Long Distance Walking (and Cycling) Routes: A brief introduction

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Foreword

I am honored to introduce a Special Issue of Plurimondi addressing the challenging topic of Long Distance Walking (and Cycling) Routes – LDW(C)R. The topic is clearly multifaceted and of great scientific relevance. The seven contributions of this Issue cover almost all the implications and they illustrate a number of important National and international case studies. Local development, environmental concerns, landscape and nature protection and valorization, slow tourism, design and planning, social participation … are the most frequently recurring keywords. The papers are frequently written by multidisciplinary teams, which are mostly composed of young researchers. The seven contributes mainly evoke the blatant aspects, sharing a consistent number of considerations, even when dealing with rather profoundly different case studies. Locally involved in recovering processes, associations and professionals join the voices of researchers. Some contributors attempt to extend the role of LDW(C)R as drivers of regeneration, resulting in an ambitious task, in accordance with the dominant debate within the planners' community. Few papers offer a more complete description of the case studies, illustrated by maps and schemes, while

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others mainly focus on the methodological approach.
The introductory remarks that follow will try to illustrate the most important implications (according to the author) of walking and cycling along old and new long distance infrastructures, while striving to broaden the perspective. In order to comprehend the possibilities and methods of use, we must also be aware of the function, the geometric characteristics, the origin of historical paths, the consistency and the state of maintenance of every route. In the following few pages, we will try to echo possible further research improvements and encourage the deepening of case studies, for the sake of learning and the benefit of the entire community.

Introduction

"*The land routes are thousands of years old, the water routes as well, the railways are one hundred years old, the air routes are just born*" (Le Corbusier, 1939). The main character of land routes (the long distance ones as well) is masterfully summarized in the incipit of Le Corbusier's book [1]. "*Land routes* (he continues), *from the origin of mankind, until the advent of the machines, obeyed the pace of man: four kilometers per hour of speed*". We may add that non-professional cyclists can easily pedal at twenty kilometers per hour of speed.
All the implications mentioned in the following papers depend on the connection between speed and space. Once we know the speed, we may realize the length we can cover in a given time. Rather than the destination to be reached, the duration and the experience of the travel matters above all when we approach LDW(C)R as "slow tourists". Luckily, we can sometimes decide for a goal without worrying about the time needed to get to. In other words, the relationship between space and time can be profoundly different from

the main rule we apply when moving for business. In that case, saving time and covering the longest distance in the shortest span are our aims.

Another quite tricky connection between space and speed is the changing perception of the landscape. One may walk without boredom in a curved medieval narrow street, but it is far better riding a horse (or sitting comfortably in a carriage) when we skirt the façade of Rue de Rivoli in Paris. The walking velocity is coherent with a frequent change in views, whereas higher speeds are more suitable for a landscape that features repetitive elements. The other way round, we do not perceive the slight differences when speeding up, so slowing down allows to discover what is probably not meant to be, as in a metaphor of life. Lewis Mumford noted these ties with great insight in his memorable treatise on the history of cities (Mumford, 1961).

A third dimension: the importance of linear systems. Even before Le Corbusier and his reflections on the road network, Arturo Soria y Mata's idea of the Linear City (1882) replaced the traditional scheme of the city as a center and a periphery. The linear city is an urban plan for an elongated urban formation, where all functions are arranged along that axis, including roads, railways, pipelines and public services. Long before, the Romans carefully designed their amazing road network following a level that would protect the roads from floods. Similarly, the medieval populations hierarchized road network, designing the most important streets as following the contour lines, so to save energy (Lavedan, 1926; Morini, 1961). More recently, road hierarchy and the relation between mobility and urban functions have filled dozens of treatises (starting from Buchanan's controversial Report, 1963; to, among others, Maternini, 2014 and UNECE, 2020).

So, what's the interest of LDW(C)R within the urban and regional planning debate? They have assumed the dignity of a research topic time ago, being aware of the changes that

the prevailing means of land transportation (namely private cars) would have introduced. Private cars completely changed the relationship between travelers, space, landscape and local communities (Dupuy, 1995), by letting us using the ancient paths at completely different speeds. In that way, we changed our way of perceiving the landscape and we lost thousands of local minor elements that are still so important for our survival. Here is the key point: we now have a choice to make, at least in the time freed by other constraints, about the means of transportation on the old and new ways. That choice will allow us to live the space differently, perhaps with repercussions on the way we organize our lives.
A great impulse to the reflection about the importance of rediscovering walking as a crucial human activity and the multifaceted implications for urban and regional planning and design come from the works of R. Busi and his research team (Busi, 2007; 2009). Likewise, Busi focused his investigations especially on the role played by short and long distance walking routes, thus structuring the studies in that field. A flourishing of researches followed, even if the topic is still regarded as less prominent when looking at the urban studies. Several dimensions of LDW(C)R have thus been explored (see Pileri, 2020), with the aims of giving new values to those sometimes very important traces of the past and to designing new ones.

LDW(C)R, what are we talking about

Through the definition of "*greenways* (as) *a system of interconnected linear territories that are protected, managed and developed in such a way as to obtain ecological, recreational, historical and cultural benefits*" (Little, 1990), we can list most of the characters that the following papers in this Issue will address. In this definition of greenway, the fundamental

characteristics of a "green way" are highlighted: linearity, continuity, connection of green and valued areas and the latter with urbanized areas.
The specialization of the itinerary to be carried out should be strongly conditioned by the characteristics of the local communities involved in the project. In view of the will of the administrations, the policies aiming at planning routes for soft mobility at territorial level should pursue the following indications:
- identification of the area of social and / or tourist-recreational interest characterized by multiple resources, some of which can be visited;
- determination of the corridor within which to implement the infrastructural system of main and secondary routes;
- design of the connections to urban centers and to the already existing services;
- planning and actual design of the articulated network of routes that allows the area to expand the system based on the load on the main route.
The transport approach to itinerary project is therefore unavoidable. This means referring to specific parameters already considered in the literature such as: sizing of the route based on the level of suitable service, useful width of the section, dimensions of the functional and urban furnishing elements, use of traffic-calming techniques even among non-motorized users, etc..

LDW(C)R and local development

In recent years, active tourism (hiking, trekking, cycling, snowshoeing, etc.) had a significant boost, along pathways, secondary roads, river towpaths, abandoned railways, mountain trails, greenways, involving an increasing number of operators. For this reason, we began to think of this form of use of space as an engine for local development, especially

in minor deprived communities. The intuition is correct, but a series of profoundly different interventions are needed for the structures to be recovered and those to be traced from scratch. In reality, since urban and infrastructural development have normally fragmented existing routes, a mix of interventions, from recovery to a new design, are required.

The infrastructure implementation at the regional scale plays a strategic role, contributing to the modal shift in favor of the non-motorized modes, when correctly integrated with the planning of soft mobility on an urban scale. More often, anyway, the LDW(C)Rs are meant to promoting new forms of tourism, aimed at enhancing the natural, historical and cultural resources of the territory (Pezzagno, Tira and Zazzi, 2008). As a complementary effect that deserves to be highly investigated, the economic and social impacts are discussed in the contributions of this special Issue. It does not seem to be a futile task, given the evocative power that Long Distance Routes have evoked and still arouse [2]. Is that possible, more modestly, also for Walking (and Cycling) Routes?

There is still to poor evidence of the indirect positive effects of most of the case studies, but we know that slow tourism generates revenues of billions of dollars worldwide, with prevalence in Europe and other areas with strong pilgrimage traditions (Olsen and Timothy, 2018; Serdane et al., 2020). When considering the positive externalities (see the chapter by Bruzzone et al.), the most famous path (the "Camino de Santiago") is perhaps the one that allows the greater profits. A study (2021) particularly highlights the multiplier effect the visitors have on jobs in the region. Thus, each euro of pilgrim spending generates up to 11% more product and 18% more employment. In its consumption basket, the disbursements that pilgrims make in goods and services, especially in food and drink, stand out, which account for

61% of their spending, compared to 26% of tourists who visit Galicia for another reason.
Most of other LDW(C)R have minor direct (local economic activities) and indirect effects (the work places and the related expenditures, the increase in property values). Worth considering anyway the social pressure of users for improving accessibility, landscape and monument restoration and new public services. The topic of linear regeneration has also been addressed by Toma, as a chance for minor deprived communities to find a way out from their marginality (see also Incarnato).
In general, benefits can only be obtained downstream of important economic investments, but it is hard to motivate public authorities towards such an uncertain venture. Moreover, the simple establishment of an itinerary is not a guarantee for its success, since there will be a competition in the offer, that will put in place alternative locations and ever better equipment.

LDW(C)R and the environmental concerns

Sustainability is a must for those places crossed by LDW(C)R, as their existence is the counter-proof of a territory that has maintained a good level of conservation, together with a delicate equilibrium. Sustainable management of those infrastructures is strictly linked with a deep knowledge of their history (as correctly underlined by several contributes in this Issue) and the rediscover of misused ways of moving, going back to the origin of land paths. In other words, LDW(C)R remind us a basic dimension of our life before machines. That is probably the main fascination coming from the experience of walking (and cycling): using solely our own energies, we recall the fundamental condition of human beings. Melilli will describe how this attitude can influence a long-term behavior of

visitors towards the environment. An educational activity, not just an alternative way of spending free time.
More ambitious seems to be the modal shift generated by LDW(C)R. Too many factors are influencing the way we move and the choice to undertake an itinerary, often tiring and less equipped than our habits. It is therefore highly ambitious (but probably increasingly promising) to hope to improve environmental parameters (namely air quality) through the recovery and creation of equipped paths for pedestrians and cyclists. So the protection of the environment along the LDR is probably the primary effect. It can be obtained by the common approach of stick (regulations) and carrot (special offers and promotional campaigns). In this respect, the question of land property is far from irrelevant (as underlined by Rovigatti).

LDW(C)R and the landscape protection and valorization

The link between space and landscape perception and speed is clear and abundantly demonstrated by an extensive literature (CST, 1987; Cassatella, 2011; Costa and Richards, 2015). Milano and others insist in this Issue on the importance of landscape protection, even when the layout has been transformed and the surroundings as well. The perception of landscape through a walking (somehow cycling too) experience is one of the biggest attractions of LDW(C)R. The panorama is also a fundamental component in the enhancement of the space through soft mobility networks. The landscapes crossed are to be understood as the set of longitudinal and transversal planes existing along the route and determining the attractiveness of the long-distance route. They must, first of all, maintain their role as a place of identity of the territory and the local community

to which they belong (Pezzagno, Tira and Zazzi, 2008). A more ambitious goal is that of using LDW(C)R as the plot of a new spatial plan. We have an exceptional demonstration in the Roman centuriation, without considering the latest experiences of route tracing (Tira and Zazzi, 2007), some of those evoked in the following contributions.

LDW(C)R and slow tourism: being a pilgrim in the age of new nomadism

I do not know if we are in the age of new tourism, but for sure we entered the era of a new nomadism. People move incredibly more than their ancestors. Why they move and where they go is not always known. For sure we know that many people do not know at all the places close to them and they aim at visiting as far away as possible destinations. In other words, we move as it is possible to, not only as a choice. It is bizarre, in that respect, that some internet search engines for low cost flights allow you to select the destination according primarily to the lowest cost.
Slow tourism is a way of rediscovering our vicinities, usually at a low cost: perhaps we will be forced to do it more and more to limit the use of the planes. So LDWR is (rightly) increasingly recognized as a niche of tourism. Is that only a new form of "grand tour"? In this Issue someone argues that a more deep experience can be made through those paths. On one hand we may ask ourselves what moves people to search for moving facing fatigue and discomfort. A reason could be the reaction against a prevalent way of leaving, where little space is left for personal dimensions. By walking (and cycling) we use our body, we meet other people, we get tired, we rest, we eat, we welcome any adverse weather, as it used to be in the past. No surprise then if walking has always been considered a metaphor of life. Such a particular link with nature is unique and calls for the profoundness of our

being, far beyond our religious practice. For somebody it is indeed a spiritual experience, but in a non-confessional way [3]. In this regard, "pilgrimage" is assumed in its wider meaning, going well beyond the most common religious connotation, and including the experience of slow, active itineraries *en plein air* (Kato and Progano, 2017).
Have a good journey!

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[1] We can add that a non professional cyclist runs about 20-25 km/h.

[2] The One Belt One Road initiative, the brainchild of Chinese President Xi Jinping, is (maybe it was) an ambitious economic development and commercial project that focuses on improving connectivity and cooperation among multiple countries spread across the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Dubbed as the "Project of the Century" by the Chinese authorities, it may be seen as a great opportunity for imperialistic growth!

[3] Some references to pilgrimage as a Christian experience can be found, among others, in: Hume, B. (1984) and John de Taizé (1983).