



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Mountain tourism – Towards a more sustainable path



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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

and

United Nations World Tourism Organization

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Foreword

Mountains offer an array of possibilities for tourists, offering a place to refresh, recharge and re-awake with the power of nature.

At the same time, sustainable tourism can serve as an important driver of socio-economic development in mountain areas. Well managed, community-based tourism increases and diversifies household incomes, enhances job and livelihood opportunities, supports traditional systems, builds resilience and helps to conserve and promote natural and cultural heritage across landscapes.

Tourism has proved to be a lifeline for many communities in mountain regions and can play a leading role in protecting these fragile ecosystems. As global tourism emerges from the cloud of the pandemic, we have a chance to rethink the sector and the benefits it delivers. In the longer term, this could open the way for new opportunities for mountains and their inhabitants. Travellers are increasingly looking at ways through which to reconnect – in a low-impact way – with nature, local traditions and cultures, and for experiences in open-air and less crowded destinations. This is particularly important in mountains, which are under pressure from the impacts of the climate crisis, natural disasters and biodiversity loss.

The mountain sector is also stepping up its climate action ambitions. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and partners launched the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, committing stakeholders to work towards net-zero by 2050.

This study, jointly developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and UNWTO, aims to support the role of tourism in the sustainable development of mountain regions. It presents projects and initiatives from around the world, detailing successes and challenges, and highlighting the key elements necessary to ensure that tourism development in mountains contributes to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The release of this report also marks International Mountain Day 2021, the theme of which is “Sustainable Mountain Tourism”.

A recent Memorandum of Understanding between FAO and UNWTO emphasizes the crosscutting relevance of tourism and the importance of cooperation at all levels to fully engage local communities, maximize the benefits of the sector, and effectively manage its impacts on resources. This collaboration aims to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship, drive sustainable development and income diversification opportunities, and strengthen livelihoods through rural tourism, agritourism, nature tourism, outdoor activities and other forms of landscape-based tourism. It envisages, among others, collaborative activities within the framework of FAO’s Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), the Coalition of Fragile Ecosystems and the Green Cities Initiative.

We are confident that this new study will contribute to identifying ways of accelerating recovery in mountain regions for the well-being of local people, who include some of the world's most fragile populations, and the conservation of mountain landscapes and their rich heritage.



QU Dongyu
Director-General
FAO



Zurab Pololikashvili
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Community-based tourism in Castelmezzano, southern Italy

Southern Italian mountains covered in snow
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Emilio Cocco, Rita Salvatore and Anna F. Mines

Depopulated inner rural areas are in the midst of a transition towards territorial requalification processes related to the sustainable and responsible management of 'tourism-making'. One such case is the small village of Castelmezzano at the foot of the Dolomiti Lucane mountain range in the region of Basilicata in southern Italy. The village is located in the protected area of the Gallipoli Cognato Regional Park at 750 m above sea level.

Severely impacted by the 1980 Irpinia earthquake, Castelmezzano is now a picturesque hamlet. Most of its historical houses have been restored according to specific rules and a coherent landscape plan. While witnessing a 19 percent loss in population since 2001, the hospitality capacity of the village has grown tenfold in the same period.

The biggest draw to the area is the Volo dell'Angelo (the Angel Flight): an innovative, low-impact experiential tourism attraction whereby participants 'fly' on a zip line from Castelmezzano to the village of Pietrapertosa and back again. The attraction has contributed to the economic and cultural growth of the local population and has also been a driving force for other minor attractions, such as the Via Ferrata (fixed rope routes for climbers), Il Percorso delle Sette Pietre (the Path of the Seven Stones) and Il Ponte Nepalese (the Nepalese Bridge).

A new company that was established by the municipality of Castelmezzano in cooperation with private investors has hired 22 people, mostly youth, and the business has grown to reach an overall income of about EUR 650 000 (about USD 751 034) per year. These outcomes are slowing the trend of depopulation in the inner rural areas of Italy by providing decent employment directly to community members.

“Over the years, a micro-economy has grown and diffused in all of families in Castelmezzano. More than 40 B&Bs have been established, not to mention the restaurants, bars, etc. Every tourist could be a hypothetical client to a person. So, everyone respects everyone else, without competition. It is fantastic because people really feel at home here.”

Pro Loco Administrator

The active hiring of young people, requalification of institutional actors and business owners, and a willingness by locals to engage with tourists were all important factors that resulted in a shared, cohesive and communal identity that enhanced the tourism experience.

The experience of Castelmezzano is a replicable, successful community-based brand of tourism, with the management of the tourist services by the local residents. It valorizes endogenous assets, such as natural landscape beauty and historical, cultural, and geological heritage, and the involvement of community members in developing tourism.



Southern Italian mountains
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