

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.

To develop in a way that respects our territory and the tourism that characterizes it, we have chosen some main issues to work on, divided according to the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. The goals we have set for ourselves are numerous, but among the most important achievements already reached stands the certification of the destination as a sustainable one, concluded with the GSTC international standard in August 2021. The GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) criteria cover aspects ranging from the environment to the destination's management model. This is a milestone that marks our commitment toward an increasingly responsible and caring tourism. At the same time, obtaining this certification is not and should not be seen as an achievement to aspire to, but a starting point in a process of continuous improvement and development of our destination.

Within our tourism region there is a marked culture of hospitality and respect, which is why we as a Tourism Cooperative, repudiate any form of discrimination, serving all our visitors with the highest values of hospitality, sharing and respect. To then enhance the role of young people in our area and in our work, we offer internship opportunities to high school and college students who are interested in tourism and sustainability.

Economic sustainability

Monitoring the economic impacts of tourism and collecting data on various issues in the area are instrumental in making informed decisions to better guide the management of our destination. Three indicators will be closely monitored in the short and medium term.

Monitoring attendance in the 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 accommodations 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 accommodations operating in the area. As a Tourist Cooperative, we have begun to reduce the use of paper in our offices, on the one hand using recycled paper for our advertising campaigns, reaching a use of 80 percent, and on the other hand encouraging the use of paperless communication tools. We then decided to impose on ourselves a target of reducing paper consumption by 15% by 2025.

With the collaboration of outside professionals, we are developing a tool to be shared with local businesses, which will enable them to measure and analyze the emissions they produce, identifying the areas (e.g., heating) that need immediate improvement.

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

Improving mobility

We are constantly working to improve mobility in our area, with a special focus on certain Hotspots, which are highly frequented by both, our tourists, and day-trippers. We support public mobility, both by introducing additional bus routes, to reduce waiting times, and by disincentivizing 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 Nature Parks. One goal we have set is to urge the local political organizations to obtain electric or hydrogen buses and employ them especially on routes that cross the Nature Park.

As a Tourist Cooperative, we have invested in the "HolidayPass" project. This is a card given to accommodation facilities associated with the Cooperative, which in turn give it to our tourists. The HolidayPass allows the holder to use all public transportation and even some cable cars in the whole of South Tyrol completely free of charge.

Preservation of the Territory

The territory is not only a tourist attraction, but also our home, so keeping it healthy by preserving the rare flora and fauna of the Dolomites is crucial.

One of the lines of action has been 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.

Another project was the Lungiarü village's membership in the "Bergsteigerdorf" (German for "mountaineer's village") project. This is an international network of villages, municipalities or hamlets characterized by special natural beauty, their mountain-related historical and geographical features, who distanced themselves from mass tourism. It is not just a label, but the concrete implementation of the Alpine Convention, which wants a development of the Alpine space according to the canons of sustainability, environmental protection and protection of the tradition and culture of these beautiful places.

Drinking water

Throughout San Vigilio and San Martin, water is of the highest quality, accessible and safe to drink in most local areas. We drink tap water daily and that is what we want to pass on to our visitors as well. There is no need to buy water bottles before a trip, just have a canteen, a bottle to fill with our water and take it with you on your excursion. This leads to a double benefit: the first is that you will be able to enjoy the exquisite water of the Dolomites, and the second is that you also reduce the use of plastic bottles and the connected waste. As a Tourist Cooperative, we support and encourage these good practices, and to this end several historic fountains in our area have been restored. We are also raising awareness of this important issue among both our accommodation and restaurant businesses so that they, too, offer our visitors the option 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 in the destination, ensuring the representation of every economic category: hoteliers, room and apartment renters, restaurants and bars, shopkeepers, ski school, farmers, ski lifts and artisans. By our nature we work closely with the local community, organizing events, trainings, and outreach. In addition to actively involving the resident population, we have also decided to enter partnerships with companies outside the area that share our values and philosophy on sustainability.

Among the most notable stands the one with Swarovski Optik, a world leader in the production and distribution of professional binoculars and telescopes. Swarovski provides optics for animal observation, increasing the value of our Wildlife Watching events, which are opportunities to raise awareness and educate our visitors on wildlife issues and beyond. Another key partner is Ente Natura with the Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park Visitor Center located in San Vigilio di Marebbe. The Visitor Center is an educational and didactic hub, the site of numerous activities and events for young and old, developed with the specific purpose 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 AgricolaArt 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.