

Are Natura2000 SPAs and SACs perceived by local communities like important elements for local development? The case study of Fortore-Alto Tammaro, a rural area on the mid-southern Apennines

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Abstract — Apenninic areas cover a wide part of the Italian surface and represent an important element of conservation for cultural, biological, economical and social diversity. Many difficulties, however, expose these internal areas to high risks of abandonment and loss of diversity. A long-run research project aims to calibrate action models for sustainable rural development based on eco-agri-tourism, also to promote conservation and knowledge of local natural resources.

Index Terms — Natural resources, eco-agri-tourism, rural development

1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The area of Fortore - Alto Tammaro (Benevento province) represents a good model to evaluate the problems that mountain-inner areas, far from the main communication ways, usually experience in Southern Italy.

Apenninic areas cover a wide part of the Italian surface and represent an important element of conservation for cultural,

biological, economical and social diversity. Many difficulties, however, expose these internal areas to young escape, underemployment, ageing and agricultural abandonment, with high risks for the integrity of the so called "basket of goods" that groups all the elements of diversity of the Apenninic rural areas.

In the most recent years, investments in tourism were expected to give impulse to the local economy [1], yet so far the results did not correspond to the expectations.

2 THE RESEARCH

In the frame of a research project, the local economy has been analysed, and a census of the small enterprises was taken.

Territorial partnership and networking have been stimulated through information

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and training activities, involving associations, firms and local people. In three townships of the Fortore district, namely S. Marco dei Cavoti (population 3707, main centre of the district), Castelvetere in Val Fortore (pop. 1801), Molinara (pop. 1946), a more thorough analysis was performed. Structured interviews were used to perform a qualitative and quantitative analysis of small enterprises and shops, aiming to identifying the perspectives of future development.

Tourist flows, offer and demand have been analysed [2] on the basis of the data collected by the Provincial Board for Tourism in the period 1999-2007.

Questionnaires and SSI (Semi Structured Interviews) have been realized to know tourist's preferences and local people awareness about the natural resources of the area.

3 RESULTS

Questionnaires have shown that tourists use to visit a rural area on the Apennines for the whole "basket of goods", nature included. Focus Groups and SSI, on the contrary, have shown that local firms and tourist establishments give importance only to a part of that "basket of goods" (especially to local food and folklore), absolutely underrating the nature-landscape element.

This difference, between the nature of the tourists' demand and the awareness of the tourism operators about it, should not be neglected representing an obstacle for local and tourist development processes. In addition, it can expose interesting natural areas to the risk of abandonment.

These observations have a particular value considering that a big part of the studied territory is today preserved like SPAs and SACs (i.e. Castelvetere in Valfortore forest).

4 FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

Ad hoc researches will aim to value cultural, leisure and economic value of these Natura2000 areas; to know and increase the level of awareness of tourism entrepreneurs. Territorial networking processes will be promoted, stimulating an active participation of local people and supporting the diffusion of information and knowledge.

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