

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE ALPEN-ADRIA REGION: REALITY AND GOALS

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Abstract

In this paper we would like to focus on the awareness of sustainable management of resources among hotel managers and tourists visiting the mountainous parts of the Alpen-Adria region (Southeastern Alps, Northern Adriatic) of Europe. We are going to elaborate on results of quantitative questionnaires made in several tourist resort of the region. Our study proves that the environment has become the problem of the society and the economy where tourism is taking place.

Key words: Southeastern Alps, Northern Adriatic, tourism, sustainable development, environment

SONARAVNI TURIZEM V REGIJI ALPE-JADRAN – REALNOST ALI UTOPIJA

Izvleček

Pričujoči prispevek obravnava zatečeno stanje na področju ekološke ozaveščenosti med turisti in turističnimi delavci na območju alpskega sveta Jugovzhodnih Alp, v Italiji in Avstriji. Ponekod so ekološko naravnani programi postali temelj promocije posameznega turističnega središča. Upravljalci - turistični menadzerji in turisti so si enotni, da sta narava in kulturna dediščina pomembni sestavini turistične ekonomije. Degradirano okolje je potrebno sanirati vendar, po mnenju turistov in upravljalcev, ne na njihov račun.

Ključne besede: Jugovzhodne Alpe, Severni Jadran, turizem, trajnostni/sonaravni razvoj, okolje.

INTRODUCTION

More than two decades ago have several far-sighted entrepreneurs, members of the academia, national and international civic institutions and enterprises within the tourism sector of the economy started to focus on problems related to the environment. First products of the tourism industry have been labeled with the seal of environmental quality about 10 years ago. Preserved physical and/or cultural environments have become a quality mark for products offered on the global tourism market. The »environmental awareness« is praised by the tourist entrepreneurs and tourists alike and has become a promotional tool within the industry. In several countries of the world have therefore institutions of the state or other associations developed criteria for the measurement of the »non-polluted nature« and »non-globalized culture« and produced »ecological certificates« for environments in which set standards are held. In receptions of hotels, motels, camping grounds, mountain huts one can often find one or several seals and/or diplomas praising the enterprise for its environmental consciousness through a certificate.

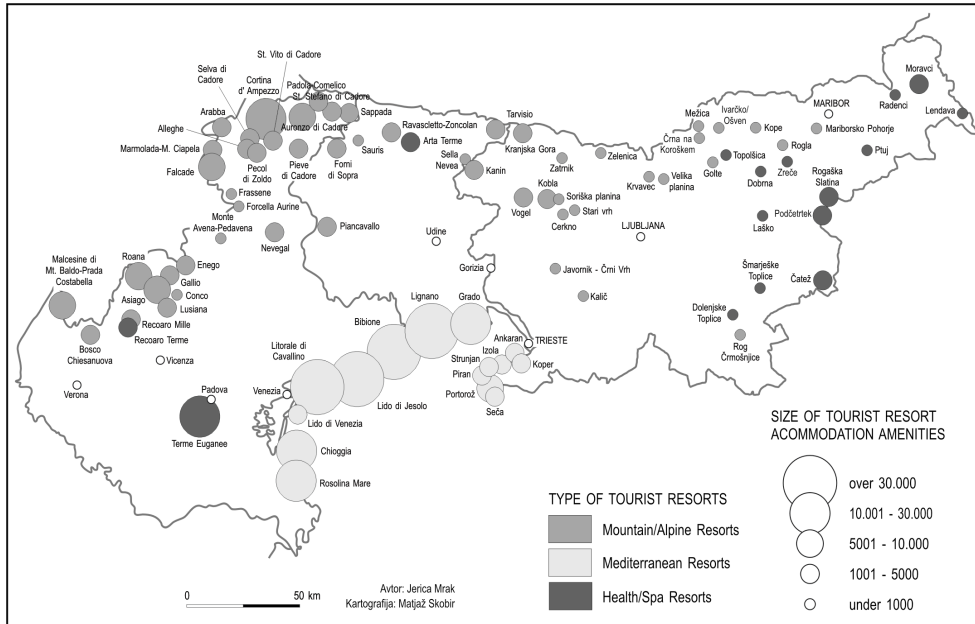
There is a large discrepancy between national institutions of the civic society and state governments regarding the certificate criteria. But, trans-national institutions have developed their own criteria and data base. The oldest association in Europe promoting and praising environmental care is the European Association for Environmental Education (1987). Their "Blue Flag" waves on close to 2000 European beaches and in almost 500 marinas. European certificates ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 have not long ago set new standards for the measurement of the sustainable approach towards physical and cultural landscapes. Twenty-one enterprises of Great Britain have recently introduced the measurement of the environmental quality on the grounds of the ISO 14000 system. (Hamele, 2001). The project Eco Labels for Sustainable Tourism has developed the idea even further by supporting co-operation between several subjects, promoting sustainable development in tourism, and theirs as well as other similar networks. Today, it exchanges ideas of several associations, like the Dutch Eceat, the Danish Econtrans, the Anpa and 15 other national and international institutions. Several countries in other parts of the world have developed their own internal eco-programs, have set ways for the sustainable development of tourism and have introduced certificates for those enterprises accommodating their efforts. The Costa Rican example is typical (Costa Rican Tourism Institute 1997).

Europe has an important role within this frame. A study done by WTO (World Tourism Organization), in 2002, has shown that among 104 examples of eco-labeling and of eco-promotion programs and of several forms of sustainable development actions on local level 78% are referring to tourism product in Europe. The interest of the private sectors is of similar intensity, namely 66% initiatives are of this background. The costs of projects are shared equally by the private sector (1/3), NGO (1/3) and governmental (1/3) institutions. Half of the initiatives and projects are less than five years old, their impacts are therefore of a symbolic nature, they have not penetrated into the core of the

tourist economy. But, nevertheless, this is an important shift towards sustainable development actions in tourism.

In this short article we would like to focus on the awareness for the need of sustainable management of resources among hotel managers and tourists, visiting the mountainous parts of the Alpen-Adriatic region of Europe. Finally we are going to elaborate on results of quantitative questionnaires made in several tourist resort of the region.

Map 1: Alpen-Adria: Accommodation Amenities 2000, Size of Tourist Resorts



TOURISM IN THE ALPEN - ADRIA REGION

The Alpen-Adria region occupies an area of northern Italy – the provinces of Veneto and Friuli Veneti-Giulia (26,209 km²) – and the young nation-state of Slovenia (20,251 km²); often southwest Austria, in particular the province of Carinthia, and northern parts of Croatia, in particular the region of Istria, are added to the region. We will focus on the Italian and Slovenian part of the region, where Alps meet the narrow Mediterranean plain of the Adriatic Sea and where coastal and mountain resorts are less than 100 kilometers away. The mountains, with up to 3400 meter high peaks, are the Southeast Alps, stretching about 350 kilometers in the east-westerly direction. As promotional slogans the term “On the Sunny Side of the Alps” and “In the Hearth of Alpen-Adria”, referring to the mountains of the region, is often used.

The Alpen-Adria region of Italy and Slovenia offers three major types of tourism: the coastal Mediterranean resorts, the traditional health spa "watering places", and the mountaineering and alpine-skiing centers. Our focus is on the latter! Slovenia is visited yearly by 1.9 million, the provinces of Veneto and Friuli Venetia-Giulia combined have 11.5 million tourists - making in Slovenia 6.7 million and in the Italian part of Alpen-Adria 50.7 million bed-nights a year in 2000). Bed-nights in winter-sport resorts of Slovenia make 14.2% of the overall number of bed-nights of the country (0.95 million), whereas in the Italian winter-sport resorts the relation is, with 12.6%, even lower (6.37 million). Alpen-Adria winter-sport resorts are therefore to a high extend urban recreation facilities, being in daily reach of the 12 million citizens of the Italian north, from Milan to Venice and Trieste. The major tourist profits out of bed-nights and related tourist services are made by the Adriatic coastal resorts of Grado, Lignano, Jesolo, Venice, Portorož and Poreč.

There are 51 alpine-skiing resorts in the Southeastern Alps in the regions Veneto, Friuli Venetia-Giulia of Italy and the Northern Primorsko and Gorenjsko region of Slovenia. The transition from predominantly agricultural villages to tourist resorts took place in the 1970's, with the exception of traditional 19th century developments like Bled, Cortina d'Ampezzo and Kranjska gora. The appearance of the settlements really changed in the late 1980's, just a decade ago, as huge commercial flats and second homes have been added to the picturesque alpine and transhumance rural image. The alpine pastures above villages have become urbanized. In regard to

- the number of tourist visits,
- the size of accommodation facilities and
- the overall length of skiing grounds,
- the following diversity can be distinguished:

Cortina d'Ampezzo is the largest tourist resorts in the discussed alpine region and in the Italian region of Veneto, having more than one million bed-nights a year, offering more than 10.000 hotel-beds and providing more than 40 kilometers of alpine skiing grounds;

The group of large tourist resorts consists of two: Nevegal and Falcade in the Italian region of Veneto (between 500.001 and one million bed-nights, 1001 - 5000 hotel-beds, the length of skiing grounds is at least between 11-20 kilometers);

There are 19 mid-size tourist resorts, accommodating yearly in average between 100.001 and 500.000 bed-nights, offering between 1001 and 5000 tourist beds and providing at least 10 kilometers of skiing grounds; just 3 resorts of that type are within the boundaries of Slovenia (Kranjska gora, Bohinj and Bovec);

By far the largest is the number of small-scale alpine tourist resorts: 29 resorts, of which 18 are on the territory of Slovenia. Here, the newly introduced market economy has not yet used up all of the available alpine space, offering in average less than 10 kilometers of skiing grounds, less than 1000 tourist beds and registering less than 100.000 bed-nights a year.

The terrain of mountains, the slopes and peaks surrounding the resorts, are used-up in different intensity. Out of 51 skiing-grounds in question, 35 have elevation above

1.500 meters; just on 19 the starting ground for the alpine skier begins below the named elevation. It is most interesting that the region of Veneto, by tourism most developed part of the area, has developed its higher grounds at the most: just 7 out of 27 Veneto mountain resorts have their skiing grounds lower than 1500 meters. In Slovenia, the development in this regard is in balance, but not in the length of slopes devoted to the skier. Small size skiing prevails. The peripheral region of Italy Friuli Venetia-Giulia has just one skiing ground on higher elevations (Piancavallo).

Development on low scale has been introduced in Southeastern Alps throughout different projects on the national scale and by transnational programs of the European Union. Interreg, Phare and other cross-border programs have improved infrastructure in the peripheral and increasingly empty space. Residential population in this part of the European alpine bow is at present just one third it was one century ago. Romanticizing the alpine landscape in urban areas has helped in keeping the appearance of some alpine parts untouched by tourism infrastructure, elsewhere mushrooming of second homes took recently place. Several national parks have been inaugurated in the 1970's and 1980's. The national mountaineering societies have worked on improving mountain huts to the standards of sustainability (waste-water, garbage) and have, at the same time introduced policies of bringing your own linen to mountain huts. Carrying your own (human) waste has not yet been introduced (as for example in California), just proposed by Slovenian mountaineering society.

Tab. 1: Major characteristics of selected Alpen-Adria winter-sport resorts, 2000

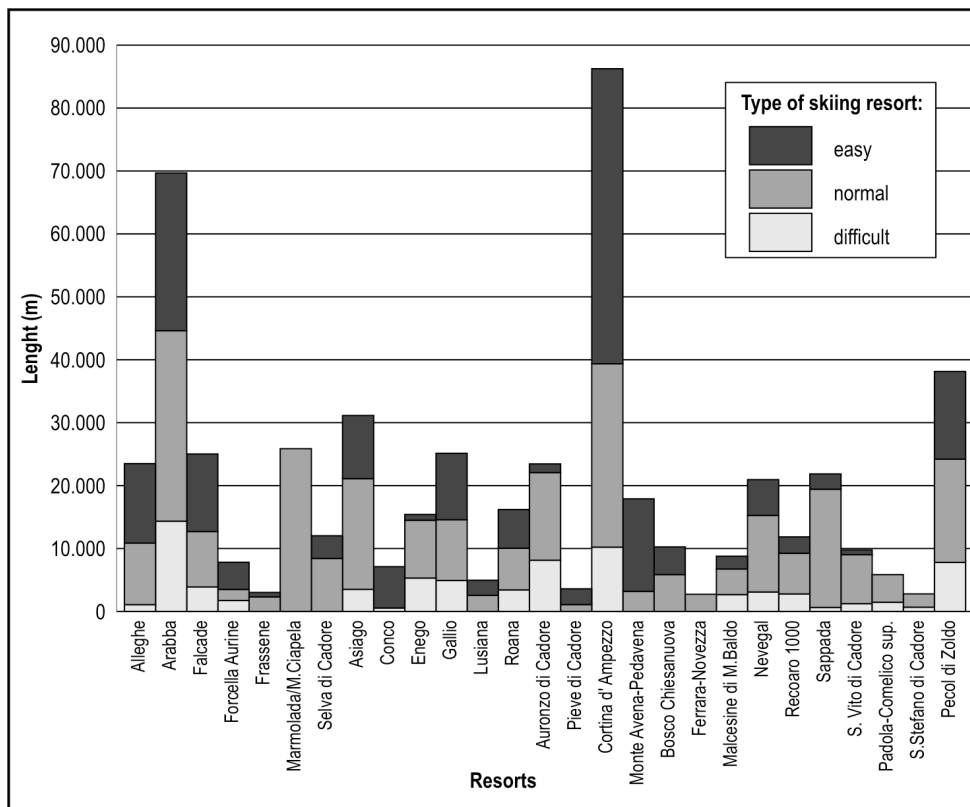
| | | Accommodation (beds) | Bed-nights | Alpine-skiing | Nordic skiing | Highest grounds |
|-----|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. | SLOVENIA /ALPS/ | 15.238 >726< | 948.153 >45.150< | 298 km >14 km< | 274 km >13 km< | 2306 m >1349 m< |
| 2. | Kranjska gora | 3579 | 303.001 | 31km | 42 km | 1623 m |
| 3. | Bohinj | 4056 | 285.343 | 18 km | 8 km | 1801 m |
| 4. | Bovec | 1654 | 102.030 | 15 km | 14 km | 2306 m |
| 5. | Rogla | 728 | 89.908 | 12 km | 30 km | 1517 m |
| 6. | FRIULI VENETIA-GIULIA /ALPS/ | 9.610 >1.602< | 1.040.911 >173.485< | 66 km >11 km< | 121 km >20 km< | 2065 m >1793 m< |
| 7. | Tarvisio | 1025 | 305.419 | 13 km | 62 km | 1760m |
| 8. | Piancavallo | 2800 | 270.470 | 11 km | 25 km | 1850 m |
| 9. | Ravascletto-Zancolan | 1891 | 152.477 | 19 km | 6 km | 1757 m |
| 10. | Sella Nevea | 634 | 59.038 | 8 km | 6 km | 1841 m |
| 11. | VENETTO /ALPS/ | 99.974 >3.702< | 5.331.507 >197.463< | 498 km >18 km< | 874 km >32 km< | 3270 m >1869 m< |
| 12. | Cortina d'Ampezzo | 21622 | 1167.327 | 87 km | 58 km | 3130 m |
| 13. | Nevegal | 1243 | 664.997 | 21 km | 18 km | 1680 m |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 14. | Falcade | 6180 | 503.383 | 25 km | 64 km | 2280 m |
| 15. | Auronzo Cadore | 6458 | 426.714 | 24 km | 83 km | 2220 m |
| 16. | Asiago | 8914 | 264.096 | 31 km | 148 km | 1959 m |
| 17. | Marmol./M.Ciapela | 3529 | 262.034 | 4 km | 15 km | 3270 m |
| 18. | Arabba | 1930 | 247.741 | 70 km | 4 km | 2958 m |
| 19. | Pecol di Zoldo | 4141 | 232.774 | 38 km | 11 km | 1890 m |
| 20. | Roana | 5438 | 215.692 | 16 km | 0 | 2009 m |
| 21. | Sappada | 2904 | 205.101 | 22 km | 0 | 2032 m |
| 22. | S.Vito Cadore | 3820 | 200.444 | 24 km | 83 | 1600 m |
| 23. | Alleghe | 1966 | 194.537 | 24 km | 0 | 2082 m |
| 24. | ALPEN – ADRIA /ALPS: Italy+ Slovenia/ | 124.822 >2.312< | 7.320.571 >135.566< | 862 km >15.9 km< | 1.269 km >23.5 km< | 3270 m >1670 m< |

>< = average per resort

Source: Statistični urad Republike Slovenije 2001, Istat 2001.

Figure 1: Alpen-Adria/Province Veneto: Mountain-Alpine Resorts Skiing Amenities



BETWEEN MARKET ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Governmental institutions of Italy and Slovenia which, share the same mountainous space of the Southeasterly Alps and the Mediterranean space of the northern Adriatic, do not forward certificates for the commitment to the idea of sustainability. International directions in that regard, like the Blue Flag and the ISO standards, are accepted though. Regional planning institutions, in accordance with the appropriate ministries, have set development standards for tourism in accordance with environmental standards introduced by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and the Rio Conference in 1992.

Tab. 2: Use of natural and human resources in resorts, 2002

| | | All | % |
|----|---|-----|------|
| | AVERAGE-DAY RESORT ACTIVITY | 225 | 100% |
| 1. | <i>Outdoor recreation /walking, sightseeing, ... /</i> | 74 | 32.9 |
| 2. | <i>Outdoor sports /skiing, tennis, .../</i> | 16 | 7.1 |
| 3. | <i>Indoor recreation /swimming, socializing, ... /</i> | 41 | 18.2 |
| 4. | <i>Indoor sports /chess, aerobics, .../</i> | 11 | 4.9 |
| 5. | <i>In- and outdoor education-culture /lecture, .../</i> | 6 | 2.7 |
| 6. | <i>Radio and TV</i> | 8 | 3.6 |
| 7. | <i>Activity – not specified</i> | 19 | 8.4 |
| 8. | <i>No activity</i> | 49 | 21.8 |
| | RESORT HIGHLIGHTS | 225 | 100% |
| 1. | <i>Mountainous/Alpine landscape</i> | 31 | 13.8 |
| 2. | <i>Climatic conditions</i> | 7 | 3.1 |
| 3. | <i>Way of life and culture</i> | 23 | 10.2 |
| 4. | <i>Food and Drink</i> | 25 | 11.1 |
| 5. | <i>Peace, other</i> | 7 | 4.1 |
| 6. | <i>Hospitality</i> | 51 | 22.7 |
| 7. | <i>Recreation possibilities</i> | 81 | 35.9 |
| | RESORT NO-NO'S | 225 | 100% |
| 1. | <i>No no-no's</i> | 101 | 44.9 |
| 2. | <i>Rare educational/cultural/other events</i> | 40 | 19.6 |
| 3. | <i>Lack of "after-hours socializing"</i> | 22 | 9.8 |
| 4. | <i>Lack of "day-to-day international/local information"</i> | 18 | 8.0 |
| 5. | <i>Short shopping hours</i> | 13 | 5.8 |
| 6. | <i>Lack of parking space</i> | 13 | 5.8 |
| 7. | <i>Lack of young people</i> | 4 | 1.8 |
| 8. | <i>Other</i> | 14 | 6.2 |

The field-work in the Alpen - Adria mountainous region, performed by students of Turistica – the College of Tourism and Hospitality of Portorož-Portorose, Slovenia, resulted

into findings important for the understanding the issue of sustainability. A questionnaire was distributed among three hundred guest of hotels (225 have been returned) and interviews with two dozen hotel managers have been carried out in spring of 2002. The issue was “sustainable development on the property and in the resort town”. In addition, mapping of the hotel property, including supporting infrastructure, took place.

In eight largest Alpen-Adria alpine resorts: Cortina d'Ampezzo, Falcade; Tarvisio and Piancavallo in Italy and Bovec, Kranjska gora; Bled, and Bohinj in Slovenia have tourists and managers alike had to answer questions. The field study was carried out in late March and early April 2002 as the winter season was almost over and the pre-summer season just started, due to early Easter. Several tourist enterprises have closed their operations by mid March already and have had no intention to open doors before June. Therefore research has had to be carried out predominantly in three and four star hotels, which operate all year long. Tourists, visiting such enterprises out of season, might not have been the average tourists of the resort, in particular if visits at the peak of both seasons are in question. Therefore, results obtained reflect the higher age of visitors and their, in general, higher education, as well as their intellectual spirits, showing interest for the problem of sustainable development. Mountaineering or skiing was not put into the foreground of interviewed visitors' interest. But, Cortina d'Ampezzo and Kranjska gora, which have major alpine skiing events every year and are summer hide-ways for the urban population of Italy and Germany are known just for that.

Following are major outcomes of the fieldwork, reflecting the analyses of qualitative interviews and empirical results, provided by the questionnaires:

1. Hotel managers are interested to invest into sustainable development if appropriate measures bring short-term or mid-term economic benefits. The introduced measure to limit the use of energy in guest rooms by combining the lights in rooms with the guests presence and the selective laundry-system, where towels and linens are washed on guest's request, has reduced the running energy costs in hotels by 30%. In addition has the limited use of detergents and waters added another 10% to the reduction of the operating costs.
2. Hotel managers dislike the attitude of resort governments as they try to implement ecological measures without warning and solely or mostly on costs of operating tourist enterprises. Therefore, in several winter-sport resorts of Italy consortiums of tourist enterprises have been established to deal with the problem, ahead of the imposition of the local or regional law.
3. Tourists are in favor of the idea of sustainable development as long as measures implemented do not effect
 - their pockets – their finances;
 - their privacy and behavioral tradition;
 - expected services at the resort.

In resort and municipalities discussion has flamed up if natural heritage is, and should remain, a “no cost good”. The implementation of fees by local communities

- for putting kayaks into waters,
- for parking on gravel grounds of mountain roads and passes,

- for transfer by sport utility vehicles on certain off-road alpine valleys,
- for the use paragliding facilities,
- for the use picnic grounds,
- and so on. This has steered up discussion, which yet has not ended.

In Italy and Slovenia entrance fees to national parks and natural heritage sites have not been introduced yet. The difficulty, as it seems, is also to distinguish whom to consider a payable customer: the international tourist, the citizen of the nation state, or the local resident on vacation as well? At man-made infrastructure facilities (tolls for tunnels, bridges, some alpine roads, toilets, parking on paved grounds, etc.), recreational grounds and cultural heritage attractions, with the exception of religious facilities, payment is taken as granted.

4. As our limited study of “the tourist’ attitude” has shown, the idea of saving energy and waters has not yet become the attitude of the general public visiting hotels in winter sport resorts of Italy and Slovenia. Instead, local governments and managers should think of it! In theory is the personal standpoint of the tourist to the issue of environmental protection positive. Deeper, dealing with the real day-to-day issues, just a few tourists are ready to go. The topics on pollution seem to be topics of the daily home-town routine and of the working day; on sundays/weekends/holidays we, as tourists, don’t want to deal with serious issues, such as this one is.

Tab. 3: Ecological behavior and standpoint of tourists, 2002

| A | Personal Attitude | All | in % |
|---|--|-----|-------|
| 1 | DRINKING TAP WATER IN HOTEL | | |
| | Yes | 81 | 36% |
| | No | 144 | 64% |
| 2 | TAKING A SHOWER IN HOTEL | | |
| | Once a day | 152 | 67.6% |
| | Twice a day | 48 | 21.3% |
| | Every second day | 15 | 6.7% |
| | Once a week | 10 | 3.1% |
| 3 | HOTEL TOWEL EXCHANGE POLICY | | |
| | Daily | 163 | 72% |
| | Not daily | 62 | 28% |
| | | | |
| B | Personal Standpoint | | |
| 1 | SEWAGE/GARBAGE DISPOSAL | | |
| | “I am sure it goes into a modern sewage system” | 35 | 16.6% |
| | “I don’t know where it goes, I become worried sometimes” | 175 | 77.8% |
| | “I don’t care about ecology, the least about sewage” | 30 | 13.3% |
| 2 | ECOLOGICAL APPROACH | | |
| | “Support the idea of sustainable development in tourist resorts” | 164 | 72.9% |
| | “Support the idea, but I don’t know if I like it always” | 21 | 9.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|----|-------|
| | “I am active in the ecological movement” | 21 | 9.3% |
| | “On vacation, I don't care about the idea of sustainable development” | 25 | 11.1% |
| 3 | INFORMATION ON ECOLOGY | | |
| | How would you like to be informed about the ecological issues in resorts like this? | | |
| | Newspaper | 24 | 10.7% |
| | Lecture/Talk/Discussion | 21 | 9.3% |
| | Local TV | 14 | 6.2% |
| | Hotel Reception | 9 | 4.0% |
| | Brochure/Leaflet | 6 | 2.7% |
| | On vacation I am not interested don't care about this topic | 56 | 24.9% |
| | No answer | 95 | 42.2% |

CONCLUSION

In Europe, the idealistic euphoria of the late 1980's and early 1990's, as environmental issues have been tackled, has declined. The national decision-making structures which address sustainability, like

- a national sustainable development coordination body;
 - a national sustainable development policy;
 - a environmental impact assessment law;
 - a national agenda 21 framework (introduced by the EU) and
 - a local/regional agenda 21 framework,
- have been put on hold.

Slovenia has for example nor national sustainable development policy nor Agenda 21 frameworks. In Italy sustainability is addressed most of the time on paper solely, except in places where bad experiences from the past, as the environment was neglected (pollution of waters/air, seaweed, landslides, fires, ...), has impacted the tourism industry, in particular tourist visits. There, local and regional steps were taken to deal with the matter. Winter-sport resorts, located in a certain valley or basin, have solved part of the oncoming problems with the efforts on local level, with semi-private organization structures and states' EU's financial help.

As our study proves, the environment has become solely the problem of the society and the economy where tourism is taking place. Tourists are not willing to solve the problem, nor being part of it. They are not discussing, nor want to discuss the issue in their favorite leisurely environment. If matters are getting worse they react. They react by finding another pleasure-offering winter sport resort in the Alps of Europe, in the Alps of New Zealand or in the Colorado Rockies where environmental issues are not put in the foreground of their holiday-making.

If the environment issue is an issue of the tourist industry, as it faces the burden of own declining of the economy and the disappearance of natural and cultural resources, societal actions to stimulate actors dealing with the problem had to be taken. Therefore measures on national and international level to praise “the good” must be favored. Similar to the “Blue Flag Award” which mark best beaches, a “Green Flag Award” could mark those mountain resorts, tourist establishments, and alike, being extremely environmental conscious.

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