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Rural tourism driving regional development in Tuscany.  
The renaissance of the countryside.

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**Abstract.** After the crisis of the traditional agricultural system in the 50's, starting from the 80's rural tourism is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside. The empty spaces of rural areas, which characterise the agricultural landscape, show a new set of functions developed by and for the tourist field.

The Tuscany Region was the first Italian region to recognize the new trend of the integrated rural development so that in 1985 it stated the first regional law on agritourism. In this context Tuscany is the one of the first Italian and European regions committed to the development of rural areas.

This paper recognizes the leading role of Tuscany in the development of rural areas and tourism and shows the relationships between tourism and local sustainable development in rural areas through a case study.

In the first part there is a historical analysis of the evolution of the tourism in rural areas, of the strengths of the Tuscan model in this field, and of the relationship between identity and local resources for the sustainable development of tourism (the topic of rural tourism may be analyzed from a local development point of view).

In the second part there is the introduction of a case study developed in a rural area characterized by the "typical" Tuscan landscape, the presence of art cities, and a high-quality supply of services and products such as food and wine. The analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative methodologies that helped us outline the network of tourist centres and study tourism in rural Tuscany. Then there is an analysis of competition capacities and potentialities of the local area to understand if and how these depend more or less on the network structure or on local resources. At the end the paper underlines the strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism in Tuscany, one of the leading region of the European project NECSTOUR, and outlines possible future regional policies in support of the sector.

JEL Codes: O18, Q26, Q56, R11

Keywords: rural tourism, regional development, sustainable tourism, Tuscany

## 1. Introduction

After a period of development in the Nineties, with growth in demand and offer, Rural Tourism (RT) has moved into a more complex phase (Long and Lane, 2000), and many scholars argue on its role in local development and policy and, consequently, on its role within the restructuring countryside, and within wider tourism development processes (Hall et al., 2005).

In this second phase RT is not anymore a minor agent of rural economy, landscape and social change and it has become a prior element, able to attract attention of local, regional, national and supranational policy makers. Even if many parts of Europe have experienced a century, and North America a eighty years of rural decline (Long and Lane, 2000), tourism cannot be considered the main path to enhance local economies (Hall et al., 2005). Furthermore, many studies in various European countries show that RT is not the solution for the problems facing the agricultural areas,

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although it certainly can contribute to diversify farm incomes, especially in small family farms, carry out additional benefits into the rural economy, counteract emigration from rural areas, encourage an increase in cultural exchange between urban and rural areas, and enhance the values inherent to rural life, as well as contribute to the general diversification of the economy (Sharpley et al., 1997; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Canoves et al., 2004).

In the literature a plethora of researches make it very complex to define RT. This versatility and diversity has led to a big confusion and/or substitution of terms such as farm tourism, green tourism, outdoors, ecotourism or nature/wildlife tourism on one side, and RT on the other (Frochot, 2005). According to Lane (1994) and Sharpley (1996), all these terms are specific forms of tourism activities taking place in rural areas, built upon the specificities of the rural world (open space, rural heritage, etc.), rural in scale (usually implying small scale) and representing the complex pattern of the rural world (environment, economy, history and location). In conclusion, RT cannot be limited simply to farm tourism but should include all the aspects of tourism that its physical, social and historical dimensions allow it to develop. For this reason, in this paper, RT is considered as the “tourism in rural areas”. All kind of tourists will be accounted, those renting a house or hosted in a farm, bed and breakfast, hotel, camping and any other kind of hospitality.

Even if the trend towards specialization in RT is especially consolidated in the UK and the Netherlands, and in France, Spain and Italy as well, not all rural areas within any country are at the same stage of development and some of them can be considered particularly matured in the development of RT. In this paper, in the section 3, we analyse the case of Tuscany which can be considered, at least within Italy, the most important area for RT. In section 4 we report the results of a quantitative and qualitative survey on the rural area of Vinci, the hometown of Leonardo.

## **2. Rural tourism**

Today, many different interests, targets and purposes are converging into rural areas: the countryside becomes a refuge from urban life (Daugstad, 2008), but at the same time it is sometimes geographically involved in the urban sprawl; countryside faces globalisation (Woods, 2007), but at the same time it leads to the “re-regionalisation” of food system<sup>2</sup>. The relation between urban areas and the countryside has been changing in the last century, and today new flows toward rural areas are generated by the city. Financial capitals but even people are moving from the richest cities toward some rural areas, where “People” means primary or secondary home owners but also

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<sup>2</sup> See the special issue of Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 2010.

## DRAFT VERSION

tourists. All of them should be considered part of the same process which is generated by the wish of living something considered “true”, in the sense of “not artificial”.

In our 21st century society, large hotel chains or leisure centres are rather similar and lacking of identity, without the value added of the landscape or environment. That is the reason why rural environment reveals itself as exceptional, showing the value of reality, far from the standard or international large-scale hotel chains. On the other hand, RT needs to remain a support for rural development without trespassing a certain limit, an invisible threshold, over which it is possible to compromise the true spirit of the countryside.

Actually only few regions are approaching that threshold. In those regions the main issue is not anymore the development of RT, but its sustainability. Sustainable tourism is the only type of tourism that can generate the maintenance of an authentic countryside lifestyle area, where it is possible to relax and enjoy nature and countryside atmosphere, without compromising the other local specialisation, first of all agriculture. The growth of RT has to be totally divergent from that one of seaside tourism development that tends to create huge holiday resorts and artificial villages with no identity. Many coastal regions in Portugal, Italy, Greece, and particularly in Spain, have suffered this problem, and coast line has been completely destroyed by blocks of apartments and huge hotels, lacking in green or natural areas (Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011). This could be a threat for RT too: exceeding in the urbanization of rural spaces. According to us, RT offers a great chance to fill in the empty spaces (i.e. houses) “disposed” by the decline of rural areas, but it should not contribute to the change in the land using (i.e. new buildings).

In those “intensive” RT destinations (i.e. Tuscany, Provence, the rural areas close to London, and some regions in Portugal and Spain), where occupancy is spread throughout the year and clients come regularly for weekends or short vacations, due to the proximity of large urban agglomerations and rapid access (Canoves et al., 2004), rural tourists are mixed with second home ownership. The great beauty of the landscape and the existence of housing stocks that is being abandoned but remains desirable have led to a population influx from closed large urban areas, purchasing these homes as a primary or secondary residence (Randelli et al., 2007; Solana, 2010). This topic has been widely studied in Great Britain (Champion et al., 1998; Cloke and Thrift, 1990; Phillips, 1993, 2005) and in other countries as well (Curry et al., 2001; Ghose, 2004; Hines, 2010), even if those studies focused primarily on the displacement of social classes and persons, and on the possible social and economic impact of the rising cost of housing as a result of a persistent process of immigration (Dirksmeier, 2008; Solana, 2010). More recently, rural gentrification deriving from relatively young, ex-urban members of the postindustrial middle class, has been considered as a form of “permanent tourism” (Hines, 2010). In this case the term “permanent tourists” is “a

conceptual hybrid that demands that we appreciate not only the analogy between the activities of rural gentrifiers and those of traditional tourists but also the fact that rural gentrifiers are pursuing these activities in a regular and constant fashion” (Ibidem, p. 509).

Rural gentrification is a primary driver in the process of re-exploitation of the existing building stocks; it is undoubtedly responsible of the “renaissance” of many rural areas although it can not be a never ending process because when the stock of empty homes is totally recovered it might be very difficult for the manager of local communities to resist to property speculation. For sure new buildings, especially if not integrated with local architectural style, might attempt to preserve the landscape, charming old structures and those other bucolic characteristics of rural areas. In other words, rural gentrification may be a driver of rural development such as agriculture and tourism, but it needs to be considered in order to account sustainability.

In essence we consider RT as an opposite force to gentrification present in rural areas, as its characteristic is to be a major source of income for rural actors (Ilbery et al., 1998) and it has taken over from agriculture as the principal business in many rural communities in Europe (Sharpley et al., 1997; Butler et al., 1998; Roberts et al., 2001; Garrod et al., 2005). Nevertheless it would be very dangerous if policies would be focused on developing tourism in rural areas without a suitable evaluation of their effects on local community, land use and landscape change, natural systems, local identity and many other aspects of the particular and precarious balance of every countryside. In order to achieve this aim it would be necessary a local management and some constraints on visitor numbers (Canoves et al., 2004). This is a crucial point making RT totally different from “tourism industry”, which is invested, as any other industry, in reaching a large scale demand.

### **3. Genesis and evolution of RT in Tuscany**

Starting from the Eighties, RT is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional agricultural system in Tuscany, as in other Central Italy regions, was based on the “*mezzadria*” system (sharecropping). At that time the Florentine merchants owned the majority of rural properties around the urban area and started to use the sharecropping in order to manage their rural properties. With 100.000 inhabitants, Florence was one of the largest cities in Europe and it was depending on the food produced in the surrounding countryside. Sharecropping offered certain advantages to both landowners and landless farmers, in that the first could keep their properties flourishing and sell the share products in the city, and the second could have a small farm<sup>3</sup> with a house and the food for their families. The same happened in the rural areas around

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<sup>3</sup> The sharecropping farm in Tuscany had an average size of 10-15 hectares (25-37 acres) and to this day it is almost the same.

## DRAFT VERSION

Siena, Lucca, and Arezzo, the other principal Tuscan cities. The city overcame the economy of the countryside and a constant flow of agri-products moved from the rural areas to the nearest city (Cianferoni and Mancini, 1993). At the same time those rich merchants moved towards the rural areas financial capitals, invested in new buildings, new roads and new agricultural fields so to increase both production and productivity.

It is in that period that the Tuscan landscape takes its typical shape: the merchants built their *ville*<sup>4</sup> and the sharecroppers their *case coloniche* (farm houses). That architecture, with only some marginal changes, is today still alive on the Tuscan hills, together with olive trees, vines and cypresses, the latter used around the houses, to limit properties and on the boulevard reaching villas and castles. The rural settlement on the Tuscan hills is still composed by villas with gardens and parks around (Azzari and Rombai, 1991) and many farm houses – sometimes small villages - surrounded by olive trees and vineyards. The small cities are sometimes located down the hill, more frequently at the top of the hills, generally on the main roads, as they developed as market places. To this day in many rural municipalities of Tuscany the number of *case sparse* (scattered houses) is over 30%.

In the Fifties of the last century, the sharecropping underwent a deep economic and social crisis and the sharecroppers abandoned their houses. The reasons of a such profound crisis are different but one in particular explains it at best: the gap between the farm income and the industry income was 1 to 3.7 in the 1955, and 1 to 5.5 in the 1963 (Cianferoni and Mancini, 1993). In the 1971 the Italian Census of Population shows clearly the “escape” from Tuscan countryside and the growth of industrialised cities. The rural crisis has been overdrawn by the take off of industrial districts in Tuscany and in the rest of the “*Terza Italia*” (Third Italy) (IRPET 1975, Bagnasco 1977, Goodman et al. 1989; Pyke et al. 1990). The Tuscan countryside was classified as “depressed area” and many rural municipalities lost in the period 1955-1971 over the 50% of their population (Milani, 1991).

Since the Eighties, after a deep re-organization, the Tuscan countryside started to improve all social and economic indicators. A modern and technological agricultural system, based on the production of wine and olive oil export oriented, has been developed. The empty spaces in rural areas, the villas and the farm houses take a new set of functions. A large number of scattered houses, heritage of the ancient agricultural system starts to be occupied by new arrivals: tourists and residents.

Since the Sixties some pioneers had been acquiring those empty farm houses, in the beginning for very low prices and later on for a fortune. They were especially foreign people from England, France, Germany, Swiss and US, or Italians from the main cities of Italy (Milan, Rome, Naples, etc.) and Tuscany (Florence, Prato, Siena). As the merchants in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they bought rural

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<sup>4</sup> In a certain point of view, the merchants and their guests, moving seasonally from the cities to their villas in the countryside, they could be considered the first rural tourists in Tuscany.

properties to invest their money coming from other businesses, so to have a primary or secondary house or to become a wine maker<sup>5</sup> (Randelli et al., 2007).

In conclusion, the large availability of an unemployed architectural heritage embedded in a unique rural landscape masterpieces of an ancient rural society, has been the primary input of RT development in Tuscany. In this sense, only an evolutionary perspective can explain the success of RT in Tuscany, that of course, it cannot be replicated as well with the same modality. It could be possible, and it is really happening, that other regions with the same agricultural system and a similar landscape are undergoing through the same path of RT development (i.e. Umbria and Marche).

This way the role of institutions could be important. In fact, in 1985 Tuscany Region has been the first to make a law on *agriturismo* (farmer's house). Actually it is better to state that in Tuscany the regional Government co-evolved with the territory instead of declaring that it is determined by the success of RT; this means that the co-evolution of local institution can support RT development but it is very difficult for institutions to promote RT without a spontaneous spread of entrepreneurs and tourists attracted by the countryside.

This success it is confirmed by some results of a study on RT in Tuscany, part of a three-years research program promoted by the Tuscany Region. Due to the number of *agriturismi*, Tuscany is considered in Italy a leading region on RT : in 2008 the percentage of *agriturismi* located in Tuscany was 22,5% on the total at the national level (4,200 on 18,674 *agriturismi* in Italy) (Agriturst, 2011).

Nevertheless there are different stages of development on RT in Tuscany. To proceed on the analysis of those differences, the first step has been to detect the rural areas within the region. On this way we have selected three different indicators so to include social, economic and ecological dimensions of rurality. Than we have classified as rural those municipalities respecting at least one of those three following indicators:

- Social dimension: density of population < 150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (OCSE);
- Economic dimension: number of employees in agriculture > 4,09% (regional average);
- Ecological dimension: rural land use (forests, agricultural fields, seminatural areas, beaches, rivers, lakes, etc.)<sup>6</sup> > 95,92% (regional average).

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<sup>5</sup> The rural gentrification of Tuscan countryside is not homogeneous and it can be displayed by the value of rural houses. The value of a rural house can vary from 800/1.000 € per square meter (sm) in the north mountainous areas to 2500/3000 € sm in the countryside southern Siena and 4000/5000 € sm in the Chianti, the rural area between Florence and Siena. At the same time we argue that it should be more meaningful the analysis of tourist prices (Tinacci, 1969). Nowadays tourists make their choices online and the price results to be the main choice's lever. Because of this fact, RT becomes the substitute of urban tourism both in terms of price and taste.

<sup>6</sup> The result of the first step was a selection of 213 municipalities on 287. We decided to include even those coastal municipalities respecting at least one of the three indicators. This choice is due to the fact that those coastal



## DRAFT VERSION

As second step we considered a data set including all available tourist statistics. In Table 1 we report some of them for the rural areas of Tuscany, in comparison with similar data for the whole region, which of course includes tourist urban areas such as Florence, Pisa, Siena, Lucca and Arezzo. The nights per capita (14,51) and the total number of beds per capita (0,2) in rural areas are higher than in the whole region. This is due to both the high level of development of some internal rural areas and to the lower density of population living in rural areas.

Table 1 – Statistics for rural areas in Tuscany.

	Population	Density (Pop/kmq)	Total nights	Nights per capita (%)	Total beds	Beds per capita (%)	Beds in hotel	Beds not in hotel
Rural areas	1.369.579	72.93	19.86.9475	14.51	269,443	0.20	84,106	185,337
Tuscany	3.677.678	159.92	41.995.655	11.42	461,104	0.13	178,915	282,189

Source: Regione Toscana, 2007

In the third step of our analysis we choose an open source Geographical Information System (Quantum GIS) to manage the large data set. The quantitative analysis allowed us to represent Tuscan municipalities according to their level of development in RT.

According to us the level of development on RT can be measured by some indicators such as:

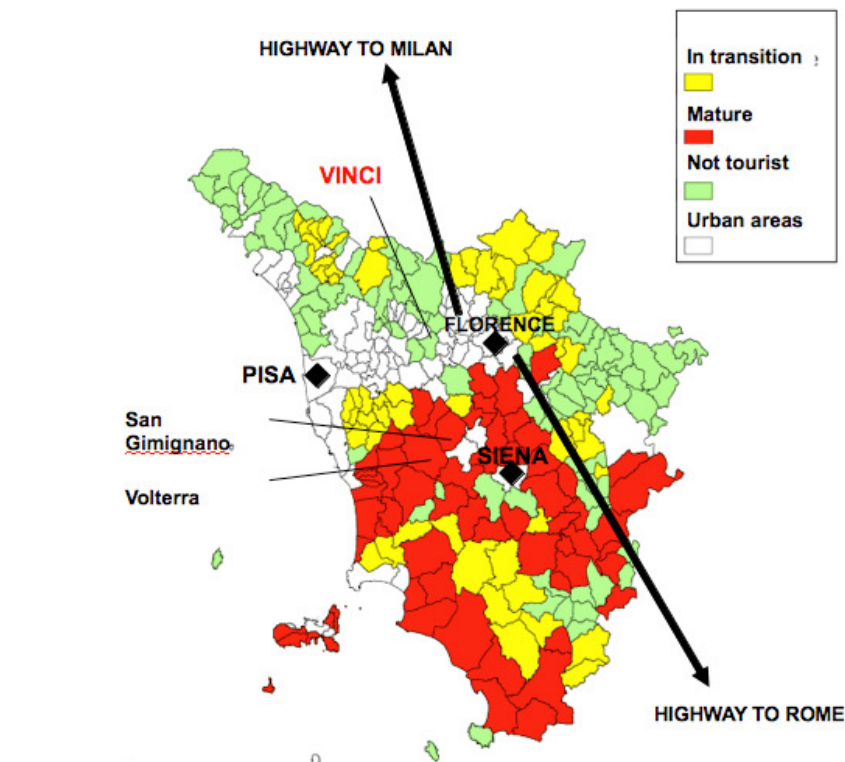
- Total nights and nights p.c.;
- Total beds and beds p.c.;
- Both trend of nights and beds (2000-2007);
- Number of intensive capital *agriturismi* (with at least one service such as swimming pool, restaurant, golf, tennis);
- Percentage of foreign tourists.

The results has been an output of three different kind of municipalities: those with a “mature” development of RT, those “in transition” moving forward on the development of RT and those “not tourist” (see fig.1).

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municipalities have an internal countryside rich of agricultural productions and agritourisms. This large number may lead someone to argue that this number is excessive because it includes urban and rural costal areas more oriented to beach tourism.

Figure 1 - The different stages of RT development in Tuscany.



In conclusion, RT in Tuscany is much developed in rural areas such as Chianti, Val d’Orcia, Maremma and the surrounding countryside of Siena. In some leading municipalities such as San Gimignano, Pienza, San Quirico d’Orcia or Radda in Chianti the number of nights spent per capita is over 50 and the local governments are discussing about constraints on visitor numbers. This is the main reason why in Tuscany RT could become unsustainable in some rural areas and has to be controlled in the sense of sustainability. On the other hand, in the majority of northern mountainous rural areas RT is not developed yet and only few particular areas (Mugello, Garfagnana) are under transition.

#### 4. The case study: Vinci, the hometown of Leonardo.

##### 4.1 The methodology

The aim of this paragraph is to present the case study of a municipality embedded in a rural area, moving forward on the development of RT, in order to study and analyze opportunities and threats. The municipality is Vinci, the hometown of Leonardo. The aim was to reveal if there is a local development strategy in the tourism sector of a local community embedded in a rural landscape but with arts specialization as competitive advantage, and what is the real sense of it in terms of sustainability and tourism.

## DRAFT VERSION

We argue that under the umbrella of sustainability it is possible to observe different tourisms in rural areas and that these different ways offer different opportunities and threats to local development strategies. It follows that there are many ways to analyze tourism in rural areas. That is possible because of the different specialization of rural areas firstly driven by the multifunctional process of rural firms, and because of the different natural and cultural environments, of the supply side and the local community's sense of belongings and identity. These differences lead to more paths of development. It follows that the values, the mission and the identity of a place become the main pillars which a sustainable competitive strategy should be based on. The aim here is to underline the sense of identity and belongings of a local community embedded in a rural area but specialized in tourism.

The methodology has been developed on three steps: first, the collection and organization of quantitative data from institutional sources; second, direct interviews to citizens (200), tourists (200) and stakeholders (10 individual interviews); third, a focus group to stimulate a discussion with the involved stakeholders on three main topics such as the identity of the local place, the role of networks and priority actions policies. In the following parts there is the presentation of the qualitative analysis.

### 4.2 A profile of Vinci.

The municipality of Vinci (54.42 km<sup>2</sup>) is composed of Vinci and the villages of S. Amato, Collegonzi, Faltognano, S. Ansano, Greti, S. Pantaleo, Paterno, Petrolio, Sovigliana, Spicchio, Streda e Violini. According to the last Census (ISTAT, 2001) the population has 13.778 inhabitants (+ 0,13% than the previous Census of 1991). In the last thirty years the population's dynamics has shown, on one side, stability and, on the other side, a progressive abandonment of young people migrating from rural areas to industrial centres, a flow determined by job opportunities .

Table 2. Population in the Municipality of Vinci.

<b>Vinci (Municipality)</b>	<b>13.778 (inhabitants)</b>
Vinci (Town)	1.566
Spicchio - Sovigliana	7.598
Vitolini	723
Other villages	3.891

Source: ISTAT, 14° Censimento generale delle popolazioni e abitanti, Toscana, 2001

The main production activity after the World War II and before the industrial development of the Sixties was agriculture. In 1951, 64.7% of population was employed in the agricultural activity whose main products were olives and vines. From the Sixties, the industrial phenomenon increased employing 44.2% of population (20% more than ten years before) and developed in the so called “aree depresse” (depressed areas) of Sovigliana e Mercatale. During the Seventies the model of widespread industrial development driven by small and medium firms (less than 20 workers on average) onset. The main productions were clothing, food, chemicals, rubber and paper. At the same time handicraft developed and specialized in decorated ceramic and glass. During the decade 1971-1981 there was an increase in employment’s levels. At that time Vinci had 74.3% of people employed in agriculture and industrial activities. Today Vinci shows the same specializations but with different percentages. The main sectors in terms of employment are clothing, ceramic, tourism, rubber and plastic, food, furniture, glass, commercial distribution, olives and wines. In terms of employees, agriculture has 1.987 workers per 784 firms, the industrial sector employees 5.862 in 1.472 firms (of which 573 are handicraft with 1.657 workers) and the service sector 2.222 per 1.248 firms (Marradi, 2010).

#### 4.3 Results from the questionnaire for the citizens of Vinci and the interviews to tourists.

##### *The questionnaire.*

The main aim of the questionnaire was to understand the basic characteristics of Vinci as a main tourism destination. It is analyzed how much the local community values its town, the impact of tourism on its hometown and the ability of the local system to manage this sector. The questionnaire has been used to interview 200 citizens in person or by phone. The results show that citizens think of tourism as a resource for the local development, but that their town does not have many strengths or potentialities and that local entrepreneurs are not capable of new investments and operations. In fact, they have given higher values, more than eight points in a range from zero to ten, to landscape (70%) than to the historical town centre. They reckon localization as a strategic tool in relation to the regional context (54%), but the capacity and ability to welcome tourists and the levels of the local tourist entrepreneurship and of services are rated very low (from 15% for services to 29% for entrepreneurship). The same negative value is given to the efficiency of public services. Because of the overall negative impression of Vinci and its resources, citizens have the idea that there should be more investments in tourism development and more actions to preserve the rural territory.

## DRAFT VERSION

### *The interviews to tourists.*

The main aim of the direct interviews methodology is to catch feelings, critics, suggestions and ideas of people visiting Vinci. The 200 tourists, classified as Italians and foreigners, were interviewed in the center of Vinci near one of the main tourist attractions (Museo Leonardiano – the museum of Leonardo) during the summer 2010. The interview was about five questions: the kind of transport used to arrive to Vinci; the origin (country, city) of tourists; the place chosen to stay in Tuscany and to visit Vinci from; the kind of resort and the time of stay. The answers were collected by trained students and organized in a matrix to underline the main keywords and show the main results. Since the results are composite, they are worth of a detailed description.

The results show that there is no difference between Italians and foreigners in terms of the chosen transport to go to Vinci and to move around: 80% of them prefer to use a car and only 6-7% bus or trains. Italians prefer to use motorbikes (15%) more than foreigners (only 2%).

In terms of place of origin the focus is on foreigners which represent 60% of our sample. The majority (76%) comes from the North of the European Union (Germany 23%, the Netherlands 16%, Belgium 12%, France 10%, United Kingdom 8%, Denmark 7%), while only 3% from the United States and 3% from Asia (China and India).

In terms of the chosen destination to stay, foreigners and Italians show similar tastes (Vinci and Florence are first), even if with some differences: Vinci was chosen by 25% of foreigners and 70% of Italians, while Florence by 15% of foreigners and 7% of Italians<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of the kind of resort, foreigners prefer to stay in agritourism (39%), camping (23%), B&B (21%) and hotel (2%), while Italians in hotel (66%), agritourism (16%), camping (7%), and B&B (2%).

The time dedicated to visit Vinci and to stay in town is different but without a wide gap. The chosen timeline used to categorize the answers (less than 1 day, 2-3 days, 4-6 days, more than 7 days) shows the following results: more than 50 percent of tourists, both Italians and foreigners, prefer to stay only for one day (64% foreigners, 57% Italians). The second best choice is to stay for more than a week for foreigners (19%) and for 2-3 days for Italians.

The same answers were analyzed in aggregated terms and absolute numbers. The data show first that tourists chose to visit Vinci in conjunction with other places, such as Florence (74 tourists on 200), Pisa (54), Siena (45), Lucca (33). It results a reminder to the “classical” tour of Tuscany based on the network of city of arts. Second, the main reasons to visit Vinci are: arts (52), rurality (20) and food (13). Third, the main sources used to get information are the Internet (26), word-of-mouth (25), travel guide (19) and personal experiences (12). Finally, it was asked them to give a general

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<sup>7</sup> Other places are Montecatini (10%), San Baronto (7%), Lucca (6%) and others below 5%.

evaluation (from zero to five) of the “system” of Vinci. The evaluations resulted very high with some strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are rural landscape (4.9), hospitality (4.3), accommodation (4.2), and general opinion (4.2). The weaknesses are shopping (3.0), transports (3.1), and entertainment (3.6).

#### 4.4 Results from the Focus Group.

The focus group was organized at the end of the qualitative analysis to show to stakeholders both the results of the quantitative and qualitative studies and to monitor and register their opinions, critics, suggestions and expectations. The stakeholders involved in the focus group were the Mayor and the vice-Mayor of the town of Vinci, the director of the museum, the director of the URP office (the Public Relations Office) of the Municipality of Vinci and one of the front desk assistants. The focus group was organized and lead by three researchers from the Department of Economic Sciences of the University of Florence. The main topics presented to the stakeholders were: 1) Which is the base of identity of Vinci, i.e. the main resources that found the identity of places – the genius loci, and which the strengths, weaknesses and critical points of the tourist supply?; 2) Is Vinci part of an integrated tourist system of a national, regional, local reference network? Is it part of tourist routes comprehending other places? If yes, which one?; 3) Which priority actions have to be implemented for regional and local policies?.

##### Point 1: The identity of Vinci.

On the basis of the answers, it is possible to state that the identity of Vinci is composed of two main elements: the landscape and the image of Leonardo da Vinci. This relationship has many important consequences but it is not intended by all the stakeholders in the same ways. Because of the different backgrounds, professional profiles and level and quality of the relationships with visitors, they see different opportunities and threats and propose different solutions (see point 3.)

For the Mayor, it is important to maximize the relationship between these two elements to increase the capacity of the territory to be more competitive. Since the competitive advantage is based on a mix of arts, landscape and architecture, it is strategic to collect data and to develop a SWOT analysis as a main tool of strategic development. For the URP Director Vinci has a multiple identity. The first is Vinci as the city of Leonardo: the consequence is that this town attracts visitors with a complex profile, but with the same motivation - to visit Vinci because of its arts and the image of Leonardo’s awesomeness. It follows another kind of expectations, both cultural and scientific: since Vinci is the hometown of Leonardo, according to the Director this “is” the city of culture and innovation. The second identity is connected to landscape and architecture. Vinci is embedded in a

## DRAFT VERSION

rural landscape and it has a medieval village urban structure. These two characteristics give a total perception of the rural and middle-age profile of the city, but also show how late the local community is in developing an adequate strategy. Since many visitors are rambler/hikers more than tourists (they do not pass the night in Vinci's structures) there is a lack of services to tourism. For instance, during the month of August (one of the peak months) many commercial services are closed. This fact shows that local people do not understand and recognize that the landscape is at the same time leverage, driver and accelerator of and for the local growth. It is, combined with the Leonardo awesomeness, the added value of Vinci.

The Director of the Museo Leonardiano presents the same concepts from a different perspective. If he agrees that the identity is based on the link between the territory-landscape and the image of the Genius, anyhow he underlines there are two essential constraints: 1) Vinci cannot be defined as a city of arts; 2) the image of Leonardo is mediated by foreign media where his character as naturalist painter, who reproduced the landscape of Vinci in many artworks, is neglected. This side of Leonardo is not present in foreign media contents. If the naturalist one is one of the main character of the identity of Leonardo, then it has to be developed in order to move from a folk vision of Leonardo and its hometown to a higher image based on "quality"<sup>8</sup>. By "quality" the Director means a different and higher image based either on historical facts (e.g. the Museum has invested in the last years to build all the Leonardo's mechanical machines) and the natural heritage, the local landscape. For this reason the municipality is investing in promoting new communication activities oriented to give a new image of Vinci based first on a new name of the Genius: Leonardo "a" (in) Vinci (instead of Leonardo "da" (from) Vinci), and on a stronger identity as the birthplace of Leonardo.

Point 2: The network system.

The sense of belonging to a place and the vision of the own identity is necessarily based on the sense of belonging to different and multi-scale networks. A place is a nod in one or multiple networks. So the point is whether the local community feels to be part of one or more networks and which ones. Answering these questions helps understand what kind of multiple identity is fitting to a possible strategy to develop Vinci.

The Mayor considers Vinci located and embedded in an area connected and open to flows coming from the coast and the West of Tuscany. If right, new strategies and investments are needed to

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<sup>8</sup> This folk image was constructed not only by foreign media but also by local and regional players such as the Tuscany Region.

increase these incoming flows and relationships with those areas rich of arts and history, such as the area of Val d'Elsa (San Gimignano) and Valdera (Volterra).

The same idea is confirmed by the Director of the URP Office. The city of Vinci turns itself to the area and the towns of Volterra and San Gimignano because of the affinities with these two historical and arts cities.

The Museum Director thinks there are two levels in the network connections of Vinci: the first is the local – founded on relationships with other local players in Italy and abroad; the second is the regional – founded on networks with European, Italian, and other institutional actors.

Point 3: Suggestions for policies.

The final point is the need to understand if the local community has a strategic vision, in order to increase the quality of tourist services and the number of tourists, and the kind of policies to develop accordingly.

The Mayor states that there are different strategies, the first being based on the assumption that the town of Vinci is located inside a metropolitan area, as indicated by the Regional Planning Act, composed of the three closest provinces of Florence, Pistoia and Prato. The local administration has been lobbying the Tuscany Region to consider Vinci and its surrounding hills (Montalbano) as the “green lung” of the metropolitan. Another strategy is based on the recognition that there is not a systems organization at the base of the tourist supply side. This lack of systems structure leads to a lack of organized training tools. For these reasons the municipality of Vinci asks for i) the recognition of the territorial/local uniqueness; ii) the introduction of tools that discourage the use and the development of fragmented promotional activities. Today Vinci is promoted by the Tuscan Region or by the echo of Leonardo da Vinci. Actually this situation is not effective for a sustainable planning process.

New investments in communication, culture and infrastructures<sup>9</sup> are necessary now and this is the key idea for the vice-Mayor too, as showed by the strong relationship between Vinci and its Museum. From 1987 to 2000 there has been an accelerated increase in the number of visits (from 40.000 to 120.000), while from 2000 to 2010 there has been a low increase (from 120.000 to 140.000). This happens because there is a strong competitiveness on the use of the brand “Leonardo” from other actors located in Tuscany, in Italy and abroad. The investments adopted from 2000 have sustained and lead the tourist demand to the same levels of the pre-crisis era.

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<sup>9</sup> Even if the problem of an integrated communication policy and strategic marketing plan is recognized, there is not a clear roadmap that is even more necessary in order to develop and disseminate a proper sustainable image in the Internet era (Tortora, 2010).



## DRAFT VERSION

The URP Office Director states it is fundamental and strategic to invest in an adequate tourist information network, because giving information to tourists guides their choices while at the same time it generates precious feedback on the profile of the tourist demand. Unfortunately there is not a network at various levels. This is a problem because tourists are disoriented because of the use of different communication practices (languages, information, data) by insufficiently trained operators, in that there are not investments in the education and training in the Tourism sector, not only at the local but also at the regional level. At the moment there is not any kind of coordination with other tourist information offices or centers located in other cities, villages or areas of the region. The idea of the need for an information system is confirmed by the URP Front desk girl who stresses the fact that there should be more investments in the area of education and training of the personnel of regional tourist information offices. Information is seen as the leverage to disseminate properly the knowledge of the regional and local territory. There is also a problem of communication in terms of transparency and accessibility to information and data not only for tourists and visitors but also for professionals.

The Museum Director gives a more global outlook from a cultural point of view. Because of the richness and quality of cultural infrastructures presented in Vinci, the development strategy should be based on the fact that Vinci “could be the place of innovation and culture”. The Museum and the Library of Leonardo (Biblioteca Leonardiana) should be thought and developed as study centres. The reading of the works of Leonardo is a scientific event (Lettura Vinciana) that began in the Sixties. Over the years this meeting has grown up till the point today it is a major event open to a mass of experts and amateurs. In 2006 there was the launch of a summer school in partnership with the University of Florence while a doctoral program with the University of Pisa was developed. Other activities included the realization of a digital archive with 40,000 documents online. One of the key point is the creation of synergies with other actors (institutes, institutions, multinational firms, etc.) that could locate in Sovigliana, the modern area of Vinci developed in the plan and place for many different industrial and service activities. Because of its nature and historical tradition, Vinci is devoted to communicate with many players, located in different parts of the world. The results depend especially on more coherent and flexible national and regional policies.

### 4.5 The case study conclusions

Vinci is considered an interesting tourist place, located in an area rich of arts, culture, architecture and embedded in a rural area as well. Its main advantages are: the name, the landscape, the image of the Genius and its proximity to Florence and other international tourist destinations. Although these characteristics should give Vinci a competitive advantage in the international market, Vinci is not

considered by citizens as a tourist center or as a place in which a specialized form of tourism is developed. The interviews and the focus group with the stakeholders strength the idea that there is a gap between the image of Vinci as it is reflected on one side in the eyes of tourists, on the other side in the eyes of citizens, policymakers and local players. It seems that this gap is nurtured by a lack of a strategic and systemic planning process in three main areas: education and training, infrastructures, communication. Moreover, the small size of Vinci (in qualitative and quantitative terms) does not help the local system to be an active nod in a multiple network and so there is the need both for a stronger connection with the upper level - regional and national actors - and with other Leonardian centers located in the same region or abroad. In fact the small size is a threat because on one side it forbids the place to develop new investments and strategies(local government and stakeholders), and on the other side (citizens, local firms and entrepreneurs) there is not the capacity to understand the competitive advantage of the place and to put in action all those activities needed for the local development.

Finally, there is something missing. As introduced at the top of the paragraph, the aim of the research was to understand the development of a local place located in rural areas on the basis of the tourist sector from a sustainable point of view. As read in the results, sustainability and rurality are two key concepts that did not enter into the discussions or interviews, or they did it only indirectly. Rurality is considered as the landscape, like in a painting of Leonardo, and as the main box in which foreign tourists like to stay because of an inner contact with the natural environment, that should be preserved for the future. This refers to sustainability, of which the complex sense is not yet very present to the stakeholders we met. The question is: can tourism be a factor of environmental conservation? According to us it could be, but only if there is a raising consciousness about the needs of qualitative and quantitative choices of tourism. This should be favored by the recency of tourism that makes it co-evolve with more awareness.

## **5. Conclusions.**

In this paper, to better understand how, starting from 80's, RT is driving the renaissance of Tuscan countryside, we approach RT studies in an evolutionary perspective (Boschma and Martin, 2010), taking seriously into account the history. We argue that the large availability of an unemployed architectonic heritage, embedded in a unique rural landscape, can be considered the primary input of RT development in Tuscany. And yet, the landscape is the output of a particular agricultural system (sharecropping) and it has been positively influenced by the proximity of rich city arts as Florence and Siena.

## DRAFT VERSION

To have measures of the leading role of Tuscany in the development of RT within Italy, some statistics have been displayed. But within Tuscany there are different stage of development on RT so to need a deep analysis to the municipality level. Depending on the performance on a selected set of indicators we have been able to point three different kinds of municipalities: those with a “mature” development of RT, those “in transition” moving forward on the development of RT and those “not tourist”. RT in Tuscany is much developed in some internal rural areas such as Chianti, Val d’Orcia, Maremma and the surrounding countryside of Siena. In some leading municipalities, such as San Gimignano, Pienza, San Quirico d’Orcia or Radda in Chianti the number of nights spent per capita is over 50 and the local governments are discussing about constraints on visitor numbers. This is the main reason why in Tuscany has a sense to argue on sustainability of RT. On the other hand, in the majority of Northern mountainous rural areas RT is not yet developed and only few particular areas (Mugello, Garfagnana) are under transition.

The case study of Vinci, classified as “not tourist” in our regional analysis, offers us some important remarks. As other Central and South rural areas of Tuscany, if compared with other rural areas of Italy and Europe, Vinci has a particularity. Their territory is characterized by a typical rural landscape, quality agricultural products, and a rich set of arts, culture, and architecture. In addition, Vinci can spend the image of the Genius and its proximity to Florence and other international tourist destinations.

Nevertheless, the interviews and the focus group with the stakeholders strengthened the idea that there is a gap between the image of Vinci as it is reflected on one side in the eyes of tourists, and on the other side in the eyes of citizens, policymakers and local players. This gap seems to be due to the lack of a strategic and systemic plan in three main areas: education and training in Tourism, infrastructures and communication. Moreover, the small size of Vinci, as that of any other rural place, does not help the local system to have an active role and so there is the need both for a stronger connection with the upper level - regional and national actors - and with other Leonardian centers located in the same region or abroad. At this stage of development, the next step on evolution of RT in Tuscany seems to be depending on the capacity of connectivity and cooperation among rural municipalities so to develop new investments and strategies on various topic issues. Actually it is not clear if cooperation will rise spontaneously or if it will be driven by regional and national actors.

Finally, we are conscious there is something missing in our results and it is the analysis of the sustainability of RT. Sustainability, as well as rurality, are two key concepts that did not emerge during the focus group or interviews, or they did it only indirectly. Rurality is considered only from the point of view of the landscape, in that tourists, especially foreign ones, feel the Tuscan

landscape as a part of a painting of Leonardo. Obviously, to be part of that “painting” means also an inner contact with the natural environment, that is precisely a fundamental issue of sustainability. Instead of this no regards on the ecological sustainability of RT emerged during the focus group and interviews. According to us this could be very dangerous in prospect, because over a certain threshold of growth even RT might become unsustainable for a fragile environment as the rural one. The recency of the tourist development should guarantee a good level of consciousness.

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