

**International Conference on Religious Tourism:
Fostering sustainable socio-economic development in host communities**

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Session 1: Understanding religious tourism - motivations and trends

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Bio:

He joined the Order of Friars Minor in 1981 and was ordained priest in 1987.

Holding his Bachelor studies in theology at the Theological Interreligious Institute of Puglia in Bari, he continued his studies by attending a Specialization course in mass-media at the SPICS of Paolini in Rome.

Appointed Town Hall Secretary and Chief of the missionary work of the Friars Minor in Puglia from 1991 to 1997, he then managed press relations in the Communications office of the Order of Friars Minor, from 1997 to 2006. In 2006, the Custody of the Holy Land entrusted him the assignment of Director of the "Peregrinatio Terrae Sanctae". Since 2006 he has been coordinating the training of tourist guides for pilgrims, in collaboration with the Faculty of Archaeology and Sacred Scripture of the Flagellation (SBF) of Jerusalem.

Abstract:

"Pilgrimage is the visit to the places of God, to the spaces that he chose to lay down the tent among us, so that men have a direct contact with him"

In the last 8 years, the office for pilgrimages of the Custody of the Holy Land had the primary aim of "promoting the experience of pilgrimage" by paying attention and by enhancing the elements of uniqueness that characterize an experience of this type. Despite the difficult moments and situations, a winning

promotional-communications strategy encouraged the presence and the continuity of groups visiting the Holy places.

Pilgrims are travelers motivated by spiritual and transcendent reasons. The purpose and goal is to visit places, environments that are relevant in the religious experience. The pilgrim is moved by a deep and profound need, looking for his own spiritual roots; He wishes to live an experience of faith, conceived as recovery of his origins and personal growth.

This need had been connecting pilgrims through centuries and it is particularly true for the modern man, lost in the multitude of problems related to daily life. For this same reason, he has more needs to find himself. To achieve this, he needs reflection, meditation, prayer, silence; he needs to make out of the physical journey, a "path of the soul".

The roots of the pilgrimage can be traced back in the Bible, beginning from the very first man, Adam, who fully lives the detachment from Eden, to the patriarch Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that pilgrimed - homeless- to the Promised Land. Since the early centuries of the modern era, Christians had the Holy Land as a goal of the spiritual journey, in order to find the signs of the presence of God there. The Holy Land is for the pilgrim the most expensive piece of land.

The journey takes its original mission and leads to research - far from the place of ordinary life - the deeper meaning of existence, by offering the opportunity to meet witnesses, beneficial in a person's life.

In this area of needs, religious tourism fits with its peculiarities: visit to the holy places, time devoted to prayer and "statio", generating a sense of belonging to the reality encountered.

These elements have a great significance for the pilgrim, who is not afraid in front of the problems or difficulties of any governmental, political or economic nature, that could prevent him from traveling. For the "pilgrim" the spiritual need takes prevailing character.

In times of severe economic crisis we find that, compared with a decline of demand for purely tourist itineraries, the religious keeps a constant positive trend.