

# THE EXPERIENCE-ORIENTED TOURISM IN TUSCAN RURAL AREAS

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**ABSTRACT:** Despite the present scenario of general economic uncertainty, Tuscan rural spaces are still appealing to tourists from Italy and abroad. The changes which took place in the early 1990's are still evolving in these rural places, where farmers are adapting their supply to the demand of this changing market. In fact, nowadays, there still is a tourist demand for an old-style holiday in rural spaces which is based on the attraction towards natural places and genuine food, while a demand for a more stunning glamorous-style holiday is increasing. The widespread presence of farms involved in tourism is sizable, with more than 4,000 farms (and about 52,000 beds) recorded in 2011, which were dispersed around places with valued cultural landscape and linked to appreciated and certified products which in some areas are the pivotal resources. Rethinking rural tourism and agritourism through a wider range of integrated and customized services and looking at rural areas from a different perspective represent two important strategies in order to implement the experience-oriented tourism in the countryside too. **Keywords:** Rural development, agritourism in Tuscany, branding, cultural heritage, experience-oriented tourism

**RESUMEN:** A pesar del actual escenario de general incertidumbre económica, los espacios rurales de la Toscana siguen siendo atractivos para los turistas de Italia y del extranjero. Los cambios que ocurrieron en el inicio de los años 90 aún se están desarrollando en estas zonas rurales, donde los agricultores están adaptando su oferta a la demanda de este mercado en mutación. De hecho, hoy en día hay todavía una demanda turística para vacaciones tradicionales en espacios rurales que se basa en la atracción por locales naturales y comida genuina, mientras que la búsqueda de vacaciones más glamorosas está creciendo. La presencia extensiva de fincas involucradas en el turismo es grande, con más de 4.000 fincas (y cerca de 52.000 camas) registradas en 2011, desparramadas por locales con paisajes culturales de valor y conectadas a productos apreciados y certificados que en algunas áreas son recursos cruciales. Repensar el turismo rural y el agroturismo a través de una grande variedad de servicios integrados y personalizados y mirar las áreas rurales en una perspectiva diferente representan dos estrategias importantes para implementar el turismo experiencial también en el campo. **Palabras claves:** Desarrollo rural, agroturismo en Toscana, gestión de marcas, patrimonio cultural, turismo experiencial.

**RESUMO:** Apesar do atual cenário de geral incerteza económica, os espaços rurais da Toscana continuam a apelar aos turistas da Itália e do estrangeiro. As mudanças que aconteceram no início dos anos 90 ainda se continuam a desenvolver nestas zonas rurais, onde os agricultores estão

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a adaptar a sua oferta à procura deste mercado em mutação. De facto, hoje em dia há ainda uma procura turística para férias tradicionais em espaços rurais que se baseia na atração por locais naturais e comida genuína, enquanto a procura de férias mais glamorosas está a crescer. A presença extensiva de quintas envolvidas no turismo é grande, com mais de 4.000 quintas (e cerca de 52.000 camas) registadas em 2011, dispersas por locais com paisagens culturais de valor e ligadas a produtos apreciados e certificados que em algumas áreas são recursos cruciais. Repensar o turismo rural e o agroturismo através de uma grande variedade de serviços integrados e personalizados e olhar para as áreas rurais numa perspectiva diferente representam duas estratégias importantes para implementar o turismo experiencial também no campo. **Palavras-chave:** Desenvolvimento rural, agroturismo na Toscana, gestão de marcas, património cultural, turismo experiencial.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to highlight the development of a variety of a kind of tourism which is affecting the Tuscan countryside and the effort by the public sector to join it to the experience-oriented tourism in order to implement the tourist proposal of the region. The existing literature on this topic, coming mainly from the Universities in Tuscany, shows the richness of the accommodation system in the countryside. This system is still growing mainly to meet a tourist demand that is still looking for an old-style holiday based on the attraction towards nature and genuine food. There is an increasing demand for a glamorous-style holiday, the so-called experience-oriented tourism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), as a form of postmodern tourism (Urry, 1990; Munt, 1994) that could be an important opportunity for the Tuscan tourist market. Unfortunately, it needs a supply that locally seems to be not completely able to satisfy this trend. On one hand, only few firms are able to guarantee a wide range of integrated and customized services; on the other hand, the public sector is trying to create a strong image of the Tuscan countryside by concentrating on a branding that is catalysing the attention on an experience-oriented tourism.

The analysis proposed is almost qualitative; it mainly focuses on the agricultural heritage that is still giving high quality and traditional products (wine and food tourism) and on the cultural heritage of the Tuscan countryside. Nevertheless, some data concerning agritourism, both at the national and regional level, are shown - mainly resulting from ISTAT (Istituto Italiano di Statistica), CENSIS (entro Studi Investimenti Sociali) and MIPAAF (Ministero per le Politiche Agricola, Alimentari e Forestali) - in order to explain the evolution of the tourist supply.

*THE SPREAD OF RURAL TOURISM IN ITALY*

Rural Italian areas, with investiture from the European Community development programs, have been, for a long time, trying to seize development opportunities by using local, cultural and environmental resources and to qualify their territory by introducing services for families and businesses. The main function of the agricultural sector concerning the production of food has been accompanied by other types of production and activities. A somewhat recent classification highlights 4 different functions, today, carried out by agriculture (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007): 1) landscape and biodiversity management (“green” function); 2) water resource management (“blue” function); 3) conservation of historical and cultural heritage and of the landscape amenities (“yellow” function); 4) food security and safety (“white” function).

The change has obviously been welcomed and favoured, even as a result of the diffusion of the new styles of life and the birth of new profiles of tourists and consumers, as well as the constant developments of communication systems: a set of factors that has pushed the demand, firstly, towards the natural environment and genuine products and, then, towards an always more extensive search for the rich destinations of such resources. An evolutive process that took off slowly in Italy, beginning in the early 1970’s, and which underwent an acceleration in the 1990’s. The changes which emerged have made the rural areas more attractive and the tourist offer gravitates around the reinforced and diversified “green tourism” or “ecotourism”, an expression which, in Italy, indicates tourist activities broadly carried out in the countryside. The distinction between the different forms of structures like hotel accommodation, other types of accommodation and farms has led to distinguishing between rural tourism and agritourism. Such forms of tourism, even though they include activities in the same environmental context, are differentiated, furthermore, by the laws regulating them and by the types of entrepreneurs involved (Lemmi, 2009, pp.129-130).

Beyond these considerations, tourism has become a real growth factor for rural areas, always more characterized by agriculture, which on one hand has had to direct itself towards quality products for direct sale and also for tasting, obtaining the improvement of internal company services and on the other hand has had to integrate with external resources, such as the landscape and the environment, traditions and local culture: a *heritage*, as already anticipated, of which the company itself has to assume responsibility in order to contribute to the enhancement of the area in which it is inserted and to reach levels of certified quality to the benefit of its products and of the territory as a whole, thus contributing to the development of a more general process where “landscape is produced” and the historical memory of places are kept alive (Sorlini, 2011, p.13).

The data relating to the tourist offer and fluxes help to understand the existence of regional disparity. However, it's necessary to state first that rural tourism is not easily quantifiable, while the official statistics show complete data as “agritourism” concerns.

In 2011 (ISTAT), there were 20,000 agritourism farms in Italy with 193,400 sleeping places, with the majority of structures located in Southern Italy (45%) and Central Italy (34%). The Mezzogiorno, which generally presents an inferior number of agritourism farms, in comparison to 2010 has recorded a 10% increase. The data relating to the agritourism movement underlines the importance of the phenomenon, considering that in 2009 the presences concerned over 12 million people, with an average stay of 4.5 days, for a turnover of over a billion euros. Even though it is a segment of the tourist movement, on the whole, the dynamism of agricultural areas, where the proposals and services offered continues to increase, is relevant.

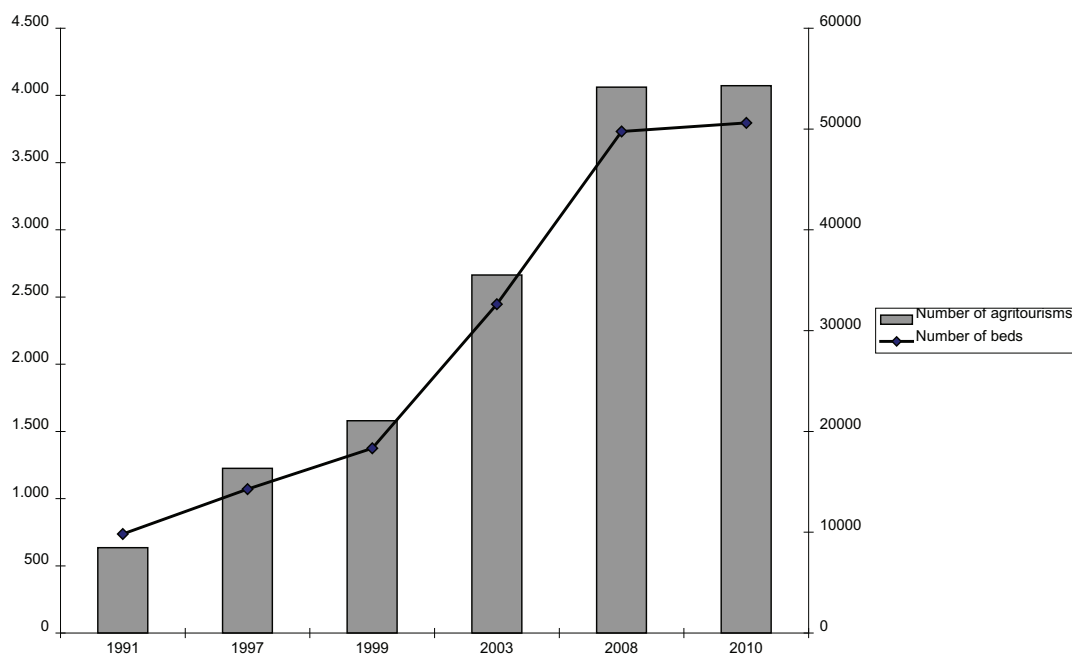
Nevertheless, beyond these obvious considerations on the effects of the current economic crisis that could lead towards a general decrease in demand, it is in any case desirable that company commitment is directed towards a less individualistic and a more collaborative orientation in close relationship to the territory, for the benefit of the community more than a single firm.

Moreover, an evaluation of new tourist behavioural trends is necessary in order to build an offer and a branding able to evoke sensations to meet the growing demand of experiential tourism.

### *AGRITOURISM: A GREAT RESOURCE IN TUSCANY*

With the EU intervention planning policy for 2000-2006 Tuscan rural areas acquired new value, becoming areas selected for alternative development by enhancing local resources (Telleschi, 2003). Through the extension of the financial aid to the overall territorial situation, works were financed to overcome the hydrogeological instability and the deterioration of forestland to improve communication, transport and the distribution of water and power. Then, funds were put aside for the conservation, development and fruition of tourist resources, including finance for projects for the renovation of rural buildings (such as farmhouses, hamlets, villas, castles and rural buildings used for accommodation for visitors), historic centres and individual monuments, as well as for the planning of the wine routes, signposted pathways, bridleways, fairs and markets, local festivals and the enhancement of craftwork.

**Figure 1. Growth of agritourism accommodation and beds in Tuscany (1991-2010)**

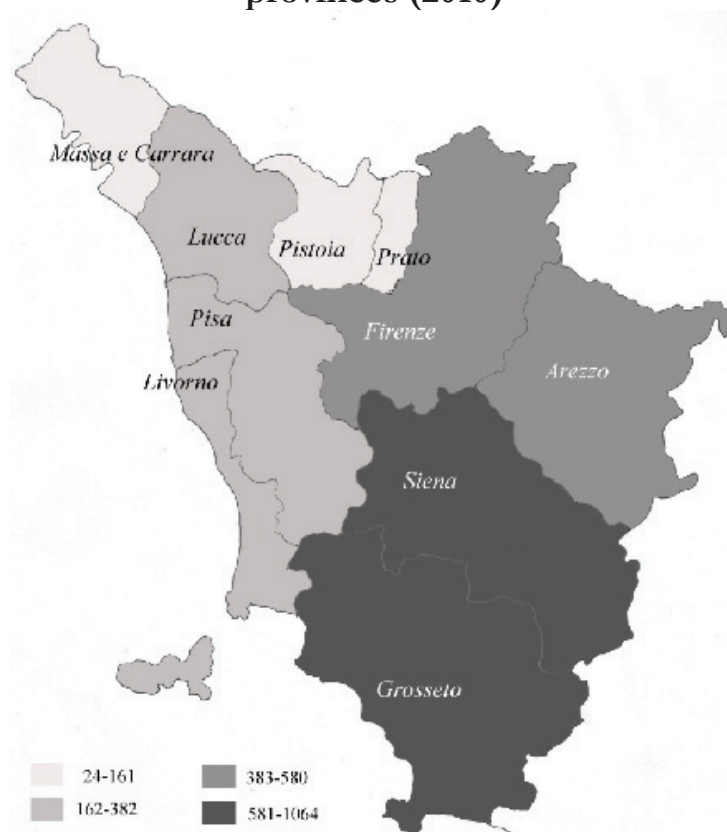


*Sources: Authors' elaboration based on ISTAT data*



As a result, in more or less 25 years, the agritourism (or rural holiday accommodation) has become an impressive phenomenon and an extremely important economic and social reality for Tuscany, the region that has the greatest concentration of agritourism accommodation (Figures 1 and 2).

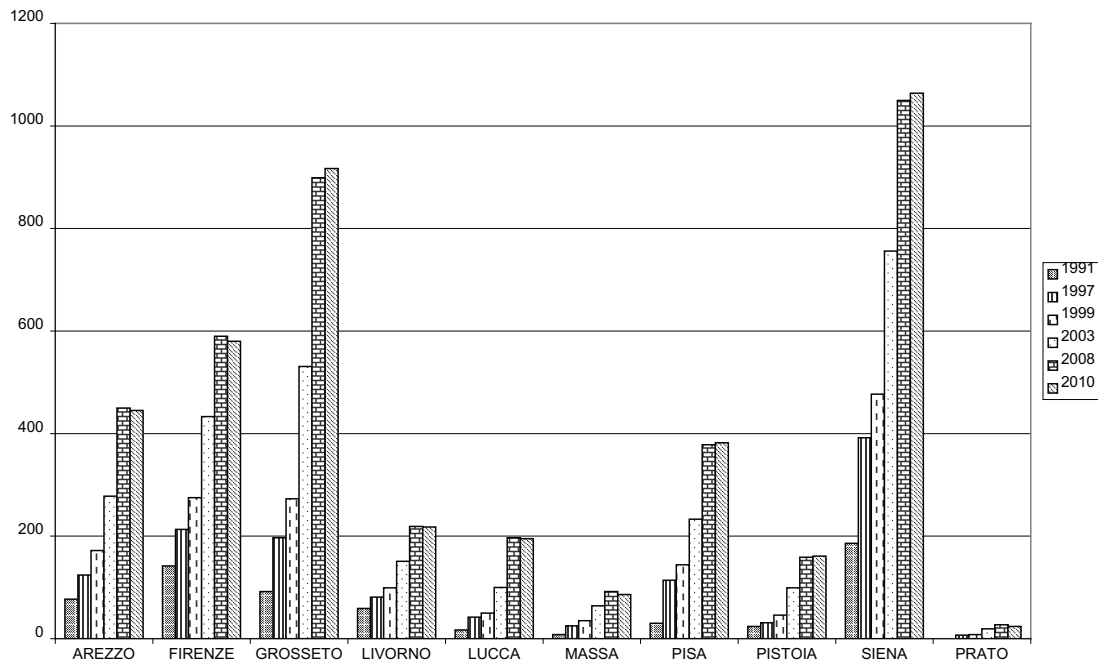
**Figure 2. The spatial distribution of agritourism in Tuscan provinces (2010)**



*Sources: Authors' elaboration based on ISTAT data*

The increase of agritourism accommodation has not been homogenous (Figure 3). Until 2008, the provinces of Florence, Siena and Arezzo showed a continuous development, while in 2010 Siena suffered a setback and Florence and Arezzo suffered a drop; the province of Grosseto has had a more recent increase and is still showing a good inclination towards it; others (such as Pisa, Pistoia, Livorno and Lucca) have always shown a slight bias. In any case, the data suggests an ongoing development of agritourism accommodation, with only some localized decrease, concerning both tourist demand and flux in spite of the present economic crisis.

**Figure 3. Growth of agritourism in the provinces of Tuscany (1991-2010)**



*Sources: Authors' elaboration based on ISTAT data*

Moreover, “rural tourism” has also been developing in the same period, and in spite of related missing data, some regional studies concerning this phenomenon has shown that its importance in some areas of Tuscany is of a similar entity to that of agritourism. One of these studies concerns the province of Arezzo where 258 agritourism and 257 rural tourism establishments were recorded in 2002 (Telleschi, 2009).

We ought to point out that the distinction between agritourism and “rural tourism” has little significance in terms of revival of the countryside, since both forms of tourism provide a positive contribution: rural tourism brings capital to the rural areas; agritourism brings capital, firstly to the agricultural area and, secondly to the rural area. Both have established a kind of “virtuous circle” within which the renovation of rural buildings and the reorganization of farming have been, and still are, both the cause and the consequence of the growth of tourism. For this reason, it is sufficient to say that agritourism and “rural tourism” businesses bring in a flow of capital that establishes a series of relations between themselves and the territorial, economic, social and environmental contexts.

The new EU policy for 2007-2013 is going to bring some other important changes concerning the chain integration in order to foster the competitiveness for the agro-food sector, quality improvement and economic diversification. It is mainly going to reinvigorate the previous policy focusing on some themes such as the improvement of the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, the environment, the countryside and the quality of life in rural areas. As for the last theme, it particularly concerns tourist supply and tourist routes in specialized agricultural areas.

The market linked to a particular agritourist demand is at the moment very segmented in accordance with the presence of many resources in rural areas, of the different tourist motivations, the development of a more specified and “experience-oriented” tourist style and the general diversified consumer needs. In general, the motivations pushing towards agritourism could depend on:

- the desire to relax, the love for nature, the environment and food and wine tourism;
- activity on the farm, a strong attraction to the services offered by the farm, both sports and education through meetings and courses on the “teaching farms”;
- the search for a place to stay in order to explore the local resources and the heritage (ISMEA, 2010).

The segmentation of the demand suggests an opportunity for the entrepreneurs; according to the economies of scales strategy, this opportunity is worth seizing through supply diversification, by turning to a wider range of activities and integrated services (Briedenham & Wickens, 2004) and, last but not least, of the territorial merchandising and the research of useful synergies by taking advantage of the wealth of local resources. In any case, the trend shifting towards a supply modulation through the combination of services should be more diffused in order to personalize one’s stay as much as possible, following the so-called policy of “mass customizing” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 73), an expression that could be judged as too strong considering the kind of services and the place, but convenient to underline the general strategy.



*THE EVOLUTION OF WINE AND FOOD TOURISM*

Wine and food tourism has been spreading especially with the affirmation of the Wine Routes (Strade del Vino) and the Olive Oil Routes (Strade dell'Olio) established at the end of the 1990's, which have contributed in multiplying tourist destinations and giving a new look to the rural landscape. In Tuscany, there are 14 Wine Routes and 3 Olive Oil Routes, 3 Typical Products Routes and 1 Chestnut Route which are still playing an important role. They have contributed to the development of the specific demand which is currently undergoing an important change, orienting itself towards an experience-tourism or of satisfaction according to personal inclination. It's the exact wealth of certified products (11 DOCG, 40 DOC, 5 IGT wines, 12 DOP and 10 IGP food farming) and the traditional ones (462) that have played a fundamental role for Tuscany (MIPAAF, 2012), where some farms have equipped themselves with special services according to their own productions: about 31% of the companies offer tasting of local products, 27% combine tasting with diverse services and 24% offer catering.

**Figure 4. A specialized vineyard for Val d'Orcia DOC white wine**



*Source: photo by M. Siena Tangheroni*

The phenomenon of food and wine tourism analyzed at a national level in 2011 involved 11% of Italians (5.5 million people), for an average expenditure per capita of 193 euros, of which 20.7% for catering, 20.2% for purchases of typical products and 17% for the purchase of wine (Censis, 2011). Over the past few years, the offer has undergone an evolution to meet diverse consumer behavior; today, in fact, it is able to satisfy the request for “food shopping”, the topical “snapping” and tasting in the sphere of festivals and fairs as well as proposing completely new opportunities with the aim of rediscovering their food roots, through the WI-MU (wine museums) and by the diffusion of “Eataly”, a chain with points of sale of typical, quality food products in Italy and abroad. To this should be added specialized magazines, television programs, websites and portals (for example “Movimento del Turismo del Vino”) and particular events like the yearly BITEG (Borsa Internazionale del Turismo Enogastronomico).

Such initiatives underline the importance of the relationship between territory and product in virtue of the ever more pronounced sensitivity of the gourmet tourist towards a well-known destination with a territory of undisputed quality. The planning and the management of food and wine tourist activities have to move along a defined path of conceptual issues of *terroir-milieu-territory-landscape*, terms which synthesize the geographical, economic, sociological and anthropological factors more closely connected to this type of integrated tourism (Croce & Perri, 2009, p.29). Moreover, other commitments on the supply side, like respect for cultural traditions and local production, the adaptation to the needs of the demands of the tourist and the involvement of the people of the place are surely necessary to trigger off a process of endogenous development (Pollice & Spagnuolo, 2012, p.120).

Already for many years the will to create recognizable territorial brands has emerged. From the thematic gastronomical routes and certified products, other acknowledgements to the area of

origin have been added such as “Citta’ Slow”, “Citta’ del Pane”, “la Bandiera Arancione”: brands which enrich small towns and rural villages with a particular calling to the food and wine and eco-tourism field. Sometimes it contributes to the design of a single brand for the entire territory that offers undoubted benefits favoring a single marketing strategy and the immediate recognition of products and the tourist offer of a peculiar territory. In fact, recently, Tuscany has seen the proliferation of area brands among which “Terre di Siena” and “Maremma” are the most well-known. As far as the brand “Maremma” is concerned, it must be specified that there is an ongoing process of internationalization both through the creation of two concepts “Maremma Wine Shire” and “Maremma Food Shire”; this clearly indicates a policy also aimed at the external market with the stipulation of partnership with European regions.

**Figure 5. The fair “Balestra del Girifalco” in Massa Marittima (Grosseto)**



*Source: photo by M. Siena Tangheroni*



More generally speaking, Tuscany is elaborating a new philosophy of *place branding* with the creation of networks composed of private and public partners and business associations devised to encourage the development of products and of a certain kind of communication capable of creating emotions (Di Vittorio, 2010, p.525). This implies that even the image of the brand enhances the consumer's experience of living the emotion to the full, because this is included in the purchase (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.17).

### *TEACHING FARMS: THE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE*

Tourist curiosity about agricultural activities can be satisfied with the participation in courses related to cultural products or the phase of transformation of products, a trend which is somewhat recent in Italy and that has brought about the development of the "fattorie didattiche" or "teaching farms". Their expansion came about rapidly, above all, following the Piano di Sviluppo Rurale 2000-2006 (Rural Development Plan). Currently, these structures are still increasing, above all, in reference to the model of the company that hosts programs of environmental education be addressed to the families staying at the farms, to scholastic groups and other agricultural workers. Sometimes this aspect is accompanied by an offer of "active teaching", through opportunities to observe or work together on one or more of the processing stages (for example, milk and cheese production, sheep shearing for wool production, the production of honey) but also maintenance of hedges, ponds and other biotypes there. The teaching initiatives proposed by the farms take on a strong socio-cultural value which in turn regenerates a stable bond between the farm and the territory, between city and countryside.

The synergy that can be activated between company actions and territory consolidates the relationship with schools. The farms activate constant relations with the institutions and together with these participate in the creation of guided tours on the farms, educational courses, practical workshops and seminars for teachers, showing how to take care of the agricultural produc-

tion, how to protect the environment, etc. This way, agritourism tries to fulfill the objectives of an economic, environmental and social nature. The social function is expressed by animating rural life, the environmental function by defending and maintaining its own resources. In fact, some of the farm's objectives also concern breeding of plants and endangered animals and the use of traditional farming techniques.

The farm, in this case, really has the function of a *stage* resuming the theory of Pine & Gilmore, in which experience is actually being lived out by each single person through direct involvement, participating in activities both in the farming sector and in the processing of agricultural products. Children are fascinated and are able to keep these particular moments in their memories for a long time.

A study carried out in 2005 on a sample of chosen teaching farms in Emilia-Romagna, the most active region for these particular experiences, highlighted the presence of certain characteristics like the high capacity to share the territorial reality in which the teaching farms are inserted, the adoption of a low-impact environmental production system (organic and integrated farming), the management of livestock and farmyard animal farming, the use of crops typical to the area, the recruitment of staff with strong communication skills, the presence of structures suitable for this type of hospitality (Nasolini T., *Il turismo rurale nelle fattorie didattiche*, [www.ciseonweb.it](http://www.ciseonweb.it)). However, there are some very different realities like those of Abruzzo where the presence of the National Park encourages the specializations related to the "settimane verdi" ("green weeks"), (Castagnoli, 2004).

In 2010, at a national level (ISTAT), 752 agritourism farms with teaching activities were recorded, many of which characterized by the presence of organic farming. The figures provide a reality which is not very common if placed in comparison to the reality of some other European countries, but undoubtedly interesting, above all, if the distribution of the phenomenon at a regional level is taken into consideration, from which emerges a



concentration of the offer in the northern regions of Italy—principally Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Lombardy and Piedmont—where, in some cases, there is a will to join in the network of certified and acknowledged quality by their very own regions.

According to the *Portale delle Fattorie Didattiche* (Portal of Teaching Farms) in Tuscany, there are 103 teaching farms; amongst these those of the province of Arezzo and Siena stand out and which form the network of the teaching farms of the respective provinces. Moreover, there is a certified network at a national level of *Biofattorie Didattiche*, created by the *Associazione per l'Agricoltura Biologica* (AIAB), (Association for Organic Farming) which offers a particular program of agri-environmental training aimed at the diffusion of the best agronomical practices. The network of Italian organic farms today includes 7 “City Farms” or entertainment farms; 3 are in Rome, while in Tuscany there is only 1 (in Livorno): structures in urban or suburban areas whose objectives are to make citizens understand the bond that unites the rural world with the urban world.

### *CULTURAL HERITAGE IN RURAL AREAS*

We have so far considered agricultural activities in Tuscany in close relationship with agricultural production, enhanced also through the widespread interest for wine and food, the search for typical products and the attraction to environmental education: types of tourism which underline how much the activity in agricultural areas is strictly correlated to rural diversification. More generally, the segmentation of the offer of agritourism services is today insufficient for the modern market trends since an effort is being made to raise awareness among the stakeholders to encourage the integration of tourist activities in a rural field and to create a network system: the rurality has become a business opportunity and through tourism, newer perspectives could be open up. Strategies do not only develop the basis of agricultural activities but also the scenic and cultural resources held in the rural areas, sometimes unknowingly: on one hand, there is the landscape to be valued and to be considered

as an economic resource and, on the other hand, the cultural heritage to be maintained and return both to the local population and to the tourist population through the creation of cultural itineraries in the rural areas (Cassi & Meini, 2004). The “thematization” is a strategic process through which a scenario is created where a new tourist experience can be lived, making the place a “special” one. This happened for some small rural European centres which tried to stimulate the local economy, repositioning themselves as *Book Towns* and trying to repeat the experience of Hey on Wye thanks also to the possibility of accessing the EU funding LEADER+ or FERS, like Montereggio, a small town on the northwestern mountain of Tuscany (Lemmi & Siena Tangheroni, 2009).

The search for new abilities of attraction are at present linked to some initiatives following the recent European policies for the development of cultural experiences in rural areas such as innovative planning through which it is possible to shed light on the local cultural specificities. In particular, the initiatives in the field of the project *Routes of Europe* are aimed at restoring the cultural and religious values to the places crossed by important historical routes, like the Via Francigena, contributing to the salvage of the artistic and religious patrimony, as well as to the rediscovery of the peculiar identity and the *genius loci* of the places. Through these types of intervention the tangible contents of the rural areas are recognized, such as historical buildings, sacred buildings or artistic works in general and the non-tangible ones, such as the significance and the vocation of places (spiritual, artistic, historical etc.) and the diffusion of a toponymy that is still able to enlighten them<sup>1</sup>. Tuscany owns a plurality of landscapes, all candidates to carry out an important role through the integration with rural tourism and agritourism: from those natural ones shaped by the effects of secondary volcanism, rich in thermal springs, to the more anthropic ones and

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<sup>1</sup> As an example, the study of the toponyms in a mountain area of Tuscany near the borders of Emilia-Romagna underlined the presence of toponyms of Lombard origin, many of which belonging to the military sphere (Lemmi & Siena Tangheroni, 2009); interesting too, the toponyms observed along the Tuscan Via Francigena, which are frequently attributable to names of Saints and to the presence of ancient buildings of worship (Lemmi & Siena Tangheroni, in press).

with a historical relevance, which still today can be traced back to an ancient rural culture and to those so-called “evolutionary ones”, such as non-urban areas subjected to post-industrial changes. In some cases, the landscapes considered unique from a naturalistic and historical point of view have been declared as World Heritage by the UNESCO (like the Val d’Orcia area). The acquisition of such an important “certification” and of the brand obtained even by virtue of repeated celebrations of that kind of scenario through painting or literature could be considered as a starting point for the future of the rural Tuscan landscape.

**Figure 6. The typical landscape in Val d’Orcia (Siena):  
cypresses and an isolated country house on the top of a hill**



*(Source: photo by M. Siena Tangheroni)*

Fortunately, the local authorities are considering these acknowledgements as a strong point from which to begin to operate in a new perspective to attain a sustainable tourist development, above all, according to the more recent market trends. The most recent contribution of the Tuscan landscape comes from the ci-

nema, which has for some years been assiduously searching for their locations even in rural areas, thus contributing to guaranteeing for them a new function in the field of film-induced tourism. An intimate bond was born between the significance of the cinematographic work and the representation of the landscape, so much so that it can be sustained that the joy and the sense of belonging of the gladiator is to the wheat fields of Terrapille (*The Gladiator*) as the pain and solitude are to the reserve of the Convent of Saint Anna in Camprena, amongst olive trees and cypresses (*The English Patient*). Some agritourism farmhouses began to organize guided visits to filming locations following the screening of films on agritourism itself and always accompanied by tasting of local products and the exhibition of handicrafts, so combining the charm of the landscape with the richness of the territory.

The eclectic nature of rural Tuscan areas goes even beyond this, for the natural capacity in welcoming particular events in green areas, mostly musical and theatrical events related to “public art” (Perelli, 2006), initiatives which take place, generally, in medieval centers in the provinces of Siena and Florence with the objective of promoting a new bond between art, architecture and landscape (Lemmi, 2009, p.118). The presence of a particular natural and cultural heritage can take on a current and topical significance by virtue of the capacity of creating an olfactory or testing emotion and a visual or oneiric one (that is tied to wine and food products, to the landscape and to the scenes of a film) and becomes the reason for an experience-based tourism.

### *THE RURAL LANDSCAPE AS A STAGE*

The strengthening of the relationship between cultural heritage and the territory is at the base of any kind of strategy that has, as its purpose, the enhancement of rural areas and the overcoming of the challenge that the present tourist market is facing. In fact, amongst the many functions that these areas manage to guarantee, the cultural one seems to have the most influence. So, the choice already made for some years now, to connect the set of natural

and anthropic resources to the territory has until today given life to a policy aimed at bringing the consumer closer to typical quality products by the creation of itineraries and of brands for local products, involving the typical rural structures, from the agritourism farmhouses to the wine cellars to the specialized points of sale.

The present needs have changed further; resources and territory still have to integrate in the field of a scenic environment where all its special features are highlighted to guarantee a customized offer and to make the consumer/tourist feel at the centre of a unique and individual experience. Similarly, the branding policies, which are the processes through which the brand is loaded with meanings, have to entail the strategic intention of encouraging “the lasting growth of the business, thanks to the consolidation of the reputation and of the instinctivity of the brand” (Granata, 2012, p.102).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) created a “theatrical model” through which to synthesize the tourist experience and in which the territory is considered a stage (here the landscape assumes fundamental importance) where the actors interact and perform. The actors in this specific case can be defined as actors with an offer (stakeholders) and the actors with a demand (the tourists), to give life to a theatrical representation, that is, the tourist experience. The staging of this representation cannot leave out of consideration the thematization, the experience, the involvement of the five senses, the integration of the holiday with the purchase of souvenirs, because the experiences must give strong feelings and definitively affect the memory.

Generally any type of process of purchase has become a particular experience: *Shopping Mall* and large *Outlets* organized as villages or small hamlets in which the sight is stimulated by certain out of the ordinary architectural choices and the creation of a completely artificial *landscape*, where the senses of hearing and smelling stimulated by music and fragrances make the purchase a captivating experience, through which the consumer receives stimuli derived, not so much from the product purchased, but



from all that is external to the purchase and of which the point of sale is only one of the elements.

A similar experience can be shifted to the tourist destination, starting from the thematization, that is from the identification of the characteristics of the territory to which a denomination can be given with an identification capacity in the same way as that of a brand, through which a passage from the attention towards the tangible object to the “critical attention” is made up (Cerquetti, 2010, pp.129-131). In this context, the concept of dematerialization becomes important, in economic terms, it implies that “the capacity to obtain value is dependant to an extent always more significantly on the creation, transfer and sharing of information and knowledge” (Tamma, 2010, p.28). Returning, then, to underline the relationship between culture and territory where in light of the latter affirmations, the intangible culture is the synthesis of the identity and of the profusion of the resources. In line with what was just said, the brand “Terre di Siena”, for example, seems to share many of the aspects as outlined above since the word “terra” includes both the peculiarities of local products and the cultural ones as synonyms of populations.

**Figure 7. A picture from the advertisement *Voglio vivere così* (www.intoscana.it)**



## CONCLUSION

The Tuscan accommodation system in the countryside is still mostly a traditional one, suffering the lack of some innovative intervention, despite the hope of the public stakeholders whose efforts are addressed towards:

- a greater integration of the offer with some specific services in different firms;
- a greater customization of the services, following the market trend and paying attention to the cultural difference of the foreign tourists;
- the diffusion of the building of themed short breaks and week holidays.

Following the data of Regione Toscana, the better part of agritourism farmhouses are still offering the same traditional services (swimming pool, trekking, mountain bike, restaurant) and just a few are revitalizing them, suggesting a new experience (wine or menu tasting, guided tour of the area associated to a theme, etc). This is a deficiency that can penalize the region, despite its richness in resources and its image lately promoted: *Voglio vivere così* (I want to live like that) is the slogan of the promotional tourist campaign for Tuscany. It is the brand that can be defined as “the umbrella brand” of Tuscany which leaves the tourist free to think and to choose any type of holiday with the belief that, in any case, it will be a positive one. The related advert designed, above all, for a foreign market shifts the attention from the material resources of the region to the immaterial ones through a fantasy-like interpretation that seems to make the spectator escape from the reality, while accompanying him towards strongly impressive places through uncommon visions.

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