

## The Importance of Place Names in the Sustainable Tourist Development of the Inland Areas of Tuscany: Toponyms along the Via Francigena

Enrica Lemmi, Monica Siena Tangheroni<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Tuscan cities of art and coastal towns have always been major tourist attractions and despite the continuous development of new routes and the search for different, non-traditional kinds of tourism, their competitiveness is still important.

Inland Tuscan areas, thanks to a varied heritage of resources not yet well known and exploited, could accomplish a new task and gain a higher rank as places for alternative rather than for occasional tourism. This reversal is feasible through a rediscovery of forgotten resources that could be emphasized by incisive territorial marketing, able to create new jobs and new tourism market segments.

The study of place names, through appropriate linguistic and geographical tools (topographic IGM maps, the Environmental Information System of *Regione Toscana*, etc.), reveals hidden identities in geographical areas that can be exploited because of their cultural heritage or their landscape. Sometimes the discovery of old linguistic remains is essential to understand the meaning and the role of places and buildings linked to the past of some ethnic groups who unconsciously left their mark in a place.

The Italian Peninsula is rich in particular place names due to the passage of people both from the North and from the Mediterranean Sea in different periods and for different purposes.

In Tuscany, too, some areas exist which have a cultural heritage depending on ancestral presences that can still be revealed: the study of toponyms, in fact, is an effective way to understand the origins and the role of places, the interaction between man and the territories where he lived, and historical and geographical changes.

Toponyms enable us to understand the identity and uniqueness of a location, show us a sense of place and build a cultural base in order to make local institutions aware of it so they can breathe fresh life into economically weak regions.

In particular we will deal with the route of the Via Francigena in Tuscany between Lunigiana and Val d'Orcia, where we find areas that have been economically important since their origins and rich in resources and cultural quality, others seen as 'minor' but vibrant enough thanks to new rural policies, and finally some other marginal areas.

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### The internal areas of Tuscany: some projects in progress

Recent studies and statistics suggest that Tuscany has a large annual number of tourists. As tourist flows are not homogeneously spread at a regional level, tourism brings evident spatial disparity, mainly a significant effect on the coast and secondly in the cities of art. However, the region has a very rich landscape in its seaside, mountains and countryside, and a considerable cultural heritage that is not well known and only occasionally visited. On the whole, the difficult accessibility of some of these sites, inadequate promotion and ineptitude in connecting less-known resources to more appealing ones are disadvantaging factors. These locations hold back diversification of the tourism offer and inhibit the redistribution of tourist flows. As a matter of fact, the level of accessibility has a very important function depending on the presence of infrastructures and transport services, including their organization and efficiency (Lemmi, 2009, 65).

Promotion depends on proper communication and mainly on a branding system that highlights the most relevant features of a tourist product.

The less-known resources featuring 'minor tourism' need a strong distinguishing element that can reveal the identity and the territorial qualities of an area, creating an unequivocal

<sup>1</sup> Although this paper is the result of collective reflection, the first, fourth and fifth paragraphs are by Enrica Lemmi and the second and third paragraphs are by Monica Siena Tangheroni.

image. Territorial marketing tools are vital for the improvement and promotion of a site determining the change from a tourist destination to a resort (Lemmi, 2009, 51-52).

The development of alternative planning through policies aimed at setting up tourism on a different scale could soften the effects of mass tourism, by now unsustainable, or enhance occasional tourism with little economic return (Costa, 2005, 140-148; Lemmi and Siena Tangheroni, 2009b, 447).

As in other Italian regions, Tuscany has within its inland areas a marginal economic function and for this reason some new long-standing development opportunities have been created that may be joined to pre-existing economic activities as part of a process for re-balancing between 'core' and 'peripheral' areas. The former are some urban centres, including the most popular cities of art such as Florence, Pisa, Siena and Lucca and some stretches of the coast that have a polarising effect on different kinds of tourism.

Some peripheral areas, by contrast, though rich in natural and cultural resources, are not able to emerge as tourist places. This has a negative impact since they have few industrial activities because industry is not widespread throughout the region but concentrated only in some areas (Bacci, 2002, 54).

The European economic programme for local development is well known as its aim is to help local communities improve their territorial Building Capacity (BC). As underlined in *Agenda 21*, BC is the power of both institutions and people in the local community to work together in an economic and environmental context in order to obtain new opportunities in sustainable tourism. It is an important approach for tourism planning in weak areas considering that they often have great potential, such as cultural heritage.

In this paper we will investigate the Tuscan areas crossed by the Via Francigena, pointing out their cultural heritage. Since the beginning of the present century, the European Council has been focusing on this important road, including it in the Cultural Roads Programme and creating a cultural route through the UK, France and Italy with the aim of achieving growth in tourism. Generally, tourist routes are planned to enhance some particular geographic features and some place amenities, building a trail which synthesizes and represents territorial identity. Therefore an area gains importance with its place-specific value as its focal attraction.

Via Francigena runs through a number of areas and micro regions which have strong but different landscapes and cultural backgrounds, although they also share an architectural heritage with a strong identity together with homogeneity in some place names. Place names, indeed, are a valid tool to discover the cultural origins and the former function of places (Cassi and Marcaccini, 1998; Lemmi and Siena Tangheroni, 2009a, 72-92), thus conveying an unexpected high surplus value to a region. They are a foremost resource not to be underestimated by tourism stakeholders while planning their actions designed to create various systematic tourist offerings. In this process every element must be interrelated in order to ensure that tourism options are compatible with local characteristics in regard to place identity, environment and landscape features.

### **The trails and the historic road system**

Via Francigena, thus named by the Lombards, traces a network of roads built by the Romans. After the Carolingian period it was also called Via Romea, emphasizing the destination rather than the place of the Franks' departure. The road system towards Rome was based on three ancient routes: Aurelia, running along the coast, which was in poor condition after the barbarian transition and then unsafe due to the Saracen incursions from the sea, and Cassia and Clodia which were too difficult due to their frequent sloping passes.

A fourth one, Via Etruria, a route founded in the Etruscan period and also used in the Roman period, connected Lucca and Siena through Basso Valdarno and the valley of the River Elsa and then, once past the Arbia and Orcia valleys, split into two.

This road network was very old and therefore was used both for commercial and pilgrimage purposes during the Medieval period. As to the use of these roads, we know that the Lombards travelled along the inland roads as a connection between Pavia and their southern possessions and to reach Rome going down *Mons Longobardorum* through the Cisa pass, reaching Lucca, Siena and then Val d'Orcia.

The large number of studies and research projects carried out about the routes followed by the pilgrims has given us some accurate information regarding a primary route and others presenting some diversions. As a matter of fact, besides the trail of Sygeric (the Bishop of Canterbury) in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century – accurately described and enriched with the list of the *mansions* – the later trail of Nicolas Munkthavera (abbot of the Thingor Monastery in Iceland), which dated back to 1154 (date of his travel journal) and the French King Philip Augustus in 1191 (date of his travel journal written on his way back from the Third Crusade) show some links with different places not included in the Sygeric trail. Therefore the trail was not the only way since it could be linked to two or even more diversions, a reason why the plural is need for the Via Francigena. Obviously, there were some mandatory sections like the one between Lucca and San Miniato, mainly in the hilly stretch from Porcari to Altopascio, through Badia Pozzeveri, and the road going through the Cerbaie wood considered a 'natural ford' between the marsh of Fucecchio and the marsh of Bientina, before reaching Galleno. For these reasons the town of Altopascio and the village of Galleno were important and well supplied with many services for pilgrims.

The diversions in the stretch after Castelfiorentino and the southern one in Val d'Orcia were useful to avoid the critical passages in some difficult areas due to river flooding or the presence of bandits. The numerous points indicating stopping places, the widespread buildings for pilgrim accommodation or assistance and the connection with important towns like Florence and Pisa, lead us to believe in the existence of a service system to help pilgrims on their travels. The flow of goods and people helped enlarge some towns in an axial development pattern, as occurred in Poggibonsi, Siena, San Gimignano and San Quirico d'Orcia. San Gimignano also underwent a tangible change that involved shifting the entrance of the church of San Giovanni from one side to the other to face the Via Francigena and developing three districts outside the city walls (Patitucci Uggieri, 2004, 56).

Many things underline that this road was important and well known, such as the presence of some similar toponyms found at key points along the Tuscan road system: Galleno, Gallena, Gallina, Galletta, Galluzzone, Galluzzino and also possibly Galico, are toponyms deriving from the Latin *callis*, that is a 'hard and narrow track' in high places (Arcamone, 2001, 53-54), whereas Callemala, Costamala and Malacosta suggest the difficulties encountered along the route.

The pilgrimage also stimulated some works such as the building of churches and hospitals, called *spedali* or *xenodochi* and starting in the 7<sup>th</sup> century which is when the cult of the saints began to intensify and the need to assure the safety of the pilgrims grew. Such hospitals were widespread as there were fifty on the road between Monteriggioni and San Quirico and thirty in the city of Siena. The major building development occurred mainly during the Lombard period when the monasteries acquired the dual function of a shelter and a check-point for road security. These buildings were sometimes ordered by the kings and queens themselves, such as the Monastero di San Dalmazzo in Pedona, near Cuneo, commissioned by Queen Teodolinda and the one in Bobbio, near Piacenza, by Agilulfo, to mention just two important ones beyond the Tuscan borders. Other examples are the Monastery of San Frediano in Lucca, San Michele in Marturi, San Donato all'Asso and Sant'Eugenio in

Pilosano (SI) and the Church of San Genesio in Tuscan. The church of San Genesio was built inside a Lombard settlement (Vico Wallari) and later transformed into Borgo San Genesio near San Miniato, Pisa, though now it is reduced to some scattered remains.<sup>2</sup>

Then in the 9<sup>th</sup> century during the Carolingian Age, the Via Francigena was still important and several abbeys were built (Sant'Antimo near Montalcino, San Salvatore all'Isola near Buonconvento, both in the province of Siena, San Giacomo on the Cerbaie hills near Fucecchio, in Florence, in Altopascio, Lucca, etc.), some of which show a transalpine architectural influence.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century something changed and the road between Lucca and Siena began to play a minor role, depending on political and economic events that gave priority to the link with Florence through San Casciano in Val di Pesa and the western strip of Chianti, bypassing Via Cassia between Poggibonsi and Siena. As a result, the increase in commercial trade brought with it detours to new and then prominent towns such as Florence itself, Prato and Arezzo (Stopani, 1988, 93).

The Via Francigena also had a relevant role in culture dissemination. This included the use of some transalpine saints' name, such as San Genesio, San Remigio, San Leonardo, San Marziale, etc., in resting areas, some symbols related to the pilgrimage, the presence of relics in the churches and architectural or pictorial elements. The suggestion of a labyrinth as a symbol of a dangerous and difficult path which purifies one's soul is present in some churches, for instance San Piero in Pontremoli, the Cathedral in Lucca, etc. The denomination of some churches after the cult of places in the Holy Land is frequent as well, including Corpo Santo (Holy Body) or Santa Maria a Bellèm (a corruption of Bethlehem). The use of some details from Bourguignon monastic art is much more evident through certain architectural features in Sant'Antimo, Badia a Coneo, Badia a Isola, Pieve di Camaiore, etc.

### **Toponyms along the Via Francigena: the triumph of sacred names**

Analysis of IGM (Istituto Geografico Militare) maps on a 1:25000 scale covering the area crossed by the pilgrims' path gave us 425 place names that highlight the role and cultural identity of some places in a strong, unambiguous way to be considered as key toponyms or typifying toponyms.<sup>3</sup>

The numbers include 350 saints' names (82%) for towns, suburbs, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, 125 toponyms (29%) for religious buildings including abbeys, parishes, isolated churches and shrines and some hospitals, 12 place names deriving from Latin and related to peculiar features of the path, some Lombard and Byzantine 'linguistic remains' and some ethnic group names.

The widespread presence of Lombards in Tuscany in the inland areas is traceable through a set of toponyms: Cafaggio from \*gahaghi meaning 'fenced wood' and its several versions such as Gaggiolo (Massa and Carrara), Cafaggi (Firenze) Cafaggiolo and Caggio (Siena), etc.; Braia or Braida from \*brok ('countryside'); Sala with the meaning of 'dwelling for a military chief' such as the ancient Sala Marthana near Fucecchio and Saletta (Pisa); Staffoli near Santa Croce sull'Arno (Pisa) and Montestaffoli near San Gimignano, as a border place or a meeting point along a road. There are also some place names derived from \*whato, as a place for guards including Gattero (near Casole d'Elsa) and Gattinaia (near Montepulciano), and some names from Lombard as ethnic group names: Bardone, Bardò, Bardese, Bardine, etc., which are concentrated in the Apennine area (Arcamone, 1997; 1998; 2001).

From Byzantine there are the toponyms of Filattiera meaning 'watch tower'; Baselga, related to the land assigned to the garrison soldiers; Botria/Botro, Baurin, Borra, Bando, pointing out a military border system, and Fossato as a moat.

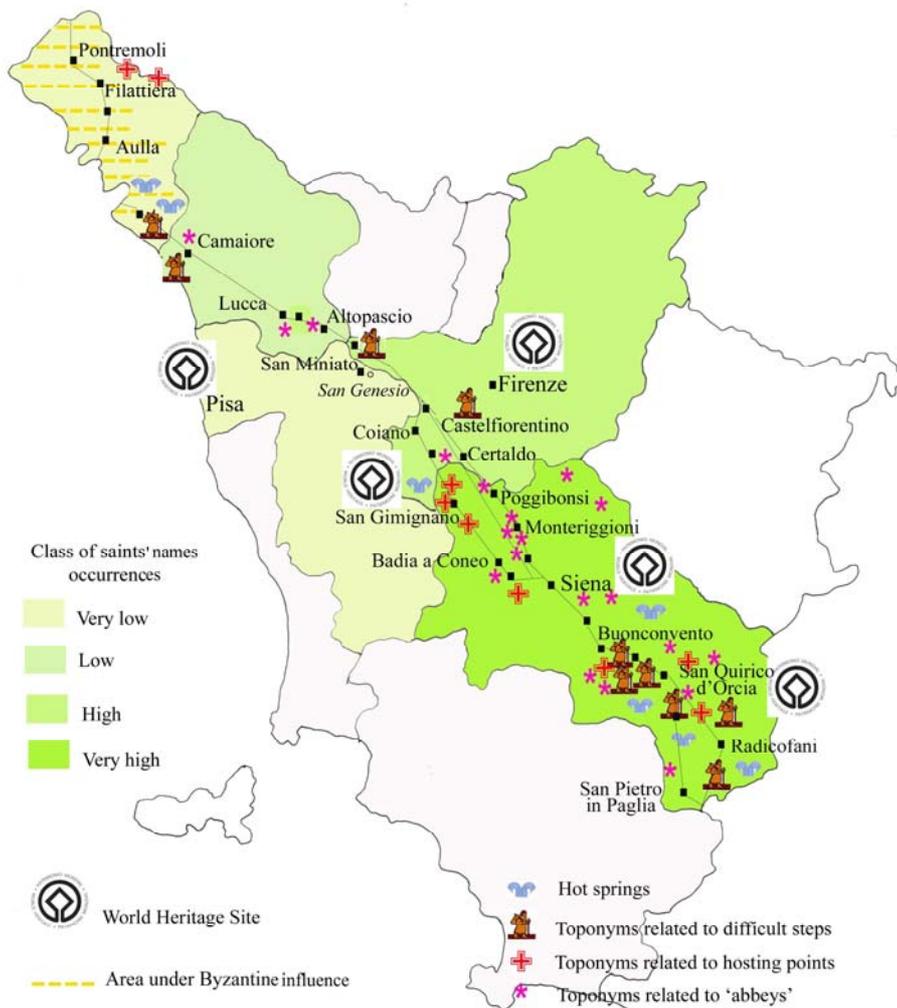
<sup>2</sup> San Miniato itself has Germanic origins shown for a long time through the toponym of San Miniato al Tedesco.

<sup>3</sup> We considered a buffer area of 16 km with the Via Francigena running through its middle.

Whereas the first and the second items are traceable in the province of Massa and Carrara, the others are also attested in some southern areas up to the province of Siena. The diffusion of ‘linguistic remains’ was as interesting as the spatial distribution of some other toponyms like the saints’ names. In the province of Siena, we found 43% of the saints’ names, 53% related to religious buildings and hospitals, among which are 18 toponyms for ‘abbazia’ or ‘badia’, both as a building still present and as an indicator of the past presence of one. Also the names of isolated churches and shrines named after the saints are numerous, located along the path or near it. Some of these buildings date back to later years, after the golden age of the Via Francigena, possibly due to the deep roots of religion and in memory of the passage of the pilgrims.

Toponyms related to the presence of abbeys may be for a single building such as Abbazia di Sant’Antimo or Badia a Coneo, medium and small towns (Abbadia a Isola) or identify an area, a district (e.g. Badessine near Monteriggioni) and rural estates (e.g. Abbadia, near Torrita di Siena).

The profusion of saints’ names of place connected to religious buildings in Siena province must be related to its size, as it is no doubt bigger (3465 km<sup>2</sup>) than the other Tuscan provinces crossed by the Via Francigena. Furthermore this size means that over one half of this Tuscan trail is in the province of Siena, as the northern part of the Via Francigena crosses four different provinces.



**Fig. 1.** Meaningful toponyms and tourist resources along the Via Francigena.

The large number of toponyms related to sacred sites has been already pointed out in previous studies that have been carried out using different methodologies but underlining as well the diffusion of some specific names like ‘pieve’, ‘abbazia’ or ‘badia’ mainly in central Italy (Fuschi, 2008, p. 287-302) or the spread of saints’ names in Tuscany, where a high distribution of occurrences has been found in Siena and Pisa provinces (Meneghello, 2006, 69).

In the diocese of Lucca, where the pilgrims went to worship the *Holy Face*, the wooden sculpture of Christ in the Cathedral of San Martino, the road between Camaiore and Lucca itself had many hospitals built with the contribution of private citizens or religious affiliations and sometimes with joint groups of citizens and ecclesiastics. Inside the walls of the town and in the neighbourhood about twenty buildings to care for pilgrims may have been built between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, while about ten could have been built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century between Montemagno and Altopascio (Benedetto, 1997, 89-91).

In this place the *Cavalieri del Tau* also gave their assistance to sick people and handed out quality food. Perhaps the tradition of the bakers in Altopascio dated back to the pilgrimage era. Fucecchio too, with its eight hospitals, was another important magnet in assistance for pilgrims due to its location next to the bridge crossing the River Arno, as was the Cerbaie area between Altopascio and Fucecchio, boasting the presence of a building in Spedaletto (thus named later on) and of the hospital of San Paolo (Garzella, 2001, 82).<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact we know that in the stretch from Pontremoli to Aulla several hospitals disappeared or were ruined, including the ‘Xenodochio di Montelungo’, a private property nowadays which is to be refurbished. Over the centuries many objects may have disappeared but the place names are there to remind us of the past presence of old sites and buildings even when the key factor does not exist any more. The same twist of fate is evident in the toponyms of Spedaletto and Passo dell’Ospedalaccio on the Apennines bordering Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, near two roads joining the Via Francigena. The two toponyms lead us to believe in the past existence of two hospitals, recently discovered thanks to the archaeological excavation carried out by some experts from the University of Pisa.<sup>5</sup>

Again, these kinds of place names related to hospitals are numerous in the province of Siena: Spedale (in the municipality of Montalcino), Spedaletto (in the municipalities of Poggibonsi and San Gimignano), Villa Spedaletto (San Gimignano), Spedaleone (Pienza), Podere Spedaleone (Torrina di Siena), and Spedanello (Asciano) (Passeri and Vecchio, 1983), where the old hospitals are used for tourism, after some masterful restoration that respected their historical features. We must also consider other toponyms like La Scala, a place near Gallina and Spedaletto (Pienza) that was as a care centre attached to the “Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala” in Siena (distinguished by a symbol of a ladder surmounted by a cross) and the “Ospedale di San Pellegrino” in Le Briccole, a site which we will discuss below. Another detail about the original function of those buildings is the presence of walls built to protect the hospitals and their property where they were also a farm or granary. As a matter of fact, at that time cereals needed to be guarded to avoid being pillaged. The name of this building is *grancia* and they are scattered all over the hills of Siena, used nowadays as farmhouses after adaptation for private purposes. Their names are rarely traceable on the maps, and there are only two areas where toponyms from *grancia* are still found in the municipalities of Montalcino (once) and Sovicille (twice).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The major part of these buildings have disappeared and others had changed their use several times, so only rich historical documentation has made it possible to learn of their existence and, sometimes, of their localization.

<sup>5</sup> From the article “Alla scoperta delle strade del ‘nostro’ Medioevo” at <http://ilgiornale.unipi.it/>.

<sup>6</sup> The *grancia*, also called fortified farms or grain fortresses, were built between the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, but some of them were made with the addition of walls and fortifications to earlier buildings by the Istituto di Santa Maria della Scala. The *grancia* had cellars, stables and shrines and were similar to a Medieval castle, such as the buildings of Cuna, Spedaletto and Castelluccio (Siena).

An interesting toponym is the abovementioned Le Briccole, near Castiglione d'Orcia and just one kilometre south of Gallina, whose name coincides with Abricula, the 11<sup>th</sup> station in the travel journal of Sigeric. Briccole derives from the Latin *apricus*, *aprica*, *apricum*; the meaning is 'open and sunny' (Passeri, Vecchio, 1983) and the name seems to be fitting to this site with its central location in Val d'Orcia, in a flat valley bottom lacking the views generally enjoyed from a hill and giving a wide-ranging view of the boundaries of the hills.

### Tourist areas along Via Francigena

The province of Massa Carrara was the first region encountered by pilgrims once they had passed through *Mons Longobardorum*. It is a mountainous region with the two mountain systems of Lunigiana and Alpi Apuane, rich in natural resources due to the presence of grottoes, forests, the famous marble quarries (with a very interesting landscape) and hot springs. Its cultural heritage is interesting too, such as the Medieval castles strategically sited along the route of the Via Francigena. Efforts to exploit its resources through thematic tourist itineraries including the hill and the mountainous hinterland have been partially successful, compared to the short coastal belt from Marina di Carrara to Cinquale.

This coastal belt is still the only powerful tourist attraction, despite the presence of an old-style accommodation system, a general lack of organization capacity and a shortage of more efficient facilities and more appealing services. The tourism rate (0.6 in Lunigiana and 4 in the municipality of Massa) confirms the imbalance between the mountainous hinterland and the urban coastal area, suggesting a more anthropic belt gravitating towards the two cities of Massa and Carrara.<sup>7</sup>

A little farther south, the area of Versilia with more than 500,000 tourists in 2008 and an extensive supply of hotel and non-hotel accommodation (over 100 beds per km<sup>2</sup>) is the most popular coastal belt in Tuscany. As to the hinterland, on the other hand, Lunigiana is mainly equipped with non-hotel accommodation, excluding the immediately adjacent areas which also depend on the demand for beach tourism. However, in general the supply of accommodation here is quite difficult to access and not very attractive, so it is not really an effective attraction (45,000 tourists in 2008) with which to begin redistributing tourism flows.<sup>8</sup>

The central plain that stretches up to the drained bed of the Bientina Lake in the province of Lucca has a medium-high population density (more than 370 people per km<sup>2</sup>). The mountainous area of Garfagnana, located in the north of the province, takes up more than one half of the province's area but has only 1/5 of its total population and obviously has a very low population density (about 63 people per km<sup>2</sup>). The plain has an important role due to the presence of a city of art in the shape of Lucca, industry and traditional crafts (in the Morianese area and also in Capannoli, Altopascio and Porcari) and an important architectural heritage such as a range of ancient villas, included on some tourism thematic trails and scattered throughout the valley bottom towards the Apuane Alps and along the road networks east and south of Lucca. Garfagnana, by contrast, despite its environmental features, local industry, an interesting range of tourist services in its farms and some heritage routes, still suffers from past marginalization due to road communication consisting of a single road along the valley bottom.

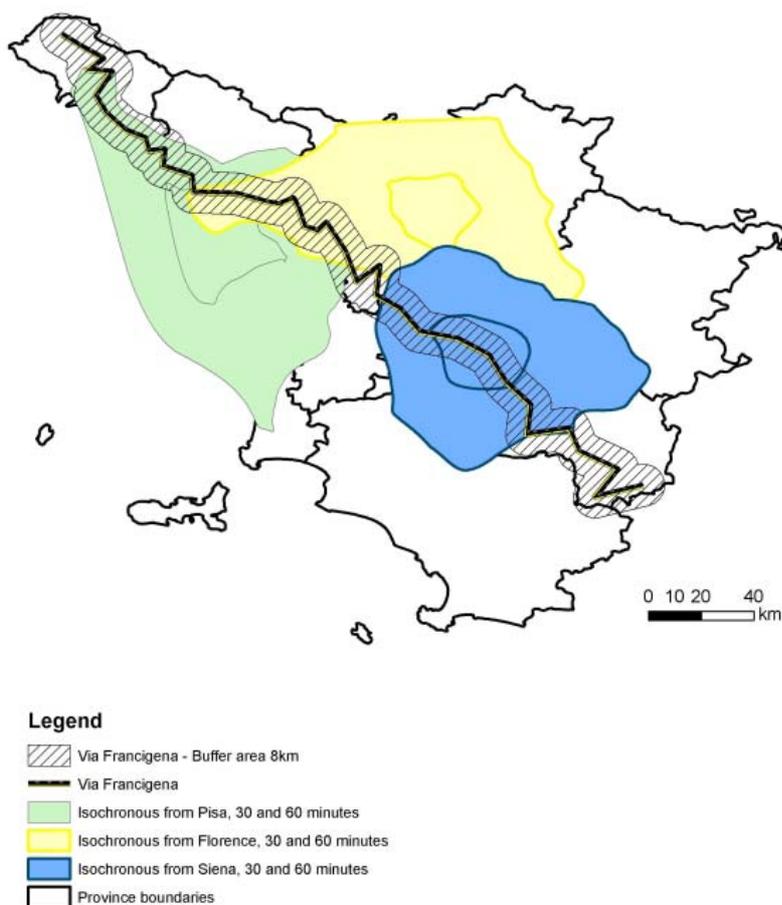
The adjoining geographical and economic regions of Medio Valdarno and Valdelsa are quite different. The hills are broken by Fucecchio Marsh and the drained land of Bientina, but

<sup>7</sup> The tourism rate is given by the following formula: (number of overnight stays / number of days) / number of inhabitants.

<sup>8</sup> Socio-economic indicators for coastal and inland towns are also different; for example, population density is 796 for the former and 58 for the latter, the employment rate in the primary sector is 1.67 in the coastal area and 4.36 in the inland areas and the unemployment rate, one of the highest in Tuscany at 5.2 in the province of Lucca, is 7.5 in the coastal areas and 9 in the inland areas.

ahead, once across the River Arno, the hills become the main features of the landscape. The municipalities of San Miniato, Santa Croce, Fucecchio and Certaldo are in an area which is rich in medium and small firms, where industry is still expanding strongly while specialized agriculture is being restructured.<sup>9</sup> The urban areas are very close to each other: San Miniato is only 15 km from Castelfiorentino which is about 10 km from Certaldo. Each of these locations has a unique historic heritage and its own manufacturing specialization. Moreover, their position near the Florence-Pisa highway and other transport links (mainly eastbound) to Val di Pesa and Florence helps with the connection to the Tuscan capital city of Florence, the other cities of art and the minor historical towns.

Here the widespread road network, while making travel easy, does not play a predominant role in tourism development, especially in the area of Medio Valdarno. This road network is today designed almost exclusively for industrial and commercial purposes. Only the municipalities of Valdelsa, where San Gimignano stands out for absorbing almost 50% of tourists, enjoy a reasonable influx of visitors compared to those of the other inland areas such as Crete Senesi and Val d'Orcia, two predominantly rural areas that stand out for their typical and certified agricultural produce, the presence of small thermal spa resorts with excellent scenery and for the predominance of non-hotel tourist accommodation. The accommodation capacity rate in the Crete Senesi area is 0.2 and in Val d'Orcia it is 0.27, which are not greatly different from the figure for Versilia (0.22) which does, however, reflect different surface areas.<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Accessibility of the sites along the Via Francigena from Pisa, Florence and Siena (by M. De Leo).

<sup>9</sup> Leather works have very old origins in the district of Santa Croce, San Miniato and Fucecchio, as do the glass works at Certaldo.

<sup>10</sup> The accommodation capacity rate is determined by the following formula: number of beds / number of inhabitants.

The town of Siena, the Tuscan city that is the symbol of the Via Francigena due to its historical importance in caring for pilgrims in its many hospices, in 2008 had only 1/3 of the number of tourists received by Pisa (554,000) and on the whole has a poorly diversified supply of accommodation. The town, even if considered a peripheral one due to its inland location in the south of Tuscany, is well connected to Florence and Pisa (both cities with an international airport) and could therefore be included in a broader Tuscan approach.

Generally, all the sites along the path of the Via Francigena have a positive location, considering they are accessible from one of the three most important cities, Florence, Pisa and Siena, by a short trip of 30-60 minutes, as shown by the isochronous ranges outlined in the map (fig. 2).

The more peripheral areas are the two geographical opposites of Lunigiana and Val d'Orcia, which have different touristic features as noted above: positive ones in Val d'Orcia which has been declared a World Heritage Site owing to its historical and landscape features. Here this important historical and natural heritage has been included in the 'minor' tourist routes, with little environmental impact but with a high cultural profile that may be supported by a widespread, non-hotel supply of quality accommodation.

### **A chance not to be missed**

The planning of a cultural itinerary by the Council of Europe is strictly linked to the combination of an integrated supply with the collaboration of public and private stakeholders. In this process, place identity must remain unchanged, following therefore a sustainability policy.

Hence initiatives at the European level concern projects for the training of tour operators willing to obtain more managerial skills in the field of cultural itineraries, mainly in rural areas.

The reason for being a cultural itinerary depends on the presence of an identity heritage that is accepted and shared by the regions involved. In this way the various projects carried out by the *Regione Toscana* itself are designed to increase expertise and knowledge either at a basic level or at a managerial one and thus implement Building Capacity in the planning of cultural tourist itineraries. In this particular case the *Regione Toscana* Master Plan for the Via Francigena clearly expresses from its first page its aim to innovate so as to put in place projects designed to build tourism demand.

Some important actions are as follows:

- A road road itinerary in parallel to some stretches of the Via Francigena now accessible only on foot, excluding a highway for the less travelled road in a more impressive environment.
- Putting road signs in georeferenced points that can be found by sat navs.
- Carrying out road works along the Via Francigena, providing better access to excursion paths near crossroads and to tourist information in the main urban squares and restoring heritage buildings.

In 2009 NECSTouR, the European Regions network, was created in order to promote the work of the Regions involved in the amplification of tourism policies, starting from landscape as heritage to be conceived in a broader sense while also embracing social and cultural features locally rooted throughout the ages. Landscape acquires the same value as the territory, becoming the starting point for the tourist promotion of cultural heritage.

Since the inclusion of the Via Francigena in the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, many initiatives have come out to popularize the route in order to enhance it for tourist purposes. It has achieved great online publicity in a short period mainly through the *Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene* and also through the *Regione Toscana*, the

*Associazione Comunità Toscana il Pellegrino* and various other websites linked to the provinces.

Finally, the creation of a tourist opportunity along the Via Francigena should make use of the toponomastic concept as a tool to ‘read’ and ‘understand’ the meaning and the history of any place. As a matter of fact, if we consider place names as cultural heritage for their capacity in giving precious indications about the past and the transformation that took place there, they take on a fundamental role as they give us important information about the region to be put forward for tourist use. Hence it is clear that this kind of cultural heritage, generally confined within maps, can provide input to enhance regional description as useful advice when planning cultural routes (Fuschi, 2008, 300).

This is an interaction between tradition and modernity in the reconstruction of heritage, generating a new and full tourist image of a place. The reinterpretation of tradition and conservation for contemporary participation in a dynamic innovation process provides strategic importance within the social and economic setting (Ferrari, 2008, 265). In a specific case, sacred toponyms have a very strong communicative role that helps to highlight the identity of the sites from the spiritual to the cultural and the architectural point of view. Cultural heritage of this kind, when shared by the local community and stakeholders, could be one of the strong points for Building Capacity improvement.

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Enrica Lemmi

[e.lemmi@geog.unipi.it](mailto:e.lemmi@geog.unipi.it)

Monica Siena Tangheroni

[humgeo@discat.unipi.it](mailto:humgeo@discat.unipi.it)

Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Uomo e dell'Ambiente

Università di Pisa

Italy