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The Val Tartano 2018-2019 Workshop's Final Report

Creating a prototype website for a niche mountain destination

The Planning and Management of Tourism Systems Master Degree Course at the University of Bergamo plans every year 4 different workshops for the students of the second year to choose among. Our workshop, designed and supervised by professor Roberto Peretta with the help of Clara Spini, a student who knows well the area, focused on Val Tartano, a niche mountain destination situated in Valtellina, in the Lombardy region, specifically in the province of Sondrio.

The Val Tartano workshop

At the end of February 2019 the Val Tartano workshop (coded 2018-2019 PMTS03 Workshop) started with the aim of designing and proposing a website for this niche mountain destination. Throughout all the meetings – from February to May 2019 – the nine students taking part in the workshop and the supervisor discussed many topics regarding Val Tartano, being aware that this is a fragile niche mountain destination which must be preserved and managed properly.

The CMS

The Wordpress open source Content Management System (CMS) was used to create a prototype website, named “Explore Val Tartano”, and not meant to be immediately public. The aim was to provide the Val Tartano stakeholders with appropriate tools, and help them to keep and run a website of theirs – whether a development of the workshop’s, or a different one – after the workshop would come to its end.

Students used the Canva graphic application to propose a logo, recalling the mountains where Val Tartano is situated and the walking opportunities the valley offers.

On-site visit

On March the 11th the students and the supervisor went for a visit to Val Tartano, in order to meet the tourism stakeholders, explore the area, and cross the “Ponte nel cielo” bridge, a recent project which is attracting more and more tourists to the valley. In the morning the group went for a walk in the Val Lunga area, having local stakeholders – namely Piergiorgio Spini and Celeste, whom everybody calls after his first name only – as guides.

Piergiorgio and Celeste explained the history of Val Tartano, its traditions and several peculiar facts. After a lunch with typical products at the Hotel Miralago, the group discussed about the issues of the area, saw pictures and consulted literature. Then, they experienced the “Ponte nel cielo” crossing.

The visit had been initially designed as a two-days trip, which would have allowed students to get into contact with locals more deeply, and get to know the valley properly. Unfortunately, due to organizational issues, this was not possible, reducing the trip to just one day. Given this and after all the information acquired, the structure of the prototype website could be set out.

Environmental resources

One must always focus on how a tourism destination can be promoted preserving its unique environmental resources. This is crucial for Val Tartano, which doesn't have many tourism services or infrastructure (i.e. parking, accommodation, facilities...). Mass tourism can in fact be an issue nowadays, when tourists look for unexplored areas with natural features. According to Doxey's irridex – Index of Irritation – the first phase of the relationship between tourists and locals is euphoria, followed by apathy and annoyance, and finally leading to antagonism, when tourism reaches its real consistency and harms the territory and the locals' lifestyle.

The website structure

It was decided to organize the prototype website in four sections – *Explore, Val Tartano, Info* and *Events* – each of them having subsections. Every participant wrote a report about the topic which she/he was assigned, each related to one of the sections of the website. For the students to be able to edit the sections of the website and write their reports, they got in touch with the stakeholders related to the topic assigned.

Providing information on a untouched area

Apart from a section within the general Valtellina tourism website, there is a lack of proper information about Val Tartano on the Web. Hence the need to provide effective information – both practical and cultural – about the area. To do this, students needed the voices and the knowledge of locals like Piergiorgio and Celeste, to mention a few.

Having no ski lifts, the valley keeps its natural beauty. This is what the Trails Group focused on, in a promotional perspective that led to publish on the website some crucial information first of all a map. The best solution would be an interactive map, with GPS tracks of all the trails. Ideally, a system allowing visitors to filter their research according to their needs should be integrated in the website. Families, for example, could choose trails that are easily viable for kids or, at the same time, expert hikers could find more challenging ones. As a matter of fact, promoting the trail network would mean giving visitors all the info they could possibly need when deciding to explore the area.

Local food

As for food, dealt with in a subsection of the *Val Tartano* section of the website, the main traditional products of the area are Pizzoccheri, Sciatt, Bresaola, Tartano cheese and honey. Some of these products can be found at "Alimentari Bulanti Cristina" in the village of Tartano; indeed, this is the only place where local producers can sell their products. The Sem Caureer farm, for example, provides the shop with a lot of different kinds of cheese and honey, produced according to traditional techniques by Raffaella Bianchini, the owner of Sem Caureer. Except for the Alimentari Bulanti Cristina, there is a lack of local shops addressing tourists' needs as far as food is concerned. The Alimentari Bulanti Cristina, moreover, is a very small shop – mainly for residents – which might not properly fulfil tourists' needs.

The "Ponte nel cielo" bridge

The new bridge was set up by a non-profit organization, that had the bridge built for two main purposes: increase the tourism flow in the valley, and facilitate access to the area facing the village of Campo Tartano, where old buildings are still in use in the summer. This initiative produced both positive and negative outcomes. On one side, it allowed Val Tartano to gather more and more

visibility, becoming increasingly known and frequented. On the other side, it compelled the stakeholders of the area to consider which strategies might manage the new, significant tourist flow.

Local accommodation

Apart from a few hotels and rental apartments, the valley doesn't provide enough accommodation to fulfil the tourists' expectations. One of the points that were most underlined during the meetings was the need to offer alternatives and activities to different sorts of tourists, whether they are families, youngsters or adventure tourists. The main accommodation services provided in Val Tartano for tourists are the Miralago Hotel, La Gran Baita Hotel, the Vallunga Hotel and the Villaggio Furfurera.

In Val Tartano, hotels and hotel workers also perform as infopoints. This condition had to be mentioned in the website, so that future tourists know that they can easily find further information about the territory at the hotels.

Local services

As for services, tourists need to be given relevant information. First, they should be made aware that services like specialized shops (mountain clothing shops, for instance), ATMs, gas stations and pharmacies are NOT available in Val Tartano. Exactly like locals, in order to find such services they need to descend to Morbegno, Talamona or Ardenno, which are located in the main Valtellina valley. Tourists can benefit only from a grocery in Tartano. A georeferenced map of services would therefore be a useful tool, and an option that the website has to consider.

Mountain huts, culture and trails

Regarding the destination promotion of the area, the prototype website puts a friendly and informal register to good use, giving an overview of Val Tartano as a family-friendly destination. This is against a common misconception of the valley as a destination frequented only by expert hikers. Pieces of information and relevant useful links are provided in other sections of the website, namely *Rifugi* (Mountain Huts), *Cultura* (Culture) and *Scegli il tuo percorso* (Choose your Trail). By applying appropriate filters to an interactive map, families of future tourists would find out which trails suit their needs better in terms of accessibility, length, duration, difficulty, etc. Information are currently provided only by locals at the ticket counter of the "Ponte nel cielo" bridge, or available at hotels and restaurants.

Discussion among participants

During the following meetings, the students and the supervisor discussed the information they had acquired talking to stakeholders. Technology is essential today, and in tourism especially. Tourists want to be informed, engaged and updated with information about the destination they decide to visit; a website can therefore be a pivotal element for them to choose between one destination or another. The "Ponte nel cielo" bridge has become well-known thanks to the word of mouth, press articles and news on social networks. Before the "Ponte nel Cielo", stakeholders and locals didn't feel any real need of tourism management, but now this need is increasingly felt like something urgent and necessary.

Apart from issues about infrastructures and services, that obviously the workshop couldn't confront, designing and launching a valuable website, on which Val Tartano might rely, has clearly appeared a major task. This is true not only for tourists but also for locals, for them to be more and more engaged in the process of managing the valley as a destination.

The final presentation

At the end of the workshop, a final presentation was held in Tartano on May the 21st. Many stakeholders of the area attended, who were – and still are – interested in developing a strong management of the destination. The visual presentation focused on “What a Workshop Is”, “Val Tartano as a Destination”, “Pros & Cons”, “The Bridge”, “A Website for the Valley”, what the workshop had done, and finally whether or not the University of Bergamo should continue this workshop initiative in the forthcoming academic year.

As stressed on the final presentation, the students and the supervisor trust that this work was only the beginning of a uniform and participatory tourist promotion of Val Tartano. The stakeholders appeared to be satisfied with the workshop’s effort, not only in building a prototype website but also proposing tools for a better management of a fragile niche destination like Val Tartano is. The supervisor, as a matter of fact, consequently chose to continue the workshop’s initiative, and give to other students the opportunity to know Val Tartano and engage in its future in the forthcoming academic year.

The prototype website as a tool for future development

Developing appropriate management strategies, intended to avoid that Val Tartano becomes a mass tourism destination, looks important. What appears to be needed is to regulate the tourists’ flow, fulfil all the different stakeholders’ needs, make them cooperate for the wellbeing of the destination and the locals. The website, if properly managed, can be an efficient tool to give useful information to tourists, and make them aware of the territory and the destination they can visit.

(report curated by Beatrice Scambi)

The workshop’s participants

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- Carola Ciceri
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- Leandro Pessina
- Beatrice Scambi
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