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## Religious Tourism and TV Series: the Case of Two Italian Papal Birthplaces

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## Religious Tourism and TV Serials: the Case of Two Italian Papal Birthplaces

### Cover Page Footnote

This paper is the result of a joint work of the two authors. In particular, Lorenzo Bagnoli wrote sections 1.1 and 2.2, and Rita Capurro wrote sections 1.2 and 2.1. Introduction and conclusions were written jointly.

## Religious Tourism and TV Serials: the Case of Two Italian Papal Birthplaces

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In this paper the authors examine two of Italy's lesser religious tourism destinations: Sotto il Monte and Concesio, small towns in northern Italy which have the distinction of being the birthplaces of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. In 2002 and 2008 respectively, two of the country's national television networks broadcast during prime time, short television serials dedicated to the two popes. Despite being very successful with the viewing public, the serials proved to have little impact in terms of tourism, as demonstrated by comprehensive tourist surveys and in-depth conversations with the parties concerned. The aim of the present research is to ascertain, using a visual geographical research approach, whether the reasons for this can be identified, taking account of the pull factors of place, personality and performance referred to by Macionis in 2004. In the first part of the study the authors put forward a definition of film-induced religious tourism based on the commonly agreed definitions of film-induced tourism and religious tourism, and outline the unique characteristics of Italy's religious-themed television productions. In the second part the two case studies are analysed, with an outline of the geographical features of the locations and biographical aspects of the two men, and an assessment of the degree of success in terms of tourism achieved by their home towns, with particular reference to the years following the screening of the TV serials.

**Key Words:** film-induced tourism, John XXIII, Paul VI, Sotto il Monte, Concesio.

*"Ever dear to me, my nest in Sotto il Monte"*  
(John XXIII)  
*"Our ancient Concesio, unforgettable"*  
(Paul VI)

### Introduction.

This paper examines the cases of Sotto il Monte and Concesio, birthplaces of Pope John XXIII (1959-1963) and Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) respectively, minor destinations of religious tourism in Italy, each the subject of short television serials.

While Sotto il Monte and Concesio are very similar from many points of view, they present just as many differences. Both places are recent religious tourism

destinations; both are situated in the administrative and ecclesiastical region of Lombardy, in northern Italy, in the proximity of major outbound tourism areas; they are both associated with men from more or less the same generation who, before becoming Pontiff, faced many similar experiences and for whom the process of canonisation is currently underway; and in each case the TV production was of comparable length, filmed in the same decade in "fake" locations. On the other hand, while Concesio is no longer the country village it was half a century ago, Sotto il Monte has retained its rural character; Pope John had already triggered a flow of pilgrims to his birthplace while he was still alive, while this did not happen at all for Pope Paul; the serial dedicated to John XXIII achieved record ratings as the most popular ever mini-serial watched by Italian viewers, with the second episode obtaining a share of

**Figure 1: Audience data for the Italian television serial *Papa Giovanni-Joannes XXIII***

Episode	Date of Broadcast	Number of viewers	Share
1	April 21st, 2002	11,680,000	43.54%
2	April 22nd, 2002	14,680,000	51.44%

Source: OFI-Osservatorio della Fiction Italiana, Italian TV drama observatory

no less than 51.44%, while the one dedicated to Paul VI achieved much more modest results, with a maximum share of 21.47% for the first episode (See Figure 1 & Figure 2).

In neither case, however, as we will see more clearly further on, has the simple fact of having been watched by millions of viewers been enough to produce positive effects on these locations in terms of tourist development.

In the first part of the study film-induced religious tourism is defined following the generally agreed definitions of film-induced tourism and religious tourism, and the unique features of Italy's religious-themed television productions are outlined. Film-induced tourism is an increasingly significant global phenomenon (Beeton, 2005; Roesch, 2009), and a number of cases comprising religious aspects have attracted so many visitors interested in spiritual matters that they may reasonably be referred to as film-induced religious tourism. The most famous and emblematic case in point is the surge in popularity enjoyed by the town of Matera, in southern Italy, after it was used as the setting for Mel Gibson's celebrated movie, *The Passion*, filmed in 2004 (Becheri, 2009).

A notable Italian phenomenon of the last twenty years, responsible for launching and intensifying tourism to tourist destinations, is the country's sizeable production not of movies but TV serials. A case in point is the celebrated long-running *Inspector Montalbano* series – watched by viewers in many different countries, both in the original version via satellite and digital transmission systems, as well as subtitled and/or dubbed editions on national TV networks or on DVD – which, since it was first aired in 1999, has drawn large crowds of tourists to its Sicilian setting (Rocca, 2013).

Amongst the most successful TV productions of the last few decades, however, by far the most popular have been the short serials narrating the lives of important, well-loved figures in the Catholic Church, especially the popes. They are regarded by Catholics throughout the world – particularly by the prevalently Catholic Italians (around 85% of the population) – as having a fundamental role in their lives as authoritative universal spiritual guides and are revered, respected and venerated, even after their deaths and the election of their successors.

The second part of the research analyses the two case studies, identifying the geographical and biographical factors responsible for the flow of tourists to the home towns of the two popes, and looks at the success in terms of religious tourism to the sites, with particular focus on more recent years. A two-phase approach has been adopted: the first phase involves a tourism survey, on both the supply and demand sides, and strategic conversations with the key stakeholders in the territory. The second phase uses visual geographical research to analyse the TV serials, especially regarding the scenes set in the popes' birthplaces (Rose, 2007).

The final aim of the research is to ascertain whether it is possible to pinpoint the reasons for the failure of such popular TV serials to draw visitors to the sites. In particular, going back to Macionis's pull factors (2004), the authors assess whether, and to what extent, they are present in the two TV productions in question and whether the lack of tourist success may be attributed to these factors having been neglected in the making of the serials.

**Figure 2: Audience data for the Italian television serial *Paolo VI***

Episode	Date of Broadcast	Number of viewers	Share
1	November 30th, 2008	5,260,000	21.47%
2	December 1st, 2008	5,633,000	19.58%

Source: OFI-Osservatorio della Fiction Italiana, Italian TV drama observatory

## Religion, Television and Tourism.

### *Film-induced religious tourism.*

For many years now the public's interest in places that have been, or still are, the setting for films or television series has been growing significantly. So-called "film-induced tourism" (which includes both movie-induced tourism and TV-induced tourism) is a specific manifestation of this interest, arising when movie goers or TV viewers are shown images of places that appeal to their imagination or attract them sufficiently to arouse their desire to see for themselves the areas that have so fascinated them on the screen (dell'Agnese and Rondinone, 2011; Nicosia, 2012). Macionis (2004) has explored the question of what motivates tourists to visit sites featured in the media and has identified three "pull factors" that determine the choices of such tourists. These factors are *place* (attributes of the location, landscapes, scenery), *personality* (characters, cast, presence of stars or celebrities) and *performance* (plot, genre and theme). In Italy film-induced tourism is well developed and, while it used to be considered a niche phenomenon, it has subsequently evolved into an attractive tourist opportunity from the point of view of both supply and demand (Martini, 2005).

Another very interesting tourist phenomenon is that of religious, or faith, tourism. Once considered as simply pilgrimage, over the course of the years it has grown considerably, so much so that it has been picked up on and developed by the tourism sector (Galliano, 2002; Mazza, 2007). Although there are probably several reasons prompting tourists to undertake this form of travel, they boil down to two principal categories: those driven exclusively by spiritual reasons and those who are also motivated by cultural interest (Shackley, 2001). In Italy religious tourism is a highly developed phenomenon, involving around 35 million people annually (source: CEI-Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, Italian Episcopal Conference).

Film-induced tourism and religious tourism are frequently found to be interlinked, occurring when a TV or cinematic production with religious content strikes the viewing public's imagination to such an extent that they are inspired to visit the sacred sites presented on the screen. Throughout its history, the cinema has regularly produced works on a religious theme (examples include *The Song of Bernadette* in 1943; *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fatima* in 1952; *A Man Named John*, about Pope John XXIII, in 1965; *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, about Saint Francis of Assisi, in 1972; *Jesus of Nazareth* in 1977; *The Passion of the Christ* in 2004, and so forth), and

visitors' expectations of the locations are normally very high.

After a period of stagnation in the 1980s which saw an abundance of foreign-made TV dramatisations and movies, the production of religious films in Italy, particularly from the mid 1990s onwards, has been undergoing a steady revival in both the cinema and television. Since the turn of the century, the quantity of Italian-made films and television dramas has reached the levels of other European countries, and the production of religious TV dramatisations has remained correspondingly high. In this study, therefore, we will be analysing the phenomenon that can justly be defined as film-induced religious tourism.

With this form of tourism it should be emphasised that the emotive component is fundamental for the television viewer. The more a serial succeeds in emotionally engaging people, the more likely they are to decide to make the journey to see for themselves the sacred sites depicted on the screen, or where filming took place, if this took place elsewhere. It is thus the job of the producer of a religious-themed TV drama or movie to concentrate on assuring the high quality of the story and facts recounted; to ensure the saints are represented in such a way that they retain or acquire appeal and charisma in the eyes of the public; and, finally, to make certain that the images of the sacred sites shown on-screen live up to the expectations of the viewers.

While on the one hand film-induced religious tourism may prove to be a "meaningful" experience for the general public (MacIntosh and Mansfeld, 2006; Trono, 2009), it also raises some interesting issues of authenticity and "staging" (MacCannell, 1999).

### *Religious television serials in Italy.*

The so-called mini-serial is a typically Italian television product developed in the mid 1990s generally narrating a single story concentrated into just two episodes. The leading Italian producers of mini-serials have made more than 500 films in under 25 years, over 100 of which are biographies of well-known figures from recent history in different fields: from sport to show business, from political activism to the lives of saints (Perugini, 2011; Simonelli, 2009).

A glance through the viewer ratings of the most successful mini-serials from 1996 to the present day reveals that amongst the top fifteen titles there are no fewer than nine religious-themed dramatisations, with the top three biographies of popular Italian religious



figures. The most widely-watched mini-serial of all time in Italy is *Papa Giovanni-Joannes XXIII*, televised in 2002, followed by *Padre Pio. Tra cielo e terra* shown in 2000, and *Karol: A Man Who Became Pope*, broadcast in 2005 (source: OFI).

The vogue of the religious mini-serial has enjoyed considerable success since 1993 with the debut of a long series dedicated to major figures or important events from the Old and New Testaments. The series began with *Genesis* and *Abraham* in 1993, with the last episode, *Mary of Nazareth*, broadcast in 2012. This series of religious dramatisations was the brainchild of the production company Lux Vide which set out to create quality products for the Italian public but with international distribution also in mind. In addition to this Bible project, the company's products include another four series of single-episode TV movies and two-episode mini-series of almost exclusively religious subject matter: *Storie di Santi*, *Amici di Gesù*, *Imperium* and *XX Secolo*.

As far as the Bible stories are concerned, their great popularity was probably due in large part to the proximity of the Jubilee events of the year 2000 (Cappello, 2003), but the genre which has aroused most interest is undoubtedly the one dealing with prominent twentieth century figures (in addition to the extraordinarily successful titles already listed, others include *Don Milani il priore di Barbiana*, produced in 1997; *Maria Goretti*, in 2003; *Don Zeno l'uomo di Nomadelfia*, in 2008, and many more). These dramatisations, along with the biographies of other important figures from Italian history, do not portray strange, unknown worlds but recount reassuring stories already familiar to some extent to the public, set in easily recognisable places associated in the collective imagination with a sense of cultural and religious identity (Buonanno, 2004).

The success of these serials is thus due first and foremost to the inclusion of elements of narrative and descriptive authenticity. The main criticisms have in fact been directed at scenes where the fictionalised parts have confused or muddled facts, or where characters have been portrayed in such a way that the complexities of their personalities fail to emerge (Macionis and O'Connor, 2011). A prime example of this is the mini-serial *Pope Luciani: the Smile of God* produced in 2006, which was enormously popular with the viewing public – recording in fact an average of 9.5 million viewers and a 35% share – nonetheless, it received a fair amount of criticism. For one thing, the scenes of the pope's childhood were not filmed in the Dolomite Agordine mountains where Albino Luciani

grew up but in an unspecified mountain location with very different geomorphological features from those of the Dolomites. Furthermore, the story presented a stereotypical image of the pope as naive rather than gentle, and failed to bring out the depth of character and shrewdness of this historic figure.

Viewers without a doubt appreciate the resemblance of actors to the characters they portray on screen: the main characters in religious TV dramatisations are generally well known to the public through their appearance and style of communication, so using an actor with very different features to play the part of a well-known real-life figure would not be advisable. To give an example, the TV drama *Karol: A Man Who Became Pope*, produced in 2005, and its sequel *Karol: The Pope, The Man* of the same year, were hugely successful thanks in some degree to the strong resemblance between John Paul II and the young Polish actor, Piotr Adamczyk, who took the lead role in both productions.

On this subject, it is worth noting how, in the case of particularly popular figures, Italy's two leading television organisations, the state-owned RAI and privately-owned Mediaset, have on more than one occasion produced or broadcast within a short space of time from each other dramatisations dedicated to the same person. This happened in the case of Pope John Paul II when the RAI, in the same year that Mediaset produced *Karol* (2005), dubbed into Italian and broadcast the US-produced mini-serial *Pope John Paul II*. Other examples concern Padre Pio, in 2000, Mediaset preceded the RAI by seven months with its mini-serial dedicated to the saint, and in 2002, it was the turn of the RAI to beat Mediaset, managing to broadcast its own mini-serial on blessed John XXIII a year before that of its rival network.

## The Case-studies.

### *Sotto il Monte.*

**The territory** – Sotto il Monte is a tiny *comune* (municipality) measuring 5 square kilometres in the geographical-cultural region known as Isola Bergamasca (taking its name from the nearby city of Bergamo), situated on the gentle slopes of Monte Canto, with an elevation of 305 metres. In February 2013 the population numbered 4,383, with foreign immigrants, mostly from Morocco and Senegal, accounting for less than 5% of the total. Residents are mainly employed in the service sector, but there are still numerous workers employed in industry, mainly within the area of Isola Bergamasca (source: census and municipal authority figures). The oldest written

records relating to Sotto il Monte, dating back to the eleventh century, show its history to be that of an agricultural village left untouched by major events. It wasn't until the accession to the Pontificate of Angelo Roncalli, a cardinal born in Sotto il Monte, taking the name John XXIII, that the small village found fame, and actually changed its name to "Sotto il Monte Giovanni XXIII".

**Angelo Roncalli** – Born on 25 November 1881, after a childhood marked by poverty in his home village, Angelo Roncalli entered the seminary in Bergamo, thanks to the economic support of his paternal uncle. He continued his theological studies in Rome and, after being ordained as a priest in Rome in 1904, he taught Church History at the Bergamo seminary, focusing amongst other things on the life and works of Saint Charles Borromeo, a major driving force in the Reformation of the Catholic Church following the Council of Trent. During World War I Roncalli served as medical assistant in the Italian army and subsequently military chaplain. Following that, now a bishop, he began a long diplomatic career as papal envoy to Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece and, finally, France where he had to deal with the thorny issue of the retirement of cardinals and bishops compromised by their collaboration with the Vichy regime. Angelo Roncalli was nominated patriarch of Venice in 1953 and retained the role until 28 October 1958, the day of his election as sovereign pontiff.

**Pope John XXIII** – His pontificate was characterised by the new style of communication he brought to the role which revealed his empathy with the faithful; by the close attention he paid to international affairs as a result of his long diplomatic experience; and, above all, by the Second Vatican Council which he announced in 1958 and opened in 1962, just a few months before his death on 3 June 1963. During the Council, John XXIII pursued a policy of no direct intervention on the Council Fathers but nevertheless had an undeniable impact on it, starting with his decision to consistently support the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which he himself had founded in 1960, and his invitation to engage in work aimed at conciliation with other Christian faith communities (O'Malley, 2010).

**His success** – Right from the moment of his election Pope John proved enormously popular. After the pontificate of Pius XII – who had given the impression of being distant from the people, as a person and in his gestures, words and actions, almost as though he belonged to another human dimension – John XXIII conveyed human warmth, with an approach and style

of communication that were familiar and comprehensible, representing a Church that was close to the people, good, patient and merciful. Pope John's attachment to his peasant origins and strong affection for his family was apparent and had the immediate effect of arousing the interest of the faithful in the place situated near Bergamo that had produced such an endearing and saintly man. It was not long before John XXIII became affectionately known as "the Good Pope" and during his years as pontiff Sotto il Monte became a catalyst for the interest of the faithful, keen to experience the soothing rural atmosphere, ancestral traditions, peasant culture and domestic devotion evoked by the pope in his speeches.

**Religious tourism** – Pope John, who so loved his native village, in a highly significant gesture left the home of his birth to the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (*Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere*, or *PIME*) which built a seminary for the training of young missionaries on the land adjacent to the house. This act reflects the personal sentiment of a pope who, though he had spent a large part of his life far from home, continued to draw strength from his roots to help perform his duties. The *PIME* left the character and appearance of the pope's humble childhood house intact, and it became a place of commemoration and pilgrimage. Being easy to reach from all over northern Italy, Sotto il Monte rapidly became a popular destination with pilgrims, receiving over a thousand visitors on days of particularly high flow.

There are several significant sites associated with Pope John to visit in the village of Sotto il Monte. The principal ones, in addition to the house where he was born, are: the church of Santa Maria where Angelo Roncalli was baptised; the Cascina Colombara farmhouse where the family later lived, and the Ca' Maitino residence where he used to spend his summer holidays before becoming pope. In the latter, his personal secretary created a museum in 1988 containing numerous mementos and items belonging to or used by the pope, including the pontiff's deathbed and the altar from his private chapel.

Following the pope's death, the village began to shape its image around the figure of John XXIII, incorporating the pope's insignia into the coat of arms of the comune, making improvements to the various sites associated with him, and welcoming the numerous pilgrims who constantly flocked to the village, whether individually or in organised groups. Tourist accommodation capacity in the village has not however changed greatly, with just one or two boarding houses in the neighbourhood over the last ten

**Figure 3: The actual house where Pope John XXIII was born (left, photo by R. Capurro) and in the television serial (right)**



or so years, and a variation in bed capacity of between six and eight. With such small numbers, statistics for guest arrivals and stays are not available but are not in any case significant (source: SIS.EL. portal). These figures clearly reflect the form of pilgrimages made to Pope John's birthplace, generally concentrated in one-day visits or combined with a trip to other locations in the Bergamo area. Nonetheless, the twenty or so restaurants and pizzerias in the neighbourhood plus numerous bars and souvenir shops are indicative of the strong sense of hospitality that the local inhabitants feel towards the 100,000 or more visitors who come to the village every year. In 2000, year of the Jubilee and the beatification of John XXIII on 3 September in Rome, the number of pilgrims visiting Sotto il Monte was estimated to be around half a million (source: Casa del Pellegrino) and the same number is expected again for 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of his death, and in 2014, the year of his canonisation, due to take place on 27 April.

**Recent years** – The fiftieth anniversary in 2013 of Pope John's death represents a major challenge for the renewal of Sotto il Monte's tourist facilities. For the occasion, the Diocese of Bergamo has promoted the creation of an organisation coordinated by the local parish to optimise and encourage pilgrimage activities in the various sites associated with John XXIII, and exchange ideas and opinions with other organisations in the Bergamo area. One result of this spirit of collaboration is the creation of the *Casa del Pellegrino* (house of the pilgrim) which acts as a sort of visitor centre for pilgrims arriving at Sotto il Monte, welcoming groups and providing useful information and material to help them make the most of their visit (Boiocchi, 2013). The PIME has also taken the opportunity of this important anniversary to launch a highly innovative project, setting up a multimedia

exhibition centre called "Papa J23" in the building erected beside Pope John's childhood home. This will enable the younger generations who have no direct memory of him to get to know John XXIII, his messages, teachings and works (Capurro, forthcoming).

**The TV serial** – The high expectations for the events related to the year of Pope John reflect an interest in him that has never faded, a level of enthusiasm confirmed by the huge popularity of the two-part TV mini-serial, *Papa Giovanni-Joannes XIII*, broadcast on 21 and 22 April 2002 and watched by around thirteen million viewers, registering a total average share of approximately 47% (source: OFI). In its depiction of the Pontiff's childhood the dramatisation includes six minutes (from 0h04'04" to 0h10'04") of scenes shot in the countryside around Bergamo, although it is immediately apparent that they were not actually filmed in Sotto il Monte itself. Despite this, particular details of the courtyard of his childhood home (the *place* factor that Macionis cites), the poverty of the peasant families at the turn of the twentieth century (Macionis's *performance* factor), and the loving relationship between the young Angelo Roncalli and his family (*personality*) conjure up reality very effectively. Although they did not use the family's original house for filming but a building with balconies and outside staircases very similar to those found at Pope John's actual home, this demonstrates the producers' awareness that his real house was well-known to many people and that using one with similar features would confer a greater sense of authenticity to the whole movie.

Despite the fact that Macionis' pull factors are all present in the television dramatisation, it is nonetheless difficult to identify and assess their impact on tourism



in Sotto il Monte, because, as Malvasi has observed (2003), it was aired not long after the beatification of the Good Pope and shortly before the fortieth anniversary of his death, as well as coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In addition, the level of local tourism at the time of broadcast already seemed incapable of further expansion, having reached what appeared to be its maximum potential several years earlier.

### **Concesio.**

**The territory** – Concesio is a small comune measuring 19 square kilometres in the pre-Alps near Brescia, with an elevation of 218 metres. On 31 January 2013 its population stood at 15,092 – including 15% foreign immigrants, mostly from Albania and Pakistan – with residents mainly employed in industry and the service sector, not only in the town of Concesio itself but also in the nearby provincial capital of Brescia, just 9 kilometres away, and in the surrounding areas. Forestry, the traditional economic activity of the town – whose name by the way is said to originate from a term related to coppicing – and agriculture are by contrast becoming increasingly less common (source: census and local authority figures). Dating back to Roman times, the history of Concesio was much like that of any other northern Italian town until 21 July 1963, when Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, born in Concesio on 26 September 1897, was elected as successor to Pope John XXIII, taking the name of Paul VI.

**Giovanni Battista Montini** – Born in the country residence of his family, who normally lived in Brescia, Giovanni Battista breathed an air of profound Christian faith from a very early age: his father was a representative of a Catholic movement of Brescia and from 1919 to 1926 was a member of parliament for the *Partito Popolare*, an important Italian Catholic group, while his mother was active in the women's section of the *Azione Cattolica* movement. Ordained as a priest at the age of 23, Montini moved to Rome to complete his education at university. In 1924 he was invited to join the Secretariat of State of the Holy See and the following year was appointed ecclesiastic assistant of the Italian Catholic University Federation. These were difficult years for Italian Catholics because no sooner had they taken up active roles in the political life of the country (following the definitive abolition in 1919 of the *non expedit* decree to abstain from elections), than they were again threatened, this time by the steady consolidation of the totalitarian policies of Mussolini, who had become prime minister in 1922 (Veneruso, 1987). In 1954 Pope Pius XII appointed him

Archbishop of Milan. Much has been made of a suggestion that this appointment may have been made in order to remove him from Rome, but the nine years that Montini spent in Milan up until his election as pontiff afforded him an extraordinary wealth of experience in pastoral care, since these were years that saw Italy undergoing not only a period of intense economic growth but also one of profound social turmoil. The archbishop carried on his pastoral duties incessantly, but they were marked by both success and failure, attracting applause and criticism alternately, with Montini demonstrating both openness and at other times insularity (Acerbi, 1997). Immediately after his election, the new Pope John XXIII appointed him cardinal and, as soon as he had announced the Second Vatican Council, secured Montini's full involvement in the work of the Council.

**Pope Paul VI** – His pontificate differed right from the start from that of his predecessor, John XXIII, in a number of significant ways. These included the decision to resume the Second Vatican Council (interrupted by Pope John's death) and to close it in 1965; the numerous overseas trips he made to countries in different continents (the Holy Land, India, the United Nations, Fatima, Turkey, Switzerland, Uganda, the Far East...); his determination to reach out to other Christian faith communities; the abolition of the Vatican court and armed papal guards; his decision to do away with the use of the papal tiara; the publication of numerous encyclicals (the most important and talked-about including *Populorum progressio*, *Humanae vitae*, *Octogesima adveniens*); his personal, direct efforts to oppose Italian terrorism; his firm support for the revival of sacred art by contemporary artists, and much else. As with his period in Milan, the achievements of his pontificate are difficult to assess both for his contemporaries and for modern historians: Paul VI comes across as a man of contradictions, often tormented, sometimes inconclusive, possibly misunderstood.

**His success** – What is sure is that the figure of Pope Paul is greatly diminished by comparisons with his predecessor and (second) successor, the hugely popular John XXIII and John Paul II. And yet, after his death on 6 August 1978 at Castelgandolfo, his spiritual legacy was instantly acknowledged by his successors John Paul I and John Paul II in their choice of papal name, and by Pope Benedict XVI who declared him venerable on 20 December 2012. It remains to be seen whether Pope Francis will consider him with the same high regard, maybe beatifying him as happened for John XXIII and John Paul II, both due to be canonised on 27 April 2014.

**Religious tourism** – For many years Concesio saw only a very limited measure of success in terms of tourism. Although there are several reasons for this, one factor that has undoubtedly played a key role is the fact that despite being born in Concesio, Paul VI actually lived for the most part in the nearby city of Brescia. Another aspect is the complex personality of Pope Paul which fails to arouse great fervour in the modern religious tourist, as well as the “competition” posed by the other popes of the second half of the twentieth century.

The flow of tourists to Concesio has therefore always been somewhat limited and, above all, restricted to brief visits of just a few hours, generally with no overnight stay. Accommodation facilities are few, just four establishments in 2004 with a total of 33 beds, rising to five establishments in 2010 providing a total of 51 beds. The number of local residents employed in the hospitality sector (lodging and catering) rose from 107 in 1991 to 123 in 2001. The tourists intending to overnight in Concesio are really insignificant comparing with those visiting the town in one day, but they are increasing. Guest arrivals rose from eight in 2006 to 59 in 2008, reaching 65 in 2010, while total overnight stays increased from 19 nights in 2006 to 744 in 2009, falling back to 465 in 2010 (source: SIS.EL, portal). The reason for the peak being the change in average length of overnight stays – 2.4 nights in 2006, 12.6 in 2009, and 7.1 in 2010 – is explained by the saturation of Concesio’s bed capacity following the inauguration of the new site of the *Istituto Paolo VI-Centro internazionale di studi e di documentazione*, opened by Pope Benedict XVI on 8 November 2009.

The *Istituto Paolo VI*, founded 30 years earlier by the *Opera per l'Educazione Cristiana di Brescia* – a foundation dedicated to Christian worship and education, established by church law in 1977 and subsequently by civil law in 1978 – had until then been located in the provincial capital of Brescia. But following his cousin’s donation to the foundation of the house where the pope was born and the large area of land behind it, it was decided to construct a new building on the land that had previously belonged to the Montini family. Today the building comprises, in addition to offices, an archive containing approximately 90,000 documents, a library housing around 34,000 volumes, a 254-seat auditorium, exhibition areas where 276 works from the Paul VI contemporary art collection are on show, and the Pontiff’s birthplace itself which may be visited under the guidance of the Don Bosco Salesian nuns.

**Recent years** – Since 2009 the very specialised institute’s initiatives have attracted a modest number of visitors, that is an average of 2,500 to 3,000 per year, coming from dioceses, congregations, parishes and *oratori* (church clubs for children), mostly from northern Italy. Visitors do not generally stay overnight in Concesio but will typically have lunch there in a restaurant or, more frequently, bring a packed lunch to eat in the “pilgrim’s tent”, erected for this purpose by the parish authorities (source: *Istituto Paolo VI*). Visitor figures for the years preceding 2009 are difficult to get hold of since arrivals were not registered in any way – not even Paul VI’s home was open to the public – but judging by local inhabitants’ reports, they would seem to have been mostly sporadic, fleeting visits by small parties, usually religious groups.

**Fig. 4: The actual house where Pope Paul VI was born (left, photo by L. Bagnoli) and in the television serial (right)**



**The TV serial** – Not even the TV dramatisation *Paolo VI*, broadcast in the prime-time evening slot on 30 November and 1 December 2008 and watched by around 5 million viewers with a total share of around 20% (source: OFI), had a significant impact on Concesio. Judging by the sequence set in Concesio, lasting around eight minutes (from 0h25'03" to 0h33'04"), it would appear that the producers paid heed to Macionis' pull factors – with the critical exclusion of *place*. In fact, as far as *performance* is concerned, these scenes depict the usual stereotype – ever popular with modern-day tourists too – of the countryside as an environment where problems and difficulties melt away. In addition, in this mini-serial the intention was to present a new *personality* of Paul VI – as “human, intellectual, solitary”, as director Fabrizio Costa puts it in a backstage interview (0'42"). The affectionate dialogues with his parents and with a widowed farm-worker effectively portray Pope Paul under a new light. However, as regards the *place* factor, not only were the relevant scenes not filmed at Paul VI's real home, but – unlike the case of John XXIII – they were shot at a *cascina* (farmhouse) whose architectural style is completely different from that of the typical Brescian *cascina*, thereby running the risk of provoking the disappointment of potential film-induced tourists.

It is premature to assess whether religious tourism and pilgrimages to Concesio will increase over the coming years, since the scarcity of accommodation, the highly intellectual objectives of the *Istituto Paolo VI*, the as yet incomplete beatification process of the pontiff, and the still insufficiently popular image of Paul VI amongst believers are all factors that appear to represent more of an obstacle than an advantage to the small town. One encouraging figure, however, is the considerable increase in the demand for holy images of the pope received by the *Istituto* coming from numerous countries, in particular Argentina where he is greatly venerated – as the promotion of worship is not one of its goals, however, the institute naturally forwards these requests to the postulator leading Paul VI's beatification cause.

## Conclusions and Recommendations.

What emerges from the two case studies is that, despite their success with Italian TV audiences, the short serials dedicated to John XXIII and Paul VI have had no more than a marginal impact on tourism in the locations in which they are set. In the case of Sotto il Monte, this could be due to the fact that the village already enjoyed a consolidated tradition of religious tourism and so the serial merely contributed to maintaining its already considerable popularity with tourists. As regards Concesio, there are compelling grounds for concluding that this was a missed opportunity since religious tourism continues to be very weak at the birthplace of Pope Paul.

One explanation for the failure of the serial to attract tourists could be the producers' decision not to use the real place and its surroundings as the geographical setting for the dramatisation with, for instance, the eight-minute outdoor sequences of the young Giovanni Battista Montini supposedly in his native town actually shot in the countryside around Viterbo, in central Italy.

In conclusion, for a TV serial to trigger a substantial flow of film-induced tourists, even the inclusion of the *place* pull factor is not enough. To attain results in terms of tourism it is necessary to draw on high levels of financial, organisational and human resources –



towards which Concesio has, so far at least, shown a certain reluctance or indeed indifference. It is therefore to be hoped that, in the event of further serials on the life of religious personalities being made, the same mistakes will not be repeated. The local authorities need to be ready to draw up comprehensive plans for developing local tourism, comprising relevant marketing and tourist management initiatives to complement the promotional effects of television.

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