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Edited by David Picard  
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[tourismcontactculture@gmail.com](mailto:tourismcontactculture@gmail.com)

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# RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND SEDUCTION: THE CASE OF SACRED MOUNT OF VARALLO

Raffaella Afferni, Carla Ferrario, Stefania Mangano<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Sacred Mount of Varallo: history, organization and tourist destination

In a romantic vision, the tourism brings out “Ulysses” that exists in everyone and as this famous traveler was attracted by the desire to know “elsewhere”, so the modern tourist is seduced by the possibility of making a new experience.

A Sacred Mount represents an alternative and sustainable experience for religious tourism, and for this reason can be considered a seduction place. In fact, it is a mix of religious, cultural and heritage attributes.

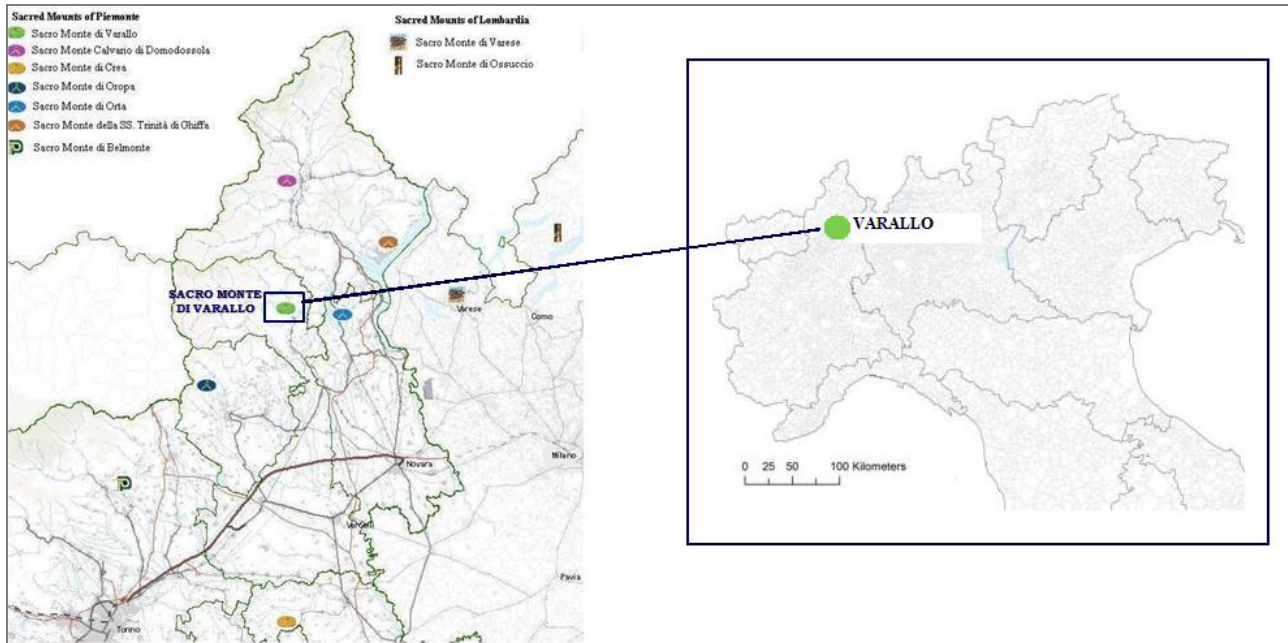
Many of the Sacred Mounts erected form a particularly interesting tourist sites and their mountainous or hilly settings enhance their unique value. They have become a permanent feature of the European cultural landscape. Irrespective of the exact period when they were created, they all belong to the European culture that evolved on the basis of the Christian tradition (Bilska-Wodecka, 2004).

A Sacred Mount it is 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. For example the life of Jesus, the Calvary, the Mysteries of the Rosary or significant religious figures such as St. Francis. The chapels are generally built on a declivity and can be reached by an interconnecting path. The pilgrims are guided from one building to the next, which allows them to follow the figural narrative that unfolds diachronically.

Sacred Mounts are extended most of all in European Countries. In Italy there are twenty-six examples (seventeen in Piemonte and nine in Lombardia), sixty in Austria, forty in France of which thirty-nine are in Brittany, sixty in Germany, sixteen in Czech Republic, seven in Belgium, six in Switzerland, five in Spain and there are also sporadic examples in Hungary, Turkey, Russia, Croatia and Slovenia (Afferni, Mangano, 2009)

The Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia (Figure 1) are inscribed in the World Heritage List of UNESCO since 2003 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” (Sacri Monti, 2010).



**Figure 1 – Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia**

Source: Personal elaboration

In particular, the Sacred Mount of Varallo is the oldest and one of the most evocative religious place in North-Western Italy. It is located in Valsesia, in the province of Vercelli. It’s name is “New Jerusalem”, because it was realized at the wish of Father Bernardino Caimi to reproduce the “Holy Sepulchre” (Figure 2). Father Caimi was a friar from Milan, who lived in Palestine for a long time. In XV century for pilgrims it was not easy to go to Palestine because of the Turkish-Christian war. So when father Caimi returned back to Italy, he decided to build in Varallo a new Holy Land. Nowadays, as in the past, at Sacred Mount pilgrims have the chance to recreate themselves in a natural and enchanting place. In fact on the doorway to the first chapel built it still is written: “to enable those who cannot travel to see Jerusalem (and the other holy sites)”.

Realized between the end of the 15th and the 18th centuries by the major artists of Piemonte and Lombardia of the period: Gaudenzio Ferrari, Morazzone, Tanzio of Varallo, Giovanni d’Enrico, Dionigi Bussola.



**Figure 2 -- Chapel 20, The Last Supper**  
Source: <http://www.sacromonteverallo.eu/>

Sacred Mount of Varallo is also a beautiful example of park gardens, organized according to the model of the Italian garden (Figure 3), with hedges, paths and wooded areas, but also of the ideal town with its two historical squares (Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo, 2010).



**Figure 3 - Chapel 13, The temptation of Christ**  
Source: <http://www.sacromonteverallo.eu/>

Thanks to this characteristic, the one of Varallo is the only Sacred Mount that maintain two closely related characteristics: the “urban aspect”, with the historical walling and the two terminal squares – the square of the Tribunals (Figure 4) and the square of the Basilica – and the evocative processional itinerary through the greenery, almost like a long rural *Via Crucis* winding around the hill.



**Figure 4 - The square of the Tribunals**

Source: <http://www.sacromontevarallo.eu/>

It is managed by the regional authority called “Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo”. This authority was constituted by the Regione Piemonte under Regional Law No. 28 of 30 April 1980 to safeguard the environmental and scenic characteristics, guarantee the care and conservation of the historical-religious complex and encourage scientific, cultural and educational projects. The Reserve has an Administration that aims to conserve and maintain the complex in terms of the history, environment and art with appropriate financial grants and thanks to the work of its employees (a director and technical and administrative staff, trained to maintain the area and park watch).

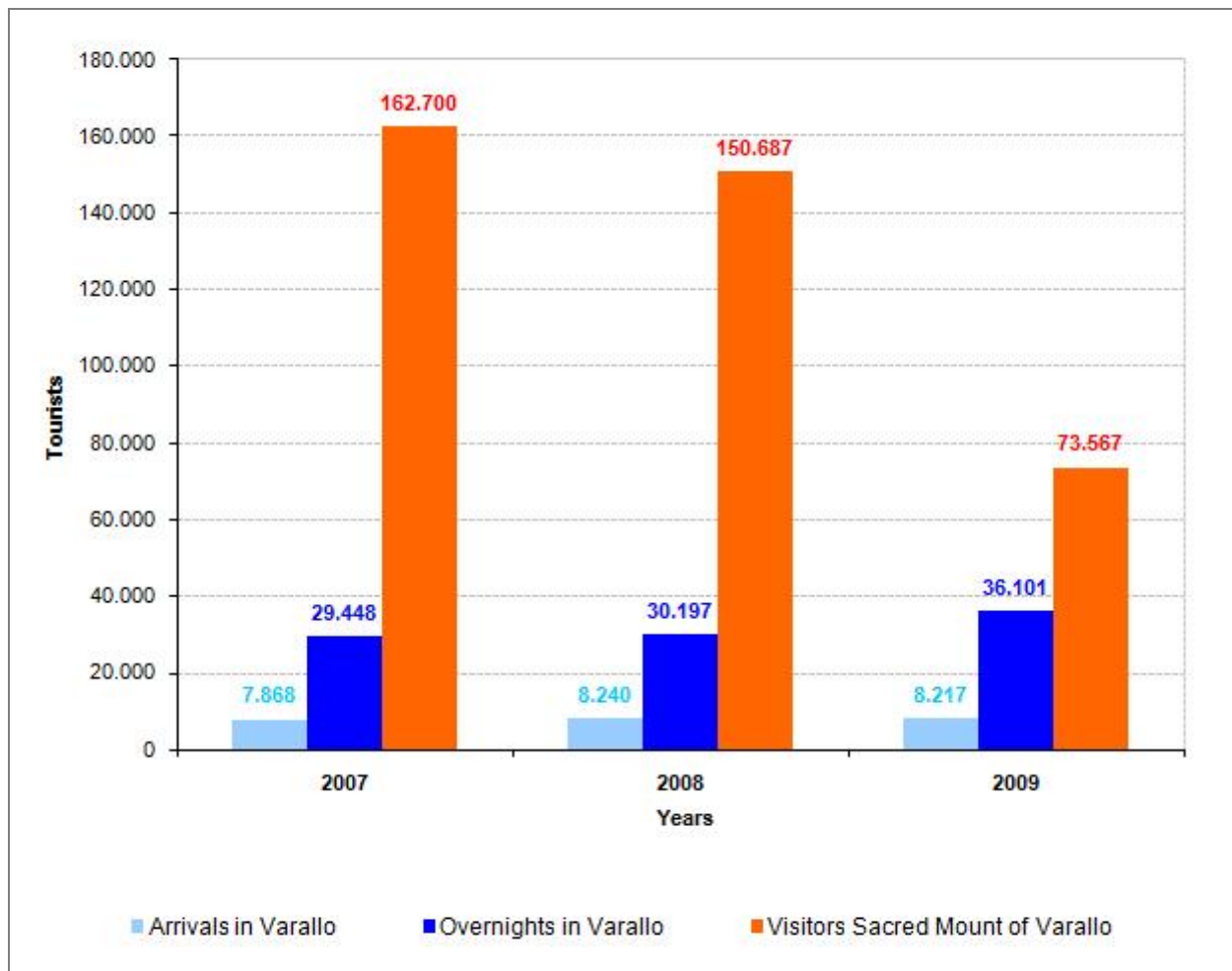
The Riserva takes care of site management, decoration and garden, path and structural maintenance services, as well as the maintenance and restoration of the chapels, research work, studies and improvements to the complex (Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo, 2010).

So the Sacred Mount of Varallo is not only a religious place but an area in which is possible to make alternative experiences, where religious, cultural and heritage attributes are in equilibrium with the surrounding nature.

For this reason, this Sacred Mount is visited by thousands of travelers (Figure 5)<sup>ii</sup>. Visitors are seduced by the beauty and the cultural mystique of the place, so it is possible to find religion and cultural tourists and pilgrims. The main difference between religious tourists and pilgrims is the motivation that drives the traveler to make the trip. The pilgrim journeys to seek the indulgence and the sources of his faith, while the religion tourist moves to look for artistic and ethnic backgrounds of his faith and to know the meaning of religious rites (Ferrario, 2010).

It is not a mass tourism aim, these type of site is a niche destination that attract specific segment of tourists and not the typical tourist of Varallo or Valsesia region.

Figure 5 compare the arrivals and overnights in the town of Varallo<sup>iii</sup> with the visitors to the Sacred Mount, that are mainly hikers and are about twenty times as the arrivals in Varallo.

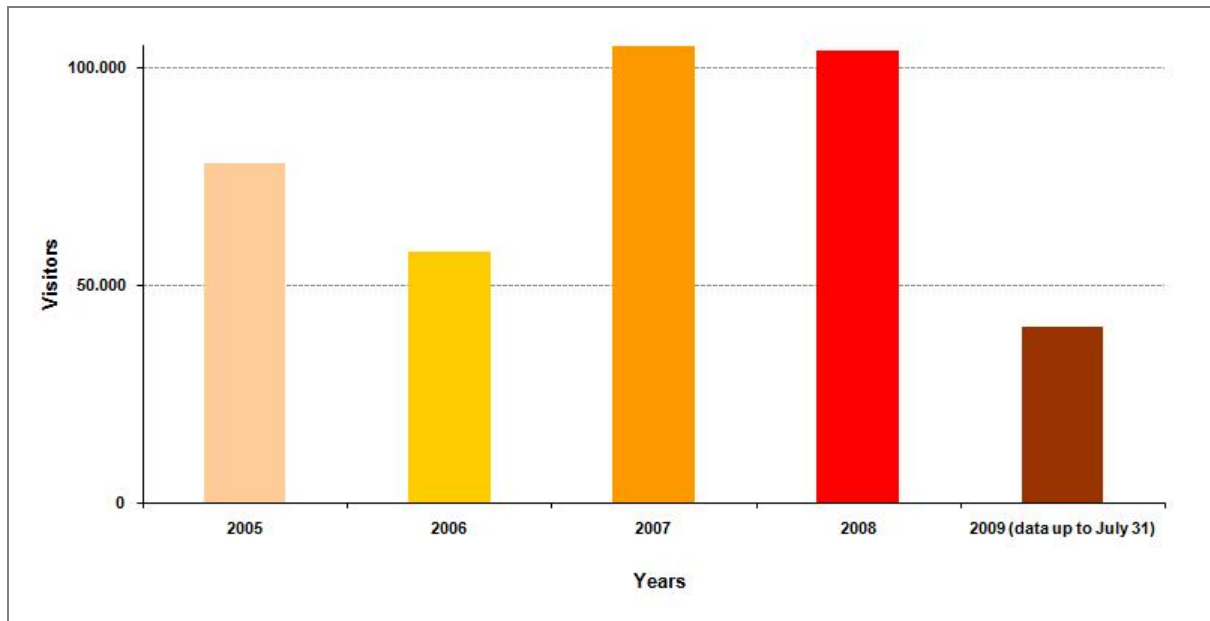


**Figure 5 – Visitors, Tourist Arrivals and Overnights**

Source: Personal elaboration on the basis of data from Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo and Osservatorio Turistico Regione Piemonte

\*The data includes only visitors between January and July, because In June there was a failure to “counting on foot traffic”, so the data is underestimated

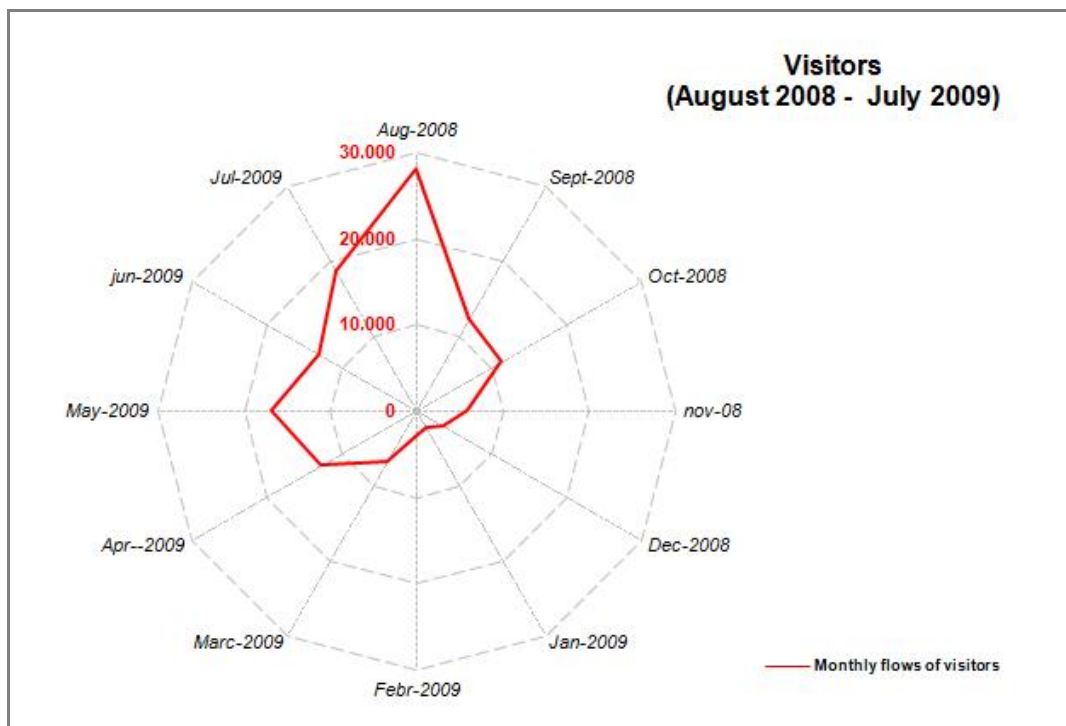
The number of visitors to the Sacred Mount is increasing in the last decades; in particular Figure 6 shows the flows in the period between 2005 and 2009. We suppose that the positive trend could be related to the improving of the accessibility of the site, and mainly with the reopening of the cable car<sup>iv</sup> that connect the town of Varallo with the sacred place.



**Figure 6 – Visitors of Sacred Mount of Varallo**

Source: Personal elaboration on the basis of data from Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo

Figure 7 shows the seasonal peaks, and the flows are higher during the summer months, probably due to the fact the Sacred Mount is an “open air theatre” and the summer is the best season to go there.



**Figure 7 - Monthly flows of visitors**

Source: Personal elaboration on the basis of data from Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Varallo

## **2. Preserving and re-producing authenticity and seduction at the Sacred Mount of Varallo**

As stated in previous paragraph, a Sacred Mount, as the one of Varallo, is a niche destination that attracts specific segment of tourists and however in this place it is possible to find an air of permanency, something modifies for internal dynamics and as result of contingencies. Material markers of the Sacred Mount, whether they be naturally occurring topographic features such as mountains, rivers, etc., or built environments of human interactions such as buildings, make the site distinctly recognizable, but the nature of the place inevitably brings changes. In fact this holy site is more than merely the sum of material characteristics; it is both physical and social and exists not only in the material world, but also in the “minds of the men”.

For these reasons the Sacred Mount of Varallo was inscribed as a World Heritage site *not* because *it was – and still is – something*, but *rather because it is representative (or exemplary) of something*, and that something can be understood, in part, through touristic interactions with the place. The inclusion in the UNESCO List is a recognition of the great “value” of this site, since it is understood to authoritatively and emotionally speak to the present about the past, giving direction to the future. To preserve and, above all, to raise the awareness of visitors about the value of such a place Administrators have to carry out appropriate and strong actions. In particular destination management should take care in creating and integrating value in tourism products and also in resources hence the place can reach a better competitive market position.

To achieve these objectives the Administrators of the World Heritage site of Varallo carried out many projects, linked to each of the meanings of the term “value”.

In particular to maintain intact the natural and heritage value of this place, that represents a valuable material link to the past in the present, the Authority of Special Nature Reserve of the Sacred Mount launched and developed a Conservation Program. The aims of this action are to sustain the quality of the “Natural Landscape” in connection with the “man made” elements and to preserve one of the primary elements of seduction that characterize the attractiveness of this place. The Program included a comprehensive risk assessment for all elements of the site and strikes a balance between conservation requirements and use implications in order to maintain the overall integrity of the Sacred Mount. Through Strategic Planning workshops the Administration of the Reserve tried also to increase environmental and conservation awareness and to improve a unified vision and consensus on development strategies among all stakeholders.

The value of Sacred Mount of Varallo can also be defined in terms of authenticity of the experience. As Di Giovine (2009) states, «authenticity is itself a highly contested word, it is employed in a variety of venues and it is endowed with a multiplicity of meanings. Yet this term is always



intimately associated with the notion of the monument or object's singular and ineffable life history».

The authenticity of the experience at Sacred Mount of Varallo can assume different meanings, as different are the motives that bring visitors to this holy place, either because of the research of the origin of the faith for the pilgrim or the mix of religious, artistic and cultural interests for the tourist (paragraph 1). The entire experience of the visitor is anyway surrounded by an "aura" that, as Mazzarella (2004) points out, provides the human with an initial motivation for interaction with such a place – to commune with its authenticity, to link oneself with the time and space which is imbued deeply in the essence of the site. The Sacred Mount of Varallo, through its aura, actually touches the human before he tangibly interacts with this place. Thus, the authenticity of the Sacred Mount is able to reference a time and space that is distanced from the actual time and space of the particular interaction. In so doing, the complex of Varallo, as the other Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia, actualize the life history of the image – they are able to render the inanimate buildings animate in the minds of the human participants such that these people can really believe, and even imagine, the monuments existing and interacting with others outside their discrete experience with them.

In order to preserve the authenticity of the experience for pilgrims the Administrators of the Reserve enhance communication with Christian Catholic bodies and organizations, that were invited to hold religious meetings, events and exhibitions at the site.

To encourage the diversification of the motivations of the visits the 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 of the Reserve were 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 result of the collaboration between these two entities.

The value of Sacred Mount of Varallo can also be defined in connection with both the quality and quantity of services offered to visitors and the accessibility of the site. To increase the appeal of Sacred Mount of Varallo 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 car in 2003 and the new signage to get better orientation inside the Sacred Mount.

To let the local community be fully aware of the universal value of the holy complex and to strengthen the connection of the Varallo's inhabitants with the site, the Authority of the Reserve developed co-constructed initiatives, as "One chapel-one family patronages" or the creation of the Interpretation Center to provide explanation and exhibits on the region, the town and the site.

But which type of the mentioned projects and actions know the visitors? What do they believe about it? Which is the image of the Sacred Mount of Varallo? Are visitors satisfied with this tourist experience? Do they wish to return? And most of all, do they consider the Sacred Mount of Varallo a seduction place?

### **3. Methodology and questionnaire structure**

To give an answer to these questions, in 2009 it was administered a questionnaire. The selection of respondents was by random selection. During the summer 250 copies of this questionnaire have been left in free distribution in some of the areas more frequented of the Sacred Mount of Varallo. The result was really positive: in three months 150 copies have been completed. That means a percentage of return of 60.

Just to understand if there were prevailing behaviors, the sampling has been done both during the weekends and weekdays. The SPSS standard package for personal computers was used for data processing.

In some cases the questions presumed more than one answer, two as maximum, only if it was necessary to express an opinion or an interest in doing activities.

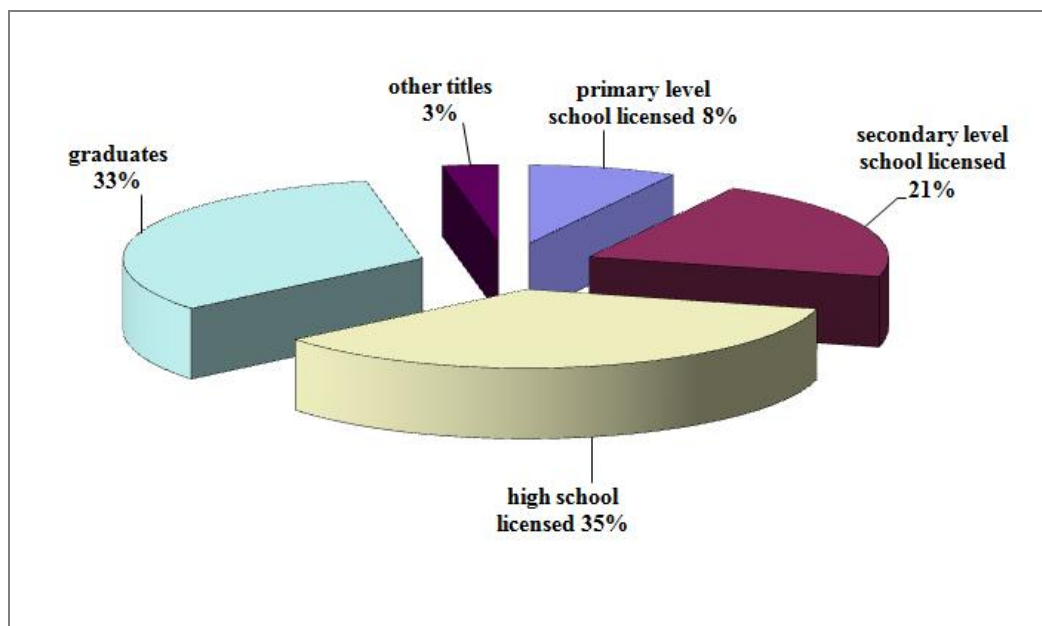
Furthermore, it was possible to compare some information of our survey to the results of a similar ones developed in 1994 on behalf of the Administration of the Sacred Mount.

Our questionnaire (Appendix 1) was prefaced by the file-card and divided into 20 questions, written in Italian, in prevalence closed ones, grouped in four logical sections, concerning:

- *Section one: characteristics of the visit;*
- *Section two: awareness of the area in which the Sacred Mount is located;*
- *Section three: evaluation of the Sacred Mount;*
- *Section four: expectations and suggestions.*

#### 4. Profile of tourist of Sacred Mount of Varallo

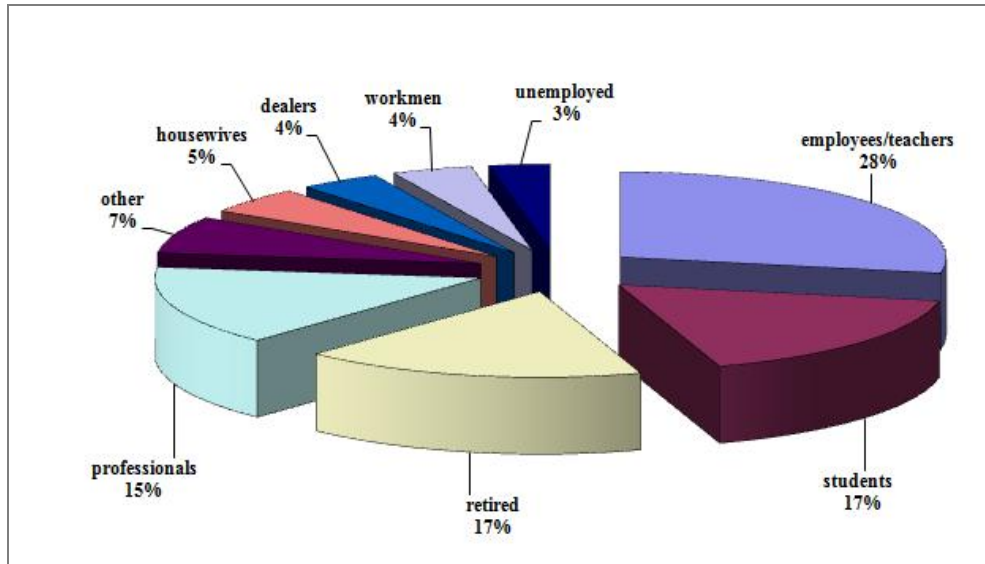
From the file-card we can do some interesting comparison with the results of the 1994's questionnaire. The sample was well balanced in both cases in terms of percentage of sexes: half male and half female. But in terms of age we noted differences: even if in 1994 and in 2009 the groups most represented are those central, i.e. 36-50 years and 51-65. Teenager and young adult (16-25 years) are increasing from 1994 to 2009, from 10 to 19 percent. So we can suppose that nowadays visitors could have different behaviors, requirements and needs in comparison with the ones enquired in 1994. The growth of the previous category led of changes both in terms of educational level and professional and social ones. As we can see in Figure 8, even if the highest percentage of visitors asserts to have got high license school, a good percentage of them achieved a university degree. On the contrary in 1994, the graduates represented 11% and the primary level school licensed 17%.



**Figure 8 – Level of study**  
Source: Survey, 2009

At the same time, from 1994 to 2009 there are some differences also in terms of professional and social characteristics. Figure 9 shows that the employees/teachers results prevail as in the first survey, even if with a different percentage. From 1994 to the 2009 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%: probably because the recession.



**Figure 9 – Professional and social level**

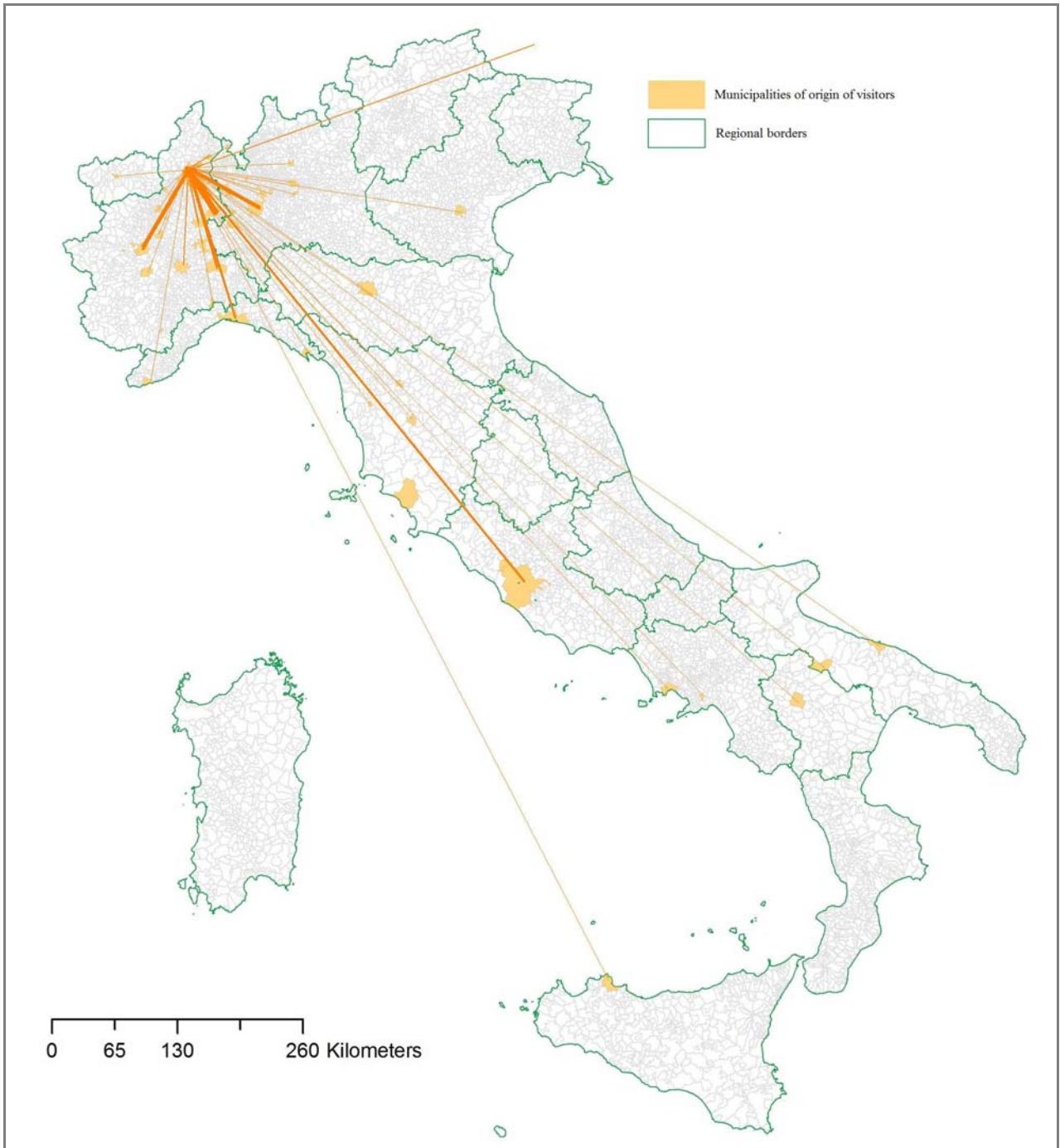
Source: Survey, 2009

Otherwise instead in the past the visitor of the Sacred Mount of Varallo is younger, has a higher level of education and achieves a more skilled labour. Perhaps it means that this visitor looks for a different tourist experience.

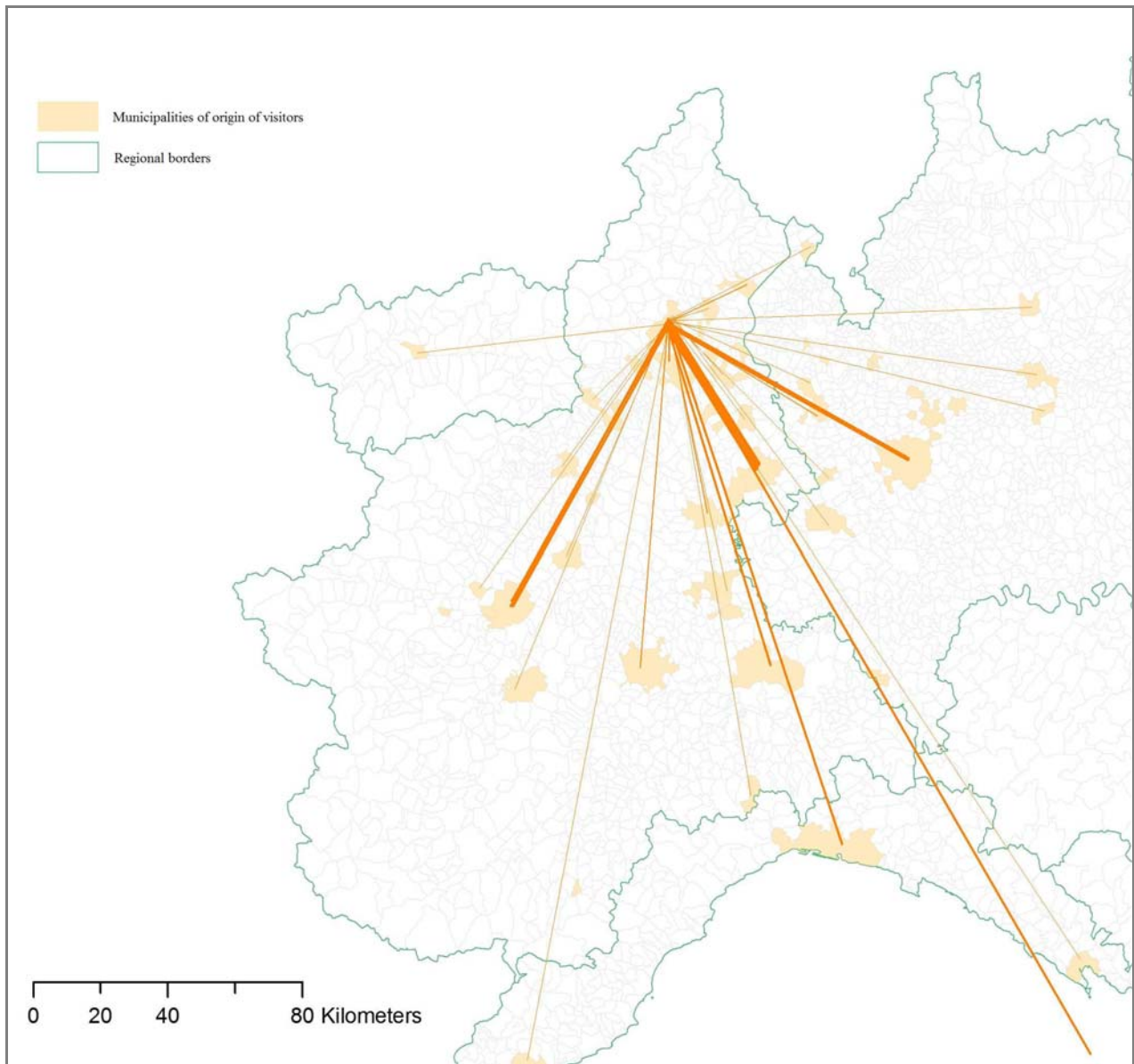
The Figure 10 and 11 regards the geographical origin of the visitors. Trying to know from where the respondents arrive, may contribute to investigate the typology of frequentation of this holy place in terms of attraction area. Our aim is to understand if the spirituality of the Sacred Mount of Varallo has gone beyond the immediate nearby and which may be the reason. In comparison with 1994, the situation appears to be rather different. In the past a substantial proportion of visitors came from the Province of Vercelli (30%) and 10% of these from the Municipality of Varallo. The attraction area of the complex was more local; today the situation is quite different.

Present data show prevail of visitors coming from the province of Novara (15%) followed by Torino (11%), Milano (10%), Vercelli (6%), Biella (4%), Varese (3%), Roma (3%), Genova (3%), Monza and Brianza (2%). A small part of the respondents come also from abroad, in particular from Austria.

The maps show a geographical proximity of the flows, that now transcend the municipalities of Piemonte and include not only the main metropolitan areas of North Italy, but also some other Italian cities.



**Figure 10 – Municipalities of origin of the visitors**  
Source: Personal elaboration



**Figure 11 – Geographical proximity of visitors**  
 Source: Personal elaboration

These results allow a series of considerations. As known the Sacred Mount of Varallo, together with the others of Piemonte and Lombardia, were inscribed in World Heritage List of UNESCO. This circumstance has probably affected the level of attendance and the attractiveness of these places widened their natural borders. But this is not the only reason. We cannot forget the trends of today's tourist market and the research of new experiences, the desire to escape from the routine, to rediscover places and situations that during the past had been the subject of what can be defined as primordial tourism. In this case we can speak about a revision of both religious tourism and pilgrimage.

## 5. Characteristics of the visit at the Sacred Mount of Varallo

About the characteristics of the visit, we proposed some questions.

A first result regards the means of transportation; Figure 12 shows that visitors mostly use private transport, even compared with the past the public ones point out a growth rising from 6% to 16%. Maybe the reasons are multiple: the growing attention of public administration towards sustainable types of transport, the greater attention of tourists to the environment, the strengthening of public service and also the restructuration of cable car.

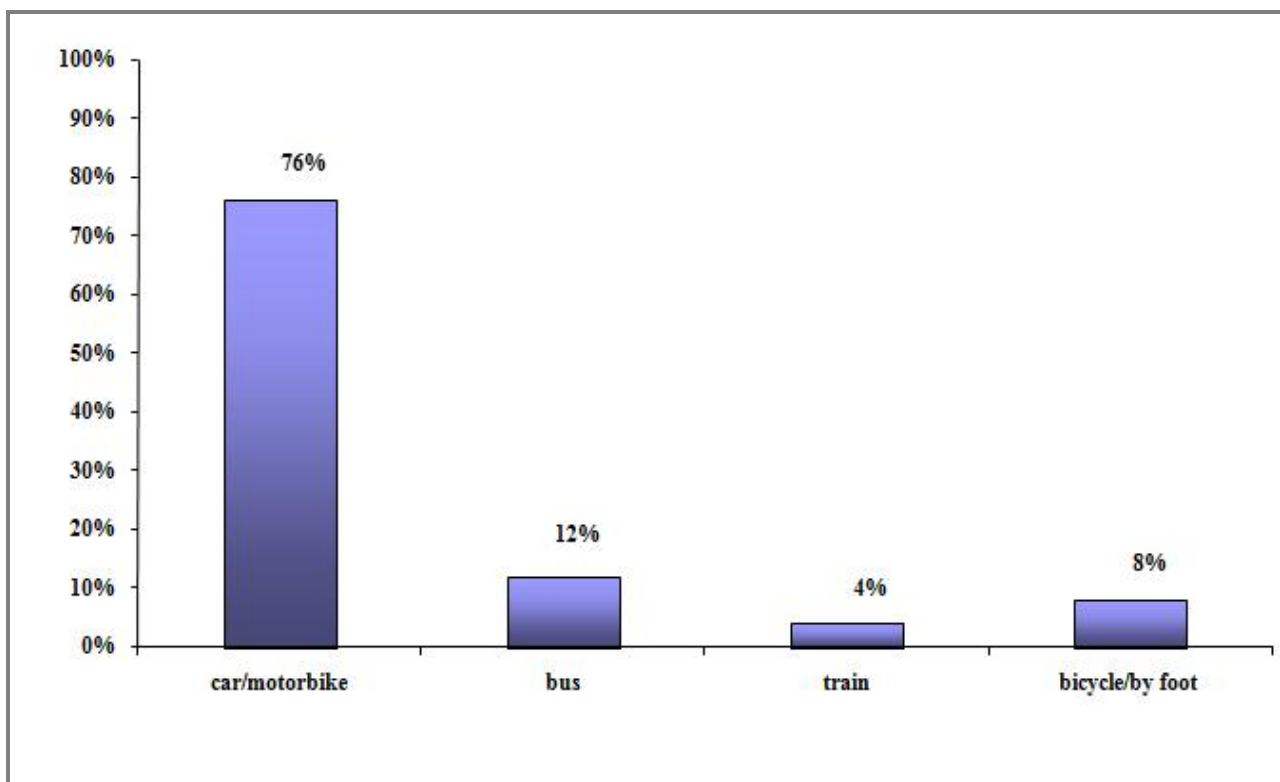
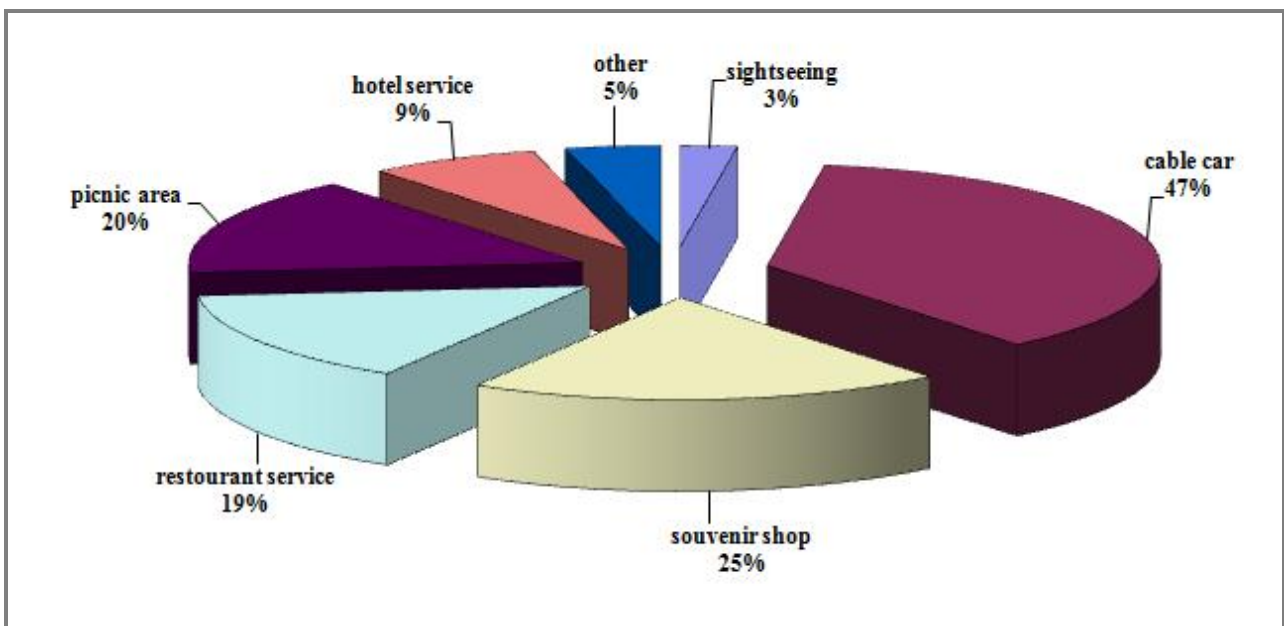


Figure 12 – Type of transport to reach the Sacred Mount  
Source: Survey, 2009

Data show that 79% of the visitors made the excursion together with family or with friends, 15% in organized group and 6% alone. The lowest importance of the organized groups, in comparison with the past, reinforces the idea that the Sacred Mount has begun to attract different types of visitors. They are not, as we have seen in the previous section, simply pilgrims or religious tourists. Regarding the services used (Figure 13), it prevails the cable car to climb by the Municipality of Varallo to the Sacred Mount, maybe because it could be a suggestive experience thanks to the beautiful landscape. Other service chosen by a certain number of visitors was the souvenir shop. Buy a souvenir for ourselves or for our friends and relatives from one side can mean to have something

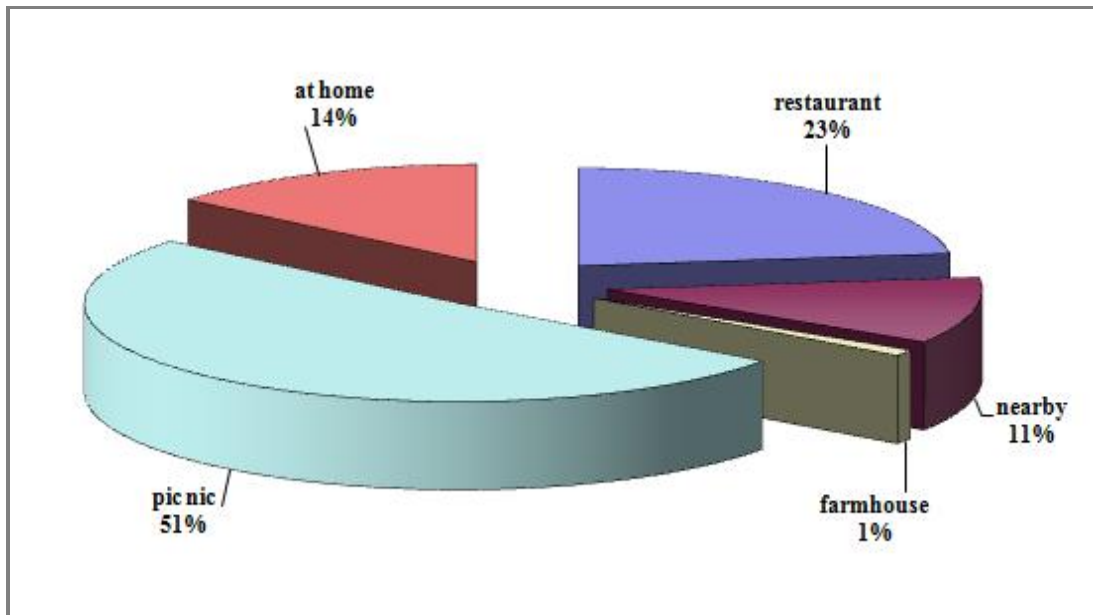
that reminds the visit. Moreover it may represent the means to share the experience with other people, just to perpetuate the experience. Among other services sufficiently used there are the picnic area and the catering services. As we noted the Sacred Mount is inserted in a context where nature is the protagonist. Make a picnic can be interpreted as an attempt of contemporary society to re-establish contact with the natural environment. While the use of catering services may be associated with the growing desire to taste the typical dishes of local culinary tradition.



**Figure 13 – Services used during the visit**  
Source: Survey, 2009

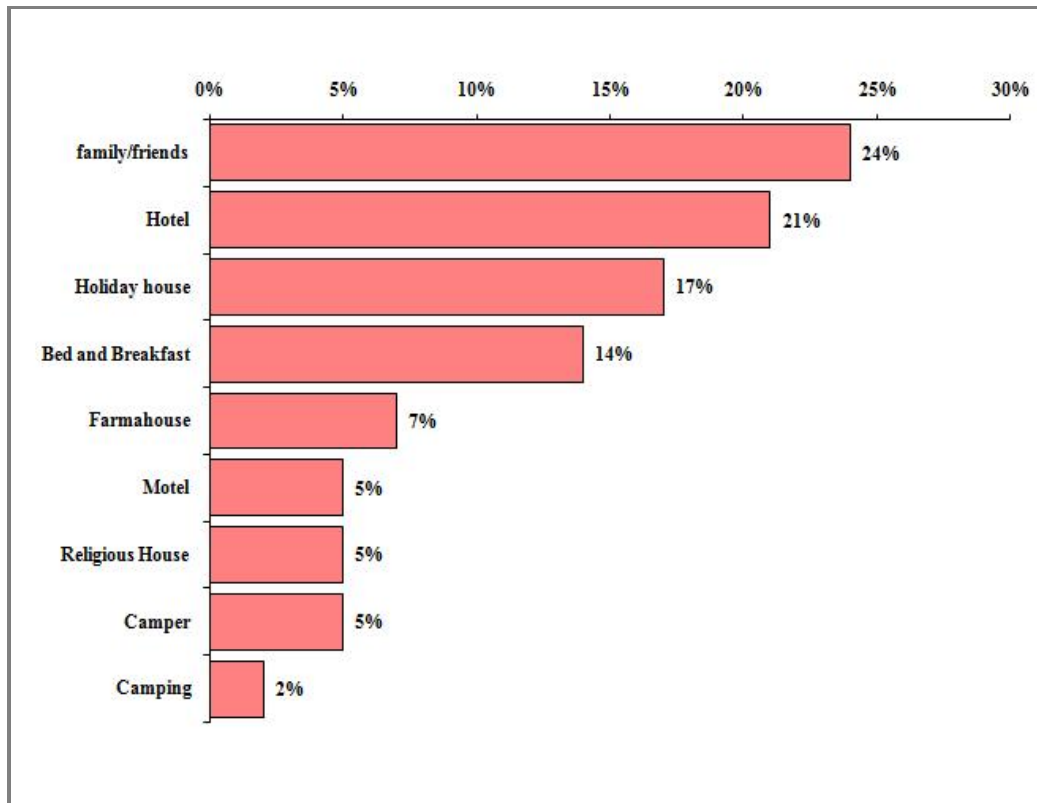
Between the 132 visitors that had lunch, more than half of them achieved a picnic, while more less 1/4 went to the restaurant. The other ways of lunch appear to be less used and their percentage vary between a maximum of 11% and a minimum of 1% (Figure 14).





**Figure 14 – Where visitors had lunch?**  
Source: Survey, 2009

The visitors who have declared information about the kind of visit 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 neighbor cities. Only 1% made a day trip as part of a holiday in Italy. These results are confirmed also by the type of accommodation chosen by the respondents who have made an overnight stay (42). The informal accommodation, home of relatives and/or friends, has shown in Figure 15 is the most used. This behavior suggests that the visit to the Sacred Mount is the result of a suggestion of the moment, more than a programmed choice.

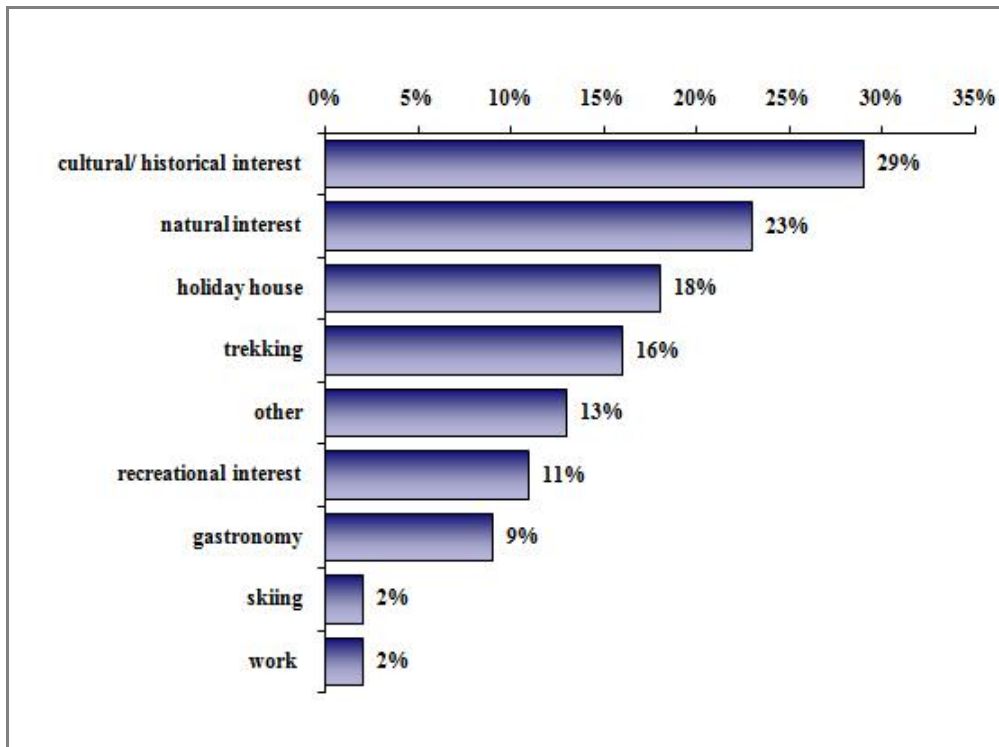


**Figure 15 – Where visitors have stayed?**  
Source: Survey, 2009

## 6. Awareness of the area in which the Sacred Mount of Varallo is located

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 them visited the Sacred Mount several times a year. Only 28% come to Varallo once a year, 12% every two years and 9% on special occasions. The fact that there isn't a high level of loyalty is not a disadvantage; probably it means that the suggestion exercised by the Sacred Mount is quite widespread and not restricted to usual visitors.

Respondents who usually visit Valsesia are 56 and, as in Figure 16, most of them declare basically historical and cultural interests and naturalistic purposes. This question wants to draw attention to the fact that very often the suggestion exercised by a single emergency (historical, artistic, cultural, etc), is not sufficient to motivate the tourist visit.

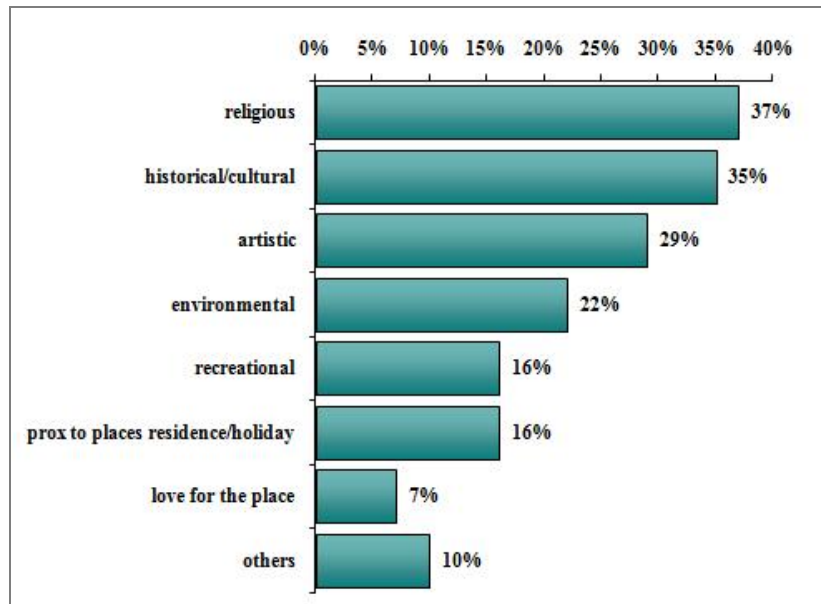


**Figure 16 – Motivation to visit the Valsesia**  
Source: Survey, 2009

It is interesting to underline whether respondents know other Sacred Mounts for at least two reasons. The first is related to the use of visiting places with similar characteristics, that evoke similar suggestions. While the second is related to the fact that they are all pretty close and can be a pleasant destination for an excursion in a suggestive natural landscape, in which combine the contemplation of art, nature and sacred objects. Over 62% of respondents (93 visitors) said they knew other Sacred Mounts; among them the most popular were Orta (60%), Oropa (29%) and Crea (25%) in Piemonte, besides Varese (35%) in Lombardia.

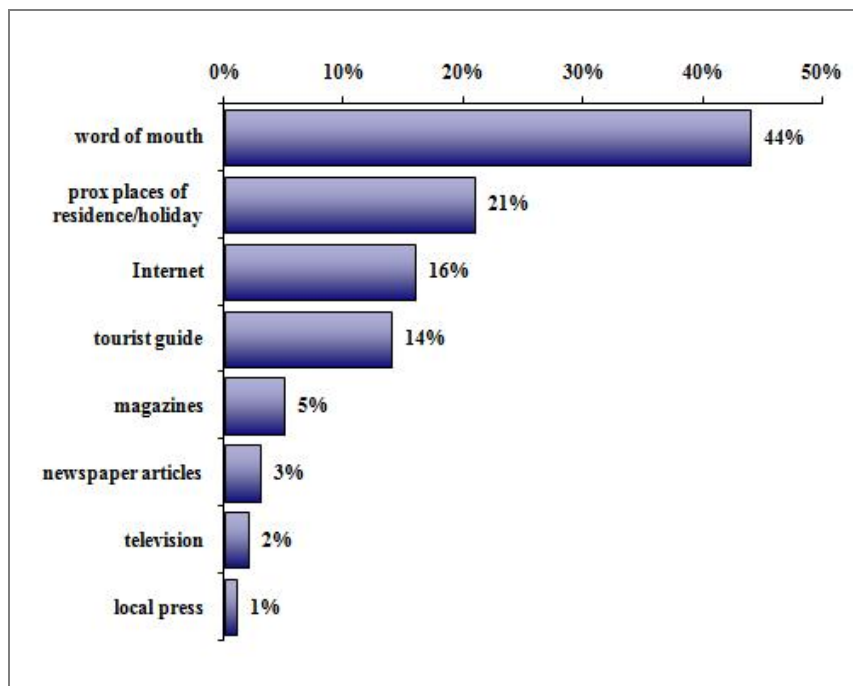
Even if as in the 1994 study, religious, historical and cultural interest, as well as artistic are the ones that attracted the main number of visitors, it is important to note that nowadays new motivations are imposing (Figure 17). Among these there are environmental and recreation purposes, i.e. closely related to the motivation of the third millennium tourist that looks for relaxed and unconventional destinations in which re-establish a relationship with oneself and with the environment.

Knowledge of the Sacred Mount is by word of mouth and thanks to its proximity not only the main touristic resorts, but also to the main metropolitan areas (Figure 18).



**Figure 17 – Interests that drive to visit the Sacred Mount**  
Source: Survey, 2009

In many cases, therefore it is a spontaneous knowledge, it is not the result of the search for something specific. Even if a fairly percentage of visitors have known the Sacred Mount thanks to Internet and tourist guide (Figure 18). In this case we can assume that visitors come to the Sacred Mount looking at random from among different tourist destination, or it was the result of a specific search.



**Figure 18 – Knowledge of the Sacred Mount**  
Source: Survey, 2009

Among those that have been known the place thank, the most widely used web pages have been the ones of Sacred Mounts of Piemonte and Lombardia or Sacred Mount of Varallo. This could endorse the idea that the choice of destination was not random.

The use of the Internet before making the visit, close to 40%, can probably be related to the large number of young people, who are the main users of cyberspace.

## 7. Evaluation and expectations of the experience at the Sacred Mount of Varallo

In this final paragraph, we attempt to unpack the results of the questionnaire more fully, revealing visitors evaluation and expectations of the Sacred Mount of Varallo.

In particular the answers to the third part of the questionnaire propose an evaluation of the holy place in relation to the state of conservation of the site, the improvements occurred in the last decade and the services offered by the monumental ensemble.

Figure 19 shows that 116 of the respondents consider the Sacred Mount well-preserved. This is an interesting data, that assumes a greater importance with reference to the fact that some of them are accustomed visitors and notice an improvement in the state of conservation of the site. The questionnaire asked also – only to accustomed visitors that observed in the last decade a better conservation of the Sacred Mount – to indicate in which field the improvement has occurred.

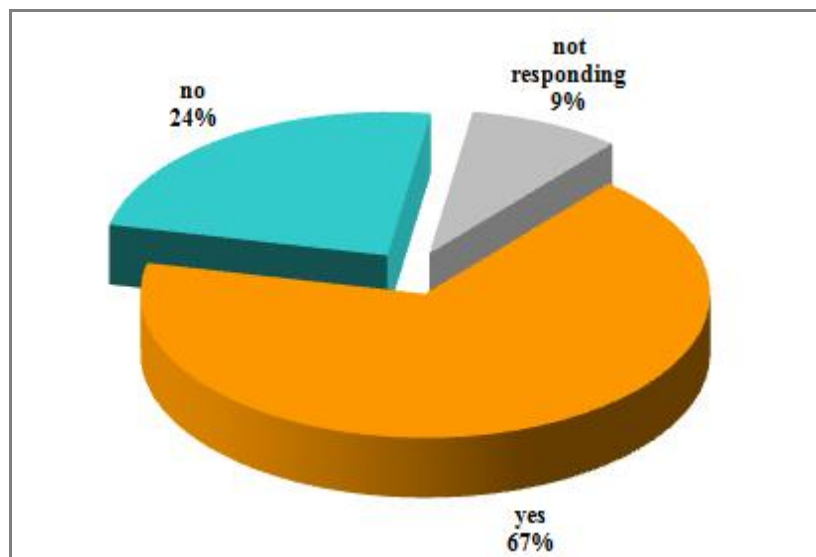
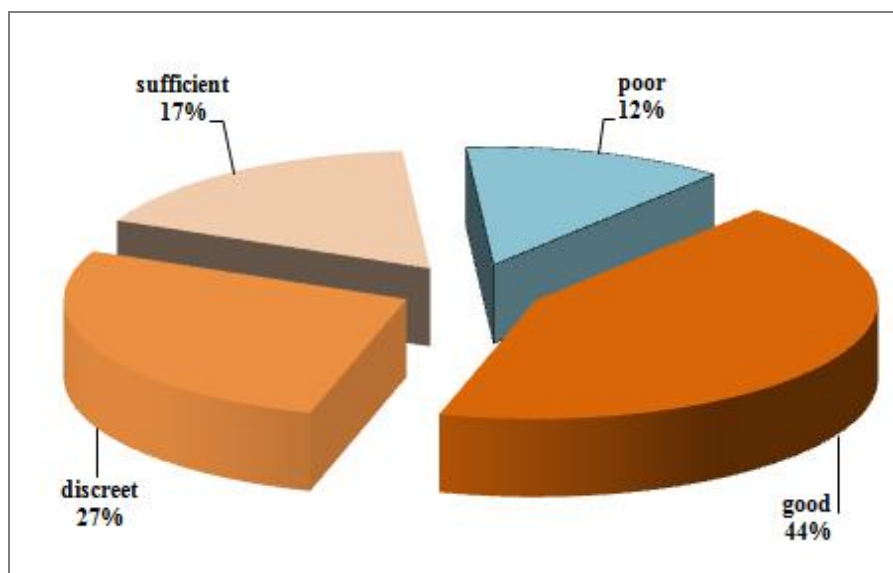


Figure 19 –Do you believe that the Sacred Mount of Varallo is well-preserved?  
Source: Survey, 2009

Many people stated maintenance of interior design of the gardens, conservation of historical and artistic status of the complex, accessibility and tourist services. Comparing the result of 2009

questionnaire with the previous survey we noted that the shortcomings that had been observed in 1994 have been brilliantly exceeded. In particular the problems linked to accessibility and the lack of some services, as the limited presence of picnic areas and the absence of guided visits, have been judged solved.

The respondents express also a positive evaluation of the facilities offered at Sacred Mount (Figure 20); about 70 percent consider the services good or at least discrete. We think this is a positive result for the Administrator, thereby justifying in an indirect way the effectiveness of the actions and policies adopted. During the last decades the Reserve carried out many initiative to limit, and where possible eliminate, the problems pointed out in the previous questionnaire. One of these was the renovation and the reopening of the old cable car in 2003, that allowed in fact an appreciably improving in the quality of the vehicular fruition of the Sacred Mount and significantly reduced problems connected with traffic and lack of parking.



**Figure 20 – How do you judge the overall services offered by the Sacred Mount?**  
Source: Survey, 2009

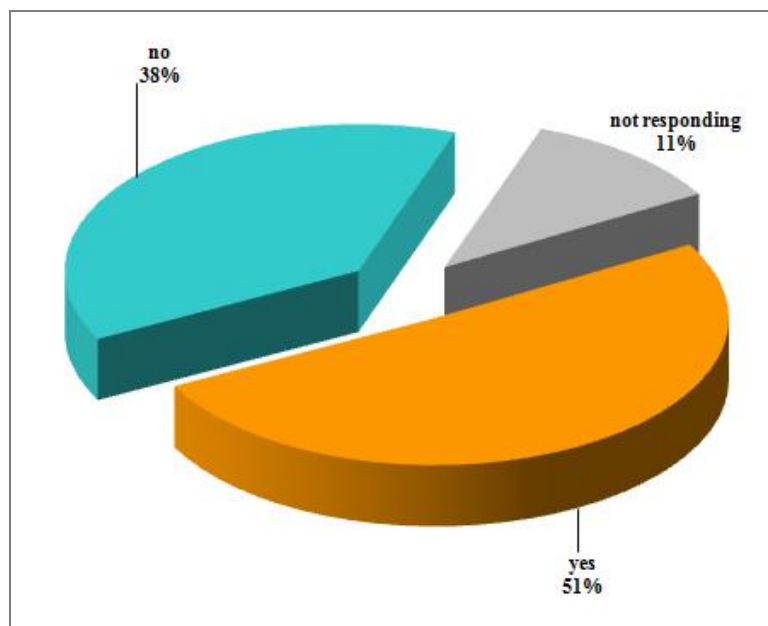
The fourth section of the questionnaire regards instead expectations of visitors and it is interesting to note that some answers provide suggestions that could improve the seduction of the Sacred Mount.

The positive response to question n. 16 (Are you interesting in the improvement or creation of new services or structures?) are about half of the 150 completed questionnaire and the main part of the visitors expressed interest in the organization of concerts. In this case respondents propose concerts of classical or religious music, type of events that we consider able to take into count the characteristic of this holy place.

Some visitors are also interested in the realization of picnic baskets with local products offered at special price. We decided to include such an option among the possible answers in order to emphasize the relevance of the history and traditions of Varallo, and in general Valsesia region. As we noted in previous paragraphs, tourists are looking for an authentic experience, a mix of religion, culture, art and tradition. This last one element can be represented by the taste of typical flavours of this territory. We interpret the appreciation by the tourists of this proposal as a positive signal of a possibility of sustain local economy.

Other answers stress the necessary of more conferences and cultural initiative at the Sacred Mount, in addition to the improvement of guided tours. Regarding the request of audio-guides, the Administrators of Reserve has provided this new service in February 2010.

Another question that we consider particularly significant is the one that asks the visitors if they are willing to pay a ticket to improve the conservation status of the Sacred Mount of Varallo (Figure 21).

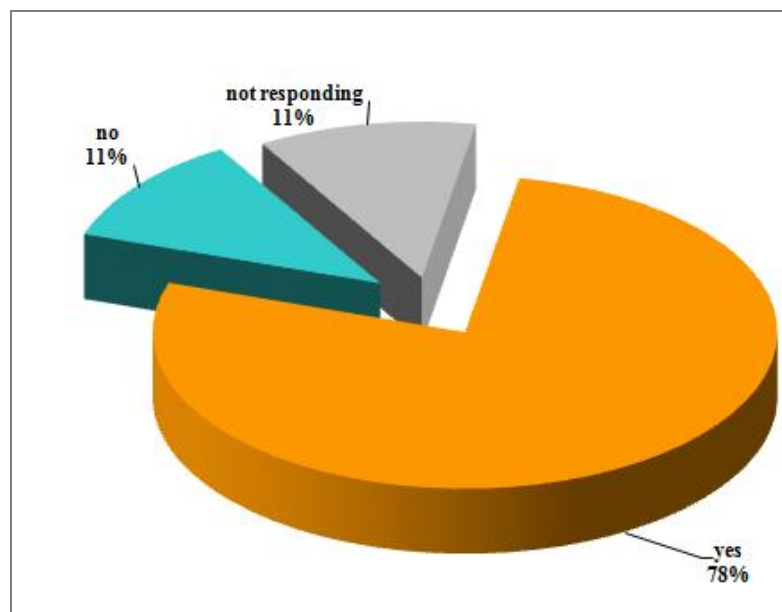


**Figure 21 – Are you willing to pay a ticket to improve the conservation status of the Sacred Mount of Varallo?**  
Source: Survey, 2009

The main part of the interviewed responded positively and the 84 percent of them declared that they would pay a ticket up to 5 € It is also to mention the 16 percent of visitors willing to spend between 5 and 10 € to ensure the maintenance of the current state of conservation. This responses are expression of a sensitivity of the tourists about the theme of preservation of cultural authenticity and environmental sustainability.

The last question (n. 20) tried to investigate the satisfaction of the tourist experience. Our aim was to identify what are tourists seduced by and if they wish to return to this holy site.

Most of the visitors consider the Sacred Mount of Varallo a seduction place and in the 78 percent of the cases they wish to return (Figure 22). They indicated various motives as the outstanding artistic value of the sculptures and paintings or the amenity of the landscape, besides specific religious reasons. Accessibility and quality of the activities of welcoming and informing are also suggested as important factors to encourage the return of the visitor.



**Figure 22 – Do you wish to return to Sacred Mount of Varallo?**  
Source: Survey, 2009

One last consideration can be drawn comparing the results of the question about the motives that attracted visitors to Sacred Mount of Varallo and the one about the reasons that would bring them back to this place. The main part of tourists visited the holy complex for the same purposes that would incentive their return. In other words, they are satisfied of the visit and this experience at the Sacred Mount of Varallo have seduced them because it allowed the individual to transcend his immediate past and present to connect with the Sacred Mysteries, whom he often feels to be unknown yet intimately a part of.



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## Appendix 1 – Sacred Mount of Varallo’s Visitor Questionnaire

<b>Sesso:</b> 1) M	2) F				
<b>Età:</b> 1) <16	2) 16-25	3) 26-35	4) 36-50	5) 51-65	6) oltre 65
<b>Residenza:</b> Comune: _____	Provincia: _____	Stato: _____			
<b>Titolo di Studio:</b>	1) licenza elementare	2) licenza media	3) diploma scuola superiore		
	4) laurea	5) altro, specificare _____			
<b>Professione:</b>	1) studente	2) professionista	3) impiegato/insegnante		
	4) commerciante	5) casalinga	6) disoccupato/a		
	7) pensionato/a	8) operaio	9) altro, specificare _____		
<b>Numero dei componenti del nucleo familiare:</b> _____					

- 1) È la prima volta che visita il Sacro Monte? 1) Sì 2) No
- 2) È un frequentatore abituale del Sacro Monte? 1) Sì 2) No  
Se sì, con che frequenza lo visita?  
1) più volte all'anno 2) una volta all'anno 3) ogni 2 anni  
4) in occasioni particolari, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) È un frequentatore abituale della Valsesia? 1) Sì 2) No  
Se sì, perché?  
1) interesse naturalistico 2) trekking 3) interesse culturale/storico  
4) interesse ricreativo 5) interesse gastronomico 6) seconda casa  
7) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Conosce altri Sacri Monti?  
Se sì, quali? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Quale mezzo ha utilizzato per raggiungere il Sacro Monte?  
1) auto/moto 2) pullman 3) treno 4) bicicletta 5) a piedi
- 6) Con chi è venuto al Sacro Monte?  
1) in compagnia dei familiari 2) in compagnia di amici 3) solo 4) in gruppo organizzato  
Se è in compagnia, da quante persone è composto il gruppo? N° \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Perché ha deciso di visitare il Sacro Monte? (max due risposte)  
1) interesse religioso 2) interesse artistico 3) interesse culturale/storico  
4) interesse ambientale 5) interesse ricreativo 6) legame affettivo con il luogo  
7) vicinanza alla località di residenza/vacanza  
8) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Come è venuto a conoscenza del Sacro Monte? (max due risposte)  
1) passaparola parenti/amici 2) riviste specializzate 3) trasmissioni televisive  
4) stampa locale 5) articolo su quotidiani 6) guide turistiche  
7) Internet 8) vicinanza alla località di residenza/vacanza
- 9) Nel caso abbia conosciuto il Sacro Monte attraverso Internet tramite quale sito/i?  
1) sito del Sacro Monte 2) sito della Rete dei Sacri Monti di Piemonte e Lombardia  
3) sito www.Santuari.it 4) risultati della ricerca con un motore (google, MSN, ecc.)  
5) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_

*Il presente questionario fa parte di una ricerca sul Turismo Religioso condotta dalle dottoresse:*

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*Stefania Mangano, Università degli Studi di Genova*

- 10) Si è documentato prima di realizzare la visita al Sacro Monte? 1) Sì 2) No  
**Se sì, attraverso:**  
 1) sito internet del/i Sacro/i Monte/i 2) internet con un motore di ricerca  
 3) materiale audio/video 4) stampa e riviste specializzate  
 5) guide turistiche 6) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) Nel caso sia un frequentatore abituale ritiene che lo stato di conservazione del Sacro Monte sia migliorato nel corso del tempo? 1) Sì 2) No  
**Se sì, specificare rispetto a quale servizio (max due risposte)**  
 1) stato di conservazione dell'offerta storico artistica 2) manutenzione e arredo dei giardini  
 3) segnaletica 4) accessibilità (parcheggi, funivia) 5) accoglienza e informazione  
 6) disponibilità di servizi di comfort dei visitatori (servizi igienici, aree pic-nic)  
 7) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 12) Di che servizi ha fruito nell'ambito della visita al Sacro Monte?  
 1) visite guidate 2) funivia 3) negozio souvenir  
 4) servizio di ristorazione 5) area pic-nic 6) servizio alberghiero  
 7) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 13) Dove ha pranzato?  
 1) ristorante a) presso il Sacro Monte b) nei dintorni, specificare dove \_\_\_\_\_  
 2) agriturismo 3) pranzo al sacco 4) a casa
- 14) Che tipo di visita ha effettuato?  
 1) escursione giornaliera  
 2) escursione nell'ambito di una vacanza in: a) Valsesia b) Piemonte c) Italia d) Estero  
 3) altro (specificare) \_\_\_\_\_
- 15) Nel caso abbia dormito in qualche località della zona, dove ha alloggiato?  
 1) albergo 2) pensione 3) agriturismo 4) istituto religioso  
 5) seconda casa 6) amici e parenti 7) bed & breakfast
- 16) Sarebbe interessato al miglioramento o alla creazione di nuovi servizi e/o infrastrutture? 1) Sì 2) No  
**Se sì, quali (max due risposte)**  
 1) conferenze/iniziative culturali 2) potenziamento visite guidate  
 3) concerti di musica classica e/o religiosa 4) accessibilità (nuovi parcheggi auto, sentieri)  
 5) audio guide 6) mappe e file per smartphone e navigatori gps  
 7) cestino pic-nic con prodotti tipici offerto a prezzo convenzionato  
 8) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_
- 17) Reputa che il Sacro Monte sia ben conservato? 1) Sì 2) No
- 18) Sarebbe disposto a pagare un biglietto di ingresso per migliorare lo stato di conservazione del Sacro Monte? 1) Sì 2) No  
**Se sì, quanto** 1) fino a 5 euro 2) da 5 a 10 euro
- 19) Come valuta nel complesso i servizi offerti dal Sacro Monte?  
 1) buoni 2) discreti 3) sufficienti 4) scarsi
- 20) Pensa di tornare al Sacro Monte? 1) Sì 2) No  
**Se sì, perché? (max 2 risposte)**  
 1) amenità del luogo 2) interesse artistico 3) interesse religioso 4) accessibilità  
 5) qualità dell'accoglienza e dell'informazione 6) altro, specificare \_\_\_\_\_

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i Although the paper is the result of a joint research, Raffaella Afferni edited paragraphs 2 and 7 and Figures 1, 10 and 11; Carla Ferrario edited paragraph 1; Stefania Mangano paragraphs 3, 4, 5 and 6.

ii Since July 2006, the Riserva counts pedestrian access to the Sacred Mount of Varallo by a “counting on foot traffic”. The monthly data collected are subjected to a calculation by the Settore Statistico della Regione Piemonte which provides for a reduction of a number of steps corresponding to the person who work or live in the Riserva.

iii Osservatorio Turistico Regione Piemonte is responsible for analyzing the tourism sector in Piemonte.

iv In 1935 the first cable car was built to connect the city with the Sacro Monte of Varallo, it was dismantled in 1974 because the carriageway was built. Since 2003 the new cable car has been working.