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## The Pilgrimage to The San Nicola Shrine in Bari and its Impact

Katia Rizzello

*University of Salento*, [katia.rizzello@unisalento.it](mailto:katia.rizzello@unisalento.it)

Anna Trono

*University of Salento*, [anna.trono@unisalento.it](mailto:anna.trono@unisalento.it)

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# The Pilgrimage to The San Nicola Shrine in Bari and its Impact

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## **Katia Rizzello (Dr)**

Department of Cultural Heritage University of Salento. Italy.  
katia.rizzello@unisalento.it

## **Anna Trono (Prof)**

Department of Cultural Heritage University of Salento. Italy.  
anna.trono@unisalento.it

Pilgrimage is defined as a journey to the Holy but more specifically as an inner journey to one's deepest religious feelings. This type of journey has assumed new forms and types that bring it closer to modern tourism in general, though it maintains its distinctive characteristics, which will be the object of this paper. These changes in the nature of pilgrimage, which in part reflect the parallel socio-cultural transformation of the average visitor, have brought about a major reorganisation of the places involved and have had a significant socio-economic impact on the territories involved. The concentration of visitors and in some cases the presence of various categories of visit have led to structural changes in holy places and their surroundings. These changes, which arise from the need to meet the requirements of travellers as consumers, in turn have social and environmental impacts on the surrounding area that are similar to those caused by mass tourism. The most evident types of impact are structural, resulting from the creation or expansion of hotel and catering infrastructure and the start-up of new businesses such as travel agencies, specialised tour operators, shops selling religious souvenirs and establishments providing entertainment. All this alters the physiognomy and the layout of the towns where the religious sites are located, in some cases completely transforming the economy of the location and the use of land. The aim of this research is to study pilgrimage flows associated with the cult of Saint Nicholas (San Nicola) in Bari, specifically concerning the pilgrimage's main characteristics and the most significant impacts on the district.

The study follows a mixed approach that includes participant observation, use of archival documents and empirical evaluation of the material landscape and observed practices.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Key Words:** pilgrimage, religious tourism, regional impact, Italy.

## **Introduction**

The rapid transformation of modern society has also entailed radical developments in the practice of pilgrimage. Despite maintaining its distinctive religious characteristics concerning visits to holy places and the experience of pilgrimage itself (Belhassen et al, 2008), pilgrimage is now affected by new forms of motivation linked to the search for authenticity, spirituality and cultural enrichment, giving rise to new forms of tourism (cultural tourism, slow tourism, etc.) that provide an alternative to the traditional model.

These changes, which partly reflect the parallel socio-cultural transformation of the average visitor, have resulted in a profound reorganization of the places involved, with socio-economic and environmental consequences. While conserving their spiritual meaning, the sites of religious interest seek to adapt to the needs of the new visitors by acquiring infrastructure and transport facilities (car-parks, low-cost flights, coach companies, etc.), catering and accommodation establishments for pilgrims/tourists, tourist services (travel agencies, specialised tour operators) and commercial activities (sale of religious souvenirs and other local products from the food, agricultural and craft sectors). There is also growth in

complementary cultural activities (religious concerts, festivals, exhibitions), which generate interest in consolidating and strengthening the image of the religious and cultural site. The consequences of these changes go way beyond the purely religious aspect: they diversify the flow of tourist demand, create new employment, increase the income of the local population, and produce regional development, as shown by analysis of the socio-economic effects of the religious music festival held in Santiago de Compostela (Herrero, Sanz and Devesa, 2009).

The literature on the socio-economic impacts of religious tourism on the host community and the opportunities for regional development generated by tourism in holy places is limited (Trono, 2012). Of interest is the first study conducted by McKevitt in 1991 on the socio-economic effects of pilgrimage on the sanctuary of San Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo in Puglia, as are the more recent papers by Gray and Winton (2009), who consider the impacts of visits to the Shrine of 'Our Lady' at Penrhys in the Rhondda valleys of post-industrial south Wales, by Brayley (2009), who stresses the importance of 'Latter-Day Saint sacred sites in and near Palmyra, New York [...] to the local community and to members of the church that manages them' (p. 169) and by Ulloa and Ruiz (2010), who analyse the economic impact of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

After a brief analysis of the new physiognomy of the pilgrim, introducing an essentially spiritual form of tourism, this study analyses the origins, nature and reach of flows linked to the cult of San Nicola (St Nicholas) in Bari in Puglia, considering the city's recent socio-economic dynamics and the limited socio-economic impact that the pilgrimage to the shrine of San Nicola has had on the city's development.

In order to delineate precisely the potential impact of these flows on the socio-economic fabric of the city of Bari, the following study was conducted in accordance with a qualitative approach based on the compilation of questionnaires by a sample of Orthodox visitors to the Orthodox church of St Nicholas in Bari. The questionnaires were in Russian so as to allow the visitors to compile them unaided. The research also made use of specific interviews conducted by researchers with key stakeholders, including leading members of the Orthodox and Catholic churches, traders and public administrators of Puglia Regional Administration and the city of Bari.<sup>[2]</sup>

## From Pilgrimage to Spiritual Tourism

The original spirit of Christian pilgrimage, a significant component of medieval culture, has changed profoundly. Towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century it was an important practice in the religious life of the epoch and almost seemed to have acquired the dimensions of a 'mass' phenomenon. The journey was justified by reasons of faith and was characterised by its ascetic and penitential components and the pervasive sentiment of anxiety that animated the pilgrim. By making himself or herself a *viator*, pilgrimage was seen as both a moment and a condition of expiation, which, since it was 'imposed', also had the character of a punishment (Vantaggiato, 2012). With the start of the process of secularisation of European culture, journeys towards places of faith took on – and still have – a multitude of forms. They are now imbued with motives of spiritual interest and of self-discovery, but also of a cultural and environmental nature, combining physical activity with an interest in identity, with reference to the historical, social and economic heritage of the places visited (Berti, 2012; Rizzo, Robiglio and Trono, 2012; Rizzo and Trono, 2012).

Although it is discussed, the figure of the ancient *viator* no longer exists, because, as Max Weber (1949) pointed out, the definition of ideal types, such as the medieval "pilgrim", refers to clearly defined historic moments and societies and is not easily adaptable to different epochs. It is therefore futile and anachronistic to associate the modern with the ancient pilgrim. Not only has the meaning attributed to the term changed over the years, but so also is the historical and environmental context of the journey (Olsen, 2010).

This does not mean that the contemporary model lacks any analogy with the ancient wayfarer, in whom the presence of spiritual values is still explicit. The 'forms of mobility', such as the preference for 'travelling on

- 2 Special interviews were conducted with representatives of the Russian community and the Russian church, the Dominican fathers, Puglia Regional Administration, retailers in the old town of Bari and the Bari Port Authority. With the help of a young Russian researcher, Natalija Semjonova, 100 questionnaires in Russian were completed by Russian worshippers selected at random from the participants in the religious ceremonies on various Thursdays in 2013. The questionnaire is divided into three parts: the first concerns personal information about the pilgrim, with reference to his or her age, social position and geographical origin. The second section is about the subject's attitude to pilgrimages, with information on their experiences, particularly previous visits to the Basilica di San Nicola. The last part seeks to reconstruct the organisation and type of pilgrimage in progress.

foot and proceeding in contact with the earth, without any facilitating structures or mediation' (Bartolomei, 2009: 210), are also similar to those of the past. What is different is the purpose of the journey, which has shifted from an essentially religious process to a 'search for meaning', in which *travel becomes experience*. The main motive is *spirituality as an emotional experience*, as a search for authenticity, for self-knowledge, but also for well-being understood as harmony, joy and knowledge, and, by extension, longevity and health. Today's travellers with no religious background are driven by the need for inner discovery, to achieve peace with themselves, enabling them to face their daily routine with greater serenity and wisdom (Barber, 1993). The new pilgrim is motivated by an emotional awakening, a desire to get away from his or her everyday existence and achieve a feeling of physical, mental and spiritual 'well-being'.

The journey becomes a search for ancient testimony and holy places, which are linked to the wide-ranging need for identity felt by today's 'technological and consumerist' citizens. Such travellers seek company and culture, to which may be added popular religiosity, as a 'naive' response to religious needs that established doctrinal systems do not meet (Mazza, 2009: 592). The journey includes a range of elements that form a unity in the consciousness of modern human beings, which is difficult to lock up in predefined schemes.

This has led to a new form of tourism, *spiritual*, which is associated with multiple contexts and motivations. It includes the recognition of intimate values that respond to an individual ethic, involving the recovery of religious, spiritual and personal motives. This type of tourism is growing in popularity because it adds to the journey a layer of emotional value linked to the location, the route, and the religious event. Visitors experience the situation as a unique and unforgettable experience that will leave them with indelible memories.

Tourism towards places of faith however is not only about a desire for travel arising from a spiritual prompting. It is accompanied by motivation of a more modern and secular character, such as interest in the localities' art, culture and landscapes. An intersection of the poles of religious attraction and a more modern or 'new age' environmental tourism arises not only from the possible physical proximity of the respective destinations, which after all is accidental, but also from a far more profound similarity in the intentional roots of these journeys, as both of them seek to slake the same desire for meaning, inside and outside a pre-set religious credo (Bartolomei, 2009: 212).

In a period in which products and services, and even cities, seem to become increasingly hard to distinguish, spiritual tourism is a good way to meet the demands of the new tourism, linked to society's new expectations, including an ever greater desire to combine the equilibrium and serenity of the spirit with physical activity and personal wellness; such tourists reject standardised holiday formats and seek opportunities for travelling as an emotional, educational, social and participatory experience that enables them to understand the culture, traditions and values of the places they visit (Timothy and Boyd, 2003; Cohen, 2008; Richards and Wilson, 2008).

The spiritual journey is important today not only due to its quantitative dimensions, global reach (Collins-Kreiner, 2009; 2010) and impact on those who practice it, but also because of its influence on the host community. Indeed, contact with the visitor enriches the host community by helping it to recover a lost identity in the sense of remembering a past that is full of echoes and meanings attributed to places and memories, but also thanks to the socio-economic consequences that such tourism produces in the areas being visited.

Spiritual tourism is an excellent means to increase *social cohesion*, thanks to the interaction that is generated between those who participate in the journey and share the same motives and values as the event (ceremonies, deeds, itineraries of a religious nature) and, if possible, the local host population who manage the places and situations. It also (and above all) becomes an economic and cultural resource, which not only allows visitors to become witnesses and participants in the memory of the host community, but allows the latter to adopt a less self-referential approach to their religious heritage, linking it more closely to the context, traditions and communities that contributed to its construction.

By linking religious motives and places with other elements of environmental, cultural and economic interest, spiritual tourism can play an important role in local development: it becomes a cultural and economic *product* and an *instrument of strategic regional marketing*, which involves secular and religious players, public and private stakeholders, all committed to promoting the religious motif as an event and to considering the visitors as *customers* to be cultivated and looked after, with whom they can establish an interaction, helping them to enjoy an *experience* that involves them emotionally and allows them to establish an indelible bond with the place being visited. It also facilitates and brings together in a single theme,



Figure 1. Location of Bari



Source: Data processed by Authors

a series of attractions and activities, thereby prompting - via the development of products and services - new secondary entrepreneurial opportunities (Meyer 2004; Rogerson 2007; Trono, 2009). The number of companies grows and higher quality services are developed, leading to the creation of economies of scale. Religious tourism brings benefits not only for companies providing tourist services, hotels, restaurants and retailers, but also other sectors and branches of the local economy (agriculture, crafts, construction, transport). Thus, if well managed, religious tourism provides significant opportunities for local development (Brunet et al. 2001).

### Socio-economic Dynamics and Tourism in the City of Bari

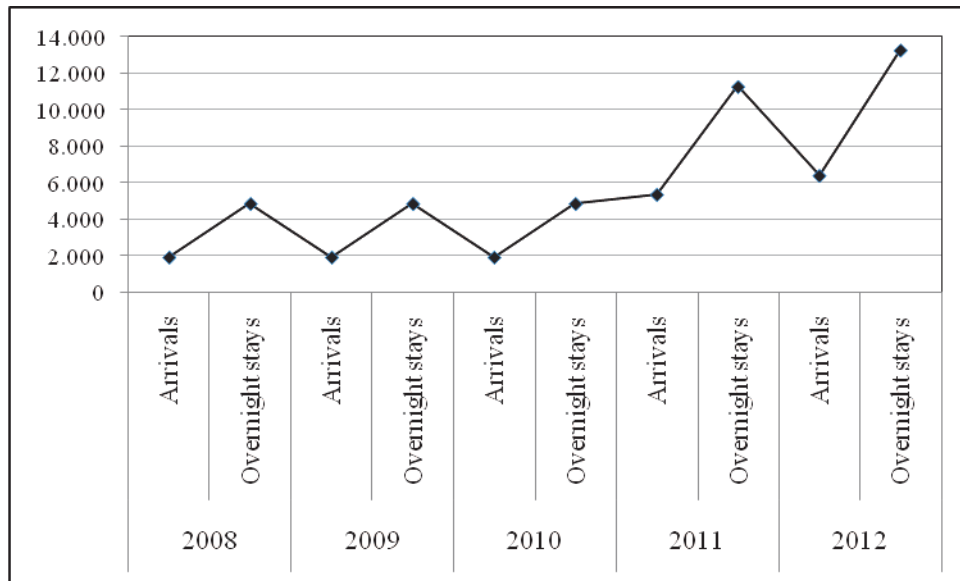
The regional capital of Puglia, Bari is one of the biggest metropolitan areas in Italy, second only to Naples on the southern Italian mainland. It is the most economically dynamic city on the central-southern Adriatic coast (Figure 1). It is among the top southern cities in terms of per-capita income, capacity for attraction and entrepreneurial initiative, as well as other indicators of well-being such as private consumption.

The main Adriatic port for passenger traffic and a

major node of transnational transport corridors, it is considered Europe's gateway to the Balkan peninsula and the Middle East. Indeed, it occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of the Adriatic corridor and the South European corridor (Corridor VIII). Its role is destined to increase in the near future, as a result of its envisaged insertion in the Motorways of the Sea (one of the EU's 30 priority projects for the TEN-T, trans-European transport networks). The presence of Bari in the core network (to be completed by 2030) will introduce the city to one of the ten envisaged Corridors of the central European network (1. 'Helsinki-Valletta Corridor'). To this may be added its hoped-for inclusion (with the ports of Ancona and Brindisi) in the southern section of the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor, along the Adriatic sea lane (IPRES, 2012). This also represents an important opportunity for tourism in the city and the surrounding area, which currently occupies a secondary and marginal position in the regional tourist overnight stay rankings: the province of Bari accounts for only 11% of overnight stays in Puglia, while the provinces of Lecce and Foggia account for 70% between them.

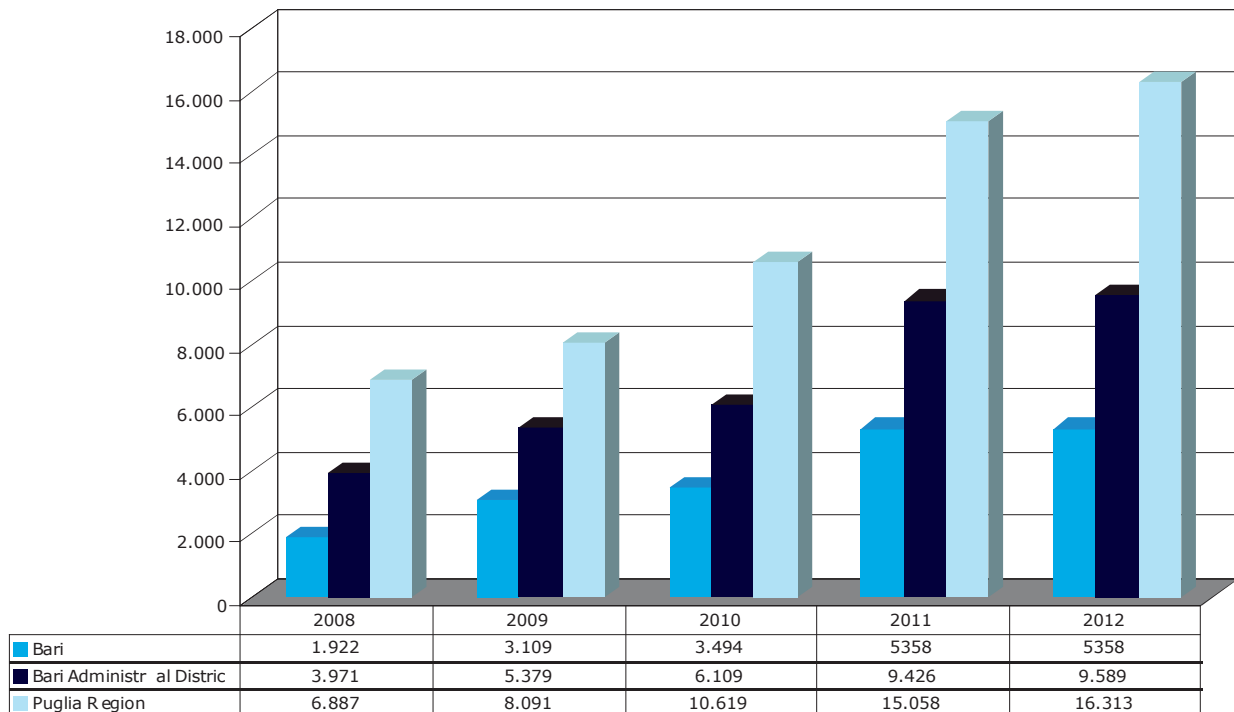
In terms of the number of stays, tourism is relatively limited both for the city and for the province of Bari as a whole, although there has been growth in the last five years (15.8% in the period 2008-2012), thanks above

**Figure 2. Arrivals and Overnight Stays of Russian Tourists in the City of Bari in the Years 2008-2012**



Source: Derived from data dell'Osservatorio Regionale del Turismo, 2013

**Figure 3: Arrivals of Russian Tourists to the City of Bari, Province of Bari and Puglia region in the years 2008-2012**



Source: Based on data from the Osservatorio Regionale del Turismo, 2013

all to foreign travellers (Osservatorio Regionale del Turismo). This growth is due above all to the constant rise in foreign visitors (up 40%), who accounted for 27.7% of the total stays in 2012. Analysis of the nationality of overseas visitors shows that in line with regional data, the biggest market is European, with France and Germany joint first (10% each), followed by Great Britain (6%) and Spain (5%). There are significant proportions of tourists from the United States (6%) and Japan (4%). What emerges most clearly is the Russian component (9% of total foreign arrivals and stays). Counting all the nations associated with Eastern Orthodox Christianity together, they account for 14% of the total number of foreign visitors.

Unlike cities whose sole or main tourism purpose is religious, in a multi-functional city like Bari it is difficult to discern the tourists' motivations for their journey. However, we shall attempt to quantify the Orthodox component and describe the seasonal nature of the flows in order to identify the impact of the feasts of San Nicola (December and May) on local tourist flows.

Analysis of the data shows that the Russian market is continuously expanding: since 2008 arrivals of Russians in the city of Bari have increased by 232%, from 1,922 in 2008 to 6,396 in 2012, while stays increased by 174%, from 4,827 in 2008 to 13,262, with an average stay of 3.4 days (Figure 2). The average stay is decreasing however: whereas Russian tourists once stayed an average of 2.53 days, in 2012 they stayed just 2 days, similar to the average for foreign tourists and slightly higher than the average stay for religious tourists (1.8 nights). Considering the average length of stay, Orthodox Christian tourists, including Romanians (3.7 days), Estonians (2.7) and Latvians (2.9), stay longer on average than foreign visitors in general (2 days).

Concerning the Russian market in particular, on average the visitors are likely to stay longer in complementary forms of accommodation (2.1 days) than hotels (2 days), but in 2012, 82% chose hotels and only 8% other structures. According to the results of this study it can be stated with confidence that the motivation of Russian visitors is above all religious, which explains why they are mostly drawn to the city of Bari rather than anywhere else in the province or region, as the municipal, provincial and regional data show (Figure 3).

If we compare the total stays in the province of Bari with those of the city of Bari it will be seen that the latter accounts for a growing proportion of the flows, increasing from 48% in 2008 to 63% in 2012. This

suggests that an increasing percentage of Russian tourists have lost interest in the province of Bari, favouring the city. Similarly, comparing data for the capital with regional data, it is seen that the percentage of Russians that stay in Bari has progressively increased, from 20% of the total in 2008 to 24% in 2012.

The seasonal nature of religious destinations is specific to each locality and is significantly affected by (i) the presence of other tourist products in the destinations that are not obviously characterised by religious motifs and (ii) the dates of the religious festivities pertaining to that locality (Ciset, 2013).

Analysing the composition of *the flows over the whole year* it will be noted that in sharp contrast to the regional data, the largest number of stays is seen in May. A record number of visitors was seen in May 2010, with a total of 56,013 stays in the month, of which 42,259 were Italians (75% of the total) and 13,754 foreigners (25% of the total). In terms of arrivals, in the same month there were 25,527 Italians, 80% of the total, and 6,340 foreigners, equivalent to 20% of the total. Analysing the data in greater detail, we see that the month with the longest stays is May, especially for foreigners, for whom the average stay is 2.1 days (2012), lower than in previous years, when it reached 2.8 days (2008). For Italians this month also has the shortest average stay in absolute terms. This may be compared to the equally positive results for December, definitely the low season for national and regional tourism, but a time of great activity in the city of Bari. December has seen a constant increase in the length of stay, from 1.9 days in 2008 to 2.4 days in 2012. The average stay by Italians has also grown with respect to the same period in 2008, from 1.8 to 1.9 days on average, while for foreigners the trend is downward, from 2.6 to 2.3 days for the same period.

Besides these officially certified flows there is also a significant number of religious day-trippers, which however is hard to quantify.<sup>131</sup> As mentioned previously, these day-trippers are not all Italian, but include a large proportion of foreigners, particularly Orthodox Christians resident in Italy or visitors arriving from Greece on organised tours, who, as shown by an analysis of the questionnaires, account for 27% of Russian pilgrims. Specifically, in summer, there is an increase in the number of Orthodox day-trippers coming from Greece, Croatia and Montenegro. According to interviewees at the Bari Port Authority (Capitaneria di Porto), although it is not possible to determine the exact number, hundreds come in by these routes, especially Russians. This is confirmed by the Rector of the Russian church himself, who says

that during the summer the Thursday mass is attended by approximately 500 people.

In addition to these weekly flows on Thursday, worthy of mention here is the Montenegrin ship *Sveti Stefan II*, which has conducted crossings from Montenegro since 2010, enabling Russian citizens holidaying there to enter Italy without a visa (using a *short pass* instead), spending the day in Bari and returning at night on the ferry. This ship usually sails every Tuesday from June to September making a total of 13 visits a season, with an average of about 300 passengers per crossing.<sup>[4]</sup> It may thus be calculated that in the period from June to September alone about 12,000 foreigners, most of them presumably Russian, pass through Bari without leaving any trace in the official statistics.

### San Nicola di Bari: from medieval judicial pilgrimage to modern journey of faith

#### *The past*

The shrine of St Nicholas (Santuario di San Nicola), situated in the old town of the city, is visited by a constant flow of worshippers who are drawn by the healing powers of a saint from the Orient who has long been loved and honoured.

Nicholas of Myra, bishop and confessor, has been called the most popular saint of all Christianity and is highly celebrated by all nations, especially by the Russian Orthodox church. In the Orient the cult of St Nicholas has deeper and more ancient roots than in the West. Specifically,

*in the Russian religious consciousness, in order to have faith in God one must necessarily have faith in St Nicholas, and the absence of veneration of this saint was considered almost heretical* (Fedotov, 2000).

Over the centuries a spontaneous movement of pilgrims to his tomb was established. First this was to Myra in Lycia in modern-day Turkey, the land of his birth;<sup>[5]</sup> later pilgrims went to Bari in Puglia, where his 'sacred relics' were carried in the spring of 1087 (Cioffari, 2001), leading to the spread of the cult of St Nicholas in western countries. The city of Bari became

a place of pilgrimage and an embarkation port for Jerusalem.<sup>[6]</sup> The discovery across Europe of *pilgrimage badges* seems to confirm the popularity of the cult of St Nicholas, the veneration of whom was particularly strong in the Slavic and Scandinavian regions (see Figure 4).

At this time, the journey from northern Europe to Bari was certainly one of the most arduous pilgrimages, considering the long distance to cover to reach the shrine in Puglia. Leo Imperiale points out, the quantity of *corpora of signa peregrinorum* from Flanders which may have more than a devotional meaning, since it reflects the practice of 'judicial' pilgrimage. Because of its difficult access and location, the great Romanesque basilica of San Nicola in Bari became a penitential staging post similar to Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela, but above all it became a primary crossroads between Europe and the Mediterranean Orient. Bari is known to have been among the preferred destinations imposed on persons convicted of violent crimes. The penal registers of Flemish cities contain numerous examples of this kind (Leo Imperiale, 2013). Thus, in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century the shrine of San Nicola di Bari became an 'imposed' pilgrimage destinations. This is further seen in the rulings recorded in the Flemish *Zoendinc Bouc* (Book of pacifications), which, as well as the *peregrinationes maiores* such as Rome and Compostela, also indicate numerous frequently visited Italian shrines such as Sant'Ambrogio in Milan, San Marco in Venice, Sant'Andrea in Salerno and the shrines of Monte Sant'Angelo and San Nicola di Bari (Vantaggiato, 2012). The flow of pilgrims continued to these sites over the years and indeed the centuries.

#### *The Present*

The attraction of San Nicola di Bari is still very strong. The flow of pilgrims from both the Orient and the West intensifies around the commemoration of his birth (6<sup>th</sup> of December) and the anniversary of the

3 Neither customs officers nor state police record entry stamps issued at the port; the shipping companies' data is considered sensitive and is thus unavailable to researchers.

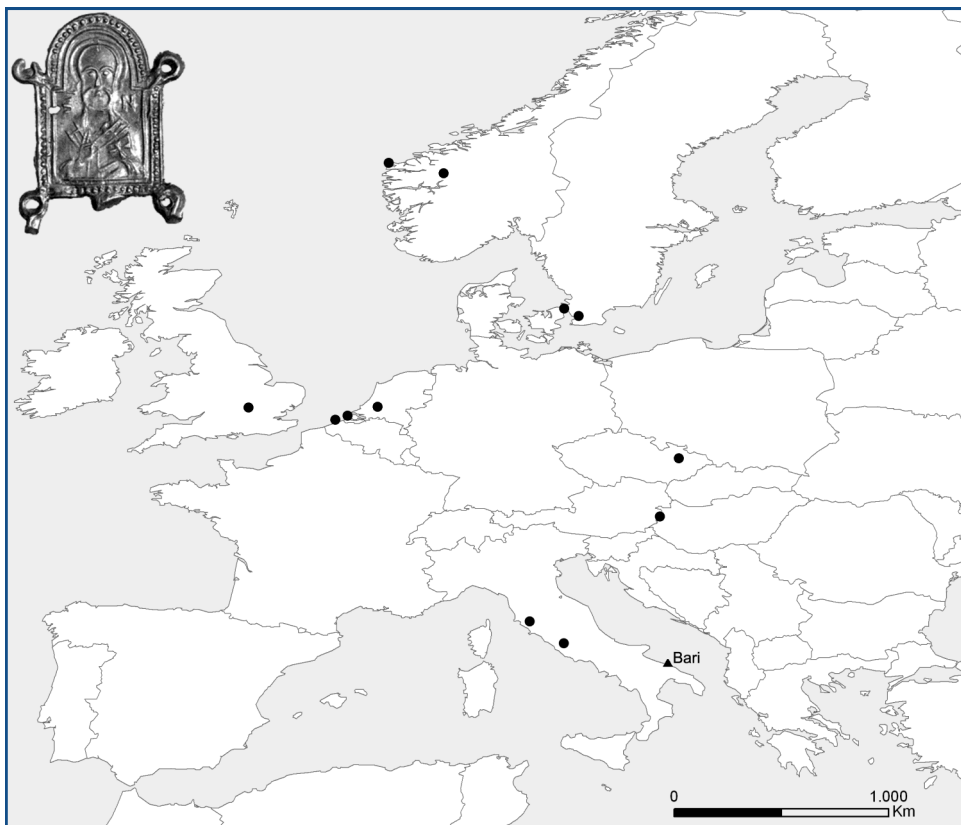
4 This service by the Montenegrin ship was banned by Italian Ministry of the Interior from June 2013. This led to a general mobilisation by the citizens of Bari (including the mayor) and the Russian community.

5 Lycia in the Orient, the saint's birthplace, was protected by him and according to legend was the scene of numerous miracles. All twelve cities of Lycia paid a special tribute to St Nicholas (Del Re, 1996). Similarly, in Greece and Russia, lands where the cult of the saint is more widespread, churches, chapels and monasteries named after the Saint from Myra can be found practically everywhere (Celletti, 1996).

6 Bernandus Monachus Francus, (*Itinerarium in loca sancta*, in Migne PL 121, col. 569) gives us an account of the pilgrims who chose Bari as their embarkation point for Jerusalem (Bernandus Monachus Francus cit. in Cioffari, 2007).



Figure 4. Distribution map of Saint Nicholas of Bari Pilgrimage Badges



Source, Leo Imperiale, 2013

translation of his relics from Myra to Bari (7-9 May).

Compared to the past, the pilgrimage to the shrine in Bari is significantly different in terms of content, organisation and the nature of the journey, which is clearly no longer ‘imposed’ by the same motives associated with medieval culture. The religious journey today is supported by the facilities of modern tourism, which it closely resembles, making it difficult at times to distinguish pilgrimage from regular tourism. The main characteristic of these modern *peregrinationes* is the limited amount of time (and indeed funds in some cases) available to travellers. This results in a rigid organisation of the journey of faith into guided tours. The visit to the relics of St Nicholas is seen therefore as an ecumenical and a group experience, structured in accordance with the principles of organised journeys: by coach, in groups and with a guide.

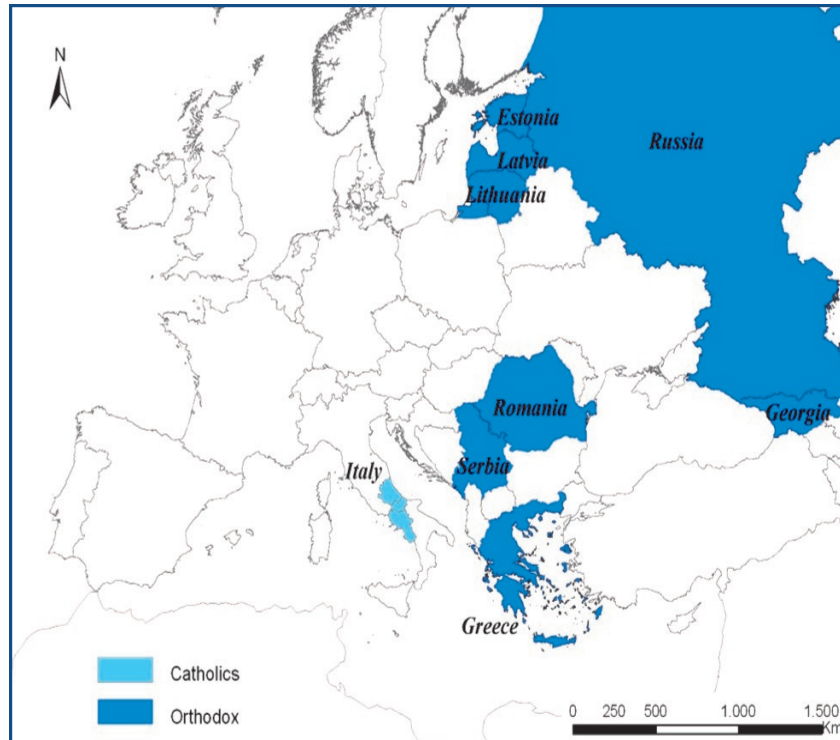
With the passing of time, the pilgrimage to Bari by Catholics began to clearly distinguish itself in term of form and period of movement from that of the Orthodox Christians. Substantial differences between the two communities lie in the *intensity* and the *distribution of the cult*: many Orthodox Christian pilgrims come from the Baltic states, Greece, Romania,

Serbia, Georgia and Russia (see Figure 5). The Catholics are mainly Italian and come mostly from Campania, Molise and Abruzzo (Cioffari, 2007).

The flows are managed mainly by pilgrimage organisations. The Catholics, both Italian and foreign, belong to a specialised market that is ‘largely outside the domain of mainstream travel agencies / tour operators’ (Bywater, 1994), and is usually associated with informal channels linked to religious organisations. The journeys are usually by coach, guided by a group leader, and their duration is limited to religious functions: they are thus exclusively of the ‘day-trip’ type. In contrast, for Orthodox worshippers, the shrine of San Nicola of Bari is a staging-post in a full programme of visits and prayers, with stops in a number of holy places.

Visits to the places of the Saint by Catholics are episodic and limited almost exclusively to the celebratory feasts of St Nicholas, with flows of approximately 5,000. In contrast, Orthodox Christians are present in large numbers (at least five times as many as the Catholics) and in all seasons of the year, with significant peaks during the two annual feasts, but also on a weekly basis (St. Nichola is remembered every Thursday), at least for the Russian community.

Figure 5. Flows of Catholic and Orthodox Christian Worshippers by Area of Origin



Source: Authors' Processing of Data

Figure 6. Pilgrims in the Basilica of San Nicola





Figure 7. Travel Packages Organised by Radonez, Russian Tour Operator



Source: www.radonez.ru

Outside the old town, Russian worshippers use the 'Barigrad' complex, consisting of two churches and a hostel for pilgrims, built in 1915 by the Russian community to strengthen Orthodox participation in the cult of St Nicholas. These Russian visitors generally arrive in groups organised by tour operators. They tend to make use of two itineraries (packages) in particular: the first starts in the main national airports of Italy (Rome, Milan, Rimini) and shows travellers the whole of 'unforgettable Italy' (www.radonez.ru), including the cities of Milan, Rome, Venice, Florence, Salerno, Amalfi, Ravello, Lanciano and Loreto, with an overnight stay in Bari which has a clear socio-economic impact on the city. The second starts with visits to the holy places of Greece, with an overnight ferry and a stop of only a few hours at the shrine in Bari, with minimal or negligible consequences for the area (Fig 7).

Eastern Orthodox pilgrims arrive in Bari in accordance with the Julian calendar of the Russian, Serbian and Jerusalem Churches, which is thirteen days out of step with the Gregorian calendar used in the West. There is a dual movement therefore of Orthodox worshippers: the Western Orthodox pilgrims join the Catholic

pilgrims who arrive in Bari on the occasion of the two feasts of May and December (7-8-9 May and 6 December), while the Russian and Serbian Orthodox pilgrims create new flows in both May (on the 22<sup>nd</sup>) and December (on the 19<sup>th</sup>). The consequence is an optimal organisation of the feast of the Saint by the Dominican fathers, who can manage the religious space and structures without generating conflict or encroachments.

The staggered timing of the event is also useful for the region, which hosts a large number of worshippers twice in the month. This aspect is even more important if one considers the Russian visitors' different patterns of consumption compared to the Italians. Described in international tourist terms as 'highly enthusiastic travellers', the Russians have a high spending capacity and are among the main purchasers of tax free luxury products together with Japanese and Americans (Osservatorio Nazionale del Turismo, 2012). Russian tourists in general are clearly not comparable to the subjects analysed in this study, whose actions are conditioned by the length of the journey and the impossibility of replicating it often in their lives. Their consumption patterns are partly affected by a 'gifting culture' and partly by the need to purchase souvenirs

and make donations on behalf of friends and relatives, which amplifies the economic impact of each individual pilgrim.

The detailed study conducted over three months (March-May 2013) with 100 Orthodox pilgrims in the church of Barigrad points to a specific type of consumer. Analysis of the questionnaires, which were filled in by Russian Orthodox Christians shows that they are mainly female (79.5%), more than half are from Moscow and they are mostly aged between 47 and 56 years (28.5%). The socio-economic level of the Russian interviewees is medium to high, as emerges from their level of education and occupation. More than 80% of them are university graduates and are entrepreneurs or professionals. This is probably linked to the type of journey and the distance travelled. Indeed, as already mentioned, the journey is structured as an 'all inclusive' package deal; while the destinations are exclusively (or almost) of a religious nature, they use medium-to-high level facilities and accommodation, the packages being targeted at a medium-to-high customer base.

Aside from this consideration, the profile of the pilgrim is consistent with what has emerged from similar research into the topic (Rizzello, 2009; 2012; Gatrell and Collins-Kreiner, 2006). The typical pilgrim has already travelled to holy places before (75.5%), although for most of them, this is their first trip to Bari (87.7%). This confirms the status of the journey to Bari as a one-off experience, and unlikely to be repeated due to the high cost.

In no case is Bari the only destination of the journey; rather, it is always part of an itinerary that includes visits to various places. Such itineraries are mainly organised into packages of seven nights and eight days (66%). The journeys are mainly booked through specialised agencies (80%) and are undertaken as part of a group (83.6%). A small percentage (18.3%) organise the journey autonomously travelling by air and by car (presumably rented). As already mentioned, the Russian pilgrims generally either head to either Greece (26.5%) or Italy (55%). Only in the latter case do the pilgrims actually stay overnight in Bari. Of these, 30% stay one night, 16% two or three days and 8% from between three and twelve nights. The most common type of accommodation is three-star hotels (36%) followed by 4-star hotels (28%). A significant percentage stay in private apartments (20%) or other undefined categories. Only 8% of the interviewees (probably the group leaders) stated that they stayed in the pilgrims' hostel, which is part of the Russian church complex and is currently being restored.

## Socio-economic Impacts

Analysis of the interviews does not suggest any positive effects of the pilgrims' presence on the economy of the city or even that of the old town, where the Basilica is 'swallowed up by Old Bari' (Cioffari, 2007: 205). One might expect this pilgrimage to bring about changes and initiatives, as is generally seen where such a shrine is part of the urban fabric (Lozato-Giodart, 1999). Undoubtedly, situations of conflict are likely to arise from the simultaneous presence of religious and commercial activities, as well from the congestion caused by the presence in the holy places of various types of visitor. However, considering the constancy and cyclical nature of the flows, such situations usually result in economies of scale that bring about the reorganisation of the entire urban system, especially in small towns (Turner, 1973). An example of this is the case of San Giovanni Rotondo, a small town in Puglia known in religious circles for having hosted San Pio da Pietrelcina. In the space of a few years, the town was transformed by the large flows of pilgrims into a 'tourist resort', with a large hotel and catering sector structured to suit all budgets.<sup>[7]</sup>

In Bari the flows arising from the veneration of St Nicholas have not conditioned the composition or the development of the city's accommodation sector. This sector is diversified and extensive,<sup>[8]</sup> but the accommodation is mostly of a medium-to-high level and thus clearly targeted at business tourism rather than at meeting any demand arising from religious tourism, which is generally oriented to low-cost solutions. While the number of complementary structures is high (B&Bs account for 54% of the total), these are of small dimensions and are thus ill-suited to large groups of pilgrims. The only structure in Bari aimed specifically at this demand is the pilgrims' hostel of the Russian Church, currently being restored, which has 100 beds. It should be pointed out however, that the lack of structural provision to meet the demand for

- 7 Since 2000 (the Jubilee year) 100 hotels and 79 other accommodation structures have been opened. The hotels have an average of 26 beds, highlighting a small, mainly local business community, to which may be added Bed and Breakfast establishments and privately rented rooms, which account for 40% of total accommodation. There are also numerous restaurants and large infrastructure projects, implemented to cope with the flows of visitors which have now reached 9 million a year.
- 8 Bari has a total of 5,559 beds in 109 structures, of which 40 are hotels and 69 other types of accommodation. The hotels account for 47% of the total beds; of these 64% are four-star hotels and 23% are three-star hotels. 'Holiday homes and apartments' account for 17% of the non-hotel accommodation structures, with only 114 beds.



Table 1. Outline of Spatial Practice

Catholic Pilgrims	Orthodox Pilgrims	Tourists / Cruise Ship Passengers
<b>Area of interest</b>		
- Basilica - Crypt (Relics of St Nicholas)	- Basilica - Crypt	- Structured itinerary in the old town - Basilica - Crypt
<b>Activities</b>		
- Mass in the Basilica - Processions between the Basilica and the seafront - Short visit to the Crypt	- Mass in the Basilica (during the May and December celebrations) - Mass in the Crypt (every Thursday) - Prayers and reflection in the Crypt	- Short visit to the Basilica and the Crypt, either organised with a guide or autonomously.

low-cost accommodation is also a reflection of the progressive transformation of the pilgrimage into a purely 'day-trip' type of tourism.

The inability of the accommodation structures to reap the benefits of the cult of St Nicholas is matched by that of local craft professionals and small local retailers, who have been unable to capitalise on the presence of these significant flows. Interviews conducted with managers of the few craft shops present in the old town clearly show their inability to capture the flows of pilgrims who arrive in the city to visit the Basilica of San Nicola. The only potential market they see for their products appears to be the (admittedly substantial) one arising from the cruise ship passengers who come ashore every day.<sup>9</sup> The only commercial activities that seem to enjoy a certain success from this pilgrimage are the restaurants and bars, particularly those in the immediate vicinity of the Basilica.

An analysis of the causes of this situation must take account of the *geographical position of the Basilica*, situated in the old town but adjacent to the seafront, used for transit and parking by the coaches. The geographical position of the Basilica heavily restricts the creation of secondary businesses serving religious tourism, since the walls that surround the Basilica also visually obscure the surrounding urban context.

The limited amount of time available to many worshippers, given the 'day-trip' type organisation of their visit, represents a further constraint on the process, of which the only ones to benefit are the Dominican friars. The pilgrims' area of interest is reduced to the Basilica, which is thus transformed into a sort of sacred enclave, within which the pilgrims can both conduct their religious practices and make any purchases of religious articles, votive objects and

souvenirs, which are sold in the Basilica's own shop (Table 1).

As shown by the table, the behaviour of the various types of visitor to the places in question leads to a differentiated use of the space:

- tourists move through the basilica in a distracted way, stopping to admire its architecture and the crypt containing the remains of San Nicola.
- Catholic pilgrims are mostly interested in the main part of the basilica, while
- Russians are mainly interested in the crypt, which is where they celebrate their rites and pause in prayer before the remains.

The visitors' different spatial behaviour prevents any conflict between the three types who visit the site, since they gather in different spaces at different times. In addition, the time spent by Orthodox worshippers in contemplation and prayer accentuates the need to obtain souvenirs in the immediate surroundings.

Such sales are in line with what happens in other holy places, where the religious authorities provide material goods (churches, cathedrals, shrines etc.) and intangible goods (in the forms of rites, events, celebrations, etc.), generating a form of tourism of which they are also the main beneficiaries (in this regard see Nolan and Nolan, 1992; Singh, 2004; Vuconic, 1996; Jelen, 2002; Shinde, 2010). In this multi-purpose cultural economy

*the key players are the religious functionaries and preceptors (individuals and institutions) who mediate the experience and exchange between visitors and the sacred or religious objects* (Shackley in Shinde, 2010: 252).

In the Basilica di San Nicola the highest-selling items are the vials of *Santa Manna* (or *Myron*): a miraculous liquid that seeps from the bones of the saint, particularly appreciated by the Orthodox worshippers

9 According to official data from the Port authority (Capitaneria di Porto), 420,158 passengers came through the port of Bari in 2011.

who, faithful to the tradition, attribute healing powers to it. It clearly has a most beneficial effect on the economy of the monastic complex.<sup>[10]</sup> Also on sale are icons, significant in Orthodox Christianity, which are indeed precious<sup>[11]</sup> since they are hand-painted and finely decorated; the demand for them has created a school of sacred iconography and launched a specialised local form of handicraft, still in its early stages.

While from the economic point of view the cult of San Nicola has not had any appreciable effects for the local community, this cannot be said of its social impact. A close synergy between the two religious communities, Catholic and Orthodox, has been created, with results on the secular and civil levels. In the last ten years, Russian citizens and local residents have created numerous cultural associations that seek to promote intercultural exchange and dialogue and boost knowledge of Russian culture. One result of this is the organisation of the *festival della cultura e dell'arte Russa* (festival of Russian art and culture), with the presence of artists from Russia, which is held annually in the city of Bari during the May celebrations for St Nicholas based on the Julian calendar. In line with this initiative, in December, a parallel festival of Italian culture is held in Russia ('Festival dell'Arte Italiana a Mosca: Suggestioni di Puglia'). The *Bari May* and the *Moscow December* have now been held for seven years and have become a tradition!

That the Russian community is now acknowledged to be an integral part of the community of Bari is also attested by the involvement of the Prior of the Russian Church in the city's civil and religious activities.

## Conclusions

This research shows that the city of Bari is subject to a constant flow of pilgrims drawn by their veneration of the relics of the holy Bishop Nicholas of Myra. They are mainly Orthodox worshippers of Russian nationality with distinct characteristics, such as high socio-economic class and high spending capacity, factors which differentiate them from the standard type of religious tourist. The final destination of their journey, highly structured and organised mainly by specialised tour operators, is the shrine of the Saint, seen as the culmination and completion of an intense religious travel experience. The journey is designed to meet a need for spirituality arising in a highly secular society and is loaded with symbolic meanings that are also evident in the use of the place of worship, which takes place in a completely decontextualised way: the spatial and physical characteristics are neglected in favour of an emphasis on the symbolic aspects of the crypt, which thus becomes the Orthodox worshippers' main item of interest. The area of the basilica alone quickly satisfies their needs as worshippers and consumers.

The results of this study show that the flows activated by the relics of the Saint affect the local and regional economy to a minimal degree. This situation is conditioned by various factors, first and foremost among which is the geographical position of the Basilica. Open towards the seafront, it facilitates access by pilgrims who arrive by coach; effectively closed off from the old town behind it, it is able by itself to meet the pilgrims' needs in terms of purchases and prayer, effectively preventing any contact with the local non-religious community. This situation collapses the 'perceived, lived and conceived space' (Lefebvre, 1976) to a single dimension, marginalising the city and its economy. In the mind of the religious tourist, Bari is coterminous with the space of the Basilica, which is thus transformed into a self-sufficient sacred enclave.

The second factor behind the limited impact of these flows is the prevailing 'day-tripper' approach, preferred not only by national tourist flows, but also among foreign visitors. The Catholic and Orthodox pilgrims use the same space, but at different times, so there is no tension between the two flows. The time spent on the visits and the way in which they are conducted are so limited that they do not lead to socio-spatial transformations, either in the area of the Basilica or in the old town as a whole. This is probably affected by the limited availability of low-cost accommodation that would suit the budget of this segment of the market.

10 Collected annually, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, on the feast of the Saint, the *santa manna* is diluted in water, bottled and sold to the faithful, following a practice that was already in vogue in 1724, according to the diary of Vasilij Grigorovic Barskij:

*there are in the church four shops selling glass vials of various types bearing the painted image of the saint . . . at times so finely produced as to inspire admiration . . . Other very small receptacles full of myron are sold well sealed . . . these receptacles are produced on behalf of the church and the money generated by their sale is used for the management of the church to supply the pilgrims' hospice* (Cioffari, 2007: 124).

11 An icon can cost up to 3,000 Euros.

Lastly, inadequate promotion policies adopted by the local and regional administrations also play a role in this, since the region in general and the city of Bari in particular do not project a good image in terms of international religious tourism.

The potential for developing this sector linked to the cult of St Nicholas is enormous, not only because it makes it possible to de-seasonalise tourist flows and guarantee distribution across the whole of the region, but also due to the enormous spending power of the Russian market, which, according to official estimates, is one of the most interesting emerging segments, with growth between 2005 and 2010 of 119.8% for arrivals and 116.6% for stays (Osservatorio Nazionale del Turismo, 2012). Despite the size of the flows of Russian visitors in the city of Bari, Puglia receives only 0.7% of the Russian flows affecting Italy.

The historic, centuries-old pilgrimage to Bari, only slightly less ancient than the more famous Way of St James to Santiago de Compostela, has a potential which has not yet been tapped; it is not used strategically to attract the cultural tourist market, nor even religious tourism, which remains a spontaneous, self-organised affair, entrusted exclusively to specialised tour operators and the two churches. The city of Bari and Puglia Regional Administration seem to 'engage' these flows passively, without activating marketing policies and investment designed to facilitate and encourage longer stays in the region. This contrasts with what happens in other regions that host pilgrimage sites and spiritual tourism destinations, for example Spain, where the rapid development of the Way of St James was promoted by structural investment from the Galicia Regional Administration (*Xunta de Galicia*). Under plan *Xacobeo 93*, the Region restructured the Way by marketing measures designed to position the product not only as 'religious' but also as 'cultural' and 'experiential'. This programme has been so successful that it is has grown continuously since 1993 and has not been affected by any economic downturn (Millán *et al.*, 2010a). The economic impact of the pilgrimage in Galicia alone is estimated to be worth around 200 million Euros, 0.5% of GDP (Ulloa and Ruiz, 2010).

The city of Bari and Puglia Regional Administration have not activated policies to encourage longer stays among the religious tourists visiting Bari. Their journeys are structured in such a way as to keep the visitor in the city of Bari for the shortest time possible or not at all: there are few services to welcome visitors and above all the city does not have the ability to ensure that the Saint plays any role in redefining the

city's identity, which would enable it to reposition itself within the national and international tourist market.

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[www.radonez.eu](http://www.radonez.eu).

## Detail of Authors

**Anna Trono** is Associate Professor in Political Economic Geography in the Department of Cultural Heritage University of Salento. Italy.

**Katia Rizzello** is a Temporary Research Associate in Political and Economic Geography in the Department of Cultural Heritage University of Salento. Italy.

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## APPENDIX

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- Man  
 Woman

Home town

\_\_\_\_\_

Age :

- 0-17  
 18-25  
 26-36  
 37-46  
 47-56  
 57-66  
 67-76  
 76-86

Profession:

\_\_\_\_\_

1. Is this your first pilgrimage experience?

- Yes  
 No

2. If not, how many pilgrimages have you already been on? (please give a number)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Is this your first time in Bari?

- Yes  
 No

4. If not, how many times have you already been to Bari? (please give a number):

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How long are you staying in Bari?

- 0 nights  
 1 night  
 2 nights  
 3 nights  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. If you are staying overnight in Bari, what type of accommodation do you have?

- 3-Star Hotel  
 4-Star Hotel  
 5-Star Hotel  
 B&B  
 Hostel for pilgrims  
 Rural hotel  
 Other

7. How did you organize your journey?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Are you travelling in a group?

- Yes  
 No

9. How?

- Aeroplane  
 Ferry  
 Car  
 Coach  
 Other please specify:

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Does your itinerary include other stops in addition to Bari?

- Yes  
 No

If Yes, which?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. How long will your trip be in total? (please indicate the number of days)

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much for your cooperation!