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The Touristification of Great War Heritage in the Province of Trento between European History and Local Identity

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to investigate the impact of the so-called touristification of the war landscapes in the Province of Trento (Italy), focusing on the role played by local communities.

Due to the increasing interest by tourists in visiting former battlefields and places that display cultural heritage referring to conflicts and wars, contemporary social sciences consider war tourism as a complex blend between social memory and tourism exploitation of territorial resources.

After a brief summary on the academic debate about the link between Great War heritage and tourism, the essay assesses the main features of war landscapes in Trentino (Italy) and provides some suggestions for further research.

Keywords: Great War; War landscapes; Tourist gaze; Tourism image; Community

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Introduction

As the 100th anniversary of Great War outbreak approached, an increasing attention from academic scholars and practitioners has been devoted to “landscapes of war heritage”, a concept generally used to refer to conflicts-related cultural heritage according to recent UNESCO studies (Winter, 2011; Hertzog 2012; Jansen-Verbeke and George, 2012; Barth-Scalmani, 2014).

In the European context, the remembrance of Great War (1914-1918) engendered a unique form of war heritage tourism, being boosted by the launch of several initiatives to mark the Centenary of conflict's outbreak.

In many countries along the Western front, national governments and private associations early fostered WWI battlefields tourism, even when the fighting was still ongoing; between the two World Wars the visit to battlefields was mainly addressed by former American soldiers, claiming the same patriotism stressed by international propaganda during the conflict, which celebrated fighting for the European civilization as a kind of crusade (Isnenghi, 1970; Fussel, 1984; Horne, 2010). In the same space of time, Great War heritage was used by Fascism as a political tool, to exalt the myth of the nation and establish consensus towards the regime (Thompson, 2009; Tizzoni, 2013a)¹.

In the Second World War aftermath, scholars and institutions became more and more aware of troublesome aspects of war remembrance, and a shift in war heritage valorization occurred, seeking new inspiring values and refusing previous nationalist narratives and any rhetoric approach (Foot, 2010).

This contribution deals with the latest touristification of war landscapes in the Province of Trento, an Italian area in the Eastern Alps formerly belonging to the Austria-Hungarian Empire. The first section of the article offers a brief summary on heritage tourism, followed by a review of academic literature on Great War tourism.

Then the background of Great War tourism in Trentino (Italy) is analysed, reporting the main aspects of heritage management and promotion; particularly, this section provides an insight on the commemoration for the Centenary.

The conclusion presents some suggestions for a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in managing war heritage tourism in Trentino and offers some proposals for further research on this topic.

1. Methodology

This contribution is based on the analysis of a case study, referring to Great War heritage in the Province of Trento.

The case study is of particular interest for many reasons: firstly, as it will be discussed below, in this area Great War heritage have been early enhanced in tourism supply, thanks to a strong commitment of both public and private stakeholders.

Secondly, a peculiar historical path makes the remembrance of the conflict in Trentino particularly troublesome, thus engendering specific characteristics of Great War heritage in comparison with other European areas.

When Great War broke out, in Trentino people belonging to a same community, or even to a same family, were divided between the loyalty to Austro-Hungarian Emperor or the cause of Italian nationalism, being accused to support *irredentismo*, a nationalist movement prominent in the last quarter of the 19th century and the early 20th century promoting the unification to Italy of so-called unredeemed lands, Italian-speaking areas under Austrian rule after 1866 (Zadra and Piva, 2005; Procacci, 2006).

Most of the soldiers recruited in this region never came back from the alienating, upsetting experience of fighting in trenches at quote often higher than 3000 metres, in harsh conditions (the fallen were more than 11.400), whereas civilians suffered bombing, limitations of food supplies and deportation in Austrian internment camps (Antonelli and Leoni, 2003).

The commemorations of Great War Centenary in Trentino are bringing into play an attempt to preserve the memory of the tragic experience of war, while gathering local resources for cultural tourism projects.

Indeed, the case study has been selected because of the features of tourism supply in Trentino, where recently the requests for a diversified holiday-experience by tourists boosted the valorisation of cultural heritage, in a context marked by a “community model”, which emphasizes the role of local stakeholders in building tourism networks basing on small, family-run businesses (Martini, 2005; Franch et al., 2008).

The methodologies employed to case study analysis take into account the latest debate on heritage tourism.

Actually, scholars suggest to gather data from different sources and apply either qualitative approaches (organizing surveys, focus group, interviews and analysing data by semantic or sentiment analysis, text mining and expert judgement), quantitative methodologies (for instance applying Likert type scale or other psychometric scale), or a mix of both quantitative-qualitative tools, as in the case of Etchner-Ritchie model (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Di Marino, 2010).

This contribution is based on both desk and field research, applying a wide range of methodologies to investigate the complexity of war heritage tourism.

Qualitative tools were deemed more significant in terms of this research, thus a predominant space was given to content analysis of materials displayed by official websites promoting war landscapes in the province of Trento (including the official web portal of the Centenary of Great War in Trentino and some thematic websites run by the province of Trento, concerning tourism, statistics, heritage management), along with printed materials and leaflets; keywords (such as “history”, “community”, “memory”) and recurring images were detected and compared with textual items issued about different Great War cultural sites.

Similarly, on-line press was taken into consideration, searching for articles in local journals (*L'Adige, Trentino*) containing the expressions “Great War” and “first World War”. The selected period of press scrutiny was January 2014-30 April 2016.

The desk research consisted of a review on relevant legislation and administrative reports describing structure and operation of war heritage tourism in Trentino, whereas the quantitative analysis has been carried out gathering data about tourism

flows and visits to cultural sites from the Province of Trento Statistical website and consulting press-releases and other printed sources.

Furthermore, the assessment of Great War tourism management is based on field research dating to the years 2014-2016, starting from the visit to most of museums and cultural sites mentioned in the following paragraphs, and interviewing (by telephone or in person) tourism officers working for the local DMO and the other institutions and some owners of tourism accommodation establishments. Finally, a comparison among the Province of Trento and other European Great War heritage sites is established, assessing similarities and differences for what concerns the role played by local communities.

2. Heritage tourism and the touristification of Great War landscapes

The growing interest in visiting Great War-related sites is generally deemed as a manifestation of heritage tourism, as “this form of travel entails visits to sites of historical importance, including built environments and urban areas, ancient monuments and dwellings, rural and agricultural landscapes, locations where historic events occurred and places where interesting and significant cultures stand out” (Timothy and Boyd, 2006).

In this framework, a relevant number of studies have been devoted to the role of museums and cultural exhibitions in shaping destination image, thus affecting positively or negatively cultural tourism (Millar, 1989; Kotler and Kotler, 2000; Silderberg, 2005).

Hence, museums in the past were seen as static exhibitions of cultural heritage, have been now conceived as meeting place for local identity and the tourists’ one (Howard, 2003) that might also serve as “sites of discourse production”, gathering knowledge around ideas and concepts pertaining cultural identity (Wight, 2016).

More generally, heritage tourism, as long as it serves economic purposes and offers cultural experiences, reestablishes local identity and introduces tourists to a different human dimension (Hall, 1994; Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner, 2013; Bourdeau and Gravari-Barbas, 2015).

According to latest findings, heritage tourism is supposed to meet both economical and socio-cultural goals and raise the attention of guests and residents on local traditions and universal values (Marcotte and Bourdeau, 2005).

Consequently, since the '80s some of the most influential international organizations (as the United Nations and the International Union of tourism organization) and academic scholars in social sciences highlighted that tourism could foster peace culture at international level (Ap and Var, 1994; D’Amore, 1988; McIntosh *et al.*, 1995).

In recent studies, given that heritage can be defined as “the present day use of the past” (Graham *et al.*, 2000), heritage tourism studies intertwined with contemporary history and other social sciences as sociology and politics into a broad reflection on the remembrance of conflicts in a peaceful international order.

Both the tourist behavior's evolution and the rise of a different approach to war memory enhancement are responsible for the association of different meanings to war heritage tourism, given that travelers' motivations in visiting former battlefields are only partially based on their dark attributes (Biran *et al.*, 2011; Butler and Suntikul, 2013; Irimiás, 2014).

According to recent surveys, cultural and historical meanings of war heritage sites seem to prevail in tourists' perspective (Ryan, 2007; Poria *et al.*, 2006) and the visit is often linked to educational purposes, national pride, interest in contemporary history (Keren and Herwig, 2009; Shelby, 2014; Becker, 2015).

Broadly speaking, the visit to war landscapes might also represent an instance of the so-called legacy tourism, which draws itineraries seeking for traces of personal and familiar histories (McCain and Ray, 2003), as well as it gives a contribution to the recovery of local identities and the promotion of a culture of non-violence and peace (Van Alstein, 2011).

Hence, heritage tourism might help locals and visitors to deal with the painful, dissonant memory of war, for instance conceiving museums which "may represent (potentially contradictory) attempts both to come to terms with the past and to recall a past which is in danger of being forgotten; possibly even an attempt by new generations to claim the past – from survivors and witnesses – as their own" (Whitmarsh, 2001).

In Belgium and France, where support from local stakeholders was significant since the early stages of battlefields tourism growth, the visit to war landscapes have been early integrated into broader cultural and educational projects and shaped around the value of peace (Vanneste and Foote, 2012).

Anne Hertzog (2012) described very accurately how war tourism in the French Departments of Aisne and Oise, firstly conceived as a "pilgrimage", turned into "tourism of history" and elicited universal values from the common experience of war rather than denying the struggles between opposing armies, as since the Sixties the *Chemin des Dames* (an ancient road where three of the most relevant battles of the WWI were fought) became the symbol of reconciliation between French and Germany (Hertzog, 2012).

Nowadays, many aspects of WWI heritage, the troublesome memory of war, the influence of national and educational factors in shaping tourists beliefs, the sometimes contrasting needs of conservation and valorisation, spark debate about war landscapes tourism.

Latest researches address Great War heritage tourism reinterpreting well-established concepts: in this framework Iles (2008) questions the primacy accorded to the gaze by Urry (1990), defining the visit to battlefields in terms of "embodied, sensuous performances".

Besides the positive effects of war tourism, the conflicting aspects of memory and the difficulties in conciliating overlapping national histories in a common tourism supply raise concerns among scholars and heritage managers.

Spatial and temporal distance from the conflict hinders an in-depth tourism experience of war heritage and induces visitors to create their own interpretation of war

inheritance (Winter, 2009; Dunkley *et al.*, 2011) while the shortness and superficiality of the stay may affect negatively the dialogue between guests and host community, thus limiting the comprehension of war memory (Pearce, 2005).

As pointed by Hertzog about French WWI battlefields tourism, local stakeholders and heritage associations usually blame professional actors charged of heritage management for the rise of a “violent”, disrespectful tourism, supposed to imply the loss of war memories (Hertzog, 2016).

Referring to the tourism image, Abbenhuis and Buttsworth (2009) noted that contemporary visual culture broadcasts a stereotyped image of Great War (of any war in some extents), far from the real living conditions of soldiers and civilians, thus conditioning the tourist behaviour.

Moreover, whenever an armed conflict causes wide rifts in society, its troublesome memory might prevent from the build of a common cultural inheritance and adds further difficulties to heritage tourism (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996).

In the following paragraph, the main features of Great War heritage in the province of Trento will be assessed, trying to apply the concepts mentioned above and assessing the role played by local communities.

3. The WWI Centenary in Trentino between memory and tourism

According to latest data gathered from the annual customer survey conducted by the *Osservatorio del turismo in Provincia di Trento*, during last years travellers interested in cultural heritage accounted for an increasing share of tourism demand in the Province of Trento, particularly for what concerns foreign flows (especially in the case of Austrian and German travellers). In winter season 2014/2015 about 10% of tourists were pushed by cultural travel motivations (8% in summer season); particularly during winter season the presence of cultural heritage was the main element of interest in the tourism area of Trento, Monte Bondone e Valle dei Laghi (about 30% of respondents) whereas it constituted the basic motivation for 10% of visitors in the area of Folgaria, Lavarone, Luserna in summer 2015 (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2015).

It must be pointed out that the two areas mentioned above offer some of most interesting Great War related sites, as a result of greater efforts spent by institutions and local communities for the conservation and management of this kind of heritage, starting from cataloguing and restoring war architecture and archives in the framework of the *Progetto Grande Guerra* (Great War project)².

Actually, over last decades in Trentino the rise up of peace values in public opinion together with the need of a rejuvenation of tourism supply (white tourism was declining as leading tourism theme) engaged local stakeholders in the promotion of Great War landscapes according to a humanitarian perspective (Tizzoni, 2013b).

One of the first projects was the building of the *Sentiero della pace* (Peace Path), a pedestrian and cycle path over 500 kilometres long, built between 1986 and 1991 employing non-profit cooperatives, that links the main war symbolic places from the Passo del Tonale and the Val di Fassa.

In many cases volunteers and members of local associations restored trenches and military building, as in the cases of 36 kilometers of trails and historic First World War sites in Valle del Camerai, artifacts and routes on the summit of Monte Pasubio, trenches on Mount Stino, to mention just a few of several examples, thus providing a typical instance of active community support, also known as “labors of love”, whose economic value can hardly be assessed (Spencer and Nsiah, 2013).

In 2009, the Province brought together local institutions, DMOs (Aziende di promozione turistica), professional and voluntary associations in the *Rete Trentino Grande Guerra*, which aims to conciliate the preservation of the war inheritance with a sustainable, responsible valorisation of war landscapes (Franch et al, 2016).

The following year a regional law (L.R. 27/2010) assigned the main competencies for the launch of the *Rete*, and drew up guide lines for the commemoration of the Centenary: the Province of Trento, along with interested institutions, was committed to coordinate a multi-years program of cultural activities including tourism itineraries, research and surveys, restoration works on war heritage and time-worn trekking path. Besides public institutions, professional associations are also contributing to issue materials addressed to war tourists: the Mountain Academy (a Foundation gathering Alpine guides and other public-private stakeholders for Trentine mountain tourism enhancement), in collaboration with the War Museum of Rovereto, produced online guides for Young People's Mountain hiking, that can be consulted on the *Trentino Grande guerra* webportal.

As the 100th anniversary of the war's outbreak approached, a Committee for the celebrations (*Comitato trentino per le celebrazioni del centenario della Grande Guerra*) has been established among institutions concerned in this field and, in partnership with the provincial agency of territorial marketing *Trentino Sviluppo*, it approved a plan in which tourism enhancement played a significant role.

According to the plan, the commemoration of the Centenary in Trento Province might firstly induce a deeper knowledge of the WWI events across local residents (particularly young generations), and also highlight to tourists the distinguishing features of war landscapes, which is part of both local and European history.

Among the actors involved in the projects, the *Coordinamento tra i musei trentini della Grande Guerra* was charged to conciliate leisure activities and educational goals in the tourism supply.

The label chosen to identify the events for the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of war (*Trentino '14-'78 from war to peace - Trentino '14-'18. Dalla Guerra alla Pace*) stresses the importance of “getting over the boundaries, the cultural and language differences” (<http://www.trentinograndeguerra.it/>).



Figure1: The logo of Great War Centenary in Trento Province
source: <http://www.trentinograndeguerra.it/>

The web portal of the Centenary in Trentino describes the cultural framework of the celebrations and provides useful information for customers through four patterns (*visit, explore, know, learn*) representing the main aspects of the commemoration.

The Centenary materials are also arranged in 8 categories of sources: *Territories*, with a synthetic presentation of war heritage in each administrative district and in the county seat (the Trentino areas that host Great War heritage are: Val di Sole, Val Rendena e Valle del Chiese, Valle di Ledro e Alto Garda, Vallagarina, Altipiani di Folgaria, Lavarone e Luserna, Lagorai, Valsugana e Primiero, Val di Fiemme e Fassa, Trento), *Museums, Exhibitions, Events, Forts, Memory, Families*.

Museums, particularly, represent the hub of the Centenary program, as they coordinate and promote local heritage, addressing both residents and tourists.

The earliest Trentine Museums interested in WWI remembrance date back to the Twenties (the War Museum in Rovereto opened in 1921), but most of them were inaugurated after the turn of the Millennium.

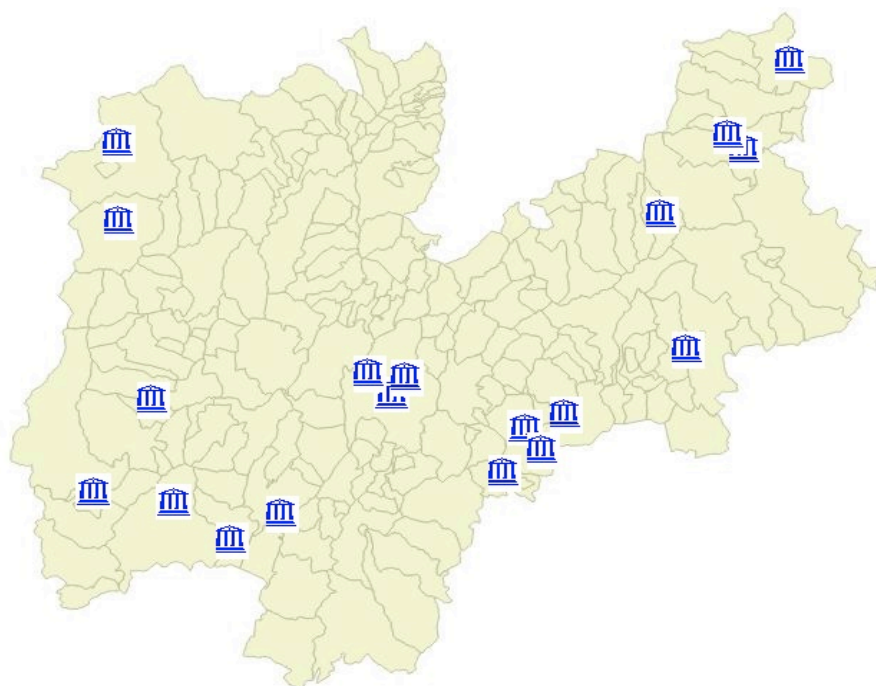
Nowadays, there are 19 museums directly and mainly related to WWI heritage (three of them can be found in Trento)³, whose permanent collections generally refer to everyday life in trenches, exhibiting artefacts and relics (weapons, ammunitions, uniforms, memorabilia, personal effects, photographs and original letters), reconstructions of battlefields and military high mountain buildings, multimedial stations.

Most of relics and items displayed in permanent exhibitions comes from private donations or were recovered by locals, including documents and items (letters, photographs) about wartime events and their effects on civilians, as in the case of the permanent exhibition *Alfabeto della Grande Guerra. 26 lettere per non dimenticare* at

the Luserna Documentation Centre; similarly, the Trentino History Museum Foundation promotes plenty of initiatives about the local communities' war experience.

The activities and services supply almost always includes guided tours, sometimes in collaboration with local associations, as the Trentino Historical Committee of SAT (Society of Tridentine Alpinists); other services refer to edutainment and research activities, providing archive materials and thematic libraries; many sites host temporary exhibitions.

Figure2: *Great War-related museums in the Province of Trento*



Source: Author's own elaboration using data available on the SIAT – Portale geocartografico Trentino's website and the Trentino Grande Guerra website, scale 1:1.000.000).

Besides museums network, the Trentino Forts Circuit has been launched, linking former military structures now hosting permanent exhibitions and special events⁴.

During winter 2016, the forts of the circuit host the free *Winter Forts* performance festival promoted by the Provincia Autonoma di Trento and implemented by the Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino.

Regarding temporary initiatives, including exhibitions, conferences, stage plays, concerts, the Grande Guerra website puts particular emphasis on the following events, scheduled from 2014 to 2018,:

- *Gli spostati. Profughi, Flüchtlinge, Uprchlíci. 1914-1919*: this traveling exhibition, inaugurated on 21 November 2014, has been organized by the Laboratorio di Storia di Rovereto with the Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, Fondazione Museo Civico

Rovereto and the Servizio Attività Culturali di the Provincia Autonoma di Trento; it reenacts living conditions of refugees from Trentino in Austro-Hungarian internment camps through personal items, such as photos, diaries, letters, along with maps and tables.

- *People from Trentino in the European war 1914-1920* (Trento, Tunnels of Piedicastello from 28 June 2014 to 3 November 2018): the Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino will set up an exhibition divided into six sections (one for each year of the war and other sections dedicated to 1919, the post-war period and the return of soldiers and civilians) presenting artifacts and war memories (photographs, postcards, diaries, the works of painters and other items).

- *1914-1918 La Gran Vera - La Grande Guerra: Galizia, Dolomiti* (Moena, inaugurated on 13 July 2014, ongoing): the exhibition, arranged by the Municipality of Moena, a well-known tourism resort in Eastern Trentino, displays the Fedelspiel-Caimi collection of uniforms, memorabilia, artifacts and photo albums referred to fighting in the Dolomites of Fassa. The exhibition presents also reconstructions of war zones, thematic displays, descriptive panels and vintage photos.

- *Tempi della storia, tempi dell'arte. Cesare Battisti tra Vienna e Roma* (Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio from 12 July to 6 November 2016): the exhibition focuses on the most known exponent of "irredentismo", Cesare Battisti, who was executed by Austro-Hungarians in 1916; it provides evidences about the works of Battisti as politician, historian, geographer and writer through archives records, photos, letters and artworks.

Along with the Centenary webportal, a relevant hint to war heritage can also be found on the official website of Trentino tourism system (<http://www.visittrentino.it>): one of the tourism themes that coordinates the tourism supply at provincial level is significantly named *Dalla Guerra alla pace* (From war to peace), proposing itineraries for an experiential holiday that may include the visit to trenches, fortresses and museums, the participation to educational laboratories etc.

The tourism portal provides basic information about the main war museums and is focused on visual contents, displaying evocative images of Trentino war landscapes.

Along with online contents, printed materials (mostly leaflet and maps) have been issued by the Trentino official destination management organizations, including both practical tips for the visit to main cultural attractors and temporary events and a brief historical introduction to war heritage.

A brochure entitled *Great War museums in the Province* (available in Italian, English and German) has been issued along with leaflets focused on each tourism area with relevant war heritage.



Figure3: Covers of some official leaflets about war heritage tourism in Trentino
source: <http://www.trentinograndeguerra.it/>

As regards the impacts of the Centenary, the celebrations held from the beginning of 2014 to the mid 2016 elicited attention and appreciation, as the attendance of museums hosting permanent collections and exhibitions linked to Great War grew significantly.

The attractors achieved positive results in terms of attendance, as shown by the outstanding performance of the Museo of war in Rovereto, which increased ticket sales from 38.688 in 2013 to 60.062 in 2014 (in the same period the number of visitors to not war-related museums of the province of Trento generally decreased); latest data confirm that in 2015 the number visitors from January to September has been higher 50% compared to the same period in 2014; moreover, more than 2.000 attended the exhibition “Gli spostati. Profughi, Flüchtlinge, Uprchlíci. 1914-1919” (Damaggio, 2015).

4. An overall appraisal of Great War heritage tourism in Trentino

This contribution shows that the engagement of different stakeholders in the Centenary celebration and the tourism enhancement of spatial and cultural inheritance turned in an integrated, shared and sustainable approach to war heritage, with an high involvement of local communities.

From an historical point of view, the commitment of locals in sustaining war heritage conservation and promotion can be traced back to a traditional community-based lifestyle, where territorial resources are managed collectively for general purposes, which is typical of this area (Leonardi, 2004).

According to a recent survey conducted by the Province of Trento Statistical Bureau in 2016, the affective sense of place identity of citizens living in Trentino shows that the regional belonging feelings are generally high, especially in comparison with national and municipal level (ISPAT, 2016).

The approach adopted in war landscapes management seems consistent with this framework, as local communities are playing a key role for conservation and enhancement of war heritage.

Actually, most of the items displayed in museums were collected from private citizens and a large part of recovery works were realized by volunteers; moreover, local associations are directly involved in managing cultural sites.

Consequently, permanent collections highlight the everyday life of civilians and soldiers during the conflict, while the exhibitions are often conceived around private histories.

This is the case, for example, of the *Museum della Guerra Bianca* (Museum of white war) in Vermiglio, a small town in the Val di Sole (a Western area of the Province), where, due to its proximity to the Tonale pass, fighting was particularly harsh: in this site, the exhibition of witnesses about war's effects on civilians is marked by panels displaying extracts of a correspondence between a soldier coming from Vermiglio who served Italian army and his wife, deported in an Austrian camp.

Furthermore, many exhibitions, as the one mentioned above, called *Tempi della storia, tempi dell'arte. Cesare Battisti tra Vienna e Roma*, focuses on the war experience of well-known Trentino patriots, like Cesare Battisti (Trento, 1875-Trento, 1916), who actively supported the cause of irredentism and, as he served in the Italian Alpine Corps during the war, was captured and executed by Austrian forces.

Along with institutional activities, private bodies are committed to commemorate the fallen and preserving witnesses of the war, consistently with major public initiatives.

For instance, one of the most popular local newspapers, *Trentino*, launched a call to readers for sending to the Editorial board photos, memories and other personal items, dating at the years of the WWI, to be displayed in the journal and be used in a research project conducted by the Archivio diaristico di Pieve Santo Stefano (Piffer, 2014).

From what concerns the tourism outputs of the Centenary, the research highlights that cultural features of war heritage have been put first, and the exploitation of war landscapes seems to be strictly linked to educational and social purposes, while exhibitions, guided tours, visit to trenches and the other activities are indifferently addressed to both residents and tourists.

Thereby tourism campaigns refer to itineraries and events across war landscapes in a wider perspective (linked to cultural, outdoor, familiar tourism), rather than offering specific tourism products; hence, Trentino war heritage is displayed from different point of view, meeting the needs of the contemporary tourist gaze, which faces a destination from a multifaceted perspective. As Anzoise and Malatesta (2010) pointed out the contemporary visual representation of Trentino war landscapes is marked by an hyperbolic association with evocative iconic symbols and by the antithesis between the concepts of war and peace: this research mostly confirms these findings; furthermore, it can be observed that the public image of war heritage is displayed as part of the local identity, so that the visit to battlefields and other similar attractors is supposed to introduce tourists to the real "aim" of the region.

The research confirms also the results of a recent work by Irimiás (2014), in which the author suggests that war heritage management in the Province of Trento has a two-

fold purpose, aiming to conserve the inheritance of the past, on one side, and contributing to diversify the tourism supply, on the other.

Furthermore, according to literature review and field research, the visits to Great War heritage in Trentino allows a personalised experienced, both cognitive and emotional, thus enabling visitors to elaborate their own interpretation of the conflict's memory (Marshall et al. 2016).

Moreover, the “witness” about battlefields experience and the effects of war against local communities represents the core element of Great War heritage supply, whilst historical reconstruction appears as functional to an in-depth comprehension rather than being the main element of interest, confirming a general trend in present public attitude towards Great War memory (Beauprè, 2014).

A comparison among war heritage enhancement in the Province of Trento and other areas in Italy and along the Western front shows many differences, not only in terms of management and organization but also for what concerns the key ideas underpinned in Great War-related tourism supply.

In Belgium, for instance, the main site is repressed by the *In Flanders fields museum*, a permanent exhibition located in the Cloth Halls of Ypres, “The City of Peace”, which addresses specifically an international audience and presents the effects of war from many perspective (historical, social, cultural etc.) thus embodying “a universal and contemporary message of peace, and therefore an important social mission” (*In Flanders fields museum* official website).

The *In Flanders fields museum*, on the whole, questions the traditional war narratives and puts emphasis of universal values such as brotherhood, sense of citizenship, tolerance (Whitmarsh, 2001).

Otherwise, the *Mémorial de Verdun*, which was built by survivors of the battle in 1967, is now managed by the *Comité National du Souvenir de Verdun* (CNSV, national remembrance committee for Verdun), a not-for-profit association with public benefit status; since 2013 the site was extended and renovated and opened in 2016 with a new layout based on “three premises: the museum should reflect a Franco-German battle rather than a battle seen mainly from the French side; the museum is located in the heart of the battlefield; the museum was the brainchild of Verdun veterans and was designed as a memorial” (*Mémorial de Verdun* official website). Despite a significant restyling, the Mémorial is still conceived basically as a witness of fighters war experience, thus maintaining its original identity and fostering education and research about military aspects of WWI (Pierson, 2009; Anglaret, 2014).

In comparison with the two sites of Ypres and Verdun, Great War heritage management in Italy seems more focused on enhancing tourism than accomplishing educational and historical purposes.

The primary goal of the project *Itinerari Grande guerra*, which represents the main initiative to coordinate war heritage promotion in the areas of Veneto, Friuli and Trentino, is to “enhance in tourism terms the stunning historical and cultural heritage” related to Great War (*Itinerari Grande guerra* official website).

By the way, tourism promotion plays a quite different role in websites about Great War heritage referring to the three Italian regions mentioned above: in the case of Friuli,

cultural and historical contents are integrated in the regional tourism website, whereas in the case of Veneto and Trentino the Great War heritage portal is kept apart from the tourism supply webpages.

For what concerns specifically the Province of Trento, the comparison with the mentioned sites along Western Front shows that, whilst the sites of Ypres and Verdun reflect also the German perspective rather than representing the conflict exclusively from the French side, in Trentino the point of view of Austro-Hungarian soldiers is almost entirely neglected, except in the case of the visit to cemetery and the commemoration of fallen found in the Trentino peaks.

Conclusions

The research found limitations, being bounded by the lack of data and tools to measure the effectiveness of war heritage tourism in meeting the needs of visitors and encouraging a close encounter between guests and local communities.

The Centenary commemorations are still on-going, thereby seems difficult to give an overall appraisal about their impact on tourism.

It might be underlined that many elements make it hard to assess the direct effects of the Centenary on tourism flows: firstly, the annual customer surveys promoted by the Provincial statistical Bureau refer only to general cultural motivations in classifying tourists behaviors, thus hindering the appraisal of the percentage of visitors particularly interested in war heritage; besides, according to official data, most of the attendance at Museum and forts is free admission.

Despite such limitations, the research tried to draw up an overall picture of Great War heritage tourism in Trentino and to offer a contribution on the ongoing debate about the links among local memories, contemporary history and travel experience in visiting WWI landscapes.

The community based approach prevailing in Trentino war heritage tourism might have represented a positive element, enhancing sustainable and aware journeys across Trentino war landscapes; at the same time, the emphasis on local perspective risks to hinder an in-depth comprehension by visitors, as recently observed by Irimiás (2014), who suggests to translated the contents displayed in museums in different languages (while tourism leaflets are usually available in different languages, only a few museums and exhibitions provide translation for panels and other written materials).

Secondly, to prevent the plentiful program of events for the Centenary to leave scarce inheritance after the end of the anniversary, the so-called public history, an approach that address a wider audience while applying a rigorous research methodology (Lauwers, 2011; Mondini, 2015), as well and cultural geography (Aitchison et al, 2000), which commits local communities at a common reflection over the needs of a territory, could offer some interesting tools for a broader reflection about war heritage.

Further studies may investigate economic, social and cultural impacts of Centenary commemoration towards residents, as well examine changes in destination image after

tourists' visit to war heritage, basing on data gathered from social media and local surveys.

In addition, future studies might deal with the lack of permanent data flows about Great War heritage-related tourism in terms of visit to cultural sites and pull-motivations, thus proposing new tools to assess travellers flows from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view.

Finally, the enhancement of tourism based on Great War heritage raises deeper questions about the relationship between tourism and history, to be questioned by an interdisciplinary approach and focusing on some outstanding cases of local identity's touristification in Trentino.

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¹ In 1919 more than 90.000 USA tourists reached Europe and the Mediterranean area (Anderla 1950).

² Legge provinciale (Provincial law) 1/2003, “Nuove disposizioni in materia di beni culturali” (New dispositions about cultural heritage).

³ Museum of the First World War in Valle del Chiese (Bersone), Garibaldi and First World War Museum (Bezzecca), Permanent Exhibition of the First World War in Valsugana and Lagorai (Borgo Valsugana), Museum of the First World War in Lagorai (Caoria), Museum of the 1914 - 1918 War in Marmolada (Fedaia Pass), Museum of Fort Belvedere (Lavarone), Luserna Documentation Centre (Luserna), Pejo 1914-1918. The war at the door (Peio Paese), Museo Casa De Gasperi (Pieve di Tesino), MAG Upper Garda Museum (Riva del Garda), Italian War Museum of Rovereto (Rovereto), On the Front of Memories (Somedà), Museum of the White war in Adamello (Spiazzo Rendena), The “Gianni Caproni” Museum of Aeronautics (Trento), The National Alpine Soldier History Museum (Trento), The Trentino History Museum Foundation (Trento), The Vermiglio War Museum (Vermiglio), The Cauriol Shelter’s collection of artefacts (Ziano di Fiemme).

⁴ The forts joining the circuit are: Forte di Cadine, Forte Tenna, Forte San Biagio, Forte Pozzacchio, Forte Belvedere, Forte Garda, Batteria di Mezzo, Forte Corno, Forte Strino, Forte Nago, Forte Dossaccio, Batteria Roncogno, Forte Larino, Forte Campo.