

# Preface

Rolling hills, chromatic extravaganzas in fields, rustic farmhouses. And cypress trees. Thus the Tuscan landscape has fascinated the world. And yet, the nature of Tuscany is more than this. The surprise of snow-covered peaks, ponds and lagoons, Mediterranean underbrush that grows right on the sea shore, woods, and a countryside still marked by millenarian cropping expertise, that is reflected in our world famous art and handycraft traditions.

To protect this heritage, of which we are proud, Tuscan region has adopted strict environmental regulations, setting up resolutely protected parks and reserves that are not oases in the desert but links in a network that covers all the environmental systems of the region: Apennines, hilly inland, wetlands, coast. The system of protected natural areas of Tuscany includes, national parks, state and sea reserves, wetlands of international importance, regional parks, provincial parks, provincial reserves, protected natural areas of local interest. In actuation of the Community "Habitat" directive (92/43/EEC), 120 sites have been identified and classified as having community importance (pSic) and 30 as areas of special protection (Zps), 15 of which correspond to pSics. These are joined by 15 sites of regional interest (Sir) and 7 sites of national interest (Sin). The totality of these areas is an integrating part of the national ecological network and, in the Community perspective, of the Nature 2000 European Network.

Tuscany, with a population of three and a half millions inhabitants, hosts every year more than 41 millions tourists overnights, that contribute to the gross domestic product by 7%. Nature based tourism in Tuscany is a very important and strategic sector, as in our heritage art and nature are strictly linked, and often impossible to distinguish. Since this region has a famous naturalistic landscape, tourist will be never disappointed by the promise of a green scenery.

Tuscan Region has therefore welcomed the proposal to organize here this 4<sup>th</sup> edition of MMV, being the first one out of Central European countries, and to do it in cooperation with CNR – IBIMET, an Institution already strongly engaged with us on projects related to environment, production, and social issues, and that is nowadays widening its research interests to tourism, also for its potentialities in underpinning rural development.

We expect that a more consistent engagement on natural tourism by the decision makers will follow this MMV4 conference. Tuscan Region will be happy to promote further initiatives to foster meeting and discussion among scientists, park managers and decision makers, and will see with favour new projects on environmental and green tourism.

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