

Cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development in peripheral mountain areas

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Mountains are cultural, natural, social and physical spaces but they are also socially, cognitively and emotionally constructed sites (Silva, Kastenholz, Abrantes, 2018). Even if they are viewed by many as unique cultural sites (Smethurst, 2000), they are historically and culturally distinct places (Stepp, Castaneda, Cervone, 2005) because they are part of different human histories. Although consumed by many problems (environmental, economic, social, cultural) the very diverse mountain world has nonetheless great potential and characteristics that need to be stimulated. For their geographic space characteristics as well as climate and landscape forms, mountains are one of the most important attractions for contemporary tourism. They also play a very important role in broader sustainability. Even if many of the mountain areas are protected by government - as biosphere reserves, nature parks or national parks for their natural and cultural capital - the carrying capacities of the mountain ecosystems are often quite limited or stressed, due to excessive economic activity impacts in these areas, including tourism (Paunović, Jovanović, 2017). Some Alps' areas represent tourism-intensive regions in Europe. While core winter destinations enjoyed a tourist permanent growth, basically until the pandemic crisis, many marginal, sub-

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developed or degraded areas are living an acute decline. A number of key challenges for these alpine areas relate to their comparative disadvantage with regard to infrastructure and services' availability. This disadvantage includes, and feed, peripherality and abandonment issues. This is the frequent case of the so-called peripheral areas encompassing rural areas, villages and small towns along the Alps chain (Scuttari, Lucia, Martini, 2013). Up to the end of the millennium, the western and southern Alps were considered the major demographic problem areas within the Alpine arc. During the past decade, however, the picture has changed significantly: communities in the western Alps have gradually recovered from massive outmigration, creating better condition to live in the mountains as permanent or temporary residents. Tourism has facilitated these processes mobilising stakeholders and resources with a view to renewing the tourist offers and products in the sustainability framework (Bassi, Carzedda, Iseppi, Nassivera, 2020). In the last few decades a lot of projects have been carried out in those geographical contexts focusing on the tourism enhancement of local culture, tangible and intangible heritage (Cerutti, 2019). Culture and heritage sum up a community's beliefs, practices, and values-shared behaviour acquired as the result of living within a group and a defined geographic area (Kumar, 2017). If culture-led development must survive the projects stage, it's necessary to ask under what conditions culture could work as a sustainable tourism developmental tool that may even become the leading growth engine in some circumstances (Pollice, 2018). Within this general framework, the aim of the contribution is to provide some insights from the Alpine peripheral areas coming from the analysis of some significant case studies. Rather than concentrating exclusively on the tangible and objective proprieties of mountain environments, these cases reveal the importance of focusing on the subjective, emotional and symbolic meanings - as it

happened with Commonlands Project, in Italy (see figure 1). Projects and processes are associated with these territories and the personal bonds or attachments people develop through both social construction of place and meaningful place experiences. So that's how it can be implemented a local, sustainable and participatory tourism.

Fig. 1 – Commonlands' Community Map, Italy.

Source: www.comuniterrae.it



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