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Authors	Lonardi, Serena
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Introduction

Sustainable tourism, like sustainable development is notoriously meant to aim at intergenerational equity (Brundtland, 1987) through three pillars: economic, environmental and social (Mensah, 2019; Soini & Birkeland, 2014). Some scholars include among the social pillar the concept of cultural sustainability (Hawkes, 2001; Soini & Birkeland, 2014). The concept of cultural sustainability focuses on the management and transmission of cultural heritage to the next generations. In order to achieve cultural sustainability, some scholars introduce the centrality of education and learning, since more educated tourists can contribute to preserve the cultural heritage (Colton & Harris, 2007; Ritchie, 2003).

The cultural heritage of a population also includes intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which has been gaining increasing attention from cultural tourists (Richards, 2018; UNWTO, 2018). Because of its fragile nature, ICH is central to the concept of cultural sustainability, as it needs to be practiced on a daily basis to be passed on to future generations (Kim et al., 2019). Among the manifestations of ICH are oral traditions and languages, as vehicle for ICH (Fishmann, 1991; UNESCO, 2003).

This paper aims at analyzing the concept of cultural sustainability, language preservation and visitors' interests in some aspects of the intangible culture of a population, like the traditional language. This study considers the case of the Ladin communities of South-Tyrol (Italy). Through sixteen semi-structured interviews, it aims at contributing to the understanding of the relevance of cultural elements of a the Ladin community – including the language – for the tourism experience in South Tyrol (Italy).

Literature Review

Cultural tourism has been recently defined as: “[...] a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.” (UNWTO, 2018).

This definition highlights the growing interest of tourists in the ICH of a population (Richards, 2018). ICH is commonly understood as ‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.’ (UNESCO, 2003). The Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH (2003) also includes a list of domains where the ICH is manifested – like, for instance, oral traditions and languages.

Previous research proved that cultural resources contribute to the attractiveness of the destination, through increased perceived locality and differentiation (Richards, 2010). Moreover, tourists are looking for meaningful and authentic encounters with the local population, as well as for authentic experiences of the everyday culture (Richards, 2018).

Previous research suggest that language can play an important role in this (Lonardi, 2021). Minority languages are perceived as authentic by visitors (Heller et al., 2014; Pietikäinen, 2015) and therefore used to promote the destination as unique, as well as to differentiate tourism experiences (Lonardi et al., 2020; Pechlaner et al., 2011; Whitney-Squire, 2016).

Among its numerous definitions and conceptualizations, cultural sustainability is meant to aim at preserving the cultural heritage for future generations, as source of identity and local sense of place (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). Particularly important in this vein is preservation of ICH, since it is particularly fragile and needs constant practice from the population in order to survive and be passed on to future generations, thus guarantying intergenerational equity (Kim et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2003).

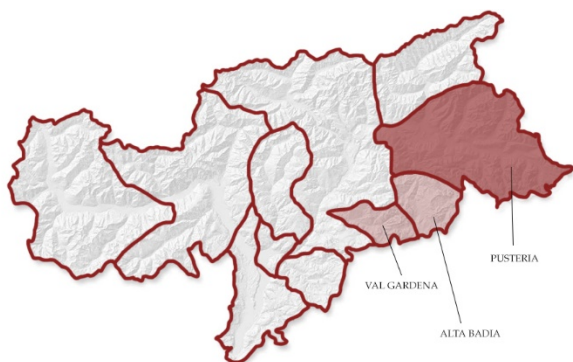
Some scholars argue that the tourism field plays an important role for rural areas and the preservation of their cultural heritage because it provides a renewed economic activity, further source of income and job opportunities (Pietikäinen, 2015). Moreover, an increasing interest from visitors outside the community has, in some cases, led to increased sense of pride and identity; which can also contribute to a desire to learn more and transmit one's cultural heritage, including the language, further to future generations (Lonardi et al., 2020). In some cases, however, for instance where "sand and beach" was the main motivation to travel, the minority language didn't play an important role for tourists; on the contrary, it was sometimes perceived as negative, which lead to strengthening the role of the major language (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2015).

This research aims at providing an exploratory analysis of tourists' interest in various aspects of the ICH of the destination they are visiting, especially traditional languages, and the consequences of cultural sustainability and culture preservation on their experience.

Methodology

This research will particularly consider tourists' interest in various aspects of the Ladin communities in South-Tyrol, Italy. South-Tyrol, also known as Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, part of the region of Trentino-Alto Adige, is located in the northernmost part of Italy. The area is of interest for the purpose of this study because it is officially trilingual: the two official languages in the whole Province are German and Italian, whereas in two valleys – Val Gardena and Alta Badia – Ladin is also recognized as an official language. The Ladin language is a Rheto-Rhomanic language spoken by approximately 40,000 people in South-Tyrol, Trentino and Veneto, 30,000 of which are in Val Gardena and Alta Badia (Casalicchio, 2020). Tourism is one of the most important economic activities for South-Tyrol: in 2019, arrivals were 7,7 million people, 4,7 mi. The most visited destination was Val Pusteria with 2,2 million arrivals (ASTAT, 2019).

The authors decided to focus specifically on Val Pusteria as it is the most visited destination in South-Tyrol (ASTAT, 2019) and it can also be considered the access valley to the Ladin Valleys of Val Gardena and Alta Badia (see Figure 1).



The study is based on a qualitative methodology, that allow for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. In particular, semi-structured interviews study the phenomenon through a set of prepared questions developed from the literature (Jennings, 2010).

Table 1. profile of the interviewees

Interviewee	Origin	Age	Gender
I1	Germany	24	Male
I2	Germany	62	Male
I3	Germany	45	Female
I4	Germany	60	Male
I5	Germany	21	Female
I6	Germany	56	Male
I7	Germany	55	Female
I8	Germany	23	Female
I9	Italy	53	Female
I10	Italy	58	Male
I11	Germany	56	Female
I12	Germany	58	Male
I13	Italy	52	Female
I14	Italy	24	Male
I15	Italy	57	Male
I16	Italy	56	Female

The interviewees were contacted following a judgmental sample: i.e. tourists who had spent their holidays in Val Pusteria at least twice. The initial plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews with hosts in two hotels in Pusteria in spring 2020; the plan had to change due to consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the interviews had to be conducted online, either via Zoom or via WhatsApp Calls. The interviews lasted on average 32 minutes. See table 1 for the profile of the interviewees.

The questions were developed from the literature (Whitney-Squire, 2016; Pechlaner et al., 2011). The interviews dealt with general questions about motivations to visit the destination, followed by general inquires about cultural interest and cultural motivation. Before the interviews continued, the interviewees were then showed a video representing a real-life contact with the Ladin language – the video showed a cooking class held in Ladin. The last part of the interviews regarded the

With a written consent from the interviewees, interviews were recorded, and transcribed for data analysis. Data analysis followed the thematic approach suggested by Mayring (2014). The interviews were organized into categories, or themes, and sub-categories. After a first coding, the codes were readjusted in order to enhance the quality of the study (Madill et al., 2000).

Results

The results will be shown in this section, where the key-themes will be highlighted.

Travel motivation

The first questions were rather generic and dealt with main motivations to visit South-Tyrol in general and Val Pusteria in particular. It was immediately clear that culture was not the main reason to visit this destination. On the contrary, the main cited characteristics were the beauty of the landscape, weather, and snow conditions.

“...when we arrived there for the first time it seemed like paradise [...] the landscape is breathtaking [...] the first thing that amazes you is the beauty of this wonderful place...” (I9_10)

However, the local population plays an important role in the delivery of a memorable tourism experience. Interviewees especially appreciate their friendliness and hospitality.

“You always have the impression that you are welcomed in a friendly way [...]. It gives you the impression of arriving and also a bit of home.” (I2_24)

“The people. The people, the friendliness, the impression of being welcome. That's what always sticks with us and that's exactly why we come back.” (I2_8)

Cultural awareness

The second part of the interviews dealt specifically with cultural interest. Although it was not the main reason to travel to Val Pusteria, results show that culture played an important role in the experiences of interviewees. Interviewees particularly appreciated living traditions:

“I also really like when I see how alive, how present the customs still are in your country.”
(I12_10)

Interestingly enough, results showed that tourists were particularly impressed with how the local population of South-Tyrol are making efforts to preserve their culture, including their language.

“I have seen a lot of embroideries and I find this a wonderful thing because...I find it very beautiful that even now, in 2021, there is still respect for these customs and these craft practices.” (I9_14)

Interviewees, therefore, value this attachment of South-Tyrolean to their heritage and their efforts to preserve tangible and intangible aspects of their heritage and transmit it to future generations. Finally, visiting a destination that value cultural preservation contributes to perceived authenticity.

Traditional languages

After a brief discussion about cultural heritage and cultural interests, the interviewees were shown a video of a possible tourism experience in the Ladin language. Even though the majority of

interviewees expressed interest and said they would like to participate in such an experience, they also confessed that they could not understand much of what the cook was saying.

“So, for me, it would be an interesting experience. The language seems very friendly and bright. So, also very appealing [...] so very soft.” (I3_14)

One half of the interviewees had already had contacts with this language and did not feel it as negative. On the contrary, the language, the sound and the accent, were associated with the destination itself.

“Yes, the languages are also associated with the holiday destination itself.” (I1_24)

“...the sound of the language gives me a holiday feeling and at the same time a homely feeling.” (I8_12)

However, one interviewee had a negative experience and a negative memory with the Ladin language, because unintelligibility was for him a stress factor. For him, visiting the two Ladin valleys would be out of question.

“But I can’t do anything with Ladin itself. There is nothing at all that you can grasp. [...] It was too stressful. [...] when you are in such a particular valley... spend the holiday there would not be an option for us.” (I6_14)

Similarly to what has been shown in the paragraph before, interviewees value the preservation of the traditional language and see it as a differentiating factor to their hometowns, or to other destinations.

“I always think it's nice how the population still cultivates this language. [...] For me, it simply has something to do with tradition and with the love of one's own country, to continue to preserve and maintain what the older generation has built up. That is the attachment to the country and the place.” (I3_18)

“I find [it] really very beautiful and very essential because [...] we should never forget where we come from, [...] the things that our grandparents [...] passed down to us.” (I9_14)

Conclusion and Discussion

This research aimed at studying the cultural motivation of tourists in the Alpine destination of Val Pusteria, with a particular focus on the intangible heritage, especially the Ladin language and the impacts of cultural and language preservation on tourism experiences.

Results partly contradict previous research. Culture is not the main motivation for any interviewees contradicting Richards (2018), nor is language. On the contrary, in an Alpine context, where mountains – the Dolomites – have been declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2009, the traditional languages seem not be the main motivation to travel (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2015). However, results proved that culture, living traditions and languages contributed to a memorable tourism experience (Richards, 2010; Whitney-Squire, 2016).

This study provides interesting practical implications for tourism practitioners in the area. First of all, they should be aware that the Ladin language in tourism experiences can be a factor for

attractiveness, especially when focusing on its successful preservation (Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011; Kim et al., 2019). However, it is important to consider the problem of unintelligibility: i.e. tourism practitioners should develop experiences where language is embedded but not the main factor; in other words, those experiences should include educational parts (Ritchie, 2003; Colton & Harris, 2007) have a translation or an interpretation (Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011). With the help of educational experiences, tourists' interest in the languages of the region could increase.

This study is not without limitations. First, it uses a qualitative methodology, with sixteen interviews, whose analysis is, to an extent, subject to the researchers. Moreover, it only considers one case study, i.e. Val Pusteria in South-Tyrol.

Further research should remedy the main limitations of this study and further analyse the interests of tourists in both cultural sustainability and educational experiences. Even though some interviewees mentioned that the experience with the language would be rather negative due to unintelligibility, there is still no understanding on how education would influence their tourism experience. Interest in educational tourism experiences (Colton & Harris, 2007; Ritchie, 2003) and how those influence tourists' interest in languages need further attention and research. As mentioned, education could improve preservation of heritage, and thus cultural sustainability (Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011), as well as the memorability of tourism experiences.

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