

## **Sustainable Development Strategy**

### **Introduction**

The San Vigilio & San Martin Tourist Cooperative is an institution established for the purpose of representing the accommodations, businesses, and restaurants in the area. Our work is to promote the tourist destination considering the interests of our members, who share with us the idea of developing our destination in a sustainable fashion. To achieve this goal, we have identified actions and projects that can add value to the area while preserving it for future generations.

In August 2021, we achieved certification as a sustainable tourism destination with the international GSTC standard. The GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) criteria cover all aspects of tourism and its potential impacts. One cannot speak of truly sustainable tourism without simultaneous attention to economic, socio-cultural and environmental elements. Obtaining certification represented a fundamental moment for us, a stance towards an increasingly responsible and attentive tourism. At the same time, this is not and should not be seen as a mere goal to aspire to, but rather a starting point in a process of continuous improvement and development.

Our tourist region is known for its excellent hospitality, respect and welcome to guests. Likewise, we as a tourist cooperative repudiate any form of discrimination, serving all our visitors, residents and employees with the highest values of hospitality, sharing and respect. To also enhance the role of young people in our area and in our work, we offer internship opportunities to high school and university students who are interested in tourism and sustainability issues.

## ***Economic sustainability***

Monitoring the economic impacts of tourism and collecting data on various issues in the area are instrumental in making informed decisions. We collect a wide variety of data, which allow us to optimise the actual management elements of the destination itself. Some of the most important monitoring actions are listed below.

### **Monitoring attendance in various seasons**

To pursue our goal of reducing seasonality, it is our intention to promote the seasons less frequented by tourists, such as spring, early summer, and autumn. Therefore, we have created offer packages with various activities, with the possibility of participating in guided and educational tours in early summer, and the "Autumn Special" package for September and October. Part of the member hospitality structures also contributed to this autumn package, thus incentivizing tourists to spend their vacation time in these less crowded seasons. It is crucial for us that flows are distributed as evenly as possible throughout the year to avoid alternating periods of crowding and absence of visitors.

### **Monitoring of visitors and residents**

It is very important to us that the residents understand and accept a form of tourism development that is respectful of nature and culture. Likewise, we encourage visitors to share our sensitivity to sustainability issues. The Cooperative's role is to manage the destination in the best way possible, so feedback from residents and visitors is crucial in guiding organizational choices with respect to the interests of locals and tourists. We have set up questionnaires for residents and visitors, collected biennially, to gather their perceptions of our destination and use these tips to improve the quality of life and tourist infrastructure in the area.

### **Monitoring the origin of touristic flows**

It is important to distinguish between visitors who stay in our facilities and those linked to daily tourism patterns, that is, a single-day enjoyment of the area. This second case must be monitored to assess the traffic volumes resulting from it, which could lead to exceeding the carrying capacity of local infrastructure. Our localities have a limited urbanized area, so they are not predisposed to receive large masses of tourists originating from daily "hit-and-run" trips. Knowing where visitors come from allows us to adapt our offers and organizational solutions to anticipate and manage any critical situations, reducing the possible inconvenience of locals and tourists.

## ***Environmental sustainability***

Our destination owes much of its success to its extraordinary natural heritage. The mountains and forests of the Dolomites have always exerted a strong attraction towards visitors seeking the most diverse emotions and experiences. Climate change, pollution and bad behavior can endanger the high mountain environment, which has always struck a precise balance between human activities and unspoiled nature. Protecting this heritage therefore becomes crucial to preserving the competitiveness and value of our area. Below are some of the most important strategies put in place to ensure its protection and sustainable development.

### **Better management of waste and pollutants**

One of the goals we have set for ourselves is better waste management both at the destination level and at the level of the accommodation facilities operating in the area. We believe in the importance of setting an example: as a Cooperative we have started to reduce the use of paper in our offices, on the one hand using recycled paper for our advertising campaigns, reaching a utilization of more than 95%, and on the other hand encouraging the use of alternative communication tools. We then decided to set ourselves a target of reducing paper consumption by 20% by 2025. From 2024, all the energy used by our office will come from solar panels installed on the roof.

We promote the monitoring of emissions produced by our members, so as to make them aware of the need to reduce polluting factors, which also guarantees not inconsiderable savings from an economic point of view.

We are also participating in a project of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano “Respect the Mountain” (Achtsam am Berg), which aims to raise awareness among visitors and managers of tourism businesses in the Dolomites towards environmentally friendly behaviour. Through this project we want to spread a greater awareness and sense of responsibility for our territory.

### **Improving mobility**

We are constantly working to improve mobility in our area, with a special focus on certain points of interest, referred to as “hotspots”, which are heavily frequented by both our tourists and day-trippers. We support public mobility, both by introducing additional bus routes, to reduce waiting times, and by disincentivising the use of one's own means of transport to reach certain locations, for example by introducing tolls to limit access to fragile areas of the Natural Parks.

We are investing heavily in the “HolidayPass” project. This is a card that is given to the accommodation facilities associated with the Cooperative, which in turn give it to our tourists free of charge. The HolidayPass allows the holder to use all public buses and trains in the whole of South Tyrol free of charge.

### **Preservation of the Territory**

The territory is not only a tourist attraction, but also our home, so keeping it healthy and preserving the rare flora and fauna of the Dolomites is fundamental. One of the lines of action was

the creation of biodiversity areas, with the dual purpose of protecting pollinators and promoting education, to make visitors aware of the very important role these insects play within ecosystems.

A reforestation project was then set up to promote the recovery of the Destination's forests, which were in difficulty due to the combination of extreme climatic events and the spread of the Bostrich, an insect harmful to the local flora.

Another project was the joining of the village of Lungiarü in the “Bergsteigerdorf” (mountaineer's village) project. This is an international network of villages, municipalities or hamlets characterised by their particular natural beauty, their mountain-related historical and geographical features and their clear distance from mass tourism. It is not just a label, but is the concrete implementation of the Alpine Convention, which wishes to create a development of the Alpine space according to the canons of sustainability, environmental protection and also protection of the tradition and culture of these unique territories.

## Drinking water

In the entire San Vigilio and San Martin area, the water is of the highest quality. We drink tap water on a daily basis and this is what we want to pass on to our visitors. There is no need to buy bottles of water before an excursion, just have a water bottle to fill with our water and take it with you. This leads to a twofold advantage: the first is that you can enjoy the delicious water of the Dolomites, the second is the reduction of all the additional plastic in the bottles. As a tourist cooperative we support and encourage these good practices, and to this end we have restored some historic fountains in key areas. We are also sensitising both our accommodation facilities and our restaurants on this important issue, so that they too can offer our visitors the possibility of ordering tap water.

## ***Social sustainability***

Another key element of sustainability relates to the entire social sphere. Culture, traditions, and people's well-being are the issues that fall under this umbrella. The protection of the artistic and historical heritage of a population has the same value and importance as the protection of the environment in which the same population lives. Regarding tourism, our commitment is to a development that is respectful of local traditions, allowing them to be known and valued, without distorting and impoverishing the specificities that characterize them. Alongside this, we seek to redistribute the benefits that tourism brings to the destination, so that the entire population can enjoy them. Below are some of the lines of action we decided to follow.

### **Involvement**

The Tourism Cooperative provides for a participatory form of governance of the destination, ensuring the presence of representatives from every economic category: hoteliers, room and flat renters, restaurants and bars, shopkeepers, ski schools, farmers, ski lifts, and artisans. By our nature, we work closely with the local community, organising events, training and awareness-raising courses. In addition to actively involving the local population, we have also decided to enter into partnerships with companies outside the area that share our values and philosophy on sustainability.

A key partner is the provincial nature authority, with the Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park Visitor Centre in San Vigilio di Marebbe. The Visitor Centre is an educational and didactic centre, the venue for numerous activities and events for young and old, developed with the precise aim of educating and training our visitors in a fair and respectful approach to nature.

### **Enhancement of the territory**

The success of our destination is directly linked to the culture, traditions and people that characterize and inhabit our territory. Respect and enhancement of these social aspects are to us of paramount importance. Our organization collaborates with local artisans and craftsmen to raise awareness of the typical activities and products of Ladin culture. In particular, the AgricolArt project aims to create a direct sales space from producer to consumer of objects and foods created from our territory.

Another relevant initiative is related to the communication of the Ladin language, a Neo-Roman language spoken in some Dolomite valleys. In collaboration with the Ladin Institute Micura De Rü, advertisements, posters, directions, and other documents now also contain translations into Ladin, so that visitors can learn about this language, a direct expression of the culture of the San Vigilio Dolomites area.

## Training for local professionals

An important project, active since 2021, is the training to the staff of accommodation facilities. This is because within our tourism region, the turnover of facility employees is very high, and seasonal workers often need specific training related to the particularities of the local area and culture. We therefore decided to collaborate with facilities to organize Workshops to train and explain to seasonal workers the cultural, environmental, and social context within which they work. This promotes both their inclusion in our destination and the transmission of correct information to visitors.