

FROM TEXT TO DATABASE: A DIGITAL FRAMEWORK FOR ITALIAN INSTITUTIONAL TOURISM DISCOURSE (1919-1959)

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Citation: Mauro, Viviana (2026) "From Text to Database: A Digital Framework for Italian Institutional Tourism Discourse (1919-1959)", *mediAzioni* 51: A25-A46, DOI: 10.60923/issn.1974-4382/23941, ISSN 1974-4382.

Abstract: The ongoing digital turn in tourism studies has transformed research methodologies by enabling the use of digital archives, online repositories and databases to analyse and compare sources across time. In Italy, however, collections specifically devoted to institutional tourism communication remain limited or virtually absent. Addressing this gap, this study presents a methodological framework for designing metadata-rich databases that support both quantitative and qualitative investigations in tourism, language, and translation studies. Drawing on the DIETALY project, which examines English-language institutional tourism communication in Italy between 1919 and 1959, the study outlines a replicable methodology for database creation, informed by extensive archival research. The resulting open-access database catalogues over 600 promotional texts with detailed metadata, enabling users to explore patterns in themes, visual materials, geographic focus and promotional strategies. By providing a structured approach to examining these past practices, the database becomes a valuable resource for interpreting and evaluating contemporary nation-branding strategies. When combined with recent findings on contemporary institutional tourism campaigns, it allows diachronic comparisons that reveal how promotional trends and representational strategies have evolved, fostering an interdisciplinary, digitally informed approach to tourism research and offering insights that can inform and enhance present-day marketing initiatives.

Keywords: Tourism Discourse; Tourism Promotion; Database; Digital Humanities; Translation Studies; Institutional Tourism Communication.

* The DIETALY research project has been funded by the Italian Ministry of Research and Universities as a national interest initiative (PRIN 2020, 2020C4RRB5).

1. Introduction: Archives and databases in tourism studies

In recent years, scholars have shown growing interest in archives, both as theoretical constructs and as practical frameworks. This renewed attention has centred on the ways in which archives shape the organisation, preservation and circulation of knowledge. Such discussions have gained particular relevance within the humanities, especially in Anglo-American academia, where archives are increasingly understood as dynamic sites of power, memory and cultural production (Infante 2023: 248).

Within tourism studies, archival materials constitute a vital resource for understanding the historical development of destinations. They enable the tracing of phases of growth and decline, reveal the long-term social and environmental impacts of tourism, and offer valuable insights into how different populations have engaged with travel over time. Furthermore, they underscore the role of political decisions and regulatory frameworks in shaping tourism practices at both national and international levels (Timothy 2012: 403).

Advances in digital technology have profoundly transformed archival research, significantly expanding both its scope and accessibility. The proliferation of digital archives and online repositories has granted scholars unprecedented access to primary sources, enabling research to be conducted without the need for physical mobility. At the same time, this digital shift has generated important methodological and ethical debates, particularly regarding the long-term preservation of non-digitised materials and the reduced opportunities for direct engagement with physical archival sources.

Building on these developments, the history of tourism is increasingly being approached through the lens of digital transformation. The expanding role of digital sources and tools has reshaped research methodologies, fostered innovative dissemination practices aligned with public history and supported large-scale digitisation initiatives, which in turn have generated new research questions and interpretative frameworks within tourism studies (Battilani 2023: 1). The emergence of online archives, in particular, has expanded the analytical possibilities available to researchers by enabling targeted searches and facilitating access to tourism-related materials.

At the European level, there is increasing recognition of the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage amid ongoing digital transformation (Fresa 2024). In this context, the European Commission's Recommendation (EU) 2021/1970 of 10 November 2021 on a common European data space for cultural heritage calls on Member States to adopt measures aimed at supporting the renewal and recovery of the cultural heritage sector, to enhance the autonomy of cultural institutions while improving the quality of digitisation, reuse and long-term digital preservation across the European Union (European Commission 2021: 2).

In Italy, the digital turn has indeed encouraged the use of online archives. Nevertheless, collections specifically dedicated to tourism remain limited or, in some cases, entirely absent. The Italian Touring Club's digital archive (*Digitouring*), for instance, although extensive, applies search criteria that restrict consultation to predefined categories of materials, limiting advanced research (Battilani 2023: 5). The digital resources made available by ENIT (the Italian

National Tourism Board) are even more limited: its online repository (*Archivio storico ENIT*) includes only visual promotional materials, such as photographs and posters. Although this collection is extensive in terms of iconographic content, it lacks textual materials, whose digitisation would be particularly valuable for research in tourism history.

These limitations underscore the need for alternative digital infrastructures capable of supporting advanced analytical approaches in tourism studies. The DIETALY database was developed in response to this gap as one of the research outcomes of the DIETALY project (*Destination Italy in English Translation Over the Years*), an Italian national research initiative aimed at tracing the development of Italy's institutional tourism communication in English between the 1920s and the 1950s (Agorni 2025a; 2025b). Designed to introduce continuity into an otherwise fragmented archival landscape, the DIETALY database aims to transform dispersed historical materials into an accessible and navigable research environment. By structuring heterogeneous sources within a unified collection, it becomes possible to trace developments across a corpus of documents and to identify recurring patterns, thematic trends and promotional strategies over time. In this sense, the DIETALY database moves beyond mere data storage and operates instead as a dynamic instrument for historical analysis within tourism studies.

This understanding of databases as analytical instruments is grounded in broader theoretical discussions on information systems. As argued by Shackley (1997), effective circulation of information requires not only advanced digital tools, but also the careful selection of datasets, the design of appropriate structures for data storage and retrieval, and the organisational capacity to manage data quality and sustainability over time. When these conditions are met, databases can actively contribute to knowledge production rather than merely cataloguing information.

The present article first outlines the methodological process that led to the development of the analytical framework informing the DIETALY database, beginning with the archival research phase during which the texts subsequently included in the database were identified, collected and examined. This section defines and discusses the research parameters guiding corpus construction and text selection. The article then addresses the design of the metadata fields used to populate the database and structure the classification of textual materials, before presenting DIETALY in its web-based, open-access form.

Through sample queries and illustrative outputs generated by cross-referencing different metadata sets, the study demonstrates the database's analytical potential and its capacity to generate new insights in tourism studies. Finally, the results of these queries are compared with analyses of contemporary tourism promotion targeting English-speaking audiences, highlighting the versatility of the database as a tool for the in-depth examination of historical Italian institutional communication, as well as for the comparative analysis of past promotional practices and current tourism trends.

The study's primary contribution is twofold, offering both a methodological instrument and a comparative analytical framework. First, it positions the database as a crucial tool for navigating and interpreting Italian institutional

tourist communication from the first half of the 20th century. Second, it tackles the central research question of how, and to what extent, institutional rhetoric has evolved by comparing historical ENIT promotional materials with contemporary content aimed at English-speaking audiences.

In extending the DIETALY project's existing scholarship, this article theorises the process underlying the database's creation and design, and introduces a broader diachronic perspective on ENIT's promotion, highlighting notable shifts in Italian institutional tourism discourse from its early development to the present.

2. *Materials and Methods*

2.1. Before the Database: Archival Work

Archival research conducted before the creation of the database aimed to compile a corpus of texts produced and published in English between 1919 and 1959 by Italian institutions promoting tourism abroad. The first institution consulted by the DIETALY research group was ENIT, which, since its establishment in 1919, has made tourism an integral component of Italy's institutional framework.

ENIT's role is of crucial importance when examining tourism promotional activity carried out by Italian institutions (Syrjämaa 1997: 15), as its foundation marked the first unified, centrally coordinated approach to tourism promotion in Italy (Podda 2025: 16). Established in response to the profound disruption of the tourism sector during the First World War in Italy and beyond, ENIT emerged from the recognition that tourism could serve as a key resource for supporting the country's economic recovery (Capuzzo 2019: 49). Conceived as a hybrid, semi-governmental body, it was tasked with revitalising the sector by promoting Italian tourism effectively both at home and abroad, ultimately becoming a central actor in Italy's tourism strategy throughout the interwar years (Berrino 2011: 200).

The DIETALY research team was granted access, through a formal agreement, to ENIT's library in Rome and to its archival storage facility, both of which are not accessible to the general public. Within these collections, a wide range of multilingual materials was identified, including texts related to tourism promotion as well as a wide array of other documents, such as administrative and financial records, personnel files, census data, registers and other forms of governmental documentation. Although these materials constitute valid archival sources and are frequently employed as empirical evidence in institutional archival research (Yin 2009: 175), they were not included in the DIETALY corpus. Instead, they were used to deepen our understanding of the historical, political and economic context in which ENIT operated during the period relevant to this study.

The texts included in the DIETALY corpus were collected from a variety of repositories. More than 50% of the items listed in the database were sourced from ENIT's library and archival holdings. At the same time, the remaining materials were gathered through research conducted in various libraries across

Italy and abroad. The investigation initially focused on national collections before extending to libraries in the United Kingdom and the United States, where the likelihood of locating relevant materials was considered higher. Most archives were consulted in person, whereas others were contacted by phone or email and provided scanned digital copies of the requested documents. A portion of the texts was also retrieved from online digital archives. In total, 40% of the materials were obtained from repositories other than ENIT. Only a very small share of texts, slightly more than 1%, was purchased from private vendors, as the extensive availability of materials in public libraries and archives made reliance on the commercial market largely unnecessary.

To facilitate archival work, a set of five research parameters was defined (Mauro 2025: 33), including year of publication, language of publication, pragmatic function of the text, length of the text and intended audience. The application of these parameters during the archival research process enabled the compilation of a corpus comprising 665 texts, which provided a representative sample of ENIT's multilingual promotional materials and formed the foundation for the creation of the DIETALY database.

The first parameter, year of publication, guided the research to focus exclusively on texts published between 1919 and 1959, a period marked by profound political, economic, and cultural transformations. This timeframe encompasses the interwar years, the two decades of Fascist rule and the early years of post-war reconstruction, all of which significantly shaped tourism policies and promotional strategies. Applying this parameter was straightforward for magazines, where the publication date is always clearly indicated. However, determining the publication year for many brochures required additional historical investigation, as this information was often missing or unclear. One particularly effective method for addressing this issue involved examining ENIT's logo, whose visual design evolved consistently over the decades and could therefore serve as a guide for dating the materials.

Regarding the language of publication, the DIETALY research focused specifically on materials in English. Whenever possible, corresponding texts in Italian were also collected. This approach enabled the compilation of a sub-corpus of 290 parallel texts, which can support both linguistic and translation analyses, as well as broader comparative studies on changes in tourism trends, promoted destinations and image use.

The pragmatic function of the texts included in this research is primarily promotional and informative, with a clear emphasis on promotion. Consequently, all non-promotional materials were excluded from the corpus. Moreover, to facilitate linguistic and translation analyses, materials containing minimal or no textual content were also omitted. In the case of the bimonthly periodical *Ospitalità Italiana*, for example, only selected pages featuring articles published in Italian, accompanied by their English translations, were included. Sections consisting solely of images and captions, without substantive text, were omitted.

Finally, the intended audience of the collected texts is foreign, English-speaking readers. Materials targeting industry professionals, such as travel information offices and tour operators, were excluded. For instance, the book

Handbook of Italian Travel (1931) was not included in the corpus, as it primarily addressed travel operators and tour guides (Mauro 2025: 33).

2.1. Database Creation

Once the texts had been retrieved and examined during the archival phase, it was necessary to arrange them within a structured database to support further analytical work. The DIETALY database was officially launched online in 2025 and is accessible through a dedicated section on the project's website (unive.it/dietaly). Importantly, the platform does not provide digitised versions of the original materials. Instead, it offers a comprehensive collection of metadata entries corresponding to each item consulted and catalogued during the research process.

By prioritising metadata over digitised sources, the platform allows users to navigate relevant promotional texts through a system of cross-referenced categories, ultimately enhancing the visibility of Italian institutional tourism materials produced between 1919 and 1959. Rather than functioning as a simple catalogue or granting direct access to full texts, the database provides a structured entry point into the archival landscape of Italian institutional tourism discourse. This approach transforms it from a passive repository (Mansyah et al. 2021) into an active analytical tool, enabling researchers to locate, contextualise and interpret sources across diverse collections.

The systematisation of information within the database evolved in parallel with the gradual acquisition of texts. This iterative approach enabled the progressive refinement of metadata categories, ensuring their effectiveness in supporting interpretation and analysis. Coding in the DIETALY database followed an inductive methodology, with metadata categories and coding criteria continuously adjusted in response to the characteristics and availability of the collected materials, rather than being rigidly imposed by a pre-existing theoretical framework.

At the same time, the database's architecture is not methodologically neutral, since the classification principles were selected to reflect the analytical objectives of the DIETALY research group. As a result, the findings of database-based analyses are inevitably shaped by the criteria used to select and prepare the materials (Palermo and Unceta Gómez 2026).

To illustrate the process of metadata selection, a preliminary set of metadata fields was established at the outset of the research and subsequently revised and expanded as more texts were consulted. For example, the inclusion of information on print runs was initially planned but proved largely unattainable for most texts. While aggregate data were available in certain cases, comprehensive details were missing for most publications, ultimately leading to the removal of this field. Other categories, such as those relating to authors and translators, were retained but redefined. Although it was anticipated that more detailed information about the individuals responsible for writing and translating the texts could be obtained, very few names were actually identifiable. Consequently, the database records only the number of authors and translators associated with each text, not their names.

In its current form, the database comprises 34 metadata fields, reflecting the diversity of texts in terms of themes, text types and genres, as well as the frequency, type and use of visual elements. The texts were catalogued according to these metadata categories, which are presented in Table 1, along with a description of each field's function.

Table 1. Metadata fields and their functions in the DIETALY database.

METADATA FIELD	FUNCTION
ID	Short for “identifier”, IDs are numerical values that typically increase automatically as new records are added (Fahmy, 2024). The ID serves as a unique marker assigned to each entry in the database, ensuring that every record can be uniquely recognised.
Title	Displays the title of the text as it appears on the cover, or in some cases, on the half-title page. This latter choice is guided by clarity purposes. For example, the brochure <i>Italy</i> (1957) shows “Italia” on the cover, although the text is in English. For this item, the title “Italy” is used in the database to avoid confusion with Italian-language brochures. Magazine titles include the month and year of publication (e.g., <i>Travel in Italy December 1935</i>) or the issue number (e.g., <i>Italy’s Life</i> 5).
Year	Indicates the exact year of publication, when identifiable, within the range 1919-1959.
Time period	Used when the exact publication year is unknown. Broader time frames are provided: “1920s”, “1930s”, “1940s”, and “1950s”. When a single decade cannot be determined with confidence, two adjacent decades are indicated, e.g., “1920s; 1930s”.
Genre	Categorises texts as “Brochures”, “Books”, “Magazines” or “Tourist Guides”. The “Brochure” label includes various formats, including leaflets, flyers and

	<p>booklets. “Books” are defined as bound or stapled texts of 70 pages or more. Regardless of their length, “Tourist Guides” are classified as such only if they closely follow the standardised guidebook model exemplified by Murray or Baedeker, which featured linear itineraries and included five key elements: a preface, introduction, cultural commentary, maps and a detailed geographical index (Bruce, 2010).</p>
Number of languages	<p>Indicates whether the text is “Monolingual”, “Bilingual”, “Trilingual” or “Quadrilingual”.</p>
Language	<p>Specifies the language(s) of the text: “ENG” (English), “ITA” (Italian), “FRA” (French), “ESP” (Spanish) or “DEU” (German).</p>
Repository	<p>Identifies where the text is held: a public library or archive (e.g., New York Public Library), an online library or archive (e.g., The Wolfsonian Digital Library), or private collection of the research team members (labelled as “Private collection”).</p>
Source text	<p>For English texts, it displays the title of the corresponding Italian source text as a hyperlink linking to its record within the database. For example, when viewing metadata on the English brochure <i>Capri The Loveliest Island in the World</i>, the Source Text field provides a hyperlink to the Italian source text <i>Capri La più bella isola del mondo</i>. In the database backend, the Source Text column displays the ID of the Italian version.</p>
Target text	<p>For Italian texts, it displays the title of the corresponding English target text as a hyperlink linking to its record within the database. For example, when viewing metadata on the Italian brochure <i>Capri La più bella isola del mondo</i>, the Target Text field provides a hyperlink to the English</p>

	target text <i>Capri The Loveliest Island in the World</i> . As for the Source Text field, the Target Text column shows the ID of the English version in the database backend.
Area	Identifies the main geographic zone promoted in the text, e.g., “Northern Italy”, “Central Italy”, “Southern Italy”, “Islands”, “Colonies” or foreign countries (e.g., Greece). The label “Every area” indicates general national scope.
Region	Specifies the Italian region promoted or the region of the highlighted city. The label “Miscellaneous” is applied if more than two regions are referenced or if the content is highly heterogeneous.
City/area promoted	Records specific cities mentioned (e.g., Rome, Milan). As with the regional classification, if more than two cities are promoted, “Miscellaneous” is used.
Tour type	Differentiates between “Natural” and “Cultural” tourism, providing a framework for the text’s primary focus.
Tour sub-type	Identifies specific thematic orientations. Under Natural, the sub-types include “Mountain”, “Coastal and Maritime”, “Lake” and “Rural”. Meanwhile, the Cultural category encompasses a wider array of subtypes, such as “Urban”, “Gastronomic”, “Artistic”, “Religious”, “Music”, “Politics”, “Educational”, “History and Literature” and “History and Arts”. When a document promotes more than two subtypes, the label “Miscellaneous” is applied to indicate thematic plurality.
Tourist activity	Reflects the types of activities typically associated with each promoted tour sub-type, providing insight into the experiences visitors were encouraged to pursue. In the Natural category, Mountain tourism includes activities classified as “Climatic”, “Thermal”,

	<p>“Wellness” and “Sports”, while Coastal, Maritime and Lake tourism focus on “Beach tourism”, “Nautical sports” and “Wellness”, with some “Climatic” and “Thermal” elements. The Cultural category encompasses a broader range of sub-types: Urban tourism involves “Tours”, “Events”, “Festivals”, “Social activities” and mentions of “Good transport connectivity”; Gastronomic tourism highlights “Dining” experiences and “Food festivals”; Artistic tourism features “Galleries”, “Theatres”, “Festivals”, “Buildings/palaces” and “Artistic sites”; Religious tourism includes “Pilgrimages” and visits to “Sacred sites”; Music tourism promotes “Concerts” and “Music festivals”; Political tourism features “Materials on political events or figures”; Educational tourism covers “School trips or tours for schools”; History and Literature or History and Arts tourism focus on “History”, “Literature”, and “Art history”. If a text includes more than two subtypes or more than three activities, it is labelled as “Miscellaneous” to reflect thematic and experiential plurality.</p>
Number of photographs	Total number of photographs and lithographs, which were particularly common in the 1920s and 1930s, as both served to provide realistic visual representations,
Number of drawings	Number of hand-drawn illustrations.
Number of artworks	Number of photographic reproductions of paintings and sculptures.
Number of maps	Number of maps contained in the text.
Number of advertisements	Number of promotional ads accompanied by text or slogans.
Number of images of mountains	Number of images showing mountain landscapes.

Number of images of coastal/maritime scenes	Number of images showing coastal or maritime landscapes.
Number of images of rural, lake, or river scenes	Number of images showing rural areas, lakes or rivers.
Number of images related to culture and society	Number of images representing cultural or social elements (e.g., festivals, social gatherings).
Number of images of urban landmarks	Number of images showing characteristic urban elements (e.g., monuments, churches, city or town squares).
Number of images related to wellness	Number of images showing wellness activities (e.g., spa treatments).
Number of images related to sport	Number of images showing sports activities (e.g., golf, polo).
Number of images of humans	Number of images containing people, regardless of gender. The count refers to the number of images, not the number of individuals. For example, a single photo showing three people is counted as one image.
Number of images of women	Subcategory of human images displaying the number of pictures showing women.
Total number of images	Shows the sum of the images contained in a text.
Number of pages	Records the total number of pages contained in each text, excluding the cover.
Number of authors	Displays the number of people who are explicitly identified as author(s) of a text.
Number of translators	Displays the number of people who are explicitly identified as translator(s) of a text.

Although the database does not host digitised copies, as noted above, the DIETALY research group conducted a detailed processing of the 665 texts comprising the corpus, classifying them according to the metadata fields outlined in Table 1. Unlike typical catalogues, which usually provide only basic metadata such as title, author or publication year, the DIETALY database offers a richer

level of analysis. It summarises key characteristics of the texts, including thematic focus, types of visual materials and promoted tourist activities. This allows researchers to access detailed information about each text without consulting the original documents directly, which is particularly valuable given that many texts are rare, fragile or dispersed across multiple, often inaccessible archives.

By removing the preliminary step of source retrieval and qualitative consultation, users can focus directly on analysing the structured data provided by the database. The value of the DIETALY database within tourism studies lies precisely in its capacity to support targeted investigations into promotional trends and their recurrence over time. For example, it enables users to visualise the most prevalent types of tourist activities in specific historical periods, to identify geographical areas or events that were most promoted by institutions and to track the diachronic evolution of such strategies. These lines of enquiry can be further enriched by analysis of the visual component, drawing on quantitative data regarding the type and frequency of visual materials, the presence or absence of human figures, landscapes and recurring thematic elements, thereby generating meaningful insights for a diachronic study of institutional tourism communication.

To illustrate the types of analytical research enabled by the database, consider a user interested in exploring sports tourism in the early twentieth century. By entering the keyword “Sports” into the search bar, the system retrieves all records in which this activity is encoded under the Tourist activity metadata field, isolating texts that explicitly promote sport-related forms of tourism. This way, the database allows the user to identify which promotional materials addressed sports tourism and to situate them within a broader historical and thematic context.

Filter: Records:

Title	Year / Time period	Genre	Language	Details
Alpine resorts in Italy	1954	Book	English	Details (#6)
Aquila and the "Gran Sasso"	1930s	Brochure	English	Details (#10)
Brioni	1934	Brochure	English	Details (#94)
Brioni	1934	Brochure	Italian	Details (#95)
Golf in Italy	1931	Brochure	English	Details (#70)
Golf in Italy	1932	Brochure	English	Details (#71)
Italia Gennaio 1938	1938	Magazine	Italian, English, French, German	Details (#102)
Monti d'Italia	1954	Brochure	Italian	Details (#253)
Motoring on the Italian Volcanoes	1935	Brochure	English	Details (#254)
Ospitalità italiana dicembre-gennaio 1930	1930	Magazine	Italian, English	Details (#276)

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Figure 1. Visualisation of a query in the DIETALY database.

The database's analytical potential becomes particularly evident when the user refines the research query by combining multiple metadata fields. For

instance, if the focus is narrowed to English-language brochures exclusively devoted to sports tourism in the 1930s, the user can apply the following parameters: Time period (“1930s”), Genre (“Brochure”), Language (“ENG”) and Tourist activity (“Sports”). By filtering out records that do not meet these criteria, the database enables a highly targeted exploration of the corpus.

This process reveals that five brochures devoted to sports tourism were published within the selected timeframe (two editions of *Golf in Italy*, *Motoring on the Italian Volcanoes*, *See Italy and the World’s Football Championship* and *Sport in Italy*). The same approach also supports diachronic analysis. By extending the Time period parameter to include the “1920s”, “1940s” and “1950s” while keeping the remaining criteria unchanged, the user can examine how the promotion of sports tourism evolved, thus facilitating comparative analyses across decades.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Understanding the Present Through the Lens of the Past: Comparing Historical and Contemporary Trends in Tourism Promotion

As outlined in the previous section, the DIETALY database is an innovative tool for analysing trends in institutional tourism promotion in the first half of the twentieth century. Its analytical potential, however, extends beyond historical inquiry. The database can also be used to examine whether, and in what ways, past promotional trends are still present today, how they have evolved over time and how they have been adapted and integrated into contemporary practices of institutional tourism communication.

Italian institutional tourism communication, which in the early twentieth century relied primarily on traditional media such as printed materials and audiovisual formats, including radio broadcasts (Fina 2025), has since undergone a significant transformation. Today, promotional strategies have expanded to include digital platforms, such as websites and social media. A notable example is the ENIT tourism marketing campaign *Italia: Open to Meraviglia*, launched in 2023, which aims to “showcase the country’s beauty, from major cities to small villages [...] to narrate Italy’s boundless heritage of art, nature and gastronomy” and, ultimately, to “open the doors of wonder to the entire world” (Italia.it n.d., my translation). Central to the campaign is the use of Sandro Botticelli’s Venus as a virtual influencer, featured on the Instagram profile @venereitalia23.

Since its launch, the campaign has attracted considerable scholarly attention (Baima et al. 2024; Francesconi 2024; 2025; Koprivica Lelićanin 2024) and has been examined from multiple perspectives, including the effectiveness of virtual influencers in tourism marketing and patterns of user reception and engagement. In particular, Francesconi’s most recent study (2025), which primarily analyses the visual representation of Venus across the profile’s posts, also provides data on the account’s content selection and distribution. When considered alongside evidence from the DIETALY database, these findings shed light on continuities

and shifts in thematic focus and dominant tourism trends between past and present institutional promotional discourse.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the two datasets differ substantially in terms of medium, scope and communicative context. The DIETALY corpus comprises historically situated, paper-based materials produced within early twentieth-century institutional frameworks, whereas the *Italia: Open to Meraviglia* campaign operates within a contemporary, digitally mediated and highly interactive environment. Consequently, this study's comparative analysis is necessarily interpretative and does not assume methodological equivalence, but rather seeks to identify indicative patterns of continuity and transformation across distinct communicative ecologies.

To carry out the analysis, the DIETALY dataset was restricted to English-language brochures, tourist guides and books included in the corpus. Magazines were excluded due to their thematic heterogeneity and lack of sustained focus on individual trends or promotional themes. For the same reason, texts classified as "Miscellaneous" in the Tourist activity metadata field were also excluded, as their thematic plurality would have hindered a clear comparison across periods.

Following the application of these criteria, the resulting sub-corpus comprises 232 texts, of which 73 were published in the 1920s, 132 in the 1930s, 6 in the 1940s, and 21 in the 1950s². The marked concentration of materials produced in the 1930s indicates that this decade represented the peak of ENIT's publishing activity, during which the institution played a central role in developing tourism communications organised around specific topics. Conversely, the limited representation of the 1940s reflects the disruption of promotional activities due to the Second World War.

The texts display a wide thematic range of promoted tourist activities, as reflected in the numerous labels associated with this metadata category (see Table 1). To facilitate data visualisation and analysis and to enable comparison with contemporary promotional models, the most salient activity was selected as the primary category in historical texts that promote multiple tourist activities simultaneously. For example, in many brochures promoting tours of Italian cities and towns in the 1920s and 1930s, the art history theme was addressed alongside tours, itineraries and organised visits. However, since the primary focus of these materials is promoting tours, these texts were categorised under this focus ("Tours"). The discussion that follows focuses on selected examples that illustrate broader patterns of continuity and divergence across the two corpora.

² For a substantial number of texts included in the database, identifying an exact year of publication proved difficult, as this information was often absent from the documents themselves or unavailable in the archival records at the time of consultation. To ensure clarity and consistency in data representation, texts with uncertain dating, such as those spanning two adjacent decades (e.g. "1920s; 1930s"), were grouped together with items firmly dated to the earlier decade. Consequently, aggregate figures for the 1920s include both texts explicitly published during that decade and those labelled "1920s; 1930s".

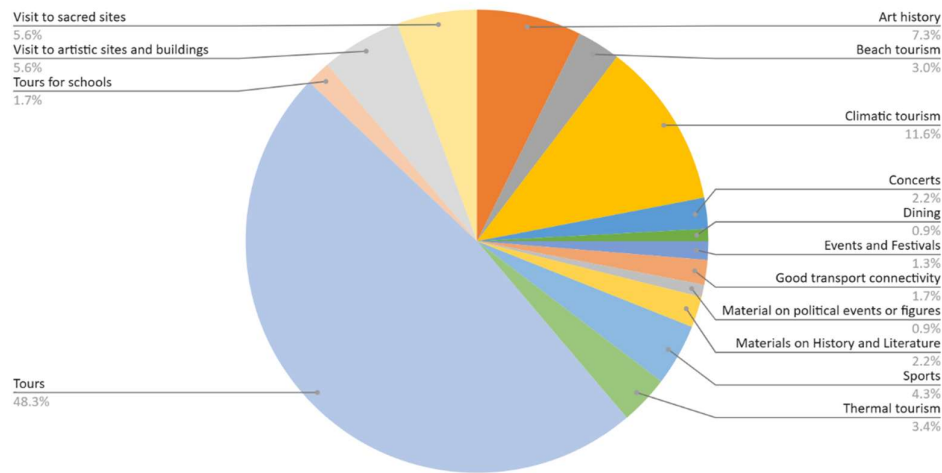


Figure 2: Tourist activities in a sample dataset of promotional materials from the DIETALY database.

A theme that is particularly prominent across both the DIETALY corpus and the @venereitalia23 Instagram posts are those that Francesconi (2025) groups under posts promoting sights to visit while on holiday, which constitute a clear majority of the account's content (49%). Within this category, a substantial proportion of posts focuses on Italian art cities and historic towns and villages, each accounting for 26%, followed by seaside resorts and representations of monuments, each accounting for 16% of the total. This distribution closely aligns with recent data published by the Bank of Italy on inbound international tourism, according to which travel motivated by art and culture and seaside tourism accounts for the largest share of leisure trips undertaken by foreign visitors to Italy (Banca d'Italia 2025), confirming their central role within the country's international tourism profile.

While cultural tourism, and visits to art cities in particular, has experienced significant growth in Italy from the late twentieth century onwards (Mariotti 2015), it already constituted a core element of Italy's promotional appeal abroad during the first half of the twentieth century. This continuity is reflected in the historical corpus, where texts specifically devoted to art history account for 7.3% of the dataset, while publications focusing on visits to artistic sites and buildings represent a further 5.6%.

The promotion of art cities and related tours was present from the earliest stages of ENIT's institutional activity, often through dedicated sections within publications aimed at promoting Italy as a whole. A notable example is the first edition of the brochure *Italy* (1920), ENIT's flagship publication (Agorni 2025a; 2025b), which devotes an entire section to art cities. Importantly, this section is not limited to presenting internationally renowned destinations such as Rome and Venice but also provides an overview of lesser-known towns and smaller urban centres.

The high proportion of publications devoted to tours within the DIETALY database (48.3%) is closely related to the substantial number of texts focusing on individual cities, regions or towns. By examining the sub-field of cultural tours³ more closely, it is possible to identify the art cities that received the greatest attention over time. The data in Figure 3 show a strong emphasis on destinations that were already internationally recognised during the period, such as Rome (19.5%), Florence (7.8%), Venice (5.2%) and Milan (5.2%). At the same time, ENIT's production also included publications dedicated to smaller cities and historic towns distributed across the national territory, such as San Gimignano, Ostia and Volterra, contributing to a more diversified representation of Italy's cultural heritage.

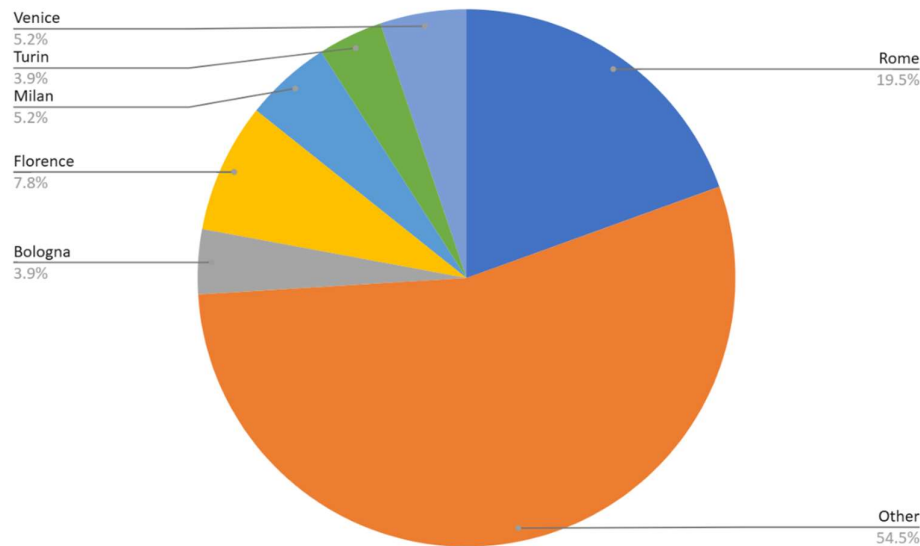


Figure 3: Main Italian cities promoted in a sample dataset from the DIETALY corpus.

With regard to seaside tourism, in the first half of the twentieth century, ENIT's promotional activity concentrated on spas and seaside resorts as privileged destinations for climatic and therapeutic tourism. This model gradually lost prominence as tourist preferences evolved (Battilani 2020: 120). Over time, the institution broadened its promotional focus to appeal to a wider audience and capitalise on the growing influx of foreign visitors, increasingly presenting seaside resorts not only as places for health regeneration but also as leisure destinations (Mattei 2025). This strategic shift enabled Italy to consolidate its position as a major international beach tourism destination while simultaneously projecting an image of modernity and accessibility, reflecting a tourism imaginary that emphasised the pleasures of the four S's (sun, sea, sand, and sex) (Hom 2015: 60).

Today, seaside tourism represents a highly significant segment of the Italian tourism sector. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, beach tourism in Italy attracted

³ Texts classified under the Tour Type field as "Cultural", excluding nature-based tourism ("Natural").

approximately 80 million foreign visitors, demonstrating its strong appeal to international travellers and ranking as the second highest-spending tourism segment, surpassed only by cultural tourism centred on major art cities (Antonioli & Bricchi 2022: 8). Although these figures declined in the immediate post-pandemic period, recent data indicate a gradual recovery, with foreign demand increasing by 3.8% in 2024, in contrast to a slight contraction in domestic tourism, which fell by approximately 1% (Confesercenti Nazionale 2024).

When comparing the current composition of tourism demand with the destinations promoted by ENIT during its early decades of activity, both continuities and discrepancies emerge. At present, the Sorrento coast stands out as the Italian seaside destination with the highest share of foreign visitors, accounting for 86.4% of total demand (Confesercenti Nazionale 2024). Historically, the Naples Riviera enjoyed considerable popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, but it was progressively overshadowed by the sustained promotion of islands such as Capri, Sardinia and Sicily (Mattei 2025: 127). In the 1920s, the Ligurian Riviera was the privileged destination for seaside and climatic tourism, and, together with the Lido di Venezia, continued to be promoted in subsequent decades, with an emphasis on its natural beauty and mild climate, to attract Northern European visitors (Mattei 2025: 129). From the post-war period onwards, however, promotional attention increasingly shifted towards the Adriatic Riviera and the Emilia-Romagna coast (Mattei 2025: 127), which experienced sustained growth during the 1950s and 1960s and became emblematic sites of mass seaside tourism (Zecchin et al. 2021: 20-22).

Today, the Venetian Riviera remains one of the preferred seaside destinations among foreign tourists, with international demand accounting for 70.2% of total arrivals. By contrast, after reaching its peak in the immediate post-war decades, the Romagna Riviera is today predominantly oriented towards domestic tourism, with Italian visitors accounting for 75.1% of total demand, while foreign tourism accounts for a comparatively modest 24.9% (Confesercenti Nazionale 2024).

The comparison between historical promotion and contemporary demand shows that only some of the destinations emphasised in early institutional discourse have retained a prominent position. In contrast, others declined in visibility or gained relevance later. Destinations such as the Naples and Ligurian Riviervas recur consistently in ENIT's early promotional materials and continue to attract substantial international demand, albeit with varying levels of visibility. By contrast, other destinations, such as the Adriatic and Romagna riviervas, gained recognition primarily in the post-war period but currently receive predominantly domestic visitors, with their international appeal substantially diminished. This suggests that, while early institutional promotion contributed to the initial international visibility of certain destinations, the persistence of their global appeal depended on subsequent economic and social developments, as well as evolving tourist preferences, which determined whether a destination continued to attract international attention or became largely oriented towards the domestic market.

Several themes that are central to contemporary tourism promotion appear only marginally in the historical corpus. This is the case for gastronomy and Italian culinary traditions, which, although exploited to a limited extent in @venereitalia23, where they account for only 6% of posts, represent one of the most significant trends in contemporary Italian tourism and constitute the aspect most strongly associated with Italy by international tourists (Richards et al. 2025). Over the past decade, food and wine tourism has expanded markedly, emerging as a high-growth segment characterised by a sharp increase in international demand, with over one million foreign visitors choosing this form of travel, and a substantial rise in visitor expenditure, which in 2024 alone amounted to €363 million (ENIT 2025). In the DIETALY corpus, except for the 1931 brochure *Gastronomic Italy* and the 1950s booklet *At Table in Italy*, promotional publications specifically devoted to gastronomy were extremely rare during the first half of the twentieth century. However, occasional thematic sections did appear in magazines throughout the 1930s and 1950s.

Beyond food and wine tourism, other activities that are now regarded as central to contemporary tourism promotion are likewise marginal in the historical corpus. This applies, for instance, to the emphasis on events and festivals, which accounts for only 1.3% in the DIETALY dataset, compared with 17% of posts on @venereitalia23. The comparison between the two corpora thus reveals a marked divergence in promotional priorities. Tourist practices and experiences that currently occupy a prominent position in destination marketing were not yet fully recognised in earlier periods, nor systematically framed as valuable tourism assets. This shift reflects a broader reconfiguration of tourism promotion, from a model centred on places, infrastructure and national prestige to one increasingly oriented towards experiential, participatory and lifestyle-based forms of engagement.

Among the less prominent themes in the two corpora, transport connectivity offers a particularly revealing case. In the DIETALY sub-corpus, texts explicitly focusing on transport account for only 1.7% of the materials, compared with 3% of posts in the @venereitalia23 corpus that highlight means of transport. While these figures point to a relatively marginal role for transport-related themes in both datasets, this finding must be interpreted in light of the corpus design, which prioritises thematic comparability across text types. In fact, transport constituted a central topic in ENIT's broader promotional production, particularly in magazines, which were excluded from the present analysis due to their thematic heterogeneity and limited comparability with the selected genres. These publications frequently featured dedicated sections on public transport efficiency, railway development, and infrastructural modernisation, portraying Italy as an innovative and technologically advanced country (Rossato 2025: 94), in line with the Fascist regime's emphasis on speed and progress.

A comparable pattern can be observed in relation to sport. Although not among the dominant themes in either corpus, sport emerges in the DIETALY materials as a progressively more visible promotional theme from the 1930s onwards, as reflected in publications dedicated to major events such as the 1934 FIFA World Cup and the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. In addition to addressing a theme that gained increasing prominence during the 1930s and was

subsequently consolidated in the post-war period (Battilani 2020: 122-127), these materials also served to promote the national territory more broadly, for instance through itineraries linking stadiums to the cities in which they are located (De Bonis 2025).

4. Conclusions

This study has investigated the DIETALY database as both a methodological and analytical instrument for the diachronic examination of tourism phenomena within the history of Italian institutional tourism communication. By outlining the process that led to the collection of the texts and the subsequent design and construction of the database, the study has demonstrated the database's analytical applicability through targeted queries, while also foregrounding its methodological replicability as a model for the development of similar research infrastructures in the field of tourism discourse studies.

While the DIETALY database was primarily conceived to support the systematic analysis of historical tourism promotion, its relevance extends beyond historical inquiry alone. The study has therefore proposed a comparative perspective that juxtaposes early institutional promotional discourse, as documented in the DIETALY corpus, with contemporary promotional practices disseminated through ENIT's digital channels, with particular reference to the Instagram profile @venereitalia23. This comparative approach highlights the potential of historically grounded databases to inform the interpretation of present-day tourism communication.

The findings indicate that several themes central to contemporary tourism promotion occupy a relatively minor position within the historical corpus. Food and wine tourism, along with the promotion of events and festivals, appear only sporadically in early institutional materials, whereas other elements considered more appealing to foreign audiences at the time, such as guided tours of cities and towns, emerge as recurrent. This latter theme not only defined early promotional strategies but remains influential in today's institutional tourism communications.

The analysis also highlights the lasting influence of historical promotion on the visibility of specific destinations. In the case of seaside tourism, for example, the Naples Riviera, consistently featured in ENIT's early materials, continues to attract a considerable number of foreign visitors, particularly along the Sorrento coast. By contrast, the Adriatic and Romagna rivieras, which rose to prominence primarily in the post-war period, now cater predominantly to domestic tourists, reflecting a marked decline in their international visibility.

By tracing patterns of continuity and change from the earliest phases of institutional tourism communication to the present, the study demonstrates how historical dynamics have shaped promotional discourse over time and highlights their relevance for understanding contemporary practices. In this context, the DIETALY database operates as a comprehensive tool, providing a systematic framework for analysing historical tourism promotion in relation to contemporary tourism phenomena, effectively bridging past and present and guiding future research and practice in tourism communication.

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