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Tourism in the Time of Coronavirus. Fruition of the “Minor Heritage” through the Development of Bioarchaeological Sites—A Proposal

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Abstract: The consequences of the coronavirus pandemic are and will continue to be devastating for the tourism sector, especially for the cultural one. It is necessary to reflect on the new strategies to be adopted to deal with the heavy losses that the world of cultural heritage is suffering. The great archaeological attractions will no longer be able to accommodate the prepandemic numbers and therefore we must also think of alternative routes to present the minor heritage of our country. In recent years, our experience has allowed us to realize an open-air museum project in bioarchaeological sites (archaeological cemetery areas characterized by the recovery of human remains) that are part of an archaeological heritage that is little known, but which reserve great dissemination and fruition potential. The design of an archaeological itinerary, even a virtual one, which includes the bioarchaeological sites that we are musealizing, could offer a new visiting experience, especially in this difficult moment for all of us.

Keywords: bioarchaeological tourism; minor archaeology; tourism during coronavirus; osteoarchaeological finds; minor cultural heritage; human remains



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1. Introduction

Tourism is certainly one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 emergency [1–5]. Activities related to tourism, from transport to catering, from museums to travel agencies and any other business that revolve around important visitor attractions, will have to wait for the restart of those tourist flows that have always characterized the economy of European countries [6]. It will not be easy to return to the pre-COVID situation of the tourism sector, nor even awaken the enthusiasm of the operators that today are experiencing one of the most important economic crises of the last hundred years. In Italy, in particular, a loss of over 31 million tourists has been estimated, with a loss that exceeds 7 billion only for the quarter of 1 March–31 May, 2020 [7]. These numbers are not surprising considering the multiplicity of sectors that depend on tourism and at the same time show us the complexity and fragility of a highly sensitive area to countless factors such as those related to the health emergency [8], safety [9], and natural disasters [10]. The vulnerability of the tourism sector stimulates reflections today more than ever and this vulnerability forces us to rethink about places of attraction [11].

Significant changes have been made to our way of life since the early days of this pandemic. For example, smart working has always raised great perplexity in Italy for most employers but is instead enhancing the quality of work by quantifying the labor of the individual employee, no longer based on hours of service but on the achievement of the objectives set [12]. Even more generally, an emergency state such as this forces the community to seek indispensable solutions to recover the functionality of many activities

that have experienced a stoppage in their operations. Hence, it is necessary to conceive of experimental strategies that will certainly have positive effects on the future of various fundamental sectors for the economy of our country such as tourism.

What changes should we adopt to overcome the constraints imposed to hinder the risk of contagion? This question has been relevant to the tourism sector since the beginning of the epidemic. As far as the field of cultural heritage is concerned, factors that have always been considered as having positive value, that is, queues in front of museums, monuments, and archaeological parks, today necessarily take on negative connotations. In fact, there is talk of overcrowding connected to the risk of contagion, subordinating the significant value of an economic resource [13].

According to the Italian National Tourism Agency (ENIT), Italy is the fourth most visited country in the world, counting 94 million foreign visitors per year and boasting different forms of tourism: seaside, lakeside, winter, naturalistic, religious and, above all, artistic-cultural. This contributes to increasing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of our country with a representative value of no less than 5% [14]. It is interesting to highlight how part of the tourist flows in Italy is directed towards the main cultural attractions of museums and archaeological parks, favouring the main cities of art. Furthermore, in recent years. There has been a substantial increase in travel for cultural reasons. Our heritage is made up of 5000 units that can be visited, including museums, monuments, and archaeological areas that in pre-COVID times were visited by over 110 million people every year, yielding a profit that exceeded EUR 300 billion [14]. The number of visitors is (was) constantly growing, and more recently there has been an increase in tourists visiting from Spain and Germany and a drop in tourists from France and the UK.

As for most European countries, Italian tourism also suffers from congestion in the museum and archaeological structures of the main cities of art. Minor archaeological sites instead usually remain on the margins of the large tourist flows, thus also determining the excessive exploitation of highly renowned cultural sites and the lack of interest for the less accessible heritage. Our country preserves a tourist and cultural potential characterized by a great historical-artistic and archaeological heritage not only represented by the pre-eminence of the great museums, but also by minor archaeological contexts. However, this potential requires urgent investments to enhance and make usable examples of minor archaeology—i.e., sites considered secondary to the great monuments that cover a large part of our territory and that may somehow be able to contain and sustain the tourist flow towards the well-known destinations. Moreover, through the growth of an archaeology of the periphery, it is possible to reduce the tourist pressure on the most famous and overcrowded places, which today represents a danger that requires the reorganization of cultural tourism.

If, on the one hand, we intend to limit large gatherings around the well-known tourist destinations, which can no longer accommodate a large number of visitors due to COVID, on the other hand, we want to promote new archaeological and historical-artistic routes as alternatives to the current ones. Today, this danger is contained by the anti-COVID provisions, but the ability to enhance and make accessible the numerous historical and artistic testimonies of our territory represents, more than ever, a key aspect to promote the Italian tourism sector again. Those who work in the field of cultural heritage continually ask themselves the reasons why the investments in historical, artistic, and archaeological heritage are scarce [15].

In particular, the archaeological field, largely unexplored and of extraordinary economic potential, records the lowest number of investments. In fact, regarding the recovery and restoration of monuments of our ancestors (think of saving movable and immovable properties, which are neither created nor built but whose remains are simply discovered), the investment policies are scarce. It is a slow business, and operators in this sector disagree. In addressing the topic “archaeology in the coronavirus emergency”, we can once again feel put aside, isolated from the great measures aiming for the economic rebirth of the country.

Archaeology has the potential to contribute to the economic and social emergency [16]. In fact, through the enhancement of archaeological sites dislocated from the main destinations, it will be possible to activate new tourist sites, thus increasing the local economy of several geographical areas. Indeed, the existing commercial activities in the territory will be able to respond positively to this proposal.

The new archaeological contexts must also be presented, above all with multimedia promotional activity, through the penetration of digital technologies that will be able to differentiate and distribute the offerings of the tourist sector to the territory [17–20]. This could represent a new way to publicize the Italian brand, enhancing the spaces still unknown and partially unexplored. The main difficulty of this operation lies in the “lack of knowledge” of an existing patrimony, which is widespread throughout the territory. Accustomed to recording large numbers of tourists for the famous monumental representations of our past, we have perhaps never felt the need to focus on what is today defined as “minor heritage”. The Italian heterogeneity is reflected in the type of heritage, which characterizes all the regions of the territory.

Over the past few years, our research group has dealt with the promotion of bioarchaeological sites—ancient funerary contexts where the study of human remains is integrated with archaeological research—enhancing minor historical-artistic and archaeological areas, and even their open-air museum displays [21]. In particular, in recent years, our research team has invested energy and funds for the planning of archaeological itineraries in northern Italy in sites already largely studied from archaeological and anthropological points of view and which are now undergoing restoration: Sant’Agostino in Caravate, San Biagio in Cittiglio and the Crypt of the Church of the Convent of Azzio. In addition, other sites—Old Cemetery of Viggiù, San Michele di Trino, the Crypt of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Vercelli and the Crypt of the Church of the Annunciation of Valenza—are included in the future bioarchaeological investigations. All these sites are united by the theme of bioarchaeological research [22,23] and are therefore subjected to the reconstruction of the religious funerary ritual and the biological history of the population and to archaeological restorations aiming for the enhancement of the site. In these cases, we promote the musealization of bioarchaeological sites in their entirety—that is, of the ancient church, which can also include the display of human and archaeological finds recovered during the excavation—and the external cemetery area through the exposure of tombs.

Moreover, a web platform useful for reproposing the digital investments offered at each site will be created in order to promote both digital and real tourist routes and itineraries.

2. State of the Art

For years, our research has privileged minor archaeological sites—historical places that have the largest and best-known archaeological monuments, often unknown to the large community, investigated by the bioarchaeological approach [24–31]. The sites cover a chronological span between the eighth and twentieth centuries.

Since 2012, in continuity with previous bioarchaeological activities, we focused research projects on the analysis of human remains, with the aim of studying ancient populations. These investigations were also possible due to the credibility of our proposals in the cultural heritage competitive tenders. These projects guaranteed the coverage of the costs necessary for the study and restoration of the osteoarchaeological finds, now devoted to museum displays, together and within the sites themselves.

In the past eight years, our research group has been able to produce both scientific results and new places of culture now destined to become open-air museums. Our activity is always structured as a first excavation phase contemporary with the study of the osteoarchaeological finds in situ, through the creation of laboratories in the buildings annexed to the cemetery area, usually the church of the sites, and in a second restoration phase, with the conclusive museum transformation of the site. Meanwhile, the project operations carried out on the sites will become useful for the construction of tourist itineraries capa-

ble of attracting other unexplored archaeological areas. Our mission looks to the future, integrating “biohistory” into this new tourist circuit.

To date, our places of interest are located in north Italy, especially the northwest of our peninsula (Lombardy and Piedmont (Figure 1)). Moreover, we hope that in the near future other regions and other countries may join these other sites, adopting this enhancement model of bioarchaeological sites.

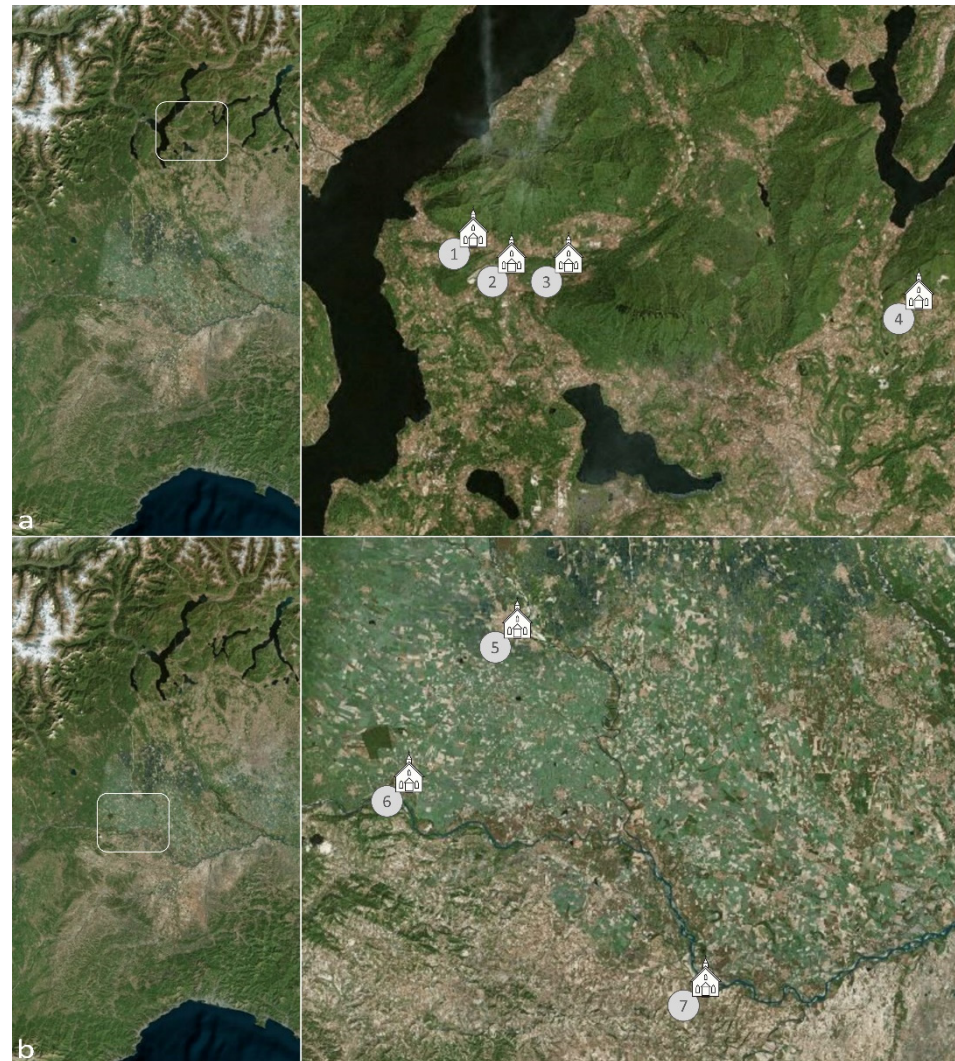


Figure 1. Localization of the sites in Lombardy (a) and in Piedmont (b).

3. Lombardy

The archaeological sites are located in the territory of Valcuvia, on the east shore of Lake Maggiore, and have already been largely investigated from a bioarchaeological point of view [32]. These are the archaeological areas of Sant’ Agostino in Caravate, San Biagio in Cittiglio and the Crypt of the Church of the Convent of Azzio.

A little further away, both geographically and chronologically compared to the sites listed above, is another site of bioarchaeological interest that today falls within our investigation plans. We are talking about the Old Cemetery of Viggiù, which will be a rare example of an archaeological intervention in a post-Napoleonic cemetery context.

3.1. Sant’ Agostino in Caravate

The archaeological site of Sant’ Agostino in Caravate represents an extraordinary example of Lombard Romanesque architecture, where in 2002 the enhancement of the

archaeological evidence was programmed [33]. The church, with its particular biapsidal architecture, as well as containing magnificent medieval frescoes, preserves traces of a small door, later walled up, which shows the ancient access to the sacred place. As the medieval tradition dictated, and as it resulted from the archaeological recovery carried out in 2002, the cemetery was annexed to the church. In this phase, anthropological analysis was conducted by our institute [34].

It is a sample represented by twenty skeletons whose biological profiles gave evidence of a young population, if related to today's mortality estimates, but are in line with what the average life span in medieval times must have been—that is, between 40 and 50 years old. An extensive presence of healed traumas, especially at the cranial level, represented an interesting paleopathological feature which stimulated other investigations in the unexplored cemetery area [35]. These operations began in 2018 and other bioarchaeological missions are currently underway with the aim of exploring the entire funeral area [36,37] and enriching biological data that best describe the demographic characteristics of a population that lived in an era between the 8th and 10th centuries.

Currently, it is possible to visit the cemetery area discovered in 2002—the Romanesque church with its splendid frescoes, the laboratory of physical anthropology with the osteoarchaeological remains and the archaeological excavation adjacent to the external area. Among the already planned works that are in progress for the Caravate site are the completion of the archaeological investigation, the study of the osteoarchaeological finds in the excavation area and the musealization of the entire site with the creation of posters describing the history of the site (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Archaeological site of Sant 'Agostino in Caravate—the Romanesque church and the external cemetery.

3.2. *San Biagio in Cittiglio*

The San Biagio site is only two kilometres away from site of Saint Agostino in Caravate. It is a sacred complex with a church and annexed cemetery area (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Archaeological site of San Biagio in Cittiglio during excavations.

Between 2006 and 2009, the church was under archaeological investigations and brought to light an internal funerary atrium and various pieces of archaeological evidence of the construction phases preceding the current one, placing the building at around the eighth century [38]. During these interventions, our institute was granted the opportunity to study the osteological remains found in the burials [39]. These remains, in a good state of preservation, allowed us to obtain a partial biological profile of the ancient population of Cittiglio, outlining some peculiar characteristics of the sample, including the presence of perimortem lesions.

Bioarchaeological investigations were followed by restoration interventions that have allowed us, by means of a glass flooring system, to enhance the underlying findings, the funerary atrium, and frescoes of earlier building phases.

The discovery of the apse below the current entrance suggests the presence of a cemetery outside the church, which, according to Christian precepts, extended to near the place of the Eucharist. This space was investigated in 2016 and subsequent archaeological campaigns have made it possible to discover about eighty graves that have contributed over the centuries to a layered cemetery on several levels, located chronologically between the 11th and 16th centuries. The oldest tombs are still visible after the first restoration

phase. The osteological remains, as well as those of the most recent tombs, have been analysed by our research team, with the participation of several university students [40].

Even for the site of Cittiglio there is a program for a museum display with the peculiarity of enhancing the work of the anthropologists with the relocation of skeletal remains inside the funerary spaces.

The archaeological evidence has also allowed us to form a historical narration of a bloody episode starting from the study and reconstruction of a skeleton that shows evident signs of a violent death. The plastic and digital reproduction of the individual's face will allow the telling of a medieval story [41].

3.3. The Crypt of the Church of the Convent of Azzio

Inside our financed project regarding the Archaeological Itinerary of the Valcuvia territory, the bioarchaeological investigation of the common ossuary of the Crypt of Azzio (VA) was also planned. The site was discovered due to the archaeological recovery promoted by our division in 2013 [42]. The sepulchral structure of the early modern age has attracted our attention as it represents a rare example of sepulchral architecture in north Italy inspired by the southern *putridaria*, and evidently refers to the baroque ritual of the double burial.

The crypt, which before our intervention was in poor condition, is today a monument accessible through the access located below the main altar (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Crypt of the Church of the Convent of Azzio.

Indeed, the highlighting of the entire structure, through the removal of wall fragments and other residual elements partly overturned on the pavement, allowed us to recover and describe the funeral deposition method adopted by the Franciscan friars of the Convent of Azzio. Moreover, throughout the archaeological, anthropological, entomological, and historical investigations, we reconstructed the ritual and understood the ties with other northern and southern Italian testimonies. The circular room included sixteen vertical niches with seats obtained from the walls where the friars were seated and walled. Subse-

quently, the tombs were opened to collect the skeletal remains and to be able to permanently bury them in the underlying common ossuary.

The anthropological investigation of human remains revealed the biological profiles of the Franciscan community buried there, highlighting an average stature of between 165 and 170 cm and that life expectation never exceeded the sixtieth year of age, with a high prevalence of arthritic diseases. The paleopathological investigations on the bones recovered inside the niches showed the important presence of arthrosis, especially to the vertebral column. The entomological investigations on puparia recovered inside the niches of the Crypt revealed a type of dipterous puparia, a species that usually colonizes the body during the first period of corpse exposure, which suggests that complete decomposition occurred in the *putridarium* room [43].

Furthermore, an interesting find, from paleopathological and forensic points of view, was the discovery of a skeleton inside the common ossuary, which has only been partially investigated until now, under the floor crypt. The recovery of a skeleton in perfect anatomical connection with the fragmented bones of the ossuary immediately suggested a case of concealment of a corpse [44]. C14 analysis allowed us to date the skeleton between the 18th and 20th centuries. Moreover, this skeleton presents the signs of a rare type of tuberculosis [45], reopening the debate on infectious diseases, nowadays a topic of great interest in the scientific community [46].

Much of the sample, however, still lies in the ossuary pending the next archaeological recovery scheduled for the next campaign. Moreover, simultaneously with the anthropological study of human remains, a digital proposal, already foreseen in the funded project, will present bioarchaeological and bioanthropological activities through virtual communication. The final interventions planned for the Crypt of Azzio are aimed to ensure the physical and virtual usability of the site. Even in this way it will be possible to perceive the past through a visual narration of a funeral ritual adopted by the religious order of Azzio.

3.4. The Cemetery of Viggiù

The cemetery was mentioned for the first time on 14 February, 1818. Another document reported that the place chosen for the construction of the cemetery was in “the open countryside” and the last enlargement of the cemetery was carried out in 1880. Indeed, in the last decades of the 19th century, there were numerous deaths due to tuberculosis, abdominal typhoid and diphtheria. Moreover, a case of bubonic plague in 1901 and sporadic cases of smallpox in 1903 were reported [47]. The deceased were buried at night to avoid any contagion. This expansion was also carried out to carry out the burials of those who did not profess to be of the state religion—that is, the “non-Catholics”, as defined by the archive documents. The east side of the cemetery was enlarged by five meters to fully include the architecture of the funeral chapel designed by G. Moraglia. Furthermore, some changes were made to this funeral chapel. The wall on the eastern side was built alongside a road which was used for private access. The spaces dedicated to autopsies were moved to the north side of the chapel, while the room located to the south allowed independent access from the garden. Perhaps this room was built for the installation of a crematorium.

No graves dated before the first expansion in 1847 are present in the cemetery. It is possible to assume that, during the expansion works, all the tombs were removed and that commemorative steles were placed by the families on the internal perimeter walls of the cemetery. The tombs visible today were built between 1850 and 1912. Nowadays, the tombs are in a total state of neglect, ruined by the weather and swallowed up by vegetation. Fortunately, in the municipal archive of Viggiù, most of the original projects of the cemetery are preserved.

For Viggiù, “A bioarchaeological study and an enhancement project of sepulchral structures, human remains and cemetery site through the realization of an open-air museum” has been proposed, and we would summarize the main aim for the realization of an action programme planned for the Old Cemetery. In addition, we can define some goals in

our research project: study of human remains, artistic and architectural restoration of the structures, archaeological investigation of the burials and enhancement of the cemetery area.

4. Piedmont

The archaeological sites are located in the territory of Vercelli. These are the Church of San Michele (Trino), the Crypt of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Vercelli and the Crypt of Valenza in Alessandria provinces.

4.1. *The Church of San Michele di Trino*

San Michele plays a crucial role in the research of medieval archaeology in Italy. With strong historical continuity, where the most ancient archaeological evidence dates back to Roman times and extends through to the Modern Age, without traces of abandonment, the site of San Michele today needs to be presented to the community in its entire archaeological dimensions and no longer simply through the only building rebuilt in its last phase of use.

San Michele has huge potential to acquire the dimensions of a bioarchaeological park representative of the Middle Ages in northern Italy. An investigation conducted from the 1980 until the 1990 brought to light burial remains of the 8th, 9th and 17th centuries and found the presence of housing traces and buildings of worship. Over 700 burials have been discovered and analysed from archaeological and anthropological points of view and the results were published in the 1990s in the volume *San Michele di Trino (VC). From the Roman village to the medieval castle* [48]. The economic resources of the time did not allow a complete analysis of the buried population. In fact, when proceeding with the archaeological investigations of the external cemetery, it was preferred to choose sample areas aiming to analyse the overall structure of the funerary context. That said, it is evident that many funerary spaces were excluded from the investigations.

Recently, we proposed a project to enhance the site. Additionally, for this site, the desire is to see the presence of archaeologists and anthropologists and also the guarantee the setting up of a laboratory of physical anthropology inside the church, thus activating all those operational components capable of stimulating interest around a new archaeological dimension. The open-air museum of San Michele will not have to wait for the conclusion of the investigation but will be activated when the research illuminates this historical stage, which will also benefit from the new technologies for digitizing cultural heritage.

4.2. *The Crypt of the Santa Maria Maggiore Church in Vercelli*

The Church of Santa Maria Maggiore was built at the behest of the Jesuit order, under a project by Filippo Juvarra in 1734, with the title of the Church of the Holy Trinity [49–51]. Under the church, an underground space dedicated to the inhumation practice is located. Through an opening located on the floor, it is possible to access an underground room via a brick staircase.

The crypt, characterized by brick cross vaults, is as vast as the church above and has some interesting tombs with inscriptions, a noble crypt and at least two ordinary wells for water intake. Another interesting aspect is the presence of five stone hatches with metal rings, which allow access to a further underground level. The floor, beaten earth mixed with rubble, appears to be raised, reducing the height extension of the space.

In line with the bioarchaeological point of view, we recorded the presence of many human remains buried inside the crypt. Some individuals were partially mummified, placed inside wooden coffins inserted within masonry niches leaning against the walls in different points around the crypt. Some of the tombs had inscriptions with the names, dates of birth and death, and specific characteristics (such as social role or work activity) of the deceased. The presence of a large number of skeletal remains can also be observed, with most of them in a secondary position—probably moved from their original depositions, they have been placed on the floors of other tombs, within wooden coffins and inside hypogeal chamber ossuaries, placed at a lower level than the crypt floor that is accessible through floor openings.

From September 2020, the setting up of a laboratory of physical anthropology *in situ* allowed us to proceed with the investigation of human remains. The anthropological approach allows us to obtain paleobiological information relating to the ancient population of Vercelli buried in the cemetery of Santa Maria Maggiore (minimum number of individuals, phenotypic characteristics, average stature, average life, infant mortality, health conditions, nutrition, etc.). The bioarchaeological project planned for the future will guarantee the usability of the entire context. To adopt this line of research, it is necessary to undertake an anthropological investigation of the human remains, both skeletonized and mummified ones. The main objective of the project is to investigate the cemetery area from an anthropological point of view. More generally, these operations fall within a much broader plan, which will concern the archaeological, anthropological and architectural study of the entire context, preliminary to a restoration intervention aimed at enhancing and making the sepulchral area usable through a museum project of the site. All the anthropological investigations will be extremely useful to the redevelopment of the entire sepulchral context, in its bioarchaeological peculiarity, where the restoration of funerary monuments and the display of human remains will accentuate the experience when visiting the archaeological site.

The project objective is to deepen the demographic and paleopathological research of the Crypt of Vercelli. The entire investigation will enrich historical and paleodemographical data of the territory.

4.3. *The Crypt of Valenza*

We were informed about the crypt of the Church of Santissima Annunziata when the results of the Crypt of Azzio were released by our division. It was immediately clear that the two historical sites shared many things in common. The crypt, which dates back to the 18th century [52], is located under the pavement of the church. By going down the stairs located below a grate, it is possible to enter this hypogeum, characterized by three rooms, where thirty-two burial cells dating back to the 18th century can be found. The cells are now almost all open and still preserve the bone remains of the nuns, together with the fragments of the monastic veil and the rosary crowns. The inspections we carried out allowed us to verify the similarity between the method of deposition of the nuns of Valenza with those of the Franciscan friars in Azzio. The dead were buried and placed on a step inside each cell and supported by a wooden stick. Later, the bodies were bricked up. It is evident that, as for Azzio, this sepulchral architecture represents a funeral reality linked to the ritual of the double burial [53].

In September, due to a grant obtained from a university, it was possible to begin the study of the osteological remains of the nuns, thus analysing the biological profile of the entire visible sample. This phase represents only a part of a project already planned and that provides for the total recovery and restoration of the area [54].

5. Results and Discussions

The coronavirus emergency has triggered recovery strategies in the most varied sectors that will allow the development of useful models even once the current state of crisis has been overcome.

It is evident that if, on the one hand, the limitations of travel have determined the collapse of tourism in recent months, on the other hand the resumption of tourist circulation, directed towards the well-known cultural destinations, will be characterized by numbers that today cannot comply with the rules for containing the contagion.

It is therefore clear that, among the solutions that can best respond to the “problem” of the overcrowding of the most requested historical and artistic destinations, we must imagine the possibility of directing a good part of the tourist flow to alternative routes showing the history, art and archaeology of our country.

Investing in the smaller centres of Italian culture means giving the opportunity to tell stories of both autochthonous and allochthonous peoples who, although until now placed

on the margins of the central and monumental narrative, can reveal historical nuances and backgrounds that have determined the fate of our country.

Being Italian means recognizing oneself in the singular local historical contexts that are distinguished by the fact that our land extends to the sea, with the coasts running on different waters, and to the sky with its immense mountain ranges, limiting borders and providing a background of hilly but also urban landscapes crossed by rivers and sprinkled with lakes that have made it hospitable from the past until the present day.

Our country is made up of many cultures that have left very strong impressions that, over centuries, have characterized our diversity and, therefore, beauty. A nation that deserves to be known for its individual peculiarities should also contribute to eradicating the usual stereotyping that we stand against. It is time to emphasise this fact and, going into the specifics of the archaeological heritage, to consider what has still not emerged that we know exists.

In summary, a strategic solution to comply with the new provisions to prevent overcrowding at the main archaeological sites could be to invest in minor heritage and to direct parts of the tourist flows and therefore economic resources towards new destinations that have, until now, been excluded from tourism.

Our proposal aims to recover a good part of the touristic flow that is currently not sustainable, but it also aims to stimulate exploration and highlight new archaeological heritage, which in turn will create new tourism solutions. Investing in unknown bioarchaeological areas also provides the opportunity to narrate experiences of archaeological exploration in order to be able to integrate the history of the site to stimulate emotional reactions in the visitor. The main point is to invest in the investigations of new sites, creating and spreading new forms of tourism in innovative and original ways.

Certain starting archaeological sites partially described in the current literature, will allow operators to realize open-air museums of archaeological sites, such as, in our case, churches, that also become museum exhibits (especially ones with human remains) annexed to external cemetery areas with extensive documentation of the excavation and, in our cases in particular, of the anthropological study of human remains (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Laboratory of physical anthropology inside the Church of San Biagio in Cittiglio.

Our experience suggests that the enhancement of an archaeological site, especially of an ancient cemetery area, does not necessarily materialize upon the conclusion of the project activities, but it takes place during the bioarchaeological investigations. The archaeological excavation, the study of the human remains, and the complete restructuring of the area are just the first steps of the work. From that moment on, the abandoned cemetery is transformed into an archaeological site enriched by the dynamism created by the presence of archaeologists, anthropologists, restorers, and visitors. The abandoned cemetery would become a place of study since our laboratories are built directly in the excavated location. It is evident that, in this phase, the cemetery would acquire great potential from the tourist point of view. Moreover, the musealization of the human remains happens as soon as the laboratories of physical anthropology and paleopathology are directly set up in the archaeological sites of necropolis and, once the anthropological study is completed, it is possible to realize its operation by proposing restoration and displaying the osteoarchaeological finds inside the church of the musealized context. Let us think about how much interest in human remains has really grown today. This is demonstrated by the large museum collections that include finds of human nature (anatomical specimens, skeletons, and mummies) but also the exhibitions scattered around the world by Von Hagen [55]. Feelings towards the human remains of the past are certainly linked to the curiosity with regard to history, which is made up of human experiences.

Additionally, now, especially during this pandemic, we think about how the investigation of the epidemiology of the past can highlight the changes in populations when infectious diseases broke out and disrupted daily lives. In this way, bioarchaeology, through the study of ancient cemeteries representative of those infectious peak periods, allows us to understand what measures were taken and, in cases of infectious diseases, the restrictions adopted to limit the spread of the infection. The great suffering, such as the important infectious pathologies of leprosy, tuberculosis, and syphilis, which have afflicted human groups of the past, is thoroughly explained in the historical medical field and has achieved great investigative development due to the study of the remains of humans. The analysis of how these affect the skeleton, leaving signs that the anthropologist must be able to recognize at the macroscopic level, is increasing knowledge of the pathologies of the past [56–58]. Additionally, in particular, what we are experiencing at the moment also shows us how, in the course of a serious epidemic, the measures necessary for survival are those that will determine profound transformations in the populations that live through it, from many points of view—e.g., demographic, economic and social. Additionally, history, especially related to anthropology, helps us understand further what the transformations were when populations of the past suffered a crisis.

Today, we must reflect on how to encourage paleopathological investigations, especially those focused on infectious diseases and on the understanding about the consequences of these on our lives. We must recover, study, and expose all these aspects.

Having the operational experiences available, it will be possible to use new multimedia technologies to not only carry out the historical reconstruction of the site but also the phases of bioarchaeological study through reproductions in virtual systems. In particular, the aim of this is to realize documentary video recordings with 360° image editing and to disseminate the contents in an interactive multimedia interface that also allows us to provide a virtual tour. All the solutions proposed here can meet the needs arising from the coronavirus emergency and, in general, we can summarize them as follows: (i) carrying part of the tourist flow towards minor archaeological heritage; (ii) to enhance unknown archaeological sites through open-air museum projects of areas not included in the catalogue of cultural heritage until now; (iii) to create digital platforms that will make it possible to disseminate and make new archaeological areas known.

It is possible to imagine that after the coronavirus pandemic, tourist flows will also concentrate in lesser-known destinations and professionals in the sector will have to be able to grasp these new perspectives and concentrate efforts—research and enhancement—to

preserve a “peripheral” archaeology which, as our experience also teaches us, could bring to light historical contexts of extraordinary interest and with great dissemination potential.

For our part, we strongly feel the desire to enhance historical sites through stories and the bioarchaeological experience. This model will not only encourage local tourism but will also be able to present around new tourist routes. In addition, thematic archaeological itineraries will have a magnetizing effect on other similar but unexplored areas, which will re-enter this new tourist system as well.

To restart after the coronavirus crisis, cultural tourism may include the transformation of historical areas in new archaeological contexts. Starting from the dissemination of still partly unexplored archaeological heritage means investing in the promotion of new centers of tourism.

The positive effects that can be achieved from the rethinking and consequent reorganization of the cultural tourism sector after the coronavirus are many. The first is the redevelopment of areas where these sites are located. The economic resources derived from the creation of a site that can be visited will lead to the growth of any sector linked to tourism and will benefit the entire community. Universities, schools, and other educational institutes will be able to take advantage of these research fields in order to introduce young people to bioarchaeological study and to the worlds of research and culture. Research, enhancement of cultural heritage, tourism innovation and teaching are all operational approaches designed and coordinated by our teams, which once again demonstrates how important the university’s participation in the tourism sector is, thus contributing to the local economy.

Within this idea, the creation of a digital platform will be useful for a multimedia promotion of the project and will also represent an innovative model for the enhancement and use of the archaeological heritage, especially during the lockdown periods, to disseminate minor heritage. The uniqueness of our proposal is the result of a multidisciplinary approach and is determined by the transformation of places, already the subject of research interest, that in the future will become part of the tourist circuits of our region. The enhancement of minor bioarchaeological sites will affect tourism itself by promoting places that could accommodate a limited number of visitors for a unique tourism experience, with the opportunity of participating in bioarchaeology operations in the field and benefiting from the vision of virtual reconstructions.

The principal aim of this work is to provide parts of cultural tourism with new, nontraditional and decentralized itineraries, proposing a solution in the tourism field, not only relating to the expansion phase of the pandemic but which will also be useful during the phase of overcoming the emergency. The realization of our project will involve researchers, professors, and professionals in the archaeological, anthropological, biomedical and informatics sectors and will see the participation of university students of our degree courses attending an internship in bioarchaeology, which has already been active for two years at our university.

Normally employed in the study of human remains in archaeological sites and under the supervision of our staff, the students in this project phase will have the opportunity to participate and thus acquire knowledge relating to IT support tools for cultural heritage and in particular to bioarchaeological finds.

The results will be obtained by a common approach using archaeological, anthropological and IT experience and will prototype a new and original tool in the field of cultural tourism.

6. Conclusions

When we talk about bioarchaeological sites, we intend to provide a visiting experience where there are actual archaeological discoveries or a cemetery area and human remains. Cemeteries of the past represent important archaeological evidence of human history. They are widespread and represent the most numerous finds in archaeology. The funerary act of burying hides protects archaeological evidence for centuries, which usually comes to light when construction works trace the most ancient layers. The funerary archaeology monuments,

disseminated throughout the country, are places of great interest as they tell the story of man through human remains and bring us closer to the past due to emotional involvement.

In our opinion, recovering this history, as well as communicating the archaeological phases and the study of human remains but also promoting their musealization, will be able to spread and stimulate new exhibition models in bioarchaeological sites from different historical periods, which could also be linked to other similar epochs through a widespread archaeological path.

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