quality of the fruition of the Sacred Mount.

The cultural initiatives carried out in the last decades have been accepted and a large number of users showed an interest to their implementation. These people are also interested in the maintenance of the religious and pilgrimage character of the place and in the preservation of natural environment. To confirm these assumptions, in 1994 survey, as in the 2009 one, visitor are favorable to pay a ticket to enter the Sacred Mount just to contribute to the cost of the maintenance of the site.

In the ongoing globalization processes, the websites of Sacred Mount obtain the favor of visitors; some of them know the New Jerusalem of Varallo thanks this way of touristic promotion that could be an effectiveness vehicle to improve the significance of this exceptional place to tourists, providing them the information necessary to the fruition of a site that can offer a moment of reflection and spiritual enrichment.

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