

Towards a sustainable tourism for the Italian mountains: the role of CAI

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Abstract — Since its foundation in 1863, The “Club Alpino Italiano” has been playing an active and often decisive role for the invention, the spread and the development of mountain tourism either on Alps and Apennines. In the last years this role has been more and more related to a clear attention to sustainability and protection of mountain environment. Both Association’ activities (hiking, climbing, caving and sky-tourism) and structures (refuges and paths) were object of a practical and cultural work aimed to reduce impact especially in protected areas. For activities, the main work is still based on improving knowledge of mountain environment in association members during technical formation courses, focusing to all the attentions to be adopted to avoid damages at wildlife and vegetation. Refuges proved to be experimental sites for innovative application of alternative source of energy and new solution of waste management. Creation of new paths and management of old ones are now carried out following practical criteria adopted at national scale and aiming to reduce damages due to erosion and impact on vegetation and wildlife. A GIS approach for excursionist paths net has been adopted in different situation, proving effective as a tool for an environmentally sustainable planning and management. Parks and protected area were strongly supported by CAI in the last years, when the Association was between the more active promoters of new protected areas. A strong collaboration is now working on with Parks, both national and regional: the target is a responsible frequentation protection of mountain endangered habitat.

Index Terms — Alpine club, climbing, hiking, refuges, protected area

1 INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1863 The Club Alpino Italiano (CAI— Italian alpine Club) is an independent national association that “has mountaineering, the knowledge and study of mountains, specifically those in Italy, and the protection of the mountain environment” in the forefront in all of its events. The Association is made up of volunteers members and is divided into local branches coordinated in regional groups. The central structure of the Club Alpino Italiano is a non-profit public organization, while all the subordinate Local Branches and regional and provincial groups are subject to private law.

In particular, in application of law no. 766 of December 24, 1985, related to the new organization of the Club Alpino Italiano, the association promotes, for its members and others, and as established in its Charter, the following objectives:

- enjoyment of the mountains and the organization of the mountaineering, hiking and caving initiatives throughout the nation;
- the organization and management of training courses for safe mountaineering, alpine ski touring, hiking and caving and naturalist activities;
- training for 22 different qualifications (instructor, guide and operator), necessary to perform the above stated activities.
- mapping, building and maintaining trails, alpine structures and mountaineering sites;
- the construction, maintenance and management of mountain huts and shelters owned by the Club Alpino Italiano and the individual local branches.;

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- the organization of CAI stations suitable for initiatives to patrol and prevent injury for mountaineers, hikers or cavers and to aid the injured, rescue those in danger and recover accident victims through the National Alpine and Caving Rescue Squad (CNSAS);
- scientific and educational activities to increase the knowledge of all aspects of the mountain environment as well as any initiative suitable for the protection and improvement of the domestic mountain environment, also through national and regional technical bodies;
- ethnic-cultural training, studies dedicated to the diffusion and knowledge of the mountain environment and its people and the multiple aspects, mountain photography and cinematography, and the conservation of the alpine culture;

The enormous enthusiasm of our volunteers and their contributions have allowed the association to build a solid strategy to promote the mountains and help those who visit them with mountain huts, shelters, trails and social and cultural initiatives. In this context we reported here the initiatives and the objectives aiming to satisfy the above statements.

2 CAI AND SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN TOURISM

- ❖ **Hiking** is the main activity carried out by members, but it is proposed with a modern approach, in which the walking in mountain environment is considered the best way to improve naturalistic and cultural knowledge, improving respect and involvement in management and protection choices.
- ❖ In this context several initiatives were built up in the last years. *Sentiero Italia* with the colligated *Camminaitalia* is an example of a long trail along all the Italian regions, involving valleys and villages as restore point and basis for excursion. These initiatives were finalized to rediscover the middle part of mountain, aiming to historical path and cultural centres instead of peaks and ridges.
- ❖ The creation of a path net in all the Italian regions is a result of a general increasing interest in hiking and walking. Recovering of historical trail and creation of new path have permitted to obtain a wide spread net able to explore most of our mountains. The realization of this net was anyway based on a cultural and environmental approach which in the last years was focused in a GIS approach, adopted especially in several park context. Gis proved a right tool to plan and to manage the trail net, permitting to avoid the interaction with the most sensible habitat and enhancing the knowledge of the landscape also for people involved in path management
- ❖ **Paths building marking, and management** were object of a strong interest and accurate guidelines were adopted to all the national area. The goal is to reduce impact on the crossed habitat and to reduce risk of localized erosion by mean of the right building criteria. Moreover standard marking criteria are an help for a safe frequentation and try to avoid unsightly signature not in harmony with the landscape [1;2]. Till now about 60.000 km and 8500 trails are marked and managed following this criteria by associated volunteers. Between the structures devoted to climbing and hiking , a particular way was reserved to klettersteigs. The CAI has chosen to stop the building of this alpinist equipped routes aiming to conserve and manage only the historical ones which are very attractive point for most of the tourists, especially in the Dolomites' area. New route were not supported if not adequate to environment and also some of the old ones were demolished in respect of some environmental characteristics and for safety.
- ❖ About impact of climbing on cliffs, the CAI with its alpinist school supports and promotes the adoption of com-

partmental rules, agreed upon all the involved agents related to cliff use and conservation: public protection agency, climbing association, land owner, environmental association. This has produced some good result and conflicts between protectionist and climbers were reduced and resolved in some cases. Of course, a lot of work was and is currently made as continuous formation of climber and guides.

❖ **Mountains huts and bivouacs** are the main structures managed by the association. We talk about 761 buildings for a total of 21,681 beds, located in strategic point of the all the Alps and Apennines. These structures allowed the frequentation and the practises of climbing, hiking and other activities proving fundamental for any kind of mountaineering. They act so as focal point for most of tourists, influencing greatly the flux of presences on paths [3]. Till now mountain hut were mainly a source of financial worries and environmental problem for the management of people, energy and waste in so delicate areas. A new concept of mountain hut is now growing up and the structures are offered as *eco-hut and cultural presidium*, strictly linked to their territory and landscape. CAI supported the creation of small library in the hut to improve the knowledge of mountain culture and environment: with a synergic work with school several attempts were made to use huts as an instrument of naturalistic education. Moreover a strong effort was made to experiment new sustainable sources of energy, trying both small eolic and hydroelectric and solar power. Water and wastes were also object of attention aiming to avoid lost of the first and to improve the recycling of the seconds. Mountain huts proved to be excellent sites to test new technologies and some good results were obtained both with energy and waste management.

Implementation of an environmental management system was carried out and tested in several refuges. A long course was followed for the “Capanna Regina Margherita”, the highest refuge in Europe at 4552 a.s.l., on Gnifetti peak. Working for several years and pairing the difficulties of quote, technical solutions were adopted to save energy, and to improve the management of water and wastes. The work made possible to obtain the final certification UNI EN ISO 14001 proving its reduced impact on environment. The work to improve a sustainable management has produced substantial guidelines published and now object of courses and divulgation [4].

- ❖ **Educative role** of CAI is fundamental not only for members but also for people which are approaching the mountains following the association initiatives.
- ❖ Courses and technical preparation of operative figures and members are the main activities carried out by the association. Behind all the information and experience transmitted to improve a safe approach to the mountain in each season, guidelines are proposed to avoid damages on mountain habitat during activities. The educative work points out to enhance the knowledge of environmental characteristics both to improve awareness of risks for people and to understand fragility of mountain ecosystems in each component, fauna and vegetation, water and soil. Specific indication are suggested for each activities, as example to save games during winter sky trail and to teach the difficult of vegetation at high altitude and the risk of small sky damages for trees growth and survival. It is to notice that frequentation of mountains is changed and now hikers and climber are present on the territory all over the year, while the spread of new tools as snow shoes has opened the use of trail also in not conventional period. So the

education is fundamental to avoid a permanent disturbance for wildlife or other kind of damages.

- ❖ The educative role of CAI is not limited to membership but several efforts are made to propose cultural moments both in the cities and in the valleys. A large production of books, guides and also films is made both at local level than at central one.
- ❖ Schools are object of specific formation moments in which CAI associates take student to make contact with environment in mountains. Not only technical aspects for safety but also environmental ones were proposed, trying to couple with the lack of nature knowledge and experience showed by so many young people. Youngers' approach to mountain is followed by the "Alpinismo giovanile" commission: the education at the mountain environment is strictly based on its comprehension and understanding, with particular emphasis to an integrate approach to landscape lecture.
- ❖ Cultural role of CAI is carried out by the scientific commission and by the mountain environment protection commission. The first is more dedicated to scientific divulgation, the second is involved in protection problems and in educational aspects. "Terre alte" groups is a specific cultural group working on several aspects of the presence of man in the high lands. An impressive work of recovering of trails and building related to past human activities was carried on in the last years allowing the persistence of an historical heritage.
- ❖ It is to point out that many of the activities and cultural works are made with the direct involvement of people living in the mountains. This because of many CAI sections are present directly in the valley villages and moreover for the effort to respect and to enhance the work of mountaineers. On this aspect we remember also the cognitive role of social excursions towards several agricultural

or transformation products and the potential of refuges as commercial centres for this high quality food products.

3 PARKS AND CAI

CAI has common purposes with parks and protection agencies. Quite all the Italian parks and many of SIC and ZPS are located in mountains areas. The CAI was between the most active supporters of the creation of a protection net for mountain as tested by many official acts and by association documents. The role of protected areas as centres of sustainable development for mountains population is a statement for CAI public engagement.

On these basis, programmatic agreements were subscribed by CAI and most national parks, as like as at regional level. The simple but efficient approach to a mountain tourism without heavy infrastructure, which produces many damages and costs as in the case of alpine sky tourism, seem the best approach for supporting an economic growth of local population. Coexistence between economic aspects and protection ones are the aim of most of CAI works in mountain environment. Moreover the intermediary role between population and agency prove to be important to avoid conflict and problems.

4 CONCLUSION

As the biggest alpinist association, the CAI plays a decisive role to improve a sustainable approach towards a new type of mountain fruition. The reported situations are the first steps of a continuous work which is mainly based on a cultural approach, where permanent formation is a focal point of technical figures and of the whole mass of members. Difficult are related to lack of scientific experience about the impact of large parties of people in the mountain habitat. On this point fur-

ther investigations are needed. The collaboration between parks and CAI also with other associations and other public structures appears to be the best strategy for the future: the work of volunteers and the technical and scientific supervision of park staff can help greatly the development of tourism in protected area, linked them also with local population.

Protection, sustainable tourism, solidarity, sharing, planning and monitoring are the key word for the future action of CAI, always aiming to enhance the value both naturalistic and cultural of our mountains.

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