

Chapter 12

Discovering Waldensian Hospitality: An Exploratory Study

Elisa Piras

Eurac Research, Italy

Abstract

The *Case Valdesi* (Waldensian Houses) are non-profit structures, managed by the Diaconia Valdese, that propose a value-based and value-driven model of hospitality. There are nine hospitality facilities (six guest houses, two hotels and one hostel) located in different Italian venues, open to individual travellers, families or groups who look for unconventional tourism experiences such as slow-paced visits to artistic and natural attractions, retreats, informal symposia, as well as creative projects. The guest houses welcome international students and volunteers who provide hospitality services. They host refugees and asylum seekers when needed and encourage connections and mutual exchanges among people with diverse life experiences. Moreover, they use the hospitality revenues to support educational and social welfare projects. This chapter will present the Waldensian model of hospitality through a case study based on observations and qualitative data collected during fieldwork, proposing it as one of the possible sources of inspiration for the creation of human destinations.

Keywords: Hospitality; religious minorities; Waldensians; solidarity; low-cost travels; sustainability

Introduction

The concept of hospitality is crucial for understanding the sites and practices of touristic destinations. On the one hand, it does refer to the provision of goods,

Destination Conscience, 143–156



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services and experiences for the guests, while on the other hand, it is a constitutive part of the identity and image of any receptive structure (Lynch et al., 2021). Moreover, hospitality identifies a common ground between hosts and guests that allows their encounter and the establishment of a relationship, as is revealed by the Latin origin of the term (*hospes*, a word used to indicate both host and guest). The etymology also reflects its historical association with places called *hospitals*, which were establishments providing care and shelter to travellers, pilgrims and the sick during the mediaeval era; these institutions, which were often run by religious orders, embodied the spirit of hosting and caring for those in need.

It is important to notice that the concept of hospitality embraces a wide range of forms of reception beyond commercial hospitality, such as institutional, cultural or community hospitality (King, 1995; Reuland et al., 1985). Institutional hospitality refers to hospitality practices within organisations, institutions or public facilities (e.g. educational institutions, government offices, community centres). Cultural hospitality emphasises the practices and customs associated with hosting guests in different cultural contexts, and it often involves rituals, ceremonies and specific codes of conduct related to welcoming, accommodating and honouring guests. Community hospitality involves the collective efforts of a community or neighbourhood in welcoming and accommodating visitors, aiming to create a sense of belonging and to promote a positive image of the community, fostering tourism and supporting the local economy (Lugosi, 2014).

This chapter describes the Waldensian model of touristic hospitality, explaining its main features and showing how it combines elements of all the different forms of hospitality mentioned above. The Waldensians are a religious minority, mainly based in Italy, who have had a historical role as pioneers of Protestantism in Europe and have known a long history of persecution and violence (Stephens, 2015; Tourn, 2008). During the last two centuries, Waldensians have been developing and entrenching their capacity for action in civil society to the benefit of the entire population of the country. Relatively recently, Waldensians' institutional hospitality (e.g. in kindergartens, shelters for vulnerable people, hospitals, retirement homes) was complemented by touristic hospitality, thanks to the use of community-owned facilities for the reception of paying guests.

Given the absence of academic literature on the subject, this chapter offers an exploratory study, aimed at defining the Waldensian model of hospitality – detecting its main characteristics and highlighting the similarities and differences of this model with respect to commercial tourist accommodation models and to the mainstream model of religious hospitality widespread in Italy (Lombarts, 2018; Reuland et al., 1985).

This chapter describes the model of Waldensian hospitality thanks to information and data collected through different research techniques. Desk research and literature review have allowed to reconstruct the historical and cultural features of the model. Moreover, evidence concerning the organisational and value-related features of the model has been obtained through 17 semi-structured interviews conducted with Case Valdesi's managers, employees and volunteers as well as with their guests between January and February 2023. Further evidence

has been collected through participant observation with the support of photographic documentation during two short periods of field research carried out in February 2023 in Casa Cares (a villa-farm in the countryside of Reggello, in Tuscany) and in Foresteria Valdese di Torre Pellice (the guest house located at the heart of the Waldensian headquarters, in the Alps of Piedmont). The triangulation of the different data and evidence collected allows to identify the distinctive features of the Waldensian model of hospitality. The study presented in this chapter is intended as a contribution to the debate on the concept of hospitality and on value-based models of hospitality; it also aims to advance knowledge on the life of the Italian Waldensian community. Given the lack of literature on Waldensian hospitality and the significance of the topic for understanding contemporary trends of touristic offers beside the mainstream models of hospitality, in the conclusion, a few avenues for future research are presented.

The Waldensian People: A History of Persecution, Mobility and Rootedness

The Waldensians, also known as the Vaudois, are a Christian religious movement with a rich and enduring history. They trace their origins back to the 12th century in the valleys of the Cottian Alps (Val Pellice, Val Chisone and Val Germanasca), west of Turin and very close to the French border. The movement was founded by Peter Waldo (also known as Valdesius, 1140–1206), a merchant from Lyon, France, who renounced his material possessions and dedicated himself to a life of poverty, preaching and promoting a simpler, more direct interpretation of Christianity (De Cecco, 2011; Tourn, 2008). The Waldensians developed as a pauperist and spiritual renewal movement within the Christian *koiné*, emphasising the importance of personal faith, the authority of the *Bible* and the access to the sacred texts in vulgar languages. They faced persecution from the Catholic Church and from several European states throughout their history, with episodes of violent repression, forced conversions and displacements. To escape violence, this ‘people-church’ had to move repeatedly across the Alps, developing a multicultural and multilingual community closely tied to the governments of Protestant states such as Great Britain, the Netherlands and Switzerland (Peyrot, 2022, pp. 23–26; Tourn, 2008). Despite the challenges, the Waldensians endured and spread their beliefs in different parts of Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany, eventually joining the Protestant Reformation in 1532 (Palombaro, 2023). The recognition of civil and political rights came in 1848, when the king of Savoy Carlo Alberto promulgated the *Lettere Patenti* (Luzzi, 1998), while the full recognition of religious freedom came only in 1946, with the Italian Republican Constitution (Stephens, 2015).

Today, the Waldensians continue to exist as a Protestant Christian community open to ecumenical dialogue and their experience is a reference point for other Protestant Churches. Although there are no precise data, about 15,000 Waldensians are based in the Waldensians Valleys in Piedmont, while about 10,000 are spread in several Italian regions, constituting the so-called diaspora. A Waldensian

community (*Colonia Valdense*) has developed in Uruguay and Argentina since 1856 as a consequence of emigration, constituting the third branch of the community (today approximately 13,000 people). Moreover, in some areas of Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Hessen) there are a few hundreds of descendants from the Waldensian families who emigrated there in the Seventeenth century. Since 1975, the Waldensian Evangelical Church is united with the Methodist churches of Italy, and it is governed by the Synod, the general assembly of the representatives of all the local communities that meet every year in Torre Pellice (Frattini & Carpanetto, 2020). The interest of other European Protestant Churches for the Waldensian history and the transnational contacts with the Protestant communities that stemmed from Waldensian emigration in Germany and in the United States contributed to make the Waldensian valleys a destination for religious tourism and the rediscovery of cultural roots (Peyrot, 2022).

Despite its small numbers, the Waldensian community has always been active and clearly recognisable in the Italian political landscape, participating to the liberal uprisings during the 19th century (Palombaro, 2020) and to the anti-fascist *Resistenza* movement during the Second World War (Viallet, 1985). Their positions on the freedom of faith and worship for all religious groups, recognition of civil rights, contrast to all kinds of discrimination and active pacifism have inspired many political struggles of the Republican era (Bein Ricco & Spini, 2016; De Cecco, 2011; Genre, 2017). Recently, they have contributed to the public discussion on sensitive ethical-political issues such as migration, gender and prison regime, expressing progressive views while proactively engaging in many activities and projects within the social sector (e.g. creating humanitarian corridors for refugees in partnership with Catholic associations and with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, realising schemes for the welcoming and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, managing programmes for the protection of women and children victims of domestic violence, guaranteeing assistance and protection of people in prison).

The principles at the basis of the Waldensian political and social engagement reflect the community's identity, forged by the experience of discrimination and violence. Mobility as a means to escape persecution and to spread the evangelical message has been fundamental for the construction of Waldensian identity, a strong and well-rooted sense of belonging that today is in danger of being lost due to the reduced number of members of the Waldensian people church in an overwhelmingly Catholic country as well as to the depopulation and precarious climatic and environmental balance of the alpine Waldensian valleys. One of the pillars of the Waldensian identity is hospitality, directed not only to the members of the three branches of the community and to the descendants of the Waldensian communities but to any person, irrespectively of her/his nationality, gender, sexual orientation or (dis-)ability.

From Institutional Hospitality to Touristic Hospitality

Given the centrality of the experiences of voluntary or forced mobility for the Waldensian populations and the strategic position of the Waldensian valleys on the (geographical and cultural) alpine border connecting the Italian, French-speaking

and German-speaking regions, it is not surprising that hospitality has always played an important role in the history of the church. For centuries, the diffusion of the evangelical message has been achieved by travelling *barbets*, clandestine preachers who, mingling with merchants and storytellers, crossed the alpine borders smuggling censored catechisms and Bibles (Tourn, 2008). The private homes of the faithful as well as the simple buildings and mountain shelters used for worship offered hospitality and protection from the political and Catholic authorities.

During the 19th century, the Waldensians, also thanks to the support of Protestant missionaries who were on good terms with the Savoy, developed in the alpine valleys a distinct system of social institutions for care and education such as parish schools (and boarding schools and houses for the teachers), hospitals, orphanages and parsonages. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the groups of the ‘diaspora’, scattered throughout the Italian territory from Friuli Venezia Giulia to Sicily, sought to garrison the cities where they lived founding charitable committees, institutions and associations or taking them over from other Protestant groups. Thus, the Waldensians acquired over time an appreciable real estate patrimony, further expanded during the 20th century thanks to donations and bequests from people not always belonging to the Waldensian community (Genre, 2017).

After the Second World War, the ecumenical activities aimed at young people of all creeds, nationalities and gender and sexual identities who wanted to discuss topical issues (e.g. pacifism and disarmament, civil and political rights, international crises, volunteer work for disadvantaged peoples) and to share moments of prayer and spirituality reached an international scope. So, in 1947, the Waldensian pastor and progressive politician Tullio Vinay launched a symbolic initiative for the participatory construction of a village for the reconciliation and fraternal love of the peoples: Agape Ecumenical Centre in Prali (Piedmont), which was inaugurated in 1951. Ten years later, as a constructive response to the mafia system that oppressed the local population, Vinay urged volunteers from different countries to build in Riesi (Sicily) a new complex with youth camp facilities, school and kindergarten, Servizio Cristiano (Vinay, 1973). Both Agape and Servizio Cristiano became outstanding examples of institutional/religious hospitality destinations where the relationship between hosts and guests was cemented by a common worldview that, leaving room for different religious and political perspectives and interpretative keys, was grounded on the will to denounce all forms of structural violence and injustice and to act in a transformative way (Rebora, 2021). These structures offer examples of Waldensian institutional hospitality: here, a number of religious (often with an ecumenical spirit) and non-religious associations organise camps and work camps for young peoples. For instance, during the summer 2023, Agape has hosted several camps dedicated to teenagers and to parents and children, a camp on sustainable economy, an international theological camp, but also lesbian, gay and trans-feminist camps.¹

¹The camps’ programme is available on Agape’s website: <https://agapecentroecumenico.org/programma/>.

With respect to religious youth camps proposed by Catholic and Orthodox groups, the Evangelical and Waldensian camps stand out for their openness to civil rights issues and the inclusion of all identities (Bein Ricco & Spini, 2016).

These centres, as well as many other facilities used for cultural and worship activities, are directly managed by the Waldensian Church under the control of the Synod. On the other hand, other facilities – e.g. the retirement home Casa delle Diaconesse in Torre Pellice and the Rifugio Re Carlo Alberto in Luserna San Giovanni, specialised in providing assistance to people suffering from dementia – are used for the activities of the Waldensian *Diaconia*, the humanitarian and social service organisation associated with the Waldensian Church in Italy. The Diaconia carries out a wide range of activities and initiatives aimed at providing social and welfare service: support, assistance, education and advocacy for individuals and groups in need, in Italy and abroad (Genre, 2017).² Although inspired by a religious worldview, these activities are characterised by a secular approach and are directed *erga omnes*.

The Network ‘Case Valdesi’

Recently, the organisational structure of the Diaconia has been reorganised according to sectorial rather than to geographical criteria: one of the main changes has been the creation of the network ‘Case Valdesi’ (Waldensian houses) to manage in a coordinated and efficient way the structures and services of touristic hospitality. The network includes nine hotels, guest houses and holiday houses located in different Italian regions. The network’s website (www.case-valdesi.it) provides useful information about the different accommodation facilities and allows users to contact them and make reservations online. It also provides information concerning the sustainable, responsible and solidarity-based tourism approach shared by the hospitality structures belonging to the network. Case Valdesi are connected to the national and international circuits ‘Turismo responsabile’ and ‘Christian Hotels International’. Some of the network’s facilities are present on the online platform www.booking.com or on other similar digital services for booking accommodation.

The network has never been studied by scholars working on tourism management or by experts of religious minorities. However, the recent engagement of Diaconia with touristic hospitality is a relevant innovation with respect to mainstream religious-based hospitality in Italy, which is generally associated with Catholic religious orders and associations; it is also a new feature of the long-standing presence of Waldensians within the Italian civil society. In order to shed light on the characteristics of the network, a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants has been realised between January and February 2023. Some interviews have been conducted online, while others have

²The 2021 Social Report of the Waldensian Diaconia is available online: https://diaconiavaldesi.org/csd/documenti/documenti_pagine/Bilanci%20sociali/bilancio%202021%20diaconia%20valdesi_WEB.pdf.

been conducted during a visit to the network's offices in Florence and during fieldworks conducted in the structures of Reggello and Torre Pellice. The network's director, three managers of the hospitality structures and some workers and volunteers have been asked questions concerning their tasks and responsibilities, the business model, the practices of hospitality and the values that ground them, with special attention to the core values of sustainability, responsibility and solidarity. The information and data collected through the interviews and complemented through desk research have been fundamental to reconstructing the main features of the Waldensian activities of touristic hospitality.

The network Case Valdesi offers different options for visiting mainstream and unusual touristic destinations in different parts of Italy. Three facilities are located in cities of art and are open all year round (Hotel Casa Valdese Roma, Foresteria Valdese di Firenze, Foresteria Valdese di Venezia), while the other six, open for variable periods only during the spring and summer season, are equally distributed between seaside locations (Casa Valdese di Rio Marina, Hotel Casa Balneare Valdese di Pietra Ligure, Casa Valdese di Vallecrosia) and countryside locations (Casa Cares di Reggello, Foresteria Valdese di Torre Pellice, Ostello Villa Olanda in Luserna San Giovanni). All these facilities had always been used for reception and hospitality, particularly for disadvantaged people. For instance, the 16th century building of the Foresteria Valdese di Firenze, Palazzo Salviati, has been used since 1922 to host the Gould Institute, founded by the American benefactress Emily Gould. This institution, which is still active, hosts and provides educational opportunities to orphans or children from underprivileged families, working together with the Juvenile Court of Florence and other public institutions. Another example of the change of use of hospitality structures is offered by Casa Valdese di Vallecrosia, that had been used first as a Waldensian female school and then as a seaside boarding house for students during the summer months and a convalescent home during the rest of the year.

The network Case Valdesi adopts a non-profit business scheme: in addition to facilities' maintenance and staff remuneration, the proceeds are used to support the social and humanitarian activities run by the Diaconia Valdese (Interview 1; Interview 2). On average, Case Valdesi welcome between 25 and 30 thousand guests each year, for a total of about 85–90 thousand overnight stays. The network's Director is responsible for the connection with the Diaconia, for the marketing and for supervising the management of eight out of the nine structures (Interview 1) – only Ostello Villa Olanda is managed independently. Foresteria Valdese di Torre Pellice provides essential services (accommodation and catering) for the activities of the Waldensian Church and for the local communities based in the Waldensian Valleys; therefore, it offers hospitality to the guests who take part in the activities of the Church's governing body (Interview 4). Each of the nine structures has a manager, who is responsible for coordinating the staff (Interview 2; Interview 3).

The number of employees varies depending on the time of year: on average, Case Valdesi employ 85–90 people in summer and 35–40 during winter. Employees are selected on the basis of their curricula and many of them do not belong to the Waldensian community – with the exception of the structures

located in the Waldensian valleys of Piedmont, where the number of Waldensian employees is higher (Interview 1; Interview 4). Beside the employees, who are all employed on regular contracts, in some structures (e.g. Casa Cares) there are international volunteers who assist the employees. They can be recruited through different schemes (voluntary civil service schemes organised by public institutions or by Protestant Churches) and they spend 9 or 12 months working/training at the hospitality structures while learning Italian (Interview 6).

Case Studies: Casa Cares and Foresteria Valdese di Torre Pellice

The two cases offer concrete examples of Waldensian hospitality. Both hospitality structures are located in the countryside, away from the mainstream tourist routes of Tuscany and Piedmont. They attract different target groups of tourists and their connection to the Waldensian religious and cultural identity is different. The two fieldworks have been carried out during the weekends, and they allowed the participant observation of typical activities that are normally undertaken in these hospitality structures. In Casa Cares, there was the annual retreat for a group of coordinators of the activities of the Gruppi Biblici Universitari (GBU), an Evangelical association for the promotion of the reading and study of the Bible in University contexts. In Foresteria di Torre Pellice, the occasion was the celebration of the 17th of February, the commemoration of the attainment of rights and of religious freedom for Waldensians, the most important civic celebration for the life of Waldensian communities.

Casa Cares, also known as Villa I Graffi, is a holiday house but previously had been a huge farm surrounded by olive trees, fruit trees and a dense forested area. Beside residential buildings, there is a former theatre and church that is used as a gym and space for activities. From 1971 to 1975, the farm was bought by a network of Protestant Churches to host the Institute Cares (Centro assistenza ragazzi e studenti), which provided social assistance (education and professional training) to underprivileged children. The property was transferred to the Waldensian Church in 1988 and since then it became a place for encounters and hospitality, where groups of people go for training, exchange, project planning, sport and spirituality experiences. Many Evangelical groups from Italy and other European countries (France, Switzerland, Germany) organise regular meetings and retreats for lay people and clergy people. A type of retreat on the rise is that of yoga, ayurvedic, new age, spirituality and meditation groups that can at times ask challenging requests, especially regarding the meals' compositions (Interview 2). Over the years, Casa Cares has been used for social projects: after 2015, the house has hosted refugees and asylum seekers within the framework of the project 'Mediterranean Hope', the refugee protection programme of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy managed by the Diaconia. During the last years, Casa Cares has started pilot projects of social agriculture for the inclusion of migrants and disadvantaged people (e.g. troubled minors and ex-convicts following reintegration paths) through training in olive cultivation and biological, sustainable farming (Krieg, 2008; Interview 2; Interview 5). The products of the farming are served to the guests of Casa Cares and

the cooks adopt anti-waste practices. The volunteers play an important role in the daily management of the house, assisting the employees with practical tasks – cleaning, farming, setting the rooms (Interview 5; Interview 6). Despite its openness to the world, one of the limitations of Casa Cares is its detachment from the local reality, not only because of the difficult public transport connections: contacts with the local community of Reggello are scarce and sporadic (Interview 2). This limits the capacity of guests and volunteers to benefit from the local offer of cultural and artistic activities (Interview 6). The percentage of Waldensian people among the guests is relatively small and limited to groups linked to the activities of the Church in Tuscany. None of the members of the staff is of Waldensian faith, although one of them descends from a Waldensian family. The microcosm of Casa Cares is multicultural: the two cooks come from Belgium and from Venezuela and one of them is an artist and street musician. The farmer is from Valdarno but has been living in London for a long time and he is Buddhist. The volunteers come mainly from Germany, and some of them belong to Evangelical communities (Interview 5). The characteristics of Casa Cares' hospitality that guests declare to appreciate more are the friendly atmosphere and the caring attitude of the staff (Interview 9).

Foresteria Valdese di Torre Pellice consists of three historical buildings – the former school Casa Beckwith, the former museum Pensionnat and the Cascina – and a more recent building that is used as dining and activities hall, Salone Diodato. The complex lies at the centre of the Waldensian Quarter of Torre Pellice, very close to the Temple, to the Waldensian House and to the Museum, the two buildings harbouring the main religious and cultural activities of the Waldensian minority. The Foresteria can host up to 112 people and it has a catering/restaurant service that is active during the opening season and that can be used for the activities of the Church (e.g. the communitarian lunch of the 17th of February) and of Waldensian associations based in Torre Pellice or in the neighbouring villages. The peak period for the Foresteria is the summer, especially during the week when the annual Synod of the Methodist and Waldensian churches takes place, at the end of August. On this occasion, the representatives of the different Methodist and Waldensian communities meet in Torre Pellice to elect the seven members of the *Tavola* – the main governing body of the Waldensian community – and to discuss the guidelines for the activities of the different organisations and working groups connected to the Waldensian Church. During the opening season, the Foresteria hosts different guests: individuals and groups interested in discovering the Waldensian valleys, often belonging to Protestant Churches or German or American descendants of Waldensian ancestors, and individuals or families, usually elderly people who live in Turin or in other towns of Piedmont looking for a cooler and peaceful summer holiday. The average period of stay is 3–4 days. A third group of guests include people who visit the Pellice Valley and the neighbour valleys for sport – trekkers, cyclists, skiers, but also ice hockey teams meeting the local team (Hockey Club Valpellice Bulldogs) for matches, tournaments or joint training activities (Interview 4). Thanks to the convenient prices during the Spring many groups visit the Foresteria for school trips and parish trips, but their goals and interests are different from the ones of the groups attending Casa Cares: normally, they do not have

training or other kind of self-organised activities, but they look forward to discover the sites of Waldensian history and to visit the museum, library and archives. The groups hosted by the Parish of Torre Pellice are welcomed with refreshments and practical touristic information by an ad hoc committee of the Società del cucito, the glorious association of local women who contribute actively to the Community's life, especially by organising fundraising activities for the Parish and recruiting volunteers for providing service in the Restaurant during the official celebrations (Interview 10). In the Foresteria, the staff is mainly composed of local (Waldensian and non-Waldensian) people from Torre Pellice or from the other villages of the valley, with the noticeable exception of an employee who arrived in Italy thanks to the humanitarian corridors. The restaurant works according to professional standards when there are groups of guests and is run by the cook and the maître (Interview 11).

Reconstructing the Waldensian Model of Hospitality

Before outlining the main features of the Waldensian model of hospitality, it is important to recall briefly what a model of hospitality is and to distinguish its components. First of all, hospitality is a human relationship – made of ‘interpersonal encounters in public space’ (Bell, 2011, p. 138) – whose essence and implications are mysterious and potentially destabilising for the people involved, an ambiguous condition that has been captured by the well known concept of *hospitality* (Derrida, 2000). Hosts share their houses with their guests. Sharing the same spaces can facilitate the encounter, but it can also create incomprehension and conflict. In general, hospitality is performed by different actors: private actors, social actors (non-commercial organisations) and commercial actors (King, 1995, p. 220). These actors tend to offer different kinds of hospitality, establishing different relationships with their guests. However, as is the case with the Waldensian model of hospitality, there can be hybrid models: here, a social actor offers hospitality for paying guests and adopts a non-profit scheme to fund social and humanitarian activities.

According to Reuland et al. (1985), a hospitality model links the three elements of the hospitality offer (Product, Behaviour and Environment) with the elements of guest satisfaction (Needs and Objectives). In her recent contribution to the debate on the conceptualisation of hospitality, Lombarts (2018) claims that this understanding of a hospitality model should be revised in the light of sustainability imperatives. So, the Environment (the specific hospitality facility) should be replaced by the Context (the planet) and new actors should be included into the formula (which ought to consider the interests and needs of direct and indirect stakeholders, i.e. all the people affected by the relationship established between the host and the guest, starting with the host's employees). Hosts' and guests' behaviours should be aligned and strive for sustainability. Furthermore, engagement, ‘the behaviour manifesting from motivational, cognitive and/or motivational drivers’ (Lombarts, 2018, p. 303), is crucial for hosts, guests and stakeholders. Finally, the relationship between hosts and guests is no longer

considered (only) as a transaction, but rather as an experience. This means that not only the commercial interactions, but also the emotions felt by hosts, guests and stakeholders are important elements to be considered. With respect to the hospitality model proposed by Reuland et al., the revised model seems more helpful to analyse hybrid models that could not fit perfectly into the category of commercial hospitality.

This analytic framework can be helpful to study the specific characteristics of the Waldensian model of touristic hospitality that, as noticed before, is different from the institutional hospitality offered for religious activities and camps, in order to interpret the data, information and evidence collected during the research.

Product: Waldensian hospitality structures offer different locations, accommodations, and board solutions. Some facilities (Rome, Florence and Venice) are open all year long, while others are bookable only from February or April to October (Reggello, Torre Pellice, Luserna San Giovanni). The holiday houses (Rio Marina, Pietra Ligure, Vallecrosia) are available for the summer season only. The prices vary depending on the facilities – they tend to be higher in the facilities located in the art cities – and on the periods of the year. All the structures propose special prices for individuals and groups or for specific targets. Furniture and services are simple and essential, but functional. Sobriety and reduction of waste characterise the choice of the linens, cleaning products and the food. Indoor and outdoor common spaces are available for the guests in several structures.

Behaviour: The network Case Valdesi puts emphasis on the caring and friendly welcoming of the guests. In the welcoming phase, there is no reference to the Waldensian religious and cultural identity and in general there are no attempts to proselytise the guests. The structures are open to any person or group, irrespective of their faith.

Environment/Context: Case Valdesi commit themselves to adopt measures in line with sobriety and sustainability and they have implemented several information campaigns and actions (through posters, postcards, infographics, anti-waste and correct recycling signals) to sensitise their guests on the issues connected to environmental and social sustainability (e.g. saving resources and expressing solidarity towards unprivileged groups). Although so far sustainability does not seem to be an essential dimension that tourists consider when they choose Case Valdesi, the adoption and explanation of sustainable measures is generally favourably received by the guests.

Guests' needs and objectives: Guests get to know Case Valdesi in different ways and they assign different values to specific aspects of hospitality. This at times can lead to a mismatch between guests' expectations and the touristic offer, especially in the case of bookings made through online portals normally associated to mass tourism by tourists who are not familiar with the European/Italian standards (e.g. some tourists find the lack of air conditioning in the rooms, or the lack of daily cleaning of the rooms unacceptable). Religious belonging or proximity to the Waldensian and Protestant transnational community are factors that play an important role as far as the possibility of getting to know the Case Valdesi network and their offers and initiatives is considered.

Engagement: In general, the employees of Case Valdesi show a high degree of engagement: they share and actively support the Waldensian model/vision of hospitality. The volunteers, even those living abroad, tend to maintain this feeling of engagement for long and it happens quite often that they return to visit the structures where they have worked as tourists. Guests tend to express satisfaction for the hospitality received, and it is not infrequent that they keep in contact with the employees; it happens that they go back to the facilities that they have visited and that they use word of mouth to suggest the Waldensian hospitality structures to family, friends and colleagues.

Conclusion

As announced in the introduction, this chapter's main goal is to sketch the contours of the Waldensian model of touristic hospitality, contributing to shed light on the recent emergence of a unique actor within the touristic sector. This descriptive contribution also aims at deepening the understanding of the presence of the Waldensian minority within the Italian society expanding the knowledge on its contribution to the innovation of touristic hospitality towards models that assign great importance to the adoption and implementation of transformative principles such as sustainability, solidarity and inclusion. The collection of data and a comprehensive analysis of the case studies are needed to deepen the understanding of the main features of the model and of its functioning.

To sum up the main findings of this exploratory study, it seems that a distinctive Waldensian model of touristic hospitality is emerging as a consequence of the transformation of institutional hospitality. The coordinated management, leaving room for the specificities that characterise each of the nine facilities of the network Case Valdesi, has been successful in proposing a common vision, achieving visibility and increasing distinctiveness with respect to alternative offers. Over the years, Case Valdesi have developed the capacity to host guests with different needs and to develop collaborations and partnerships with other actors of the touristic sector. However, the challenges ahead demand attention, among them safeguarding the heritage of buildings of historical interest while maintaining high standards of hospitality quality, matching guests' expectations and taking root in local contexts, especially for those hospitality structures located far from the mainstream touristic routes. Other aspects that would require further research are the link between the Waldensian model of hospitality and Waldensian cultural identity as well as the prospects for the resilience of the Waldensian minority offered by the touristic sector in the valleys of Piedmont and in the towns touched by the diaspora. As one of the managers of the Case Valdesi network put it: 'transforming the stranger in a guest is an act of love and gratitude for having freely received God's love' (Interview 1). Thus, it seems that shifting from religious hospitality towards touristic hospitality could produce an impact which is not limited to increasing the opportunities for employment and generating revenues to sustain social projects to the advantage of underprivileged individuals and

groups, but it opens new spaces for elaborating new visions of the relationship between hosts and guests.

Interviews Mentioned in the Chapter

Interview 1: Interview with a manager of the network Case Valdesi, 5 January 2023.

Interview 2: Interview with a structure manager, 5 January 2023.

Interview 3: Interview with a structure manager, 13 January 2023.

Interview 4: Interview with a structure manager, 24 January 2023.

Interview 5: Interview with a worker of the network Case Valdesi, 11 February 2023.

Interview 6: Interview with five volunteers, 11 February 2023.

Interview 7: Interview with a worker of the network Case Valdesi, 12 February 2023.

Interview 8: Interview with a worker of the network Case Valdesi, 12 February 2023.

Interview 9: Interview with a member of GBU, 11 February 2023.

Interview 10: Interview with a citizen of Torre Pellice, 17 February 2023.

Interview 11: Interview with a worker of the network Case Valdesi, 17 February 2023.

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