

Sakrale Räume und säkulare Religion

Kulturerbe touristisch erleben



Religious heritage and digital media

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UNESCO chair in ICT to develop and promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites



Università
della
Svizzera
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UNESCO
Chair in ICT
to develop
and promote
sustainable
tourism
at World
Heritage Sites





Mary of the Cross MacKillop
(1842 – 1909)

Founder of the Sisters of St.
Joseph of the Sacred Heart
canonised on th October 2010



Epitaph on the tomb of St. Mary of the Cross MacKillop, in the chapel
dedicated to her in northern Sydney

[photo credits: the author]

RELIGIOUS TOURISM: focus on the destination

- The destination holds religious significance = through its external remains, one seeks to attain the spirituality they embody.
- It responds to a desire for knowledge and prayer.
- It enables visitors to encounter a religious faith and enter into a religious dimension.
- Knowledge and contemplation of historical and artistic works.







PILGRIMAGE: focus on the **route**

- The journey has a cathartic function.
- It fulfils an ascetic need; it is a 'mobile expression of devotion'.
- Contemplation of creation and an understanding of local traditions.





SPIRITUAL TOURISM: focus on the **inner search**

- It is not necessarily linked to a religious belief.
- The traveler is driven by a need to find meaning, but often does not know exactly what s/he is looking for.





Heritage of Religious Interest

UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest

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There exist a great variety of religious and sacred sites that are representative of the different cultures and traditions of the world. Approximately 20 percent of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List have some sort of religious or spiritual connection.

These properties to be found in most countries around the world constitute the largest single category on the List. Specific and significant spiritual meanings are mentioned to justify the Outstanding Universal Value of a large number of the World Heritage properties. Numerous historic cities on the List possess components of religious significance and are recognized as holy cities by different communities.

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Pilgrims in the Digital Age: a research manife

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Special Issue : Information And Communication Technologies In Religious Tourism
And Pilgrimage

Editorials

-  PDF Vol. 4(iii) - Cover and Table of Contents
-  PDF Editorial : Information and Communication Technologies in Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage
Silvia deAscaniis and Lorenzo Cantoni
-  PDF Pilgrims in the Digital Age: a research manifesto
Silvia deAscaniis and Lorenzo Cantoni

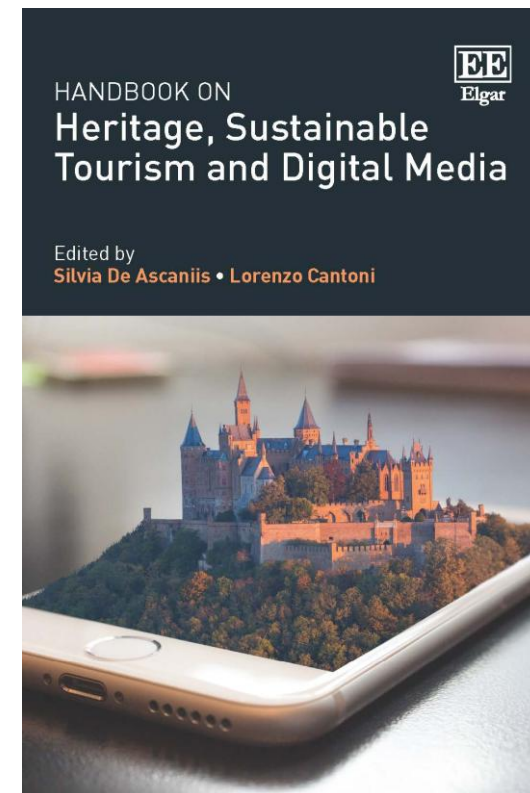
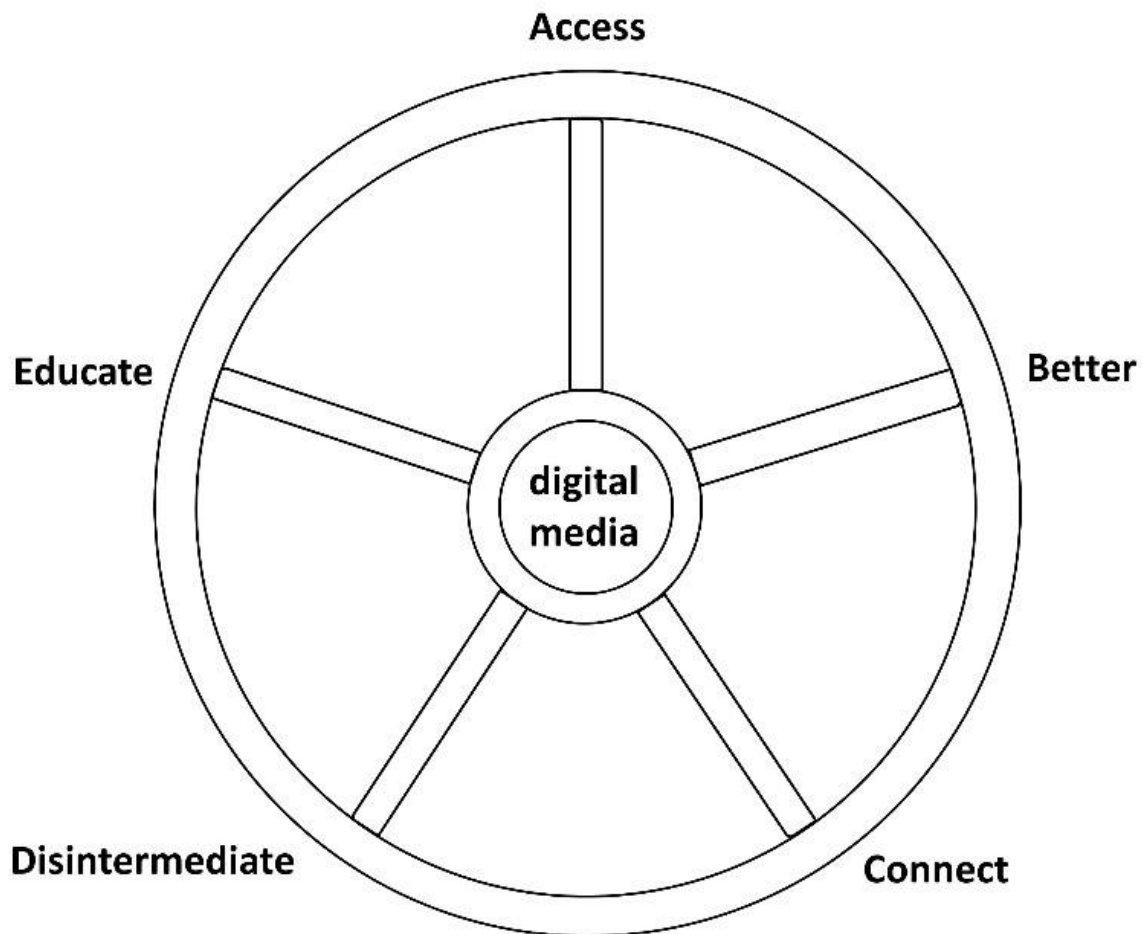
Academic Papers

-  PDF The Role of Tourists' Feedback in the Enhancement of Religious Tourism Destinations
Stefania Cerutti and Elisa Piva
-  PDF The Efficacy of Heritage Interpretation at the Lalibela Rock-Hewn Churches in Ethiopia: exploring the
need for integrating ICT-mediation
Rayvisic Mutinda Ndivo and Lorenzo Cantoni
-  PDF The Role and Usage of Apps and Instant Messaging in Religious Mass Events
Juan Narbona and Daniel Arasa



What role do digital media play in the tourist experience at sites of religious heritage and pilgrimage destinations?

The ABCDE framework



De Ascaniis, S., & Cantoni, L. (Eds.). (2022). *Handbook on Heritage, Sustainable Tourism and Digital Media*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788970082>

Enjoying the beauty to experience the sacred



Bühren, R. van, Ascaniis, S. D., & Cantoni, L. (2018). **Special issue on tourism, religious identity and cultural heritage.** *Church, Communication and Culture*, 3(3), 195–198.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2018.1548904>

De Ascaniis, S., & Cantoni, L. (2017). **Online visit opinions about attractions of the religious heritage: an argumentative approach.** *Church, Communication and Culture*, 2(2), 179–202.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2017.1350585>

RQ: What do visitors share online about the place they have visited? What topics do they discuss? Are there signs of a *via pulchritudinis* experience?

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE:

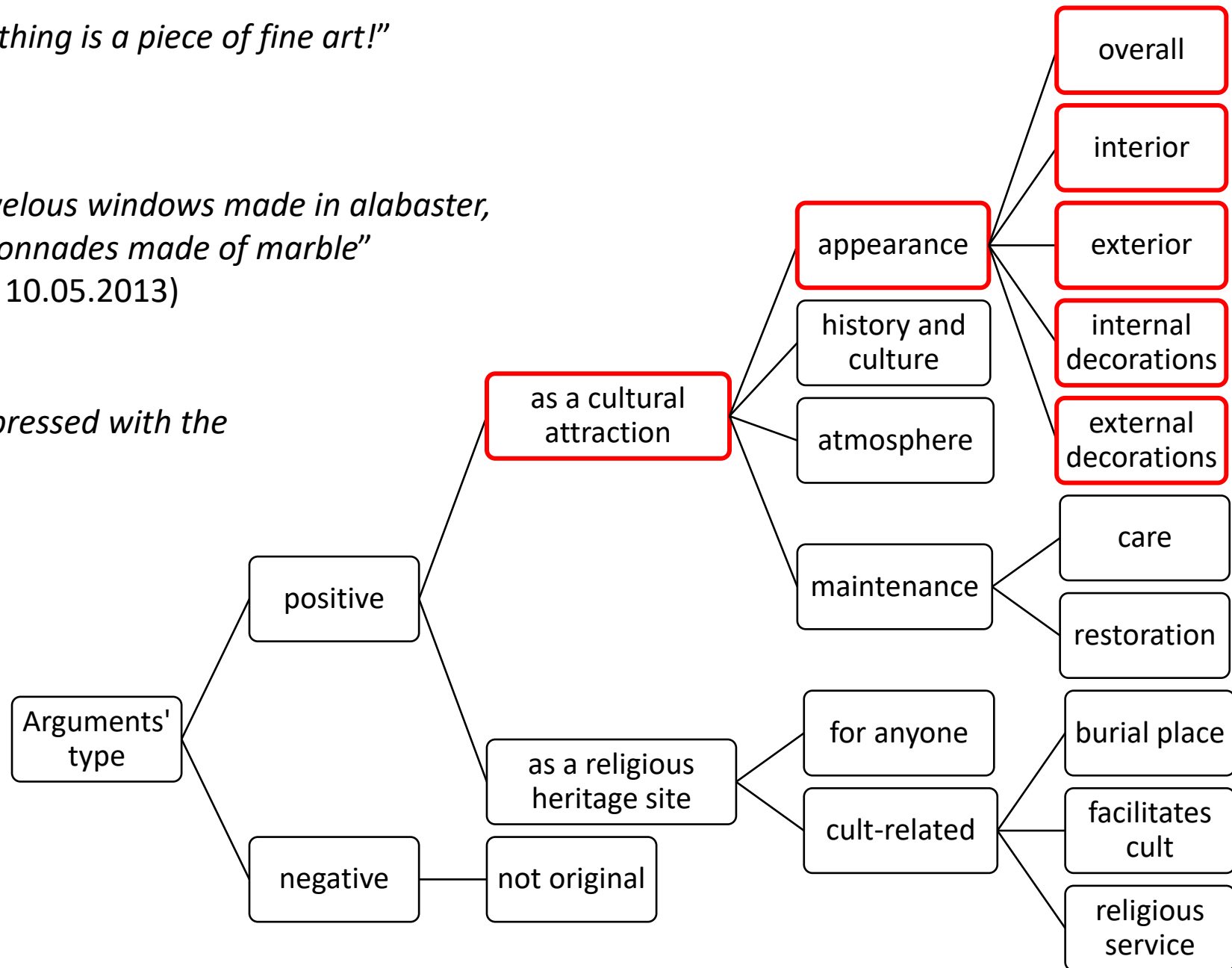
- Identification and classification of the topics raised by visitors regarding the location and their experience
- 800 online travel reviews published on TripAdvisor: 400 in Italian and 400 in English, starting from the first review published (2 May 2007)



"It is as though everything is a piece of fine art!"
(Betty L, 21.02.2013)

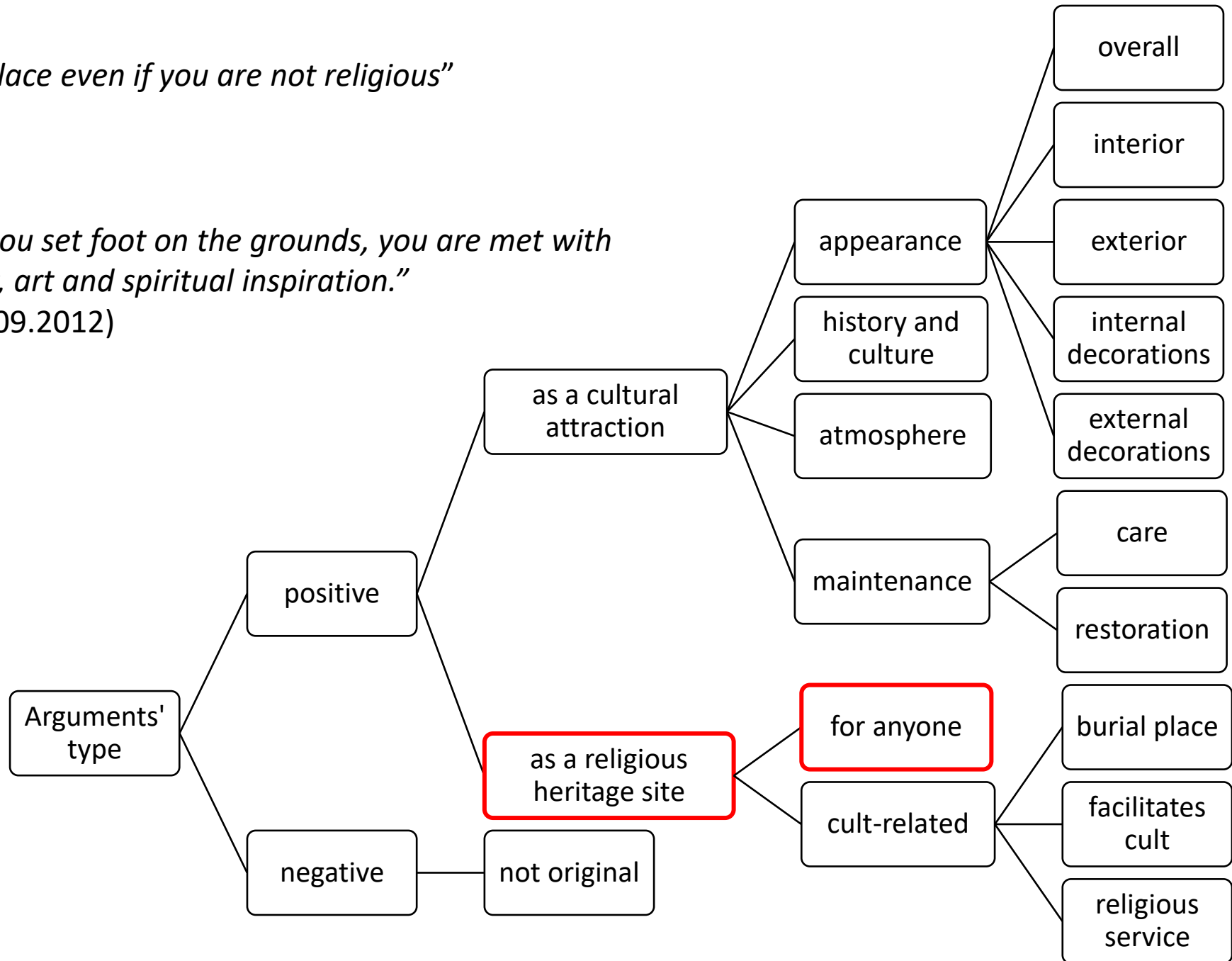
*"rare and marvelous windows made in alabaster,
astonishing colonnades made of marble"*
(Ondina_2011, 10.05.2013)

*"we were especially impressed with the
portraits of every pope"*
(rehavia6, 9.02.2013)



"This is a wonderful place even if you are not religious"
(M C, 6.08.2012)

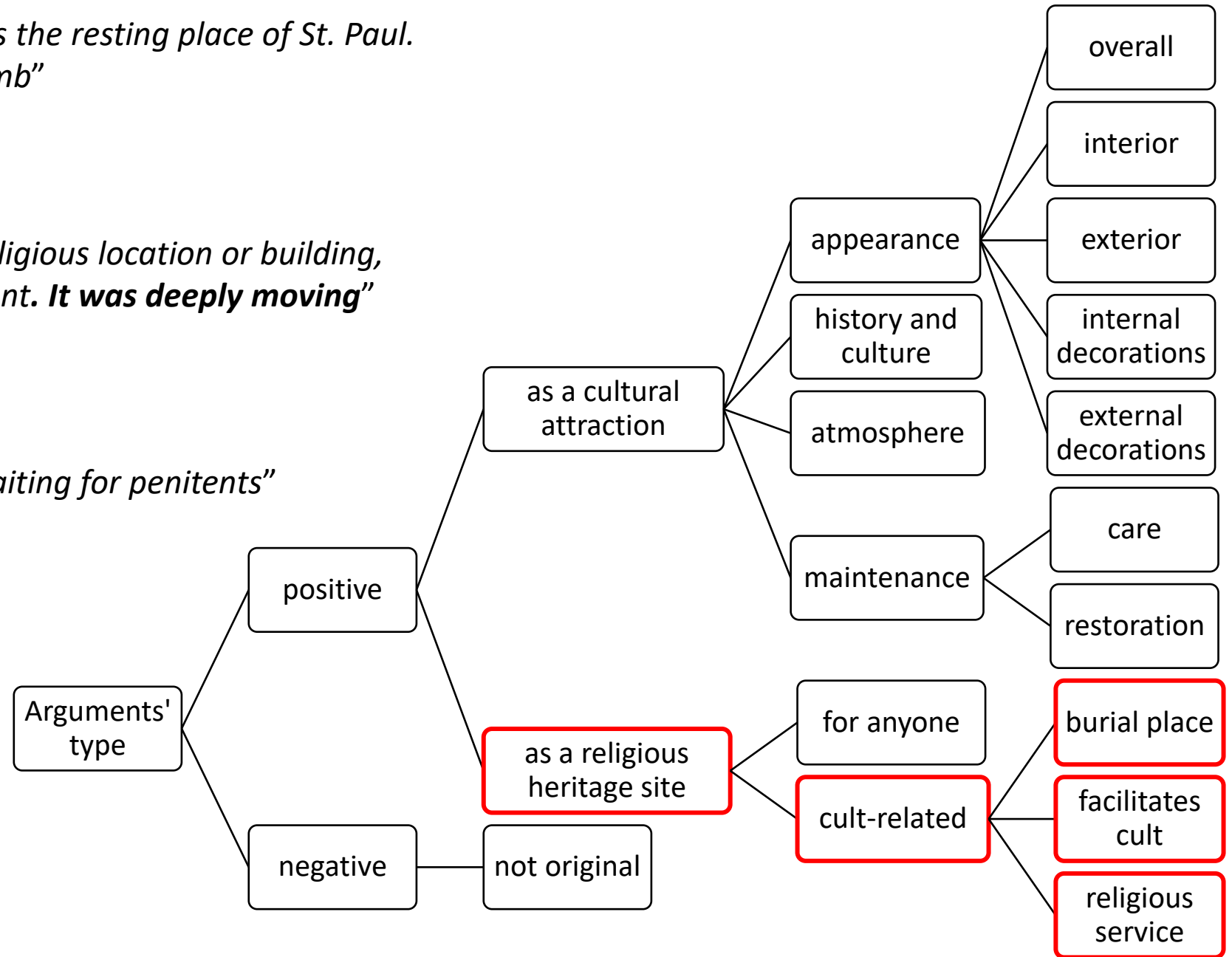
*"From the moments you set foot on the grounds, you are met with
overwhelming beauty, art and spiritual inspiration."*
(scrapbookmarie, 29.09.2012)



“First and most importantly, it is the resting place of St. Paul. One may pray in front of his tomb”
(twerner, 17.01.2013)

*“Rarely am I moved by a religious location or building, but this basilica was different. **It was deeply moving**”*
(lewisstruppi, 24.08.2012)

“we loved [...] the confessor waiting for penitents”
(valuewise1, 3.04.2012)



Secular knowledge in sacred spaces

De Ascaniis S., Cantoni L., Grazer Bideau & Peter Bille Larsen F. (2024) **Governing narrative and representational creativity to communicate heritage sites. The case of the Benedictine Convent of St. John in Müstair, Switzerland.** In: F. Graezer Bideau and P. Bille Larsen (Eds.) *Governing heritage and creativity: frictions, avenues and questions*. Lettera Ventidue.

Bilotti, U., De Ascaniis, S., Tardini, S., Todino, M. D., Campitiello, L., Di Tore, S., & Sibilio, M. (2025). **From Heritage to Gameplay: Developing an Educational 3D Experience for Museum Learning at the Monastery of St. John in Müstair.** *Journal of Inclusive Methodology and Technology in Learning and Teaching*, 5(3).
<https://www.inclusiveteaching.it/index.php/inclusiveteaching/article/view/464>



3 DIE UNTERSUCHUNG DES MÖRTELS

LO STUDIO DELLE MALTE

Das Mörtel setzt sich aus bestimmten Teilen, Zementpulver (Sand) und Wasser zusammen. Die Mischung geschieht beim Verarbeiten des Zementpulvers und Wasser zu einem pastösen Zustand. Die Eigenschaften des Mörtels hängen von der Zusammensetzung ab. Ein gutes Mörtel kann sorgen, wie für eine empfindliche und leicht zu verarbeitende Masse. Die Eigenschaften des Mörtels sind das Ergebnis der Mischung von Sand, Zementpulver und Wasser. Die Eigenschaften des Mörtels sind das Ergebnis der Mischung von Sand, Zementpulver und Wasser. Die Eigenschaften des Mörtels sind das Ergebnis der Mischung von Sand, Zementpulver und Wasser.



WILGT STEN NACH
RENNEN
ER?

ARCHÉ LA ROCCIA
PO LA COTTURA
PESA DI MENO?

BETRACHT
LICHE ZUS
SANDE A
FUNG AUS
ALT DER
DASS SE

CONSI
COMA
& B
DA QU
MAPPA C





From pilgrimage routes to cultural routes

De Ascaniis, S., & Landone, C. (forthcoming). **The dual identity of the Saint James way: ancient pilgrimage route and progenitor of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes.** To be presented at *2nd Conference of the University Network for Cultural Routes*, Lugano (Switzerland), 12–13 November 2026 (<https://www.unescochair.usi.ch/university-network-for-cultural-routes-2026-conference>)

Santiago de Compostela (Old Town)

Description Maps Documents Gallery Video Indicators

Santiago de Compostela (Old Town)

This famous pilgrimage site in north-west Spain became a symbol in the Spanish Christians' struggle against Islam. Destroyed by the Muslims at the end of the 10th century, it was completely rebuilt in the following century. With its Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque buildings, the Old Town of Santiago is one of the world's most beautiful urban areas. The oldest monuments are grouped around the tomb of St James and the cathedral, which contains the remarkable *Bática de la Clara*.

Description is available under license CC-BY-SA IGO 3.0

Routes of Santiago de Compostela: Camino Francés and Routes of Northern Spain

Description Maps Documents Gallery Indicators

Routes of Santiago de Compostela: Camino Francés and Routes of Northern Spain

A network of four Christian pilgrimage routes in northern Spain, the site is an extension of the Route of Santiago de Compostela, a serial site inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993. The extension represents a network of almost 1,500 km: coastal, interior of the Basque Country–La Rioja, Liébana and primitive routes. It includes a built heritage of historical importance created to meet the needs of pilgrims, including cathedrals, churches, hospitals, hostels and even bridges. The extension encompasses some of the earliest pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela, following the discovery in the 9th century of a tomb believed to be that of St. James the Greater.

 Spain

Date of Inscription: 1985
Criteria: (i)(ii)(vi)
Property : 107.59 ha
Buffer zone: 216.88 ha



 Spain

Date of Inscription: 1993
Significant modifications to the boundaries : 2015
Criteria: (ii)(iv)(vi)
Buffer zone: 16 285 7156 ha

Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France

Description Maps Documents Gallery Video Indicators

Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France

Santiago de Compostela was the supreme goal for countless thousands of pious pilgrims who converged there from all over Europe throughout the Middle Ages. To reach Spain pilgrims had to pass through France, and the group of important historical monuments included in this inscription marks out the four routes by which they did so.

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 France

Date of Inscription: 1998
Minor boundary modification inscribed year: 2025
Criteria: (ii)(iv)(vi)
Property : 100.9066 ha
Buffer zone: 256,672.45 ha

Explore all Cultural Routes by theme

In 2026, we count 49 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, with very different themes that illustrate European memory, history and heritage and contribute to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe.

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



Saint James Way

1987



The Hansa

1991



Viking Route

1993



Via Francigena

1994

On the web:

- The Way of Saint James
- Agencia de Turismo de Galicia
- *Santiago de Compostela Turismo*
- European Federation of Saint James Way
- Turespaña
- Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino de Santiago
- Confraternity of Saint James (UK)

} Focus on tourism aspects

} Focus on religious aspects

Providing a “space” for intangible religious heritage

Habitus Fidei Le mostre ▾ Contatti

UN CAMMINO FRA ARTE, STORIA E FEDE

Habitus Fidei

LE MOSTRE

[Le vesti delle confraternite](#)

[Francesco e l'abito perfetto](#)

[Nella casa del Señor](#)

[La creazione di un capolavoro \(online\)](#)

A BREVE

[Francesco e l'abito perfetto](#)

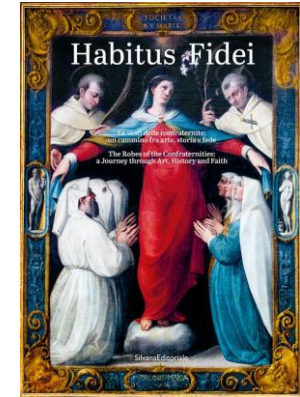
Scopri la prossima mostra



Phygital: between physical and digital

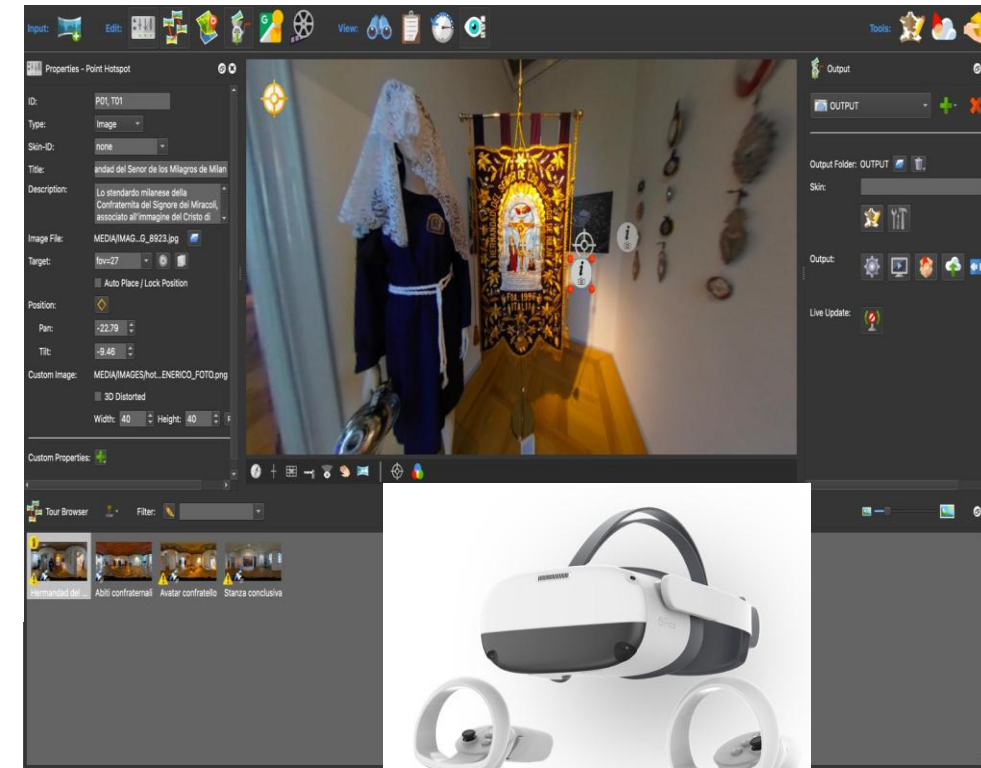
Offline staging:

- Physical exhibition (clothings, perfumes, processional objects, documents, people)
- Book
- Brochure
- QR codes



Digitalization:

- Website (<https://habitusfidei.art/>)
- Videos ([drones and fish-eye videos](#))
- [3D scanning of clothings](#)
- [Digital exhibition](#)
- Immersive virtual reality
- Photo archive ([Flickr](#))
- **AI brother**







The AI brother

Stachel, C., Lorandi, M., De Ascaniis, S., & Cantoni, L. (forthcoming). **Embodied Conversational Agents as Cultural Mediators: Social Perception and Education in Exhibitions.** *Museum Management and Curatorship*.

- Data included:
 - Self report survey (n=107)
 - structured observations
 - interaction transcripts
- Visitors who reported **higher perceived anthropomorphism** showed significantly **greater trust in the agent**. Higher perceived anthropomorphism was also associated with **increased interest** in the exhibition topic, **better understanding**, and **higher self-reported learning**.
- Observations indicated that **visitors engaged with the agent in socially oriented ways** and remained attentive to its responses, while interactional constraints limited the experience for some users.
- The findings indicate that the contribution of ECAs to cultural heritage dissemination depends on visitors' social perceptions and the trust established during interactions, highlighting the importance of relational and credible design for museum applications.

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