

The effect of fervid attachment to religious rites on tourism: evidence from the Holy Week in Southern Italy

Fervid attachment to religious rites

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is aimed to examine natives' Fervid Attachment to religious rites, as a part of cultural heritage, in its extrinsic (sense of belonging, rituality) and intrinsic (intimate bond, emotionality) characteristics, by shedding light on how leveraging on these characteristics could be emphasized to promote sustainable local development.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on the principles of an ethnographic research approach based on observational methods, this paper analyzes the rites of Holy Week in Taranto, a city located in the Southern Italy, by capturing individuals' behavior according the concept of Fervid Attachment.

Findings – Results show that tourism destinations preserving their traditions and religious rites as part of their cultural heritage can satisfy tourists' spirituality needs and, by promoting the interaction with the local population (natives) in terms of relationship between them and tourists, supporting local communities' development. Moreover their Fervid Attachment in terms of sense of belonging, rituality, intimate bond and emotionality could be empathized to promote sustainable local development.

Practical implications – Our results provide suggestions on how local policymakers and tourism marketers could leverage natives' attachment to religious rites to boost religious tourism.

Originality/value – This paper shows from a new perspective based on the concept of natives' Fervid Attachment how local people are relevant in promoting a tourism destination.

Keywords Cultural tourism, Sense of belonging, Rituality, Emotionality, Fervid attachment, Intimate bond, Religious and sacred heritage, Tourism destination development

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Every year, millions of tourists move around the world for reasons of faith, activating a multi-billion dollar business that only continues to grow (UNWTO, 2019). As a part of cultural heritage, religion represents a key resource for local development (Narayanan, 2013; Vukonic, 2002; Willson *et al.*, 2013) and is thus attracting increasing research

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attention (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Religious tourists usually look for experiences that fulfill both their need for spirituality (Willson *et al.*, 2013) and their *genius loci* (Petzet, 2008) – that is, the essence of a place and all the characteristics of its environment and inhabitants. Moreover, some studies – focusing on specific events or experiences, such as pilgrimages to Fatima (Fleischer, 2000), Medjugorje (Abbate and Di Nuovo, 2013) or Israel (Poria *et al.*, 2003) – have highlighted how individuals (both natives and tourists) tend to get attached to these places. Indeed, tourists' emotions and satisfaction are significant determinants of place attachment (i.e. a connection between an individual and a specific place, as in Bowlby, 1982). Tourists' emotions display a positive relationship with the attachment to a tourist destination (Hosany *et al.*, 2017). Over time, pilgrimages and travels foster greater attachment, which imparts new meanings on tourists and the faithful (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). People may even change their behavior in response to these experiences and their interactions with natives' culture, values and behaviors. Similarly, the literature (Abbate and Di Nuovo, 2013) has highlighted how religious tourists' experiences need to be understood regarding the place they visit: Both their perceptions of it and the meaning they attach to it. Indeed, Patwardhan *et al.* (2020) recently showed how tourists' emotional experiences influence the effect of place attachment on loyalty toward a tourist destination. Interestingly, recent studies have confirmed the role of local people (specifically, the role of natives) in influencing tourists' experiences: For instance, Ouyang *et al.* (2017) applied social exchange theory and cognitive assessment theory to investigate the role of natives' attachment to events on their own perceptions, emotional responses and support. Their study highlighted the centrality of residents' support in promoting a tourist destination.

From a marketing perspective, such attachment seems to parallel the studies on consumers' attachment to brands (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). In line with these studies, it would be interesting to know what facets of natives' attachment to their own traditions and heritage could be conveyed to tourists in order to increase a tourist destination's attractiveness. Natives' attachment to such rites and traditions could make them unique and recognizable, attracting thousands of tourists every year by leveraging natives' behaviors. To ground our assumptions, we adopt the *fervid attachment* construct (Guido *et al.*, 2016) as part of an investigation into natives' *fervid attachment* toward their religious rites. More specifically, we used an ethnographic research approach (Belk *et al.*, 2012) to capture the reality of daily life in a setting (Lofland *et al.*, 2006), as well as identify the *extrinsic components* (sense of belonging, rituality) and *intrinsic components* (intimate bond, emotionality) of natives' *fervid attachment* to those rites.

By considering these premises, the two research questions we aim to answer are:

- RQ1. How can the fervid attachment construct be useful for investigating the peculiar characteristics of a rite rooted in a population's cultural heritage?
- RQ2. How can the fervid attachment dimensions be used to enhance an event's support for tourism and local development?

To address our research questions, we implemented an empirical study based on the ethnographic approach. We considered the Holy Week in Taranto as our research setting. This is a recognized religious rite that spans three nights and three days; it has been entrenched in the cultural and religious heritage of the city since 1600. The event attracts about 4.2 million tourists every year (PugliaPromozione, 2020). Assessing religious rites in their intrinsic and extrinsic components may help marketers better understand how to leverage natives' attachment to those rites. Indeed, practitioners may be able to enrich tourists' experiences by highlighting unique tourism destinations underpinned by authentic interactions and social exchange (Ouyang *et al.*, 2017). Such initiatives could leverage the rite's authenticity permeated by transcendent states and emotions, and mainly communicating and promoting natives' "fervid" behaviors.

Our research contributes to the literature on the role of tourism destination attachment and natives' support in tourism development, especially in relation to religious rites (Hung *et al.*, 2020; Ouyang *et al.*, 2017). Such events could become fundamental for tourism destinations' economic and socio-cultural development.

This article is organized as follows: In the next section, we highlight some key aspects of religious tourism; then, we introduce the notion of *fervid attachment* and its components. Afterward, we describe the methodology used for our ethnographic investigation. Finally, we discuss our results in a way that integrates the extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics of *fervid attachment*, offering suggestions for how to leverage such characteristics for tourism development.

2. Literature review

2.1 Religious tourism

Cultural heritage and religion have been recognized as fundamental resources (Kim *et al.*, 2020; Narayanan, 2013) for tourism destinations. Interestingly, recent studies (i.e. Shinde, 2010) have shown that local entrepreneurship and local development often arise from socio-cultural and ritual exchanges, as well as the spread of knowledge about religious rites, among indigenous individuals and religious visitors. In this respect, religious tourism represents a form of cultural tourism (Nocifora, 2010): Individuals who visit these places usually look for experiences that can fulfill their need for spirituality (Petzet, 2008), while still abiding by the modern tourists' desire for cultural and experiential enrichment (Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). Consequently, religious tourism represents one of the most practiced forms of cultural tourism today. Religious rites are a prominent aspect of such tourism: One of the most popular religious rites is the pilgrimage, an ancient form of travel – such as in the “Ways” (i.e. Ways of St. James) – whereby people return to the origins of faith and culture and engage in collective activities with the faithful (Saint-Blancat and Cancellieri, 2014). Religious rites include visits to sacred places, which typically entails visitors experiencing ancient pilgrimage routes, learning about the local culture and possibly creating relationships with the local communities (Gover and Go, 2016). Some authors argue that the concept of pilgrimage now reflects the paradigm of a commodified rite, related to the commercialization of religious tourism and authentic experience (Nilsson and Tesfahuney, 2016). However, the difference between a pilgrim and a tourist lies in the meaning that they attribute to the experience lived: Pilgrims are more intimately involved and interested in sacred rites, religious messages, emotions transmitted by places and symbols, whereas tourists show greater interest in the commercial and experiential aspects (Fleischer, 2000).

Nearly all religions place great weight on their rites. For Christianity – the focal religion of this paper – Easter (and the preceding Holy Week) is one of the most important events and a basis for different events worldwide. Easter, which is preceded by the Holy Week, is one of the most important Christian events worldwide. During the Holy week, in many cities all around the world, the members of the lay religious brotherhoods usually take part in street processions (as long pilgrimage rites) in commemoration of Christ's Passion. Besides Christmas, Easter is the highest solemnity of the Christian faith, celebrated every year on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. In Europe, these processions mainly occur in Spain (in cities such as Sevilla, Toledo, Madrid and Granada; Schrauf, 1997) and in Southern Italy (a territory that has internalized Spanish traditions since the Spanish dominance in the 1600s; Cicalese and Musi, 2005). In these rites, the members of each brotherhood carry a religious image – usually a simulacrum – that portrays some venerated aspects of Christ's Passion. Previous research (Sánchez *et al.*, 2017) has shown that such rites in the Holy Week consistently attract numerous people due to the relevance of this event in the Christian religion. As the most important traditional celebration in many parts of the world, it has the

potential to create revenue and employment, support traditional industries, preserve cultural heritage and enhance a destination's image.

Past studies (i.e. [Nunkoo and So, 2016](#); [Patwardhan et al., 2020](#)) have largely investigated how natives support tourism development through their social interactions. These studies have focused on community attachment and consider it an antecedent of individuals' intention to support the community ([Styliadis, 2016](#); [Yuksel et al., 2010](#)). Moreover, research has focused on how religiosity and spirituality work as motivational forces for religious tourism and impact tourism more broadly (i.e. [Hakimi et al., 2018](#)), as well as how natives' attachment contributes to local development (i.e. [Ouyang et al., 2017](#)). However, no study has investigated natives' attachment to religious rites (and thus, not simply toward religious symbols, i.e. about the Pope or Saints), and how this relates to or differs from consumers' preference toward a brand. The present research aimed, therefore, to deeply investigate natives' attachment to religious rites and highlight this aspect's importance to a tourism destination's offer. Indeed, by leveraging natives' *fervid attachment* to such religious rites, tourism marketers could significantly increase the uniqueness of a tourist destination and foster its development. The following sections illustrate the notion of *fervid attachment* and its four components.

2.2 The concept of fervid attachment

Originally introduced in the psychological literature, attachment was defined by [Bowlby's \(1982\)](#) seminal work as a connection between an individual and something specific. Individuals who internalize religious beliefs and principles tend to externalize them in behaviors and relationships with others. These behaviors lead individuals to integrate transcendence into everyday life, with actions and rites that evoke a religious dimension. Attachment could be influenced by traditions ([Mugge et al., 2010](#)) that signal a faithful observation of religious practices: In this sense, attachment takes on the tones of a faith. [Taylor and Halstead \(2014\)](#) found that individuals who are highly religious, or who have a stronger sense of identification and attachment to religion than less religious individuals, tend to spread positive word-of-mouth about rites and traditions. These effects could also be observed in their participation in religious rites, as an expression of a strong spirituality need. Natives' loyalty and affection for religious rites could feed the desire to spread positive word-of-mouth to make the rites recognizable, fueling the sense of belonging and identification with local people and the territory in which these rites take place, thus attracting tourists and the faithful ([Whitehouse, 2004](#)). Note that there are several types of attachment. For instance, there is material attachment, which is connected to possessiveness and non-generosity ([Kleine and Baker, 2004](#)), and emotional attachment, which is characterized by affection, passion and connection ([Thomson et al., 2005](#)). [Guido et al. \(2016\)](#) introduced the idea of *fervid attachment* to capture a particular form of attachment that can assume the characteristics of a faith. It encompasses two main components of religiosity in terms of *extrinsic* components (sense of belonging, rituality) and *intrinsic* components (intimate bond, emotionality). We will discuss each aspect in detail.

2.2.1 Sense of belonging. Individuals tend to develop a sense of connection and identify with a community in which they feel recognized as members. Indeed, the Social Identity theory ([Tajfel, 1982](#)) postulates that individuals try to establish relationships with those who are perceived to be similar to, or slightly better than, themselves: The development of one's identity, therefore, derives from a sort of "self-classification" based on similarities between members of one group and the differences between them and members of other groups. For some individuals, this sense of belonging is so strong that it motivates them to join communities (namely, confraternities) in order to participate in group ideals. This awareness leads individuals to identify themselves with specific values and behaviors, and, through them, with other individuals ([McAlexander et al., 2002, 2014](#)). Notably, some communities develop a line of

“legitimacy” to distinguish the sense of belonging into two forms: those who occupy a marginal position and those who “really” understand the community’s culture, rites, traditions and symbols (Muniz and O’Guin, 2001; Stark and Glock, 1968).

2.2.2 Rituality. Rituality is an identification with symbolic activities constructed by multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence and which tend to repeat over time (Mathras *et al.*, 2016). Rites are “dramatically scripted and acted out, performed with formality, seriousness, inner intensity” (Rook, 1985, p. 252). In this sense, the rites and traditions of popular piety are essential parts of communities that express their principles. These behaviors, therefore, reside in ritual experiences that involve a series of events, often connected in a fixed order, that conform to traditions and “rules” over time. Importantly, the enactment of these prescribed behaviors is a source of self-gratification for participants (McAlexander *et al.*, 2014).

2.2.3 Intimate bond. The strong intimate bond that connects individuals with religious symbols is a distinctive aspect of religiosity. Symbols form a cultural subsystem that engenders an entire ideology, which can then influence individuals’ behaviors (Schembri, 2009; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In this subculture, people revere an “object” of reference that can evoke the sacredness that underlies the religious. Additionally, members of the group develop a deep feeling of brotherhood with one another, thereby strengthening the sense of attachment. Although Confraternities share the same original purpose – religious and spiritual enrichment – people join different ones to experience their unique rites and cultural heritage, which are sometimes preserved for centuries. Being a part of the group gives members a common set of beliefs and objectives, alongside a sense of belonging and involvement—with shared collective experiences, such as in rites, encapsulating the whole culture. Finally, such communities conduct missionary activities to proselytize, diffuse their faith and its symbols and attract new members (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). By spreading word about their beliefs, reflexively engaging with their faith and participating in religious rites with other faithful, people may increase their spiritual authenticity and fervid attachment (Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019).

2.2.4 Emotionality. Individuals are generally more willing to make sacrifices for their religious group, in a way similar to their loved ones (Hazan and Shaver, 1994). Likewise, the emotional attachment to a brand could reveal individuals’ loyalty and willingness to make sacrifices to obtain that product. Of course, it would be reductive to define the long-lasting and deep affection that a relationship with a religious community generates as mere “preference”, as the reason for such a strong attachment is to be found in the unique and irreplaceable sensations, emotions and recognitions that these arouse. When these rites are lacking (as in separation), individuals could even experience a state of anxiety (Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2009; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). The core of these strong relationships is therefore placed in a rich emotional dimension, evoking the concept of love, which is typical of interpersonal relationships. This love for a faith—and by extension, a related event with which individuals identify themselves—is characterized by an attraction that elicits positive emotions, pleasure, self-satisfaction, trust and affection. Other relevant elements include the duration and intensity of the built relationships, the dreams and memories evoked by the religion, its uniqueness and the sense of spirituality (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012).

3. Methods

3.1 Ethnographic research design

To reach our goal, we embraced an ethnographic approach based on participant observation. Indeed, while qualitative research is useful for deepening knowledge around a complex phenomenon (e.g. perceptions and motivations that guide a consumer’s decision to buy a new product or participate in an event), the ethnographic approach is useful for delving into the

underlying variables and the influences between them. Derived from studies of cultural anthropology, this approach highlights how one can trace, in any market phenomenon, the processes of signification within a social group's cultural codes. Consequently, the ethnographic approach seems best suited to analyzing particular events (such as the considered religious rites) in order to understand the peculiar meanings arising from different cultural and social contexts. Indeed, the ethnographic approach has generated important insights into religious expression as reflected in gestures, symbols, behaviors and practices (Belk *et al.*, 2012). For our research object, we considered the Rites of the Holy Week in Taranto, which includes a series religious rites that take place in the city, starting from Palm Sunday (i.e. the Sunday before Easter Sunday) and continuing through Thursday, Friday and Holy Saturday. The uniqueness of these rites made them a prime candidate for study: Contrary to the other religious rites taking place in Italy and the rest of Europe, the people directly involved who preserve and promote these symbols and rites sustain a huge economic sacrifice – up to 90,000 euros – making these rites appealing to those who witness them. We argue that such rites provide a natural setting for how *fervid attachment* affects natives who are directly involved in the rites as Confraternity members, and how these experiences engage both native families and tourists looking for unique spiritual experiences.

Following the ethnographic participant observation approach (Belk *et al.*, 2012; Lofland *et al.*, 2006), we analyzed the rites in-depth. Our intent was to explore them by including more of the social context and individuals' behaviors. Thus, we collected data and insights within a field site (i.e. the location where the individuals' behaviors occur). The informants were classified into active participants (directly involved in the rites) and passive participants (native bystanders assisting the rites and interacting with tourists). Specifically, we observed 22 active participants who could not be interviewed because of their engagement in processions, and 20 passive participants who interacted with the faithful and tourists. The observations were conducted during the 254th edition from 14th to 21st April 2019, during Thursday, Friday (day/night) and Saturday. The particular activities occurred: Sunday the 14th, 2019 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. (after the preparatory Assembly, accessed with the Confraternity's permission); Thursday the 18th from 10.30 p.m. to 00.00 a.m.; Friday the 19th from 00.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. and from 5 p.m. to 00.00 a.m.; and Saturday the 20th, from 00.00 a.m. to 07.30 a.m. We created an observational protocol to describe active and passive participants' behavior and answer the question "what is going on here?" (Belk *et al.*, 2012; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Thus, the protocol worked as a reminder and a checklist for the observations, guiding one of the authors' notetaking and microanalysis (Lofland *et al.*, 2006): Indeed, one author was responsible for notetaking and microanalysis, but all authors jointly contributed to the analysis. It was crucial to take notes immediately during and after the event, while images, sensations, sounds and emotions were still fresh in memory: Considering the full-night duration of some of the observations, the observer transcribed the results on the following morning. Through our joint analysis, we revealed the deeper meaning behind observed participants' gestures, symbols, postures, voice, sounds, emotions and words. According to Morse (2001), developing a theory requires that the microanalytic data be more than simply "snapshots of a process". This has been useful to interpret the observed behaviors.

3.2 The rites of Holy Week in Taranto as a research setting

In Southern Italy, the rites of the Holy Week are mainly diffused in Apulia, Calabria and Sicily (Lombardi-Satriani, 2008). In the Apulian area, these rites mainly take place in Taranto, Gallipoli and Ruvo di Puglia. We considered Taranto, the main city of the Ionian area (Figure 1), for our research setting.

The Holy Week of Taranto is one of the most engaging and emotional rites, entrenched in the city's cultural and religious heritage: Dating back to the seventeenth century, its origins attract foreign tourists and the faithful to these rites. In 2019, the considered area recorded 4.2

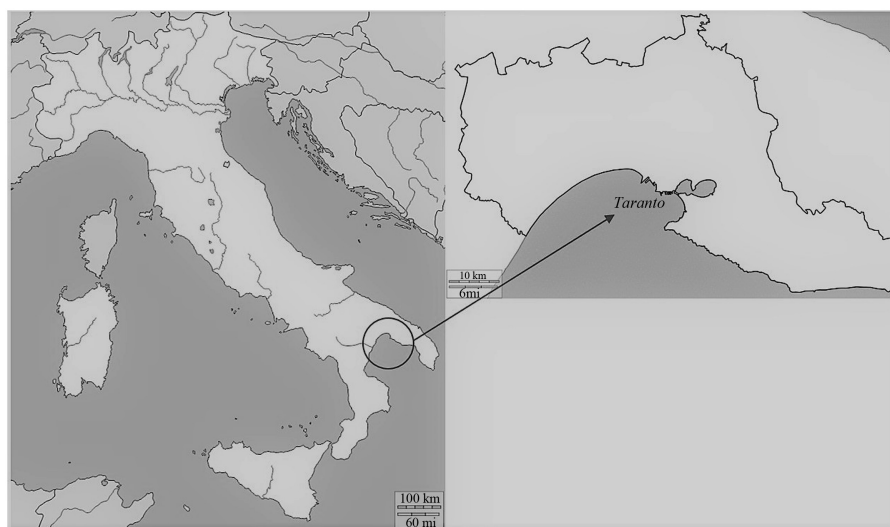


Figure 1.
Geographical location
of Taranto in
Southern Italy

million arrivals (+4% vs 2018) and 15.5 million presences (+2%), with 1.2 million arrivals coming from abroad (+11.5%) (PugliaPromozione, 2020). Taranto represents one of the most requested destinations in Easter and spring tourism: In 2019, for instance, hotels reported an average booking rate about 77% in the period between April and May (PugliaPromozione, 2019). Despite the attractiveness of the Holy Week rites, the numerous related cultural events (art exhibitions, fairs, concerts, rites), and the vast number of people who participate and assist (more than 60,000 in 2019 according to the Archives of the local Archbishopric), the appeal of Easter tourism is not yet strong enough to attract more people. Tourism destination marketers could leverage Taranto and its cultural heritage unique characteristics, alongside the natives' behaviors during rites, to communicate a value proposition to religious tourists and the faithful. Thus, we used the *fervid attachment* construct to observe the authentic features of the Holy Week in Taranto.

The Rites of Holy Week in Taranto mainly consist of two long processions which last for about three consecutive days (night and day), embodying the full meaning of the Via Crucis and the Passion of Christ. Specifically, the Rites began in 1603 when the simulacra of Dead Jesus – “Gesù Morto” – and Our Lady of Sorrows – “Addolorata” – were built in Naples for the patrician Don Diego Calò from Taranto, who donated these simulacra to the Confraternity of Carmine in the same year. The Holy Week in Taranto has only been suspended during the World Wars (1915–1918 and 1939–1945) and recently, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020. This event is awaited with great desire every year, allowing city natives to experience a sense of attachment to and pride in ancient traditions that codify the community's identity.

This religious rite takes place through the streets of the old town and the new city of Taranto, for about 30 consecutive hours, resulting in two distinct pilgrimages (or processions). The first procession involves carrying the simulacrum of the Addolorata (starting from Thursday at midnight until 2 p.m. on Friday) and the second involves the eight simulacra of the Sacred Mysteries (starting from 5 p.m. on Friday and going until dawn on Saturday). During these nights, the city operates as if it were in broad daylight, witnessing the processions and filling the streets. Families, faithful and tourists follow the processions, occupying the streets around the historic center, accompanying the simulacra across the city

and sharing the pilgrimage. All the while, eight marching band ensembles fill the air with the sounds of characteristic music (funeral marches) to create a transcendental atmosphere (Plates 1 and 2).

These Rites end on Saturday at 7 a.m., with the arrival of the Sacred Mysteries at the Church. At this stage, the “troccolante” – the figure who opens the procession-knocks on the doors of the Church. This gesture is rich in meaning: on Saturday, gives access to the symbolic door of Heaven, welcoming the Pilgrims on their return. The processions are led by couplings of devout confreres: pilgrim members of the two main Confraternities, Addolorata and Carmine. Each couple is called “perdòni”, who are arranged in a row during the procession, arranged in rows that surround the simulacra or the symbols of Passion. During the procession of the Addolorata on Thursday, the couples of “perdòni” are interspersed with the “crucifers” in order to herald the arrival of the simulacrum of the Addolorata. During the procession of the Sacred Mysteries on Friday, the couples of “perdòni” are organized in groups of four and interspersed with the simulacra representing the Passion (typically called “Poste”). The symbols are the “Croce dei Misteri”, the “Gonfalone” – the Confraternity’s flag, “Jesus in the Gethsemane” (Cristo all’Orto), “Jesus scourged” (La Colonna), “Ecce Homo”, “Falling Jesus” (La Cascata), “The Crucifix” (Il Crocifisso), “The Shroud” (La Sindone); “Dead Jesus” (Gesù Morto), “The Lady of Sorrows” (L’Addolorata). The couples of “perdòni” move

Plate 1.
Empathy toward
people – a sick person
on the left and a child
on the right-
assisting rites



Plate 2.
“Addolorata” leaving
St. Dominic’s Church at
00.00 a.m. in
Thursday night



forward in an extremely slow and swinging manner, known as “nazziacata”, for the duration of the event. This contributes to the slow and characteristic movement: It seems they take one step forward and two steps back, slowly swinging left to right. The “tròccola” – a wooden instrument carved and decorated in the perimeter – begins the processions with an onomatopoeic sound that is reminiscent of lashes on the wood, played by the “troccolante”. The beginning of this week we discovered as full of emotions, gestures, traditions, rites and prayers coincides with Palm Sunday: On this day, the members of the two major Confraternities that organize the pilgrimage – the Addolorata and the Carmine – convene in two extraordinary assemblies in which the symbols of passion are auctioned and awarded to the highest bidder – or more precisely, the “sdanghe” on which they are ruled. The term “sdanghe” refers to a wooden axis on which simulacra are located (as a sort of platform to carry the statues): Competing for a simulacrum (e.g. as for statues) could be blasphemous. Instead, the successful bidder does not purchase ownership of the simulacrum, *per se*, but rather buys the opportunity to carry it in procession alongside others – as a team – and thereby directly participate in this privileged opportunity. The sum paid is then donated to charitable purposes, in line with the Confraternities’ values (for the determinants of charitable acts, see [Sargeant, 1999](#)). Here we reiterate that it could be reductive to define this gesture as the expression of a preference for action, as the reason for such a strong attachment involves the unique and irreplaceable sensations, emotions and recognitions that are aroused by people’s spirituality and intimate bond ([Plates 3 and 4](#)).

Ultimately, given how the collected sums are dispersed, the mechanism could be compared to a charity auction. The “perdòni” dress in the sacred vestments of the Confraternity to which they belong and generally wear a hood – hence also the term “hooded souls” instead of “perdòni” – which, according to natives, makes them unrecognizable and flattens them all to a similar level (equality).

The confreres of the Carmine, unlike those of the Addolorata, do not wear footwear: The procession is carried out entirely with bare feet, except for those with a different specific function, with extremely slow progress (see [Plate 5](#)). For example, the “tròccola” leaves the Church at 5.00 p.m. and does not generally return before 7.00 a.m. in the following morning ([Plate 6](#)).

During the pilgrimage, some members wearing black suits—the so-called “forcelle”—support the other members in sustaining the simulacra. This name derives from the crutches (in the local dialect “forcella”) they use in holding up the simulacra are situated on the



Plate 3.
Confrere while
carrying “La Cascata”
simulacrum in
procession embrace
each other sharing
emotions

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Plate 4.
Emotional involvement
in the rites



Plate 5.
Different sacred
vestments of the two
main Confraternities:
Addolorata (on the left)
and Carmine (on
the right)



Plate 6.
People awaiting the
end of the rites on the
dawn of Holy Saturday



“sdanghe” (as the men in [Plate 3](#)). Indeed, the groups that hold up the simulacra are composed by two couples of “perdòni” and two couples of “forcelle” – one set of couples in front and the other set in back. Over the centuries, the Confraternities have made some changes in the sacred procession: For instance, the bearers of the simulacra and symbols have had their hoods lowered on the face, while some routes, as well as the suggestive ritual of the “return in the Church”, were restored in 1977 after decades of disuse. In this ritual, the bearer of the “tròccola” approaches the door of the Church very slowly, raises the staff on which he leans during the procession and knocks three times to ask for asylum for the pilgrims, sanctioning the end of the rites. This description embodies the exceptional predominance of gestures and symbols whose meaning has persisted for centuries. Moreover, the funeral marches played by the local marching band feed the “transcendental” psychological state: The confreres are usually totally immersed, crying and resting their heads on the “sdanghe” while looking with love and reverence toward the symbols and simulacra they have the honor – and burden – of carrying in the procession.

4. Results and discussion: extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics of the Holy Week in Taranto

Following [Belk et al. \(2012\)](#), we identified *capta* by observing the rites and participants’ behavior. Particularly, we combined the main revealed insights with the suggestions offered by our literature review, systematizing the recorded results in an integrated manner ([Bal and Nijkamp, 2001](#); [Lofland et al., 2006](#)) to delineate the extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics of the *fervid attachment* ([Guido et al., 2016](#)) ([Table 1](#)).

5. Conclusion

The present research explored the role of religion in tourism development by adopting a wholly new perspective in the literature: namely, we translated the construct of *fervid attachment* to a brand ([Guido et al., 2016](#)) to the evaluation of religious rites. In this way, we shed light on the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics (i.e. sense of belonging, rituality, intimate bond and emotionality) that can be used to promote such events. Particularly, we deeply observed the *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* characteristics of the *fervid attachment* experienced during the rites of Holy Week in Taranto. The Holy Week in Taranto is an integral part of the cultural heritage and traditions of this city: natives express a desire/duty to participate, either directly or indirectly. Theoretically, the different gestures, symbols, emotions and traditions that affect the rites can serve as possible drivers of tourism development, as we summarize in the figure below. In tandem, the insights in [Table 1](#) indicate that marketers should focus on the unique experience offered by the event, as well as leverage natives’ behaviors ([Ouyang et al., 2017](#)).

Marketing strategies aimed at enhancing a territory’s tourist attractiveness could focus on these factors, highlighting their “fervid” nature and their deep spiritual connotations (see also [Hung et al., 2020](#)). The individual and collective experiences of participants, reinforced by natives’ behaviors ([Nunkoo and So, 2016](#)), may be an opportunity to magnify the value of the tourism destination and its associated traditions. By extension, destinations can simultaneously satisfy the faithful who seek unique experiences alongside religious tourists who desire immersion and enjoyment. From a tourism marketing perspective, the promotion of religious rites such as the Holy Week can not only enrich those who participate, but contribute to the development of tourism destinations and protect their cultural heritage and identity. This is particularly relevant nowadays because, as [Narayanan \(2013\)](#) noted, place marketers should consider new strategies to guard, protect and manage religious heritage, its traditions and rites, in order to favor destination development ([Vukonic, 2002](#);

Table 1.
Intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of fervid attachment to the Holy Week of Taranto

<i>Extrinsic characteristics</i>	<i>Sense of belonging</i>	<i>The pilgrimage Confraternities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many natives follow the entire pilgrimage led by spiritual motivations, and by a deep sense of belonging towards those rites rooted in their souls, and traditions, relighting their fervid attachment - Some individuals formalize their sense of belonging by joining Confraternities, accepting their Statutes, rules, uses and customs, sharing values and committing themselves to the life prescribed by the spiritual fathers
		<i>Natives' participation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confraternities' members feel part of the group by sharing beliefs and objectives - Many individuals exalt the rites, spreading positive words toward the experienced emotions, discovering themselves as amateur photographers and video-makers, becoming the spokesman of something so dear to them. They participate both as faithful, or because the rites are "rooted in their souls", even if not faithful
		<i>Traditions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Their availability and positive words, attracts further faithful and tourism seeking for unique spiritual experiences - Individuals require correct disclosure of the inner matrix and the motivations behind the Rites, defending the correct dissemination of information about it, warning those who use it for wrong reasons without understanding its traditions and symbols
	<i>Rituality symbols</i>	<i>Pilgrimage timing, scheduling and gestures</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pilgrimage is manifested in dramatically implemented behaviors and is performed with a certain formality, seriousness, and respect in the same way, every year, and the perfect adherence to the methods of the "tradition", guarantee the "goodness" and the "quality" of the edition - The pilgrimage follows a precise order, with rules imposed repeated methodically, essence of the same rite: The good realization is a source of self-gratification
		<i>Pilgrimage systematicity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The "perdoni" wear personal vestments equal over the centuries, composed of a series of vestments regulated by the Statutes and Regulations of the Confraternities which sanction formalities and seriousness, conforming to the sharing of similarities
		<i>Sacred vestments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The personal vestments of the Confireres are preserved with care likewise to a precious object, given the high symbolic and religious value, and the "thaumaturgical" power they contain - Despite obliged to maintain composure during the rites, the "perdoni" - and the wide part of natives- are basically friendly to interact with faithful and tourists
		<i>The Perdoni</i>	

(continued)

<i>Intrinsic characteristics</i>	<i>Intimate bond</i>	<i>Initiation to the rites</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The rites descend from the ideology of the Christian Religion and contribute to creating a sort of cultural "subsystem", with an entire ideology around it. Confraternity members to initiatory educational meetings before to be accepted participate
		<i>Reverence toward own beliefs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals are reverent towards the simulacra composing the pilgrimages, to which they dedicate attention and care, as the "most precious" thing to protect. The experience is shared between "brothers" (Confreres), aimed by similar intentions and with whom it creates a unique and indissoluble bond
		<i>Sharing bonds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confraternities' members during the rites are totally involved in their gestures. Indeed, the intimate bond reaches its climax in such collective experiences and in sharing fraternity, emotions, hugs, pathos between them
		<i>Faith</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As in religious communities, the members of these "cultural subsystems" externalize and spread their faith, trying to attract new members led by those same needs
		<i>Economic and bodily sacrifices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As individuals who love a person are willing to make sacrifices for that person, Confreres bear economic sacrifices, to win the honor of carrying the simulacrum in procession according to the secular rules of the Confraternities. Additionally, they undergo physical sacrifices, due to taking part in these barefoot Rites, night and day, both as couples and in supporting the weight of the simulacra (made of <i>papier-mache</i> and wood) on their shoulders
		<i>Emotionality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To participate to the rites, Confraternities' members devote huge sums (up to 90.000 euros), destined by the Confraternity to cover their expenses and mainly to charitable purpose - The reason for this fervid attachment could be found in the unique and irreplaceable emotions, sensations, aroused in satisfying spiritual needs, that when missing, can even produce forms of anxiety
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hooded souls (Perdòni) testify that they fall into a state of transcendence and total concentration that pervades them for the duration of the rites
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confreres who are unable to participating in an edition wait the following year with fervor, embittered, but sustaining the other members during the rites with their presence Similarly, the faithful deprived of these participation experience feelings of unease. In the Pandemic due to COVID-19, these sensations led to a small edition accessible to professionals, live streaming or TV to fulfill the need for inner spirituality long-awaited by faithful and non-faithful
		<i>Nostalgia and traditions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The influence of memories, traditions, rites of passages from grandparents, fathers, children to participate in these rites, is so strong confirming the influence of the past to preserve the beauty that these religious rites as a fundamental part of the tourism destination heritage across the time
		<i>Physical and psychological involvement in the rites</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The consequentially three days/nights duration, wrapped in engaging music capable of stimulating deep inner sensations, "living" the cold of the night as part of a strong community sharing the "difficult" pilgrimage together, amplifies emotions, leveraging on the duration and intensity of the relationship with the event, the dreams and memories it evokes, its uniqueness and beauty

Table 1.

Sánchez *et al.*, 2017) (see Figure 2). Additionally, our research suggests that there are unconventional motivations that can shape tourists' experience, such as religiosity and spirituality. Leveraging this, marketers could consider how to model the experience of those who engage with these rites and find ways to make them accessible to external audiences. Thus, in order to stimulate tourists' desires, marketers should emphasize the authentic local resources such as traditions, culture and stories, which reflect the sense of belonging, rituality, intimacy and emotionality.

Promotional initiatives could contribute to the development of cultural and religious identity. Such initiatives could leverage the rite's authenticity (which derives from transcendent states and emotions, physical and psychological involvement and native's bonds with their community), and the natives' "fervid" behaviors, and traditions to make religious events related to the Easter period attractive, to tourists. Particularly, the sense of belonging, rituality, intimate bond and emotionality of natives during so rooted traditions could contribute to intensifying the territorial identity. Faithful and tourists may benefit from relationships with native people, satisfying their need for spirituality, which may increase their intention to visit and experience the rites.

On a broader point for policymakers, our research hints at the importance of preserving a place's religious and spiritual heritage. While the beauty of the local environment is key for tourism development, policymakers should not discount the value of sacred memory and communal engagement. Religious memory can be transformed into a common asset that yields not only spiritual benefits for natives and tourists but also social and economic value for the involved territories. Indeed, religious tourism can leverage local resources (such as sacred sites) to attract tourists who want to connect with a place's traditions and intimacy, which can then help preserve a territory's culture and viability.

Naturally, our work features several limitations. First, the results cannot be generalized since we focused on a particular tourism destination and religious rite. The findings could differ based on different religious contexts and beliefs; thus, future studies could consider

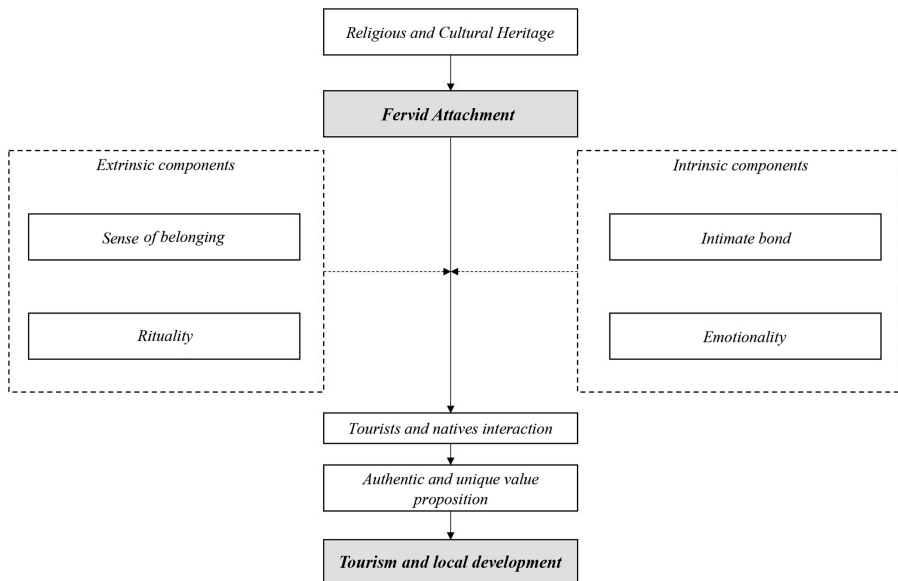


Figure 2.
The role of fervid attachment dimensions in enhancing tourism and local development

other religious events in other territories. Moreover, considering the observed components of *fervid attachment*, future studies could explore whether tourists attribute different importance to the dimensions of fervid attachment to better understand how to exploit these dimensions in communication strategies. Indeed, the theoretical model that encompasses the dimensions of *fervid attachment* could be applied to other religious events (i.e. the commemorative festivals of cities' patron Saints). Similarly, even though we focused our model on a Christian tradition, it would be valuable to test its applicability to events and rituals from other religions, such as the pilgrimage to La Mecca or the baths in the Ganges. Finally, future research should adopt alternative methods, such as document analysis, to scrutinize or deepen our conclusions.

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