

Volunteering in the religious heritage: protection, valorization and mediation in Italy and France

Giovanna Rech

giovanna.rech@unitn.it

Corresponding Author: Giovanna Rech, Trento, Sociology and social research, giovanna.rech@unitn.it

In Europe, voluntary work in cultural heritage is a debated but also crucial phenomenon which involves both young and retired people (VOCH 2008; Hustinx et al 2015). Volunteers carry out many activities related to caring and watching but also welcoming and guiding the attendance in these sites and institutions. In Italy, a large interest for the relation between religious heritage and tourism is not so recent but specific projects only dates back to the end of twentieth century even though this country owns one of the richest heritage in the world. In France, the Catholic church has launched a pastoral care in tourism sector and specifically in the religious heritage since the end of the Sixties.

This paper will present a case study on “the mediation role” (Bordeaux&Caillet 2013) or interpretation role of guides to the catholic religious heritage specifically educated and trained by religious-oriented institutions. Voluntary work of these lay guides who accompany tourists and pilgrims into the churches are not simply an instrument to cope with a lack of financial or human resources but also an answer to the increasing liturgical, iconographical and symbolical ignorance. On one hand, research hypothesis is that Catholic Church is less and less dealing with secularisation but with a phenomenon of heritagisation of religion which is weakening the centrality of Gospel announce. On the other hand, this volunteer activity is also a means of valorisation which sets religious values against lay values on the common object that is the historical and cultural heritage and its conservation and transmission.

Key Words : Religious heritage; mediation; guides; Italy; France

Bibliography

- Bordeaux M.-C., Caillet E. (2013). La médiation culturelle: pratiques et enjeux théoriques, Culture et musées. Hors-série, pp. 139-163.
- Hustinx L. et al. (Ed) (2015). Religion and Volunteering. Complex, Contested and Ambiguous Relationships, Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London. Springer.
- VOCH (2008), Volunteering in Museums and Cultural Heritage: A European Overview. Research Report by the European project Volunteers for Cultural Heritage (VOCH). .Available at: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu>