

Labels of protected areas: best practices for a sustainable regional development. The case study of the Italian Alpine protected areas.

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Abstract

Tourism can be considered as an important tool thanks to which the authorities of protected areas (PA) can reach the goal of an active environmental protection. In the last few years, the Italian PA stood out for its commitment to the development of a new and sustainable touristic model, based on: the enhancement of the environment, the particular regional and local resources and the promotion of qualities. This is one of the few models not affected by the current crisis. In fact, it has a steady increase of visitors, local products and services. This good result is also given by: the involvement of local operators in good environmental practices and large number of products and services that have one or more quality certifications recognized at European, national and local levels. Many of these PA have been active in granting their brand, with very different methods and results. The present study investigates in Italy the role of quality certifications and PA's trademarks for regional and local development. In particular, the research considers the main PA of the Italian alpine ridge. First of all the complex framework of certifications has been defined; subsequently were analysed and interpreted data of products and services. The Research highlights the economic and social added value and the potential contribution of PA's quality brands to the solution of complex and multi-functional problems of Italian and European mountain economy.

Keywords

Labels, Alpine Protected Areas, Italy

Introduction

According to data of Italian Ministry for Environment, Territory and Sea (MATTM), Italy boasts Europe's largest natural, landscape and cultural heritage with a total of 871 protected natural areas and 2564 sites of the Natura 2000 network covering a total of 21% of the national territory (MATTM 2010). The territory of the Italian Alps, within the perimeter of the Alpine Convention, contributes to this network of nature protection areas with 4 national parks, 34 regional parks, 31 regional nature reserves, several other protected areas and about one-fifth of Italy's Natura 2000 sites. Needless to say, these protected areas are governed by applicable European and Italian laws including legislation concerning the trade mark system and quality certifications intended to help protect and promote local quality products and services offered. Certifications also help protect the work of operators and manufacturers, improve consumer confidence in the products and associated services and, above all, preserve and enhance the territorial heritage.

Methods










For the purposes of this study, after an initial examination of the leading scientific and popular publications in the field, more in-depth research was carried out using national and international scientific metasearch engines. The websites of sector-specific ministries and agencies were surveyed and data were acquired from the main public and private databases of Eurac partners. In particular, the databases belonging to the following entities were considered: Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea; Italian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the European Union; Italy's statistical office Istat; other government bodies or offices in charge of providing public services and the Italian Federation of Parks and Nature Reserves. Missing data were sought and partly found in press releases or publications by other research centres and universities. Collected data were classified and suitably processed to identify areas suffering from a lack of information and requiring further research. Informal contacts with other researchers and research networks were used to fill in the gaps and boost information and data gathering. Relevant data were used to provide an overview of the sector: a catalogue of updated basic information was created, organized and systematized in order to document the entire set of spatial knowledge available at different levels. Some considerations were presented for discussion and conclusions were drawn on the opportunity to quantify protected areas' assets to better exploit their added value.

Results

The IX Ecotur Report on Nature Tourism (ECOTUR 2012) has made it very clear that one of the few forms of tourism to record a positive trend in the current economic crisis - that has hit also the tourism industry - is in fact nature tourism, that is travel or vacationing to natural areas with a focus on the observation and appreciation of the outdoors, wildlife and traditional culture. In particular, the best performing segments of nature tourism are

parks and reserves with a market share of over 35 %, followed by the mountains (23 %), rural tourism (18 %), lake tourism, the network of the most beautiful villages of Italy (*Borghi più belli d'Italia*), marine reserves and agritourism. Altogether, the nature tourism sector grosses over 10 billion euro a year. This profitable performance results primarily from the good practices implemented in recent years in the Italian nature protection areas, proving that business and environmental protection can get on well together. Italian companies can be successful in Europe just by tapping into the international markets' strong demand for environmental quality and origin certification, especially for high-end products. Certification in fact is a good tool to promote a region, as shown in Tables no. 1 and no. 2 which provides an overview of the complex system of regional quality / specificity / typicality labels for products, producers and services in the Alpine regions and the way in which such labels are recognised and perceived.

Table no. 1: European and Italian Quality Labels in the Italian Alpine Protected Areas. Data source: parks.it.

Acronym	Title	Type	Area / Initiative	Logo
DOP	Denominazione d'Origine Protetta	Marchio di Qualità Europeo	UE	
IGP	Indicazione Geografica Protetta	Marchio di Qualità Europeo	UE	
STG	Specialità Tradizionale Garantita	Marchio di Qualità Europeo	UE	
BIO	Agricoltura Biologica	Marchio di Qualità Europeo	UE	
PDM	Prodotto di montagna	Marchio di Qualità Europeo	UE	NO LOGO
PDI	Prodotto delle Isole	Marchio di Qualità Europeo	UE	NO LOGO
PSF	Presidi Slow Food	Marchio privato riconosciuto globalmente	Int	
AdG	Arca del Gusto	Marchio privato riconosciuto globalmente	Int	NO LOGO
PAT	Prodotti Agroalimentari Tradizionali	Marchio di Qualità Italiano	IT	
DOCG	Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita	Marchio di Qualità Italiano	IT	
DOC	Denominazione di Origine Controllata	Marchio di Qualità Italiano	IT	
IGT	Indicazione Geografica Tipica	Marchio di Qualità Italiano	IT	
IG	Indicazione Geografica	Marchio di Qualità Italiano	IT	NO LOGO
De.C.O.	Denominazione Comunale d'Origine	Marchio di Qualità Comunale	IT	NO LOGO
De.Co.	Denominazione Comunale	Marchio di Qualità Comunale	IT	NO LOGO
De.C.P.	Denominazione Comunale di Provenienza	Marchio di Qualità Comunale	IT	NO LOGO

Another aspect to consider is the branding of protected areas, which is a powerful tool for sharing information, engaging interested parties and fostering the growth and sustainable development of protected areas. Formalized in 1991 by Article 14 of Italy's Framework Act on Protected Areas, branding proves a powerful strategy both for the tourism industry and the agro-food production industry, not to mention the extraordinary opportunities offered by the interaction of the two sectors. The Italian Alpine protected areas are among the main promoters of area-specific brands and their activities are often identified as best practices at national and European level. Table no. 3 shows the most popular brands associated with the main protected areas in the Italian Alps. Initial data from the ongoing in-depth survey of individual protected areas in the Alps highlight and testify to the great work done by the management authorities. *Carta Qualità* (Quality card), for example, groups together all of the companies that make use of the Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park logo, i.e. more than 210 enterprises from very diverse sectors: farms growing traditional food products, hospitality facilities, restaurants serving local food, craftspeople versed in woodworking and many other businesses closely tied to the local area and the traditions of the Park. Similarly, just over two years after the beginning of the project, there are already more than fifty operators using the quality mark of the Gran Paradiso National Park.

Discussion

Article 14 of Italy's Framework Act on Protected Areas lays down that said areas can grant the right to use their trademark. Despite having been interpreted in different ways because of its generality, said article makes it clear that the right to use the trademark may be granted only to entities who promote the conservation of the protected

area through good practices. The law therefore focuses on the producers rather than on products. In fact, product quality certification would imply issues of monitoring and control which go beyond the tasks and responsibilities of the protected area's management authorities, as reaffirmed in 2004 by an inter-ministerial working group of experts. However, a recent survey conducted by Federparchi, Italy's Federation of Parks and Nature Reserves, has shown that, even without common guidelines and procedures, all management authorities of protected areas in Italy recognise that trademark licensing to third parties plays an important role in bringing together, under the same logo, services and production activities respectful of the (natural, social and cultural) environment (BOSCAGLI 2011).

Table no. 2: International labels and regional certifications. Data source: parks.it

Acronym	Title	Type	Area / Initiative	Logo
QI	Ospitalità Italiana	Marchio di Qualità	IT Private	
ECOLABEL	Certificazione Ambientale Europea	Marchio di qualità	Europe	
CETS	Carta Europea Turismo Sostenibile	Marchio di Qualità	Europe	
DEAP	Diploma Europeo delle Aree Protette	Riconoscimento specificità	Europe	
WHS	Patrimonio Mondiale dell'Umanità	Riconoscimento Specificità	Internazionale	
GEO	Rete dei Geoparchi	Riconoscimento specificità	Europe	
MAB	Riserva della Biosfera	Riconoscimento specificità	Internazionale	
Fattorie del Panda	Qualità ambientale	Marchio di qualità	Privata	
Parchi Attivi	Qualità ambientale	Marchio di qualità	Regionale	
Parchicard Lombardia	Qualità ambientale	Marchio promozionale	Regionale	
RELACS	Energia pulita per il turismo	Marchio di qualità	Privata	
Eco-Cluster	Qualità ambientale	Marchio di qualità	Privata	
VIVA	VIVA, il viaggio nella natura	Marchio di qualità	Regionale	
SAVEURS DU VAL D'AOSTE	Sapori della Valle d'Aosta	Marchio di qualità	Regionale	
ALTO ADIGE	Marchio territoriale ombrello	Marchio d'area	Regionale	
	Qualità produttiva	Marchio di qualità	Regionale	
TRENTO	Marchio di Qualità	Marchio di qualità	Regionale	
	Marchio Territoriale	Marchio d'area	Regionale	
VENETO	Marchio di Qualità	Marchio di qualità	Regionale	
LOMBARDIA	Qualità dei servizi	Marchio di Qualità	Regionale	










The decisions taken by certain management authorities echo the debate that has recently led the European Union to legislate on the creation of so-called “territorial brands”. According to our survey, that is a further opportunity for the future. One way forward might be the creation of a common “umbrella brand” for the national system of protected areas, a strong brand able to sell well internationally that could be “customised” locally to encompass and improve all those certification systems and brands that have rendered great service to the area until now.

Conclusion

In a situation of widespread economic crisis which seems to spare only the industry linked to nature tourism and the supply of quality products and services, the moment looks propitious to push the industry further and propose new strategies for the socio-economic development of protected areas and surrounding regions. The time seems

ripe for reviewing and "standardizing" the brands of Italy's protected areas as well as the criteria for granting the right to use such brands and related promotion strategies. Finally, building on the provisions of the national Framework Act on Protected Areas, brands should be governed by a single instrument at national level. This is a valuable opportunity especially for mountain protected areas, particularly in the Alps, because at the end of 2012 they were given the right to use two additional powerful tools recognized at European level, namely the geographical collective mark and the recognition of mountain specificities. In addition, the combination, simultaneous presence and interaction of various certifications and trademarks open interesting scenarios and opportunities with beneficial effects on the territory, as exemplified by the case of food and wine tourism and ecotourism (COLDIRETTI 2012).

Table no. 3: Brands of the main Italian Alpine protected areas

Name	Objective	Type	Logo
Marchio Qualità Parco	Qualità ambientale	Marchio AP	
Marchio Qualità Gran Paradiso	Qualità ambientale	Marchio AP	
Marchio Ecoturismo in Marittime	Qualità ambientale	Marchio AP	
Marchio di Qualità ambientale	Qualità ambientale	Marchio AP	
Marchio collettivo del Parco	Qualità ambientale	Marchio AP	
Il marchio del Parco delle Prealpi Giulie	Qualità ambientale	Marchio AP	
Carta Qualità, "Parco Dolomiti Bellunesi"	Qualità Ambientale	Marchio AP	
Marchio del Parco Naturale Regionale della Lessinia	Qualità Ambientale	Marchio AP	
Marchio di Qualità del Parco	Qualità Ambientale	Marchio AP	

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