

Challenges for sustainable tourism management in a UNESCO serial World Heritage Site. The case of the Dolomites.

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Keywords

Sustainable Tourism, UNESCO, tourism impacts, touristic pressure

Abstract

The poster presents an insight on the first results of a research project carried out by the European Academy of Bolzano, aiming at elaborating strategies for sustainable tourism in the UNESCO World Heritage Dolomites.

The Dolomites, located in the Northeastern Italian Alps, represent a particularly interesting case concerning the challenges for the common management of different protected areas. The site as a whole has been inscribed in the Natural World Heritage List in 2009 and is one of the few cases worldwide of serial mountainous site: it is in fact composed of nine different areas (*Systems*) not adjacent to each other.

The heterogeneity of the site, both from an administrative and a protection point of view, is high: the nine systems are spread among five Italian provinces¹ and three regions². Various protected areas are included in the territory of the UNESCO World Heritage Dolomites: nine nature parks (six provincial, two regional and one national) and 26 NATURA 2000 areas.

The Dolomites' landscape and the possibility of both summer and winter activities attracts significant tourist flows (in year 2008, prior to the inscription, more than 25 million overnight stays have been registered in the surrounding municipalities); these flows are likely to increase after the inscription in the World Heritage List. The main challenges related to the sustainability of tourism in the area are the concentration in summer and winter peak periods and in specific attraction points. Therefore, seasonal and spatial hotspots can be highlighted, not homogeneously distributed among the nine components of the site.

On the basis of these conditions, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) requested to integrate in the overall management plan of the a general sustainable tourism strategy for the overall Dolomites.

The analysis presented in the poster focuses on the challenges linked to the development of the common strategies, by comparing two Systems included in the UNESCO World Heritage Dolomites. These cases have been selected due to their heterogeneous tourism development and related impacts; the comparison is based on tourism-related indicators elaborated on the basis of data collected in the surrounding municipalities.

The first of the two Systems considered is the Puez-Odle/Puez-Geisler located in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen. This site which presents a high level of tourism intensity with a related high level of tourism infrastructure development. In this System the population growth rate from 2001 to 2011 has been positive: one of the reasons for that is that tourism represents an important generator of income and workplaces, making the area attractive for residents. Nevertheless the high number of visitors implies some negative impacts, mainly due to overcrowding in specific hotspots and seasons.

The second System considered is the Dolomiti Friulane, located in the provinces of Udine and Pordenone: this System, on the contrary, presents the lowest values of tourism intensity among the entire World Heritage Dolomites, combined with a low touristic infrastructure. The municipalities surrounding the area have seen in the years 2001 to 2011 a decline of population and tourism does not yet represent a consistent and continuous source of income that could enhance the attractiveness of the area also for residents.

The comparison of the cases shows that, in order to be effective, the development of a general strategy for the serial site of the Dolomites must take in account the different levels of tourism impacts and development observable among the different areas included in the site. Therefore, depending on the context, different aspects of sustainability have to be stressed: on the one hand, strategies fostering the reduction of the impacts of tourism have to be developed (environmental sustainability), while on the other hand, the need of the local population to make tourism a steady source of income has to be taken in account (social and economic sustainability).

In order to provide a general strategy for the overall Dolomites, five main strategic priorities have hence been highlighted: tourism demand and offer, mobility, governance, information and communication and monitoring. These priorities, which will be translated in concrete measures developed at local level, are briefly presented in the conclusive section of the poster.

¹The Autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano and the Provinces of Belluno, Pordenone and Udine.

²The Trentino – Alto Adige / Südtirol region, the Veneto Region and the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region.

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Artikel/Article: [Challenges for sustainable tourism management in a UNESCO serial World Heritage Site. The case of the Dolomites. 175-176](#)