

THE “TORRE DEL CERRANO” MARINE PROTECTED AREA AND THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS AS AN ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT TOOL

Guido Capanna Piscè

Carlo Bo University of Urbino, Italy

Received: December 7, 2021 Accepted: December 18, 2021 Online Published: December 20, 2021

Abstract

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in Protected Areas is a voluntary management tool and certification that enables protected areas to develop sustainable tourism for the benefit of the environment, local populations, businesses, and visitors. The EUROPARC Federation, of which Federparchi has been the Italian section since 2008, issues the internationally recognized Charter. The entire process is participative and integrated through a strategic approach that includes defining the strategic objectives to be pursued through an Action Plan, allocating the necessary resources, and monitoring the results achieved. This contribution aims to propose a critical analysis of the documentation produced by the managers of the Torre del Cerrano Marine Protected Areas (in Italy) following the process implemented during the months when the Charter was renewed (between autumn 2018 and spring 2019) and contained in the Strategy and Action Plan document. The author conducted a critical analysis to define the factors characterizing a protected area as the result of the participatory process.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism; Sustainable Development; Ecotourism Management, Certification, Marine Protected Area, SWOT analysis.

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UNWTO and UNEP, 2005, p. 12). Within this broad concept, ecotourism is defined as a type of sustainable tourism aimed at improving natural resource conservation and increasing environmental education.

According to several influential organizations, ecotourism can also provide socio-economic benefits. According to the United Nations (2012), ecotourism has the potential to increase income and job creation while “encouraging local and indigenous communities in host countries and tourists alike to preserve and respect the natural and cultural heritage” (Das and Chatterjee, 2015. p. 2). To that end, an effective ecotourism strategy necessitates the participation of numerous stakeholders, including resource managers, policymakers, communities, and tourists themselves.

Protected areas (PAs) are recognised as the world's most effective mechanism for nature conservation and represent a key market for nature-seeking tourists (Surendran and Sekhar. 2011); for these reasons, they provide a suitable context for the development of ecotourism. PAs have become the central actors in different contexts within the ecotourism phenomenon and, at the same time, the role of PAs can be further strengthened when considering the socio-economic and welfare effects they can exert on local territories and the communities around them.

The stimulus provided by Agenda 21 of 1992 (UN, 1992) also encouraged some actors to strengthen their commitment to promoting the philosophy and practices of ecotourism. In particular, in 1995, the EUROPARC Federation - an association that supports the management of European PAs - established the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas¹ (hereinafter referred to as ECST or the Charter). This initiative would appear to offer an effective management tool to combine competitiveness, well-being, and sustainability through a set of general principles and actions, using a triple bottom line approach (i.e. economic, social, and environmental) (Elkington, 1997). To achieve such an ambition, the Charter necessitates a strategic as well as a participatory approach within it.

The Charter plays an important role in the hoped-for development of tourism in the area, which is seen as a type of local economic development that is easier to achieve. Nevertheless over time and to an increasing extent, it has highlighted certain limits linked to its negative repercussions on the balance of natural ecosystems, to the extent that a problematic relationship between tourism and the environment must be anticipated. However, in some cases, such as the establishment of Protected Nature Areas, which were established to pursue the objectives of protecting and preserving resources in geographical areas with high naturalistic value and tourist potential, this problem appears to be lacking or at least attenuated, owing to their ability to respond to the need to promote tourist activities in a sustainable manner.

The history of protected areas shows how they have been the source of complex choices, arising from the contradictory tensions between the needs of the natural world and those of the human sphere. The fundamental cultural shift to respond to these tensions occurred when parks were conceived as laboratories for a non-homologising economy that was attentive to local peculiarities, instruments for managing the territory, important and indispensable assets, suitable not only for meeting conservation objectives (which remains the main reason for their establishment), but also for experimenting with different development opportunities.

The adoption of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) is a significant step in this direction, as it is a methodological and certification tool (Bravi, Santos, Pagano and Murmura 2020) (Murmura and Bravi 2020). for better management of protected areas, ensuring

¹ It is a voluntary agreement aimed at recognizing protected areas that positively meet the requirements for membership in the ECST, with the goal of promoting sustainable development and tourism management through the implementation of best practices. The development of the Charter's contents and methodology is the result of a collaboration between representatives of protected areas, the tourism industry, and their partners, led by the Federation of Regional Natural Parks of France under the aegis of the EUROPARC Federation, the pan-European non-governmental organization for the protection of Europe's protected areas, which manages the Charter with the support of the federation's national sections.

that tourism contributes to the balanced economic, social, and environmental development of Europe's protected areas. In fact, the collaboration of all interested parties to develop a common strategy and action plan for tourism development, based on an in-depth analysis of the local territorial situation, is a key component of the Charter. The goal is to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the protected area, as well as to continuously improve tourism management in the protected area for the benefit of the environment, the local population, businesses, and visitors.

Since its inception in 1995, the ECST has been involved in the development of more than 100 ecotourism areas throughout Europe.

The study sought to answer two key questions within this research framework: 1. Are strategic and participatory approaches truly critical to the effectiveness of ecotourism development? 2. How can strategic and participatory approaches to ecotourism development be effective? The paper begins with a discussion of the study's theoretical foundation.

The used methodology is then presented, and the research findings were also illustrated. Finally, conclusions, limitations, and future directions are presented.

2. Ecotourism Definition and Dimensions

The term "ecotourism" was coined nearly four decades ago, and it has been constantly modified and updated to the present day (Wood, 2002; Stronza, 2007). Today, ecotourism is defined as "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promote conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic participation of local populations" (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). It is worth noting how this definition emphasizes the importance of community involvement. The UNWTO defined ecotourism using the following criteria (UNWTO, 2002, pp. 4-5):

1. it includes "all nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourist is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures that prevail in natural areas";
2. it "includes educational and interpretation features";
3. it is generally, but not always, organized for small groups by specialized tour operators (Pencarelli and Dini, 2016), with service provider partners at the destinations being small, locally owned businesses;
4. ecotourism "reduces negative impacts on the natural and socioeconomic environment";
5. ecotourism "helps to maintain natural areas that are used as ecotourism attractions by:
 - generating economic benefits and wellbeing for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas for conservation purposes;
 - providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities;
 - and increasing awareness of the conservation of natural and cultural assets among both locals and tourists."

Most of the features already described in Ceballos-Lascurain's (1996) definition are clearly included in the UNWTO description of ecotourism's characteristics. It focuses on natural resources and the surrounding environment, emphasizing their role as ecotourism attractions and the importance of their conservation. Local communities are fully included in the UNWTO ecotourism perspective, as they are expected to benefit from the responsible management of the environment around them. The emphasis on educational features distinguishes this definition from previous definitions. According to the UNWTO definition, ecotourism must foster

environmental awareness, consciousness, and culture in local communities and “ecotourists² to fully promote environmental and socioeconomic benefits.

More recently, The International Ecotourism Society defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.”

Education is intended to include both staff and guests (TIES, 2015). It could be argued that natural resource conservation has remained at the heart of the definition, but other features have been condensed into a few key words. Firstly responsibility and awareness: tourists should travel responsibly to minimize their social, economic, and environmental impact; in other words, they should be aware of and respect the unique characteristics of the territory they are visiting. Secondly local people’s well-being: ecotourism must provide objective benefits to local communities in and around natural areas (Kouhhabibi, 2021). Wellbeing encompasses a broader perspective in which local community development includes socioeconomic, environmental, political, and psychological aspects (Das and Chatterjee, 2015). Third, culture: ecotourism must include interpretation and education to increase visitors and hosts knowledge, awareness, and environmental consciousness. According to this viewpoint, education is meant to be inclusive, underpinning the concept of a necessary overarching process of stakeholder involvement (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996).

2.1 Cultural and socio-economic dimensions

By providing more opportunities for earning a living through ecotourism-related employment, the development of ecotourism can improve both the standard of living and local business development within local communities (Ashley, 2002; Goodwin, 2002). Tourism-related job opportunities can range from tourism services to production systems.

The growth of ecotourism has the potential to increase social empowerment. Scheyvens (2000, p. 241) defines this as “...a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been confirmed or strengthened by an activity such as ecotourism.” From an individual standpoint, ecotourism provides direct benefits. When such benefits are shared among members of a community, its sense of cohesion and integration can be strengthened. In this view, education, and awareness, both for hosts and tourists, are essential for preserving and respecting the community’s traditions and cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2013). This process leads individuals and the community to gain a higher esteem and greater respect for their own culture, which in turn makes them more active and capable of becoming part of the decision-making process regarding ecotourism sites.

2.2 Environmental dimension

Individuals can be incentivized to protect natural resources as the direct economic benefits spread throughout the local community (Stronza, 2007; Surendran and Sekhar, 2011). Ecotourism can 'promote biodiversity conservation by providing economic benefits to communities' in this process (Das and Chatterjee, 2015, p. 5).

The development of ecotourism is based on “applying a green growth strategy in the context of tourism with the goal of sustainable use of finite natural resources” (Das and Chatterjee, 2015, p. 8). As a result, ecotourism is a viable alternative to the exploitative use of natural resources (Wood, 2002; Li, 2004; Nyuapane and Poudel, 2011). In this sense, Libosada (2009) describes ecotourism as the tangible aspect of conservation, while Holden (2003) underlines its ethical dimension. He claims that Ecotourism emphasizes the importance of resource conservation while adopting a conservation-based ethic and considering the economic interests of all stakeholders (Holden, 2003).

The framework for analysing ecotourism emphasizes “a mutual interdependence between the economic and socio-cultural aspects of ecotourism and natural resource conservation” (Das and Chatterjee, 2015, p. 14). However, there are examples of ecotourism sites that have failed to meet the goals of economic and social empowerment and environmental conservation due to a lack of proper site management and a lack of environmental consciousness among tourists. In fact, “proper” management of eco-tourism sites is one of the most important factors in their success. The dynamics of the three major stakeholders: resource manager (I); (II) community; and (III) tourists are especially important for the success of an ecotourism site; thus, they must be properly managed (Das and Chatterjee, 2015). Policies, management tools, and a strategic approach are required to avoid or manage stakeholder conflicts and to ensure that all stakeholders participate in the development of ecotourism.

It could be argued that ecotourism should be founded on a solid strategic approach to consider all of the triple bottom line dimensions systemically and holistically and to harmoniously manage the stakeholders’ diverse needs (Musso, 2019).

2.3 Ecotourism, Protected Areas and Participation

Among the factors driving the growth of the ecotourism market is the fact that tourists have become “greener” and demand “environmentally appropriate tourism experiences” (Sharpley, 2006, p. 8). Obviously, tourists only represent the demand side of the ecotourism market. On the supply side, PAs can be regarded as suitable (and in some cases, excellent) locations owing to their institutional mission. Indeed, PAs are defined globally as “clearly defined geographical spaces recognized, dedicated, and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” (Day et al., 2012, p. 9). The deep and strong conceptual connection between ecotourism and protected areas is clear from this PA definition.

In fact, PAs include several of the fundamental characteristics of ecotourism in their mission and function, such as:

1. They must be formally recognized by law and dedicated to specific conservation purposes.
2. To achieve their conservation goals, PAs must be properly managed, which means that all activities must aim to influence natural systems and human activities, ranging from careful environmental protection to resource sustainability (Dudley and Stolton, 2008).

PAs, like ecotourism sites, are expected to provide multifaceted benefits (Morandi et al., 2013; Kati et al., 2014; Scolozzi et al., 2014). in terms of preserving local biodiversity, preserving cultural and usual traditions, contributing to human well-being and wealth, and improving education, scientific research, recreational, and socioeconomic development activities Despite these advantages, “the designation and management of PAs is not always without conflict.” The approval and participation of local stakeholders has been identified as critical for the long-term success of protected area management (Kati et al., 2014, p. 2).

Warner (1997) was the first to recognize the importance of combining institutional and citizen participation in the pursuit of “sustainable orientation.” This collaboration is also required to propose a generalized model of participation based on consensus building, as well as to prevent or resolve conflict between stakeholders who may be impacted by sustainability-oriented decision making. In this regard, Tomićević, et al. (2010, p. 1) emphasized the importance of implementing the participatory approach to promote the sustainable use of natural resources. whereas Reed (2008) discovered evidence that stakeholder involvement can “improve the quality of environmental decisions.”

Participation in the management of PAs and ecotourism sites is the subject of several significant European case studies. A discriminant analysis survey of regional parks in the Slovenian Alps found that the more importance given to the factors that influence local populations' perceptions, the more significant their involvement in the process of creating, planning, and managing the protected area will be (Nastran and Istenic, 2015).

Bouamrane et al. (2016) highlighted some cases in France and Africa involving biosphere reserves that allow for continuous interaction between society and the environment and necessitate a process of active participation of various stakeholders who interact together to develop a unified proposal or a common purpose (in terms of vision, goals and actions).

3. The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The definition of the ECST certification procedures is mainly based on the recommendations of the study "Loving Them to Death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks" (EUROPARC, 1993) and the priorities contained in the recommendations of Agenda 21 and the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme entitled Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice. In addition, the IUCN Parks for Life action programme (1994) identifies ECST itself as one of the priorities for European parks.

ECST has taken on board the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity's International Sustainable Tourism Guidelines, providing a practical tool for their implementation in protected areas at a local level (Federparchi, 2021).²

The central element of the Charter is the collaboration with all stakeholders to develop a common sustainable tourism strategy and an action plan based on a thorough analysis of the local situation.

The Charter promotes five principles, which define and recognise good practice in the development and management of sustainable tourism in Europe's most precious landscapes.

The principles should inspire the promotion and the management of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas:

1. Giving priority to protection. A fundamental priority for the development and the management of sustainable tourism should be to protect the area's natural and cultural heritage and to enhance awareness, understanding and appreciation of it.
3. Contributing to sustainable development. Sustainable Tourism should follow the principles of sustainable development which means addressing all aspects of its environmental, social, and economic impact in the short and long term.
4. Engaging all stakeholders. All those affected by sustainable tourism should be able to participate in decisions about its development and management, and partnership working should be encouraged.
5. Planning sustainable tourism effectively. Sustainable Tourism development and management should be guided by a well-researched plan that sets out agreed objectives and actions.
6. Pursing continuous improvement. Tourism development and management should deliver ongoing improvement in sustainable environmental impacts, visitor satisfaction, economic performance, local prosperity and quality of life, requiring regular monitoring and reporting of progress and results.

² Protected areas that have received the Charter may then choose to implement STEPS II and III (agreements and specific action plans with individual enterprises and tour operators that have actively participated in Step I).

It seems clear that the choice of these principles was induced by the desire to lead the actors of the protected areas to a correct management of those areas, with the intention of combining the natural values to be preserved and the anthropic actions with those of sustainability, avoiding the so-called and undesirable “museification” of the area subject to environmental protection through the joint and coordinated action of the various actors involved.³

Therefore, a collaborative program between ECST, as a mutual commitment between protected area managers and each enterprise, will result in many mutual benefits. In fact, ECST aims at cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the development and management of tourism activities and at avoiding that protected area managers act in isolation. Therefore, ECST stakeholders choose to adopt working methods based on collaboration, which will be substantiated at each stage of implementation, encouraging the sharing of responsibilities, and emphasizing the individual and joint commitments of protected area managers and other stakeholders. Consequently, a cyclical monitoring of the management results obtained in the area appears necessary to evaluate the contribution of changes to the planned processes that may be necessary to achieve the predefined objectives.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool (EUROPARC, 2021) that enables protected areas, their communities, and businesses to work together for sustainable tourism development.

In this way, sustainability underpins the tourism sector in the area. Therefore, the process outlined in the Charter has 3 elements to enable companies, local businesses, and tour operators to share a common vision and objectives for the protected area they cover:

- Part I: Sustainable Destinations
 - The first part, the main one, addresses Sustainable Destinations, with reference to the geographical contexts in which a protected area falls. The Charter is assigned to the managing body of the protected area and covers a precise area of application of the Charter, which can be wider than the legally defined protected area.
- Part II: Sustainable Partners
 - The second part is addressed to local companies operating in sustainable tourism activities within the Charter area.
- Part III: Sustainable Tour Operators
 - Part III is specific to tour operators and travel agencies that bring visitors to protected areas and wish to contribute to the sustainable development of the Charter area.

3.1 ECST in Italy

In just a few years, ECST has become very important in Italy and it is now considered as a very useful tool for the governance of protected areas by parks, regions, and the Ministry of the Environment. Many factors have made this success possible. At the same time, there are some critical elements that will be important to consider for the future.

³ The actors are interested in the effects of proper management, which can have a positive induced effect on the areas in which they operate. “have multiple entities the resident population that, through the creation of a micro-entrepreneurship in tune with sustainable development policies, can enhance the territorial richness such as crops and typical products; public bodies such as the Park Authority that, through the Park Plan, manages the protected area in terms of fishing, hunting, tourism; administrations such as town or city councils that deal with natural resources within their mandate; industries such as tourism operators and water users; non-governmental organizations, research institutes and universities for whom the protected area is at the centre of their professional interests” (Quattrone, 2003, p. 95).

At the end of the 1990s, the Parco Regionale delle Alpi Marittime chose to be one of the seven pilot areas to test the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism promoted by the Europarc Federation. Thus, in 2001 it became the first ECST park in Italy and one of the first four in Europe. The Sibillini National Park and the Adamello Brenta Nature Park followed shortly afterwards. A few years later, Lombardy was the first region to decide to support and finance the candidature of four protected areas in its territory.

An important change took place in 2008: Federparchi and Europarc Italia, until then two separate bodies, merged to create a single association, which chose ECST as one of its priorities. Thus, thanks to Federparchi-Europarc Italia's relentless promotional and technical support work, a great interest in the tool developed among parks, regions, and the Ministry of the Environment.

Since then, the number of parks deciding to apply the Charter has been steadily increasing. Within a few years, the Apulia Region and the Marche Region decided to follow the example of Lombardy by promoting ECST among their regional parks. In 2011, the Italian Ministry of the Environment signed the first of a series of agreements with Federparchi-Europarc Italia, including support for the certification of some national parks and seminars and studies on ECST. In 2012, the Monte Rufeno Regional Reserve is European ECST area no.100.

In 2013, Federparchi-Europarc Italy receives the “Special Tourism Award” from the EUROPARC Federation for its “proactive commitment to support Italian protected areas in the implementation of ECST”. In 2014, the Torre del Cerrano Marine Protected Area is the first marine area in Europe to receive the Charter. In 2015, two parks (the Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta and the Parco Regionale Dune Costiere) become the first ECST Phase II partners.

Today the Italian network has 36 certified areas and many more are candidates.

Italian protected areas like the Charter because it should be remembered that almost all Italian parks are inhabited territories. Dialogue, collaboration and the consent of the local communities that live and work in the area is therefore essential. ECST, with its voluntary nature, its defined scope, and its clear objectives, is a very effective support to the instruments of public participation that Italian law already provides for. The Charter therefore responds to a real need felt by park management bodies.

Another general aspect: Italy is a tourist destination of excellence. The tourism market is very important for the country, but the institutional players involved in the sector are many and often disconnected. For this very reason, it is essential to develop coordination between the policies on the ground, which can foster development without jeopardising “capital” (the cultural and natural heritage). The methodology proposed by ECST may also be an excellent response to this need.

The international side of the Charter is also a very attractive element for parks, which perceive the appeal and potential of receiving recognition at a European level with ECST.

Without any doubt, the role played by Federparchi-Europarc Italia in recent years has been decisive for the success of ECST in Italy. The federation coordinates and animates the Italian network and spreads awareness of ECST, including through political lobbying towards institutions. Above all, it offers technical assistance to the protected areas that request it: first of all this technical support takes the form of continuous and high-quality accompaniment of the park up to its candidacy. Then, after accreditation, the park receives support for monitoring and continues to benefit from training and refresher courses through technical seminars and exchanges. The commitment of the Ministry for the Environment and some Regions, which have also made financial resources available, has also been decisive in increasing the number of certified parks.

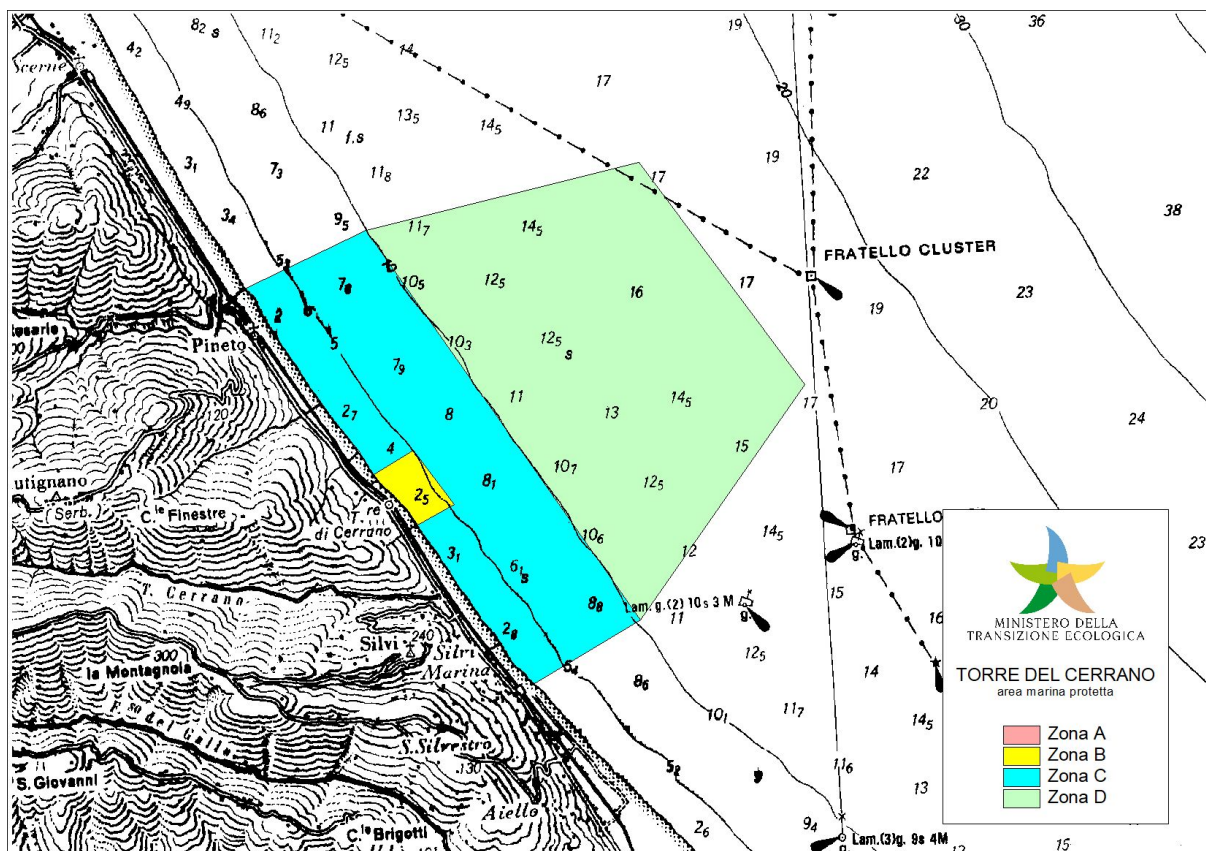
As these above mentioned elements show, ECST has been promoted, managed, and perceived as a national network programme, and not just as many individual park routes.

Another distinguishing point for the Italian experience is the dialogue with the private sector, which has been actively involved from the outset, already in ECST Phase I. In fact, private operators, in fact, are also invited to start the Charter process together with the park and the public authorities, while obviously maintaining different roles and responsibilities. In many cases, they have proved to be a great strength of the Italian ECST pathways.

4. The “Torre del Cerrano” Marine Protected Area

The Marine Protected Area “Torre del Cerrano” was established by ministerial decree on October 21 2009 (EUAP code 1226, extension: 3,430 hectares, coastline involved: 7,103 metres) and comprises a territory that stretches on the coast of Teramo between the two municipalities of Pineto and Silvi. This area is subdivided into zones subject to different protection regimes, taking into account the environmental characteristics and the socio-economic situation there. It provides for a restricted zone B (general reserve), a square area of about one km on each side facing Torre del Cerrano, a zone C (partial reserve) of 14 square km, which covers the entire extension of the sea front up to about 2 km from the coast, and a large trapezoidal zone D (protection) of about 22 square km up to the three-mile limit (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 – “Torre del Cerrano” PMA Zones (Reference I.I.M. nautical chart No. 43 scale 1:100,000)



There are several reasons that led the establishment of this marine protected area. First of all, the coexistence of different habitats in the waters of the “Torre del Cerrano” Marine Protected Area, which “presents two distinct environmental typologies in close relation to each other: the typical Adriatic sandy seabed, which characterizes the largest portion of the area, and

some parts of the bottom reefs, both by the semi-submerged rocks of the ancient port of Atri and the submerged structures of the provincial marine protection oasis, as well as some outcrops of conglomeratic geological formations.” (ministerial decree of 21 October 2009)

The area is home to a good number of marine animal species, both pelagic and benthic, and a small but important contingent of plant species.

The “Torre del Cerrano” MPA was the first marine protected area in Europe to obtain, in 2014, the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism. That has allowed it to represent at European level a model of “sustainable” and efficient Park that pursues the protection, promotion and enhancement of the territory, through the involvement of all the actors. In 2018 “Torre del Cerrano” MPA, started the process of renewing the Charter.

The following information and considerations relate to the data used to reapply for renewal of the Charter - Phase 1.

4.1 The tourism context

Among the direct anthropogenic impacts, those related to tourism activities are certainly a determining factor in areas, such as that of the MPA “Torre del Cerrano”, affected by significant summer tourist flows. The coastal strip is an important transition between ecosystems, where we find habitats hosting highly specialised plant and animal species, but also the main tourist attraction of the area. Tourism activities attracts thousands of tourists and visitors every year and, if managed in a “sustainable” way, can represent a strategic economic sector for the territory.

The quality of tourism offer, and the composition of the demand are a direct consequence of all the businesses that directly and indirectly, can offer tourism services, to coordinate and network to their needs and expanding, over time, the users catchment area. The data reported here represent an overview of the tourism sector in the ECST area.

The “Torre del Cerrano” Marine Protected Area lies between the municipalities of Silvi and Pineto, towns on the Adriatic coast whose seaside development originated in the period between the two World Wars. The development of “second home” phenomenon has produced, subsequently, different effects and consequences on the socio-economic context of the Abruzzo Region. The coastal municipalities have benefited to a certain extent, from the expansion of holiday homes by developing the connections and services present on their territory.

This led to the creation of collateral economic activities that contributed to the settlement of the population in the coastal towns of Teramo province, also leading to a redistribution of the regional population along the coastal areas. In the years that followed, Pineto and Silvi became the destination for tourists, both Italian and foreign, who chose these beaches to spend their holidays for their tranquillity, clean sea and the beautiful pine forest behind the beach, an example of an ideal family holiday.

In 2017 (ISTAT data refers to the period in which the Charter renewal dossier was presented), with 104.000 arrivals, Pineto and Silvi attracted around 19% of the tourism of the entire Teramo province and have grown by over 27% in the previous fifteen years, although the number of overnight stays has remained constant. Pineto recorded 398,000 overnight stays, compared with 270,000 in Silvi, and a similar number of arrivals (50,000 in Pineto and 54,000 in Silvi).

Foreigners account for 23% of total overnight stays in Pineto and 15% in Silvi (in the province of Teramo they account for 15% of overnight stays in the area). As far as accommodation facilities are concerned, the tourist offer is equal to 9,100 beds, equally distributed between the two municipalities, representing 18% of the accommodation capacity in the province of Teramo. The type of accommodation is very different in the two municipalities: in Silvi 60% of the beds are in hotels, and only 38% in Pineto.

The analysis on years 2012-2017, shows how the recovery (after 2009, the year of the L'Aquila earthquake) in terms of tourist arrivals derives from a greater attractiveness for national visitors, with the share of Italian tourists increasing by about 20% in recent years, while the foreign component remains stable. On the other hand, overnight stays appear to be slightly down, mainly due to the decrease in the number of nights spent in the area by foreign visitors (-10% in the years considered).

4.2 Stakeholder

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism involves everyone and it is open to anyone who wants to cooperate constructively with the protected areas institutions and network with other operators. To this end, the stakeholders have been promptly informed of the MPA's decision to renew its membership of ECST, and the schedule of meetings has been communicated well in advance. The stakeholders involved are: Local Authorities, farmers, restaurateurs, managers/owners of accommodation facilities, local guides, cultural and environmental protection associations, land professionals and local development agencies. The involvement of these actors has been continuous and, direct throughout the process by, sharing the materials of the meetings, collecting their contribution also outside the scheduled times and trying to attract the interest in participation also from subjects who had not joined the initiative during the initial phase.

The local stakeholders that took part in the process of renewing the ECST candidacy of the “Torre del Cerrano” Marine Protected Area are the following:

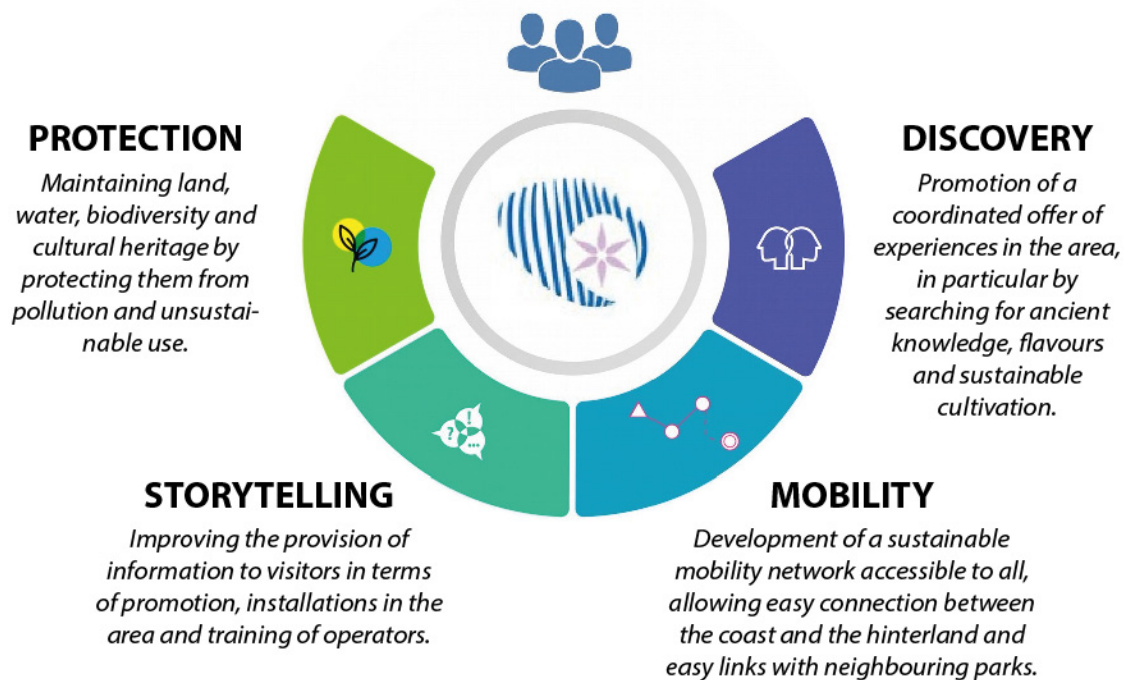
- 2 Protected Areas: AMP “Torre del Cerrano”, Ris. Nat. Reg. WWF Oasis “Calanchi di Atri”;
- 3 Local Public Authorities: Municipality of Pineto, Municipality of Silvi, Province of Teramo;
- 4 Universities and 1 School Institute;
- 26 Private tour operators;
- 13 Associations.

4.3 The shared strategy for sustainable tourism

The methodology for constructing the new ECST Strategy for the “Torre del Cerrano” Marine Protected Area was characterised by an inductive approach. Two cycles of meetings on the territory were constructed with the aim of redefining a common strategy for developing more sustainable tourism within the ECST area. Therefore, from the initial meetings of the participatory process the four strategic axes (Fig.2) emerged through a critical and shared re-reading of the 2014-2018 Plan of Actions and a joint proposal - and represent the result of the eight strategic priorities of the Authority and the five that emerged from the operators in the area and the representatives of the municipal administrations.

Each strategic axis is linked to an operational objective that has served to guide and stimulate the development of concrete actions more effectively.

Figure 2 – The Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy 2019-2023



These strategic axes are intended to provide coherence to the actions proposed by the stakeholders involved and to indicate the general priorities of the Plan itself. The efforts of each of the “stakeholders” have focused on the put into practice of these axes, through alliances built within the Charter Forum.

Crossing the four identified strategic axes with the ECST Key Issues for Sustainable Tourism resulted in the strategic matrix of the Plan.

4.3 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses

Among the various activities carried out by the thematic tables coordinated by the managing body, the activity that deserves special mention is the one carried out for the definition of a first common vision on the territory’s strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the development of sustainable tourism in the marine protected area deserves a special mention. The results of this vision were used to carry out a SWOT⁴ analysis, which, as is known, “is one of the most widespread methodologies currently used to analyse complex economic-territorial contexts, since it is a tool that guides the critical analysis of different and complementary information related to a given reference context which allows drawing from such information valuable indications for the definition of appropriate development strategies and/or intervention policies” (Scipioni and Mazzi, 2011, p. 75).

Characterizing factors (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) are primarily determined in two ways: at the “desk” and through work group (participatory). In the former, it is the researcher who formulates the forecast based on data collected by “expert knowledge” in a neutral and objective manner. However, participatory techniques are used in the latter to identify shared scenarios through joint analysis between experts and stakeholders. (Fera, 2008).

⁴ The acronym famously refers to the aspects that the SWOT analysis examines: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.

The second is a critical analysis of the results of the SWOT survey conducted by “Torre del Cerrano” MPA managers and included in the Strategy and Action Plan Document. The above-mentioned critical analysis was carried out by the author to achieve a positive comparison for the identification of the factors characterizing the protected area. The contents of the first survey, known as the participatory survey, are the result of a territorial analysis of the protected area and have been shared and thoroughly studied with all public and private subjects operating in the area, through collective and individual meetings. The distinguishing factors were identified using a “Desk” methodology, which entails the researcher’s observations based on contextual data (the prediction of scenarios is based on neutral and objective “expert knowledge”).

The issues highlighted concerns about the geographical location, environmental quality, aspects of hotel and non-hotel accommodation, tourist attraction factors, entrepreneurial presence, and territorial competitiveness levels (Palmeira, 2017).

Firstly, among the "strengths" there are: the marine protected area’s favorable location, good infrastructures (particularly highways and railways), close (proximity) of sites of cultural interest; the wine and food tradition; the well-developed coastal accommodation system, centred on the hotel sector, of medium quality and with a good quality/price ratio; and, also a significant emphasis on sustainability. Below there are details of the results of the analysis:

- Localisation
 - Central geographical location;
 - Good connections to Pescara and Ancona airports;
 - Proximity to the ports of Giulianova, Roseto degli Abruzzi and Pescara
 - Good motorway connections (A14, A25);
 - Proximity to sites of historical, cultural, traditional, enogastronomic;
 - Beautiful landscape in a sustainable and relaxing tourist environment;
 - Sense of security, absence of petty crime.
- Hospitality
 - Well-developed coastal accommodation system of average quality;
 - Good diversification of the accommodation offer, particularly for families;
 - Sense of hospitality neither mediated nor artificial;
 - Good quality/price ratio and prices fairly in line with the average;
 - Medium-level event calendar, with some “must-see” events.
- Sustainability
 - Cycle path: “Adriatic Green Corridor”
 - Presence of projects linked to the promotion of sustainability of accommodation structures and tourist services (“Friend of the Park”);
 - Birth of projects linked to electric and sustainable mobility in the territory.

Among the “weaknesses” there are elements that we could define as “recurring”, i.e. elements that had already emerged from the analysis carried out in the first five years of the Charter, such as the low popularity of local attractive factors, the low attitude of operators to mutual collaboration and the issue of seasonality. In the participatory activities and in the analysis “at the desk”, new elements and new needs emerged on the part of the operators involved in the Forum, also thanks to the numerous training activities that the MPA implemented, such as, for example, the need for a true integration between “nature and culture” and for a stronger interconnection with Atri and with the other nearby Protected Areas:

- Attractive factors
 - Some attractions (cultural, religious, food and wine) are only known in within specific niches;
 - Lack of integration between natural and cultural attractions for mutual promotion.
- Interconnection
 - Poor connection between the seaside area and the immediate hinterland and with the other Abruzzo Protected Areas;
 - Weak railway accessibility, especially to Rome.
- Business dynamism
 - Still weak associative process among the operators and little attitude to produce “value chains”;
 - High average age of the operators and low generational turnover;
 - Guest information system to be improved, developed and coordinated.
- Seasonality and competitiveness
 - Operations concentrated in the summer period with no extension of the season;
 - Low visibility of the territory in terms of promotion and marketing, especially for foreign markets.

With reference to the opportunities the evidence mainly concerned those that may arise from the new opportunities to de-seasonalise the tourist offer beyond the summer period deriving in particular from the participation of the MPA in the Interreg Med DestiMED Project, taking advantage of the possibility to explore the seaside coast, the pine forest, but also the countryside and hill areas by visiting villages, oil mills, places of art:

- Innovation in mobility services in the area, with attention also for the disabled, and connections with the hinterland;
- Seasonal adjustment of the tourist offer beyond the summer period, taking advantage of the possibility of practising sport and exploring the seaside Riviera, the pinewoods, but also the countryside and hillside areas, visiting villages, oil mills, places of art, etc.
- High environmental quality of the accommodation facilities combined with authenticity of the welcome, staff training and well-being in the area;
- Innovative and diversified promotion and marketing of the area.

Referring to and threats the evidence mainly concerned those linked to the cut in funding for tourism, as well as a chronic lack of a real tourism development strategy by the Region Abruzzo and poor management of tourist services and urban decorum:

- Deterioration of the state of the water and increased pollution of the coast and the territory;
- Low interest of inhabitants and tour operators in their land in terms of environmental awareness;
- Non-competitive individualism of structures;
- Loss of traditions and territorial identity;
- Cutting of funds for tourism by local politicians and poor management of tourist services and urban decorum.
- Erosion phenomena
- Overtourism

In conclusion, the “desk” analysis confirmed the issues related to the characterizing factors highlighted in the “participatory” analysis, but, with reference to the “strong points”, it further highlighted some others such as the proximity of the port facilities of Giulianova and Roseto degli Abruzzi and Ancona airport, in addition to that of Pescara; but, above all, it draws attention to the importance of the Adriatic Cycle Route, also known as the 'Green Adriatic Corridor', the track that runs along the Adriatic coast. In fact, the Abruzzo Region has financed the completion of the entire 132 km section of the regional network, valuing the important potential of cycle tourism. It also takes into account other threats such as those that may derive from erosion phenomena (both of the beaches and of the hills behind the coastal stretch), from the pollution levels of the Adriatic Sea water and from the risks related to the exceeding of the tourist load capacity.

5 Concluding Discussions and Implications

The analysis of the work carried out in the “Torre del Cerrano” MPA produced results on:

- The role of the strategic and participatory approaches for the effectiveness of ecotourism development;
- How these approaches can be effective.

The analysis theoretically confirmed (Yin, 2013) the central role played by strategic and participatory approaches in enhancing the effectiveness of the ecotourism development process within PAs. Such approaches are not only important, but pivotal to the effectiveness of the ecotourism development process within PAs. The analysis also highlighted those factors that are affected by these approaches (Musso, 2019).

Aside from the economic and social factors, another important factor emerged: the cultural factor. This lends support to the literature’s thesis that ecotourism is characterized by a mutual interdependence among economic and socio-cultural aspects related to natural resource conservation (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Das and Chatterjee, 2015).

The analysis also identified appropriate good practices that should be implemented for these approaches to be effective in the ecotourism development process, while simultaneously improving the three pillars of sustainable development (ecological, economic, and social).

Ecotourism can be effective when it is:

- driven by a conservation-oriented authority such as a PA; and
- guided by a participatory strategy such as the one promoted by the ECST.

The analysis confirms that ecotourism development can be improved, primarily by adopting a holistic approach (Musso, 2019), and provides additional credit to previous streams of literature.

This viewpoint is intended to include not only the site-specific social, economic, and environmental dimensions of ecotourism, but also the cultural dimension. Considering the latter, the analysis demonstrates the importance of PAs in the development of ecotourism. When guided by a collaborative and strategic approach, such as the one required by the ECTS, a PA can function as a visionary catalyst. Through a process of stakeholders’ engagement, such catalytic action can activate a positive and reinforcing loop that can improve local socioeconomic and ecological wellbeing.

5.1 Critical issues

While there are many positive aspects, there are also some critical points and weaknesses.

The first critical aspect is coordination, planning, and the actual possibility of completing the Charter's strategy and action plan in five years. The constant political and strategic changes that characterize the Italian situation at the national, regional, and local levels will inevitably have serious consequences for protected areas. It is also frequently difficult to involve public authorities actively and continuously in the Forum, despite the fact that they are critical for coordinating policies in the area.

The protected areas' perpetual uncertainty about the public funds available to implement what has been planned is also a serious issue.

Another source of weakness sometimes the very reasons why parks begin the ECST process, pressure coming from the top (ministry or region) or interest in gaining European recognition without fully adhering to the concept and method. Similarly, the change of presidents and directors of certified parks is a delicate matter: sometimes, the new management of the protected area does not fully understand or underestimates the importance of the ECST route, which they have not "seen come into being." In these cases, ECST becomes just one of many projects entrusted to a single responsible official, rather than the Park Authority's overall working method. When this occurs, ECST may lose its value, and the work done with the territory through the Forum may become ineffective.

5.2 Looking ahead

Looking ahead, it appears critical to strengthen and support the tremendous commitment of the many chairmen, directors, and officers who, despite the challenges, are enthusiastically implementing the Charter in their respective territories with excellent results.

Dialogue between the Park Authority and the private sector will become increasingly important in the future, particularly as Phase II of the ECST is developed. To be successful, however, Phase I must be solid, and the Park Authority as a whole, as well as the public authorities, must always prioritize the Charter. Only by doing a clear and stable long-term political and strategic framework can be established that private parties can decide to engage.

The strength of the Italian system is also the national network, powered by Federparchi-Europarc Italia, should be maintained, also through the development of joint projects. At the same time, it is critical to emphasize and improve the European aspect of ECST. This is also the path outlined in the Europarc Federation 2020 Strategy. The Federation has already done and can do a lot in terms of European projects, exchanges, technical seminars, events, lobbying European and international institutions, involvement of private ECST partners in the European network, and so on. In this regard, it will be necessary in the future for Italian protected areas to strengthen their commitment to the European network in terms of presence, participation, information exchange, and involvement.

ECST in Italy is an extremely interesting experience that should be preserved, enhanced, and valued at the local, national, and European levels.

References

1. Ashley, C., & Roe, D. (2002). Making tourism work for the poor: strategies and challenges in southern Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 19(1), 61-82.
2. Bouamrane, M., Spierenburg, M., Agrawal, A., Boureima, A., Cormier-Salem, M.-C., Etienne, M., Mathevet, R. (2016). Stakeholder engagement and biodiversity conservation challenges in social-ecological systems: some insights from biosphere reserves in western Africa and France. *Ecology and Society*, 21(4).
3. Bravi, L., Santos, G., Pagano, A., Murmura, F. (2020). Environmental management system according to ISO 14001: 2015 as a driver to sustainable development. *Corporate Social*

- Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(6), 2599-2614.
4. Camuffo, M., Soriani, S., Zanetto, G. (2011). The evolution of marine protected areas (MPAs): The North Adriatic case. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*.
 5. Ceballos-Lascurain, H. (1996). *Tourism, Ecotourism, and Protected Areas: The State of Nature-based Tourism Around the World and Guidelines for Its Development*. IUCN.
 6. Day, J., Dudley, N., Hockings, M., Holmes, G., Laffoley, D. d. A., Stolton, S., Wells, S. M. (2012). *Guidelines for applying the IUCN protected area management categories to marine protected areas*. IUCN.
 7. Dudley, N., Stolton, S. (2008). Defining protected areas: an international conference in Almeria, Spain. *IUCN, Gland*.
 8. E, F. (2021). *La Carta Europea per il Turismo Sostenibile nelle Aree Protette (CETS)*. Retrieved 27/11/2021 from
 9. Eagles, P. F., McCool, S. F., Haynes, C. D. (2002). *Sustainable tourism in protected areas: Guidelines for planning and management*. Iucn.
 10. Elkington, J. (1998). *Partnerships from cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st-century business* [<https://doi.org/10.1002/tqem.3310080106>]. 8, 37-51.
 11. EUROPARC. (2021). Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. In E. Federation (Ed.). Regensburg, Germany.
 12. Fera, G. (2008). *Comunità, urbanistica, partecipazione: materiali per una pianificazione strategica comunitaria*. F. Angeli.
 13. Goodwin, H. (2002). Local community involvement in tourism around national parks: opportunities and constraints. *Current Issues in tourism*, 5(3-4), 338-360.
 14. Holden, A. (2003). In need of new environmental ethics for tourism? *Annals of tourism research*, 30(1), 94-108.
 15. Kati, V., Hovardas, T., Dieterich, M., Ibisch, P. L., Mihok, B., & Selva, N. (2015). The challenge of implementing the European network of protected areas Natura 2000. *Conservation Biology*, 29(1), 260-270.
 16. Kouhhabibi, M. (2021). Feeling the Pulse of Trade in the Age of Corona: Artificial Intelligence and E-Commerce. *International Journal of Economic Behavior (IJEb)*, 11(1), 23-35.
 17. Li, W. (2004). Environmental management indicators for ecotourism in China's nature reserves: A case study in Tianmushan Nature Reserve. *Tourism Management*, 25(5), 559-564.
 18. Libosada Jr, C. M. (2009). Business or leisure? Economic development and resource protection—Concepts and practices in sustainable ecotourism. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 52(7), 390-394.
 19. Madhumita, D., & Bani, C. (2015). Ecotourism: A panacea or a predicament? *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 14, 3-16.
 20. Maniglio, A. C. (2009). Paesaggio costiero, sviluppo turistico sostenibile. *Paesaggio Costiero, Sviluppo Turistico Sostenibile*, 7.
 21. Morandi, F., Morandi, F., Niccolini, F., Marzo, D., Sargolini, M., Tola, A. (2013). *Organizzazione e pianificazione delle attività ecoturistiche: principi ed esperienze*. Franco Angeli.
 22. Murmura, F., Bravi, L. (2020). *I sistemi di gestione per la qualità, l'ambiente e l'etica*. Aracne Editrice.
 23. Musso, F. (2019). Multidimensional and Interdisciplinary Approach for Behavioral Economics. *International Journal of Economic Behavior (IJEb)*, 9(1), 1-2.
 24. Nastran, M., & Cernic Istenic, M. (2015). Who is for or against the park?: Factors

- influencing the public's perception of a regional park: A Slovenian case study. *Human Ecology Review*, 21(2), 93-111.
25. Nations, U. (1992). *Agenda 21*. United Nations.
 26. Nature, I. U. f. C. o., Parks, I. C. o. N., Areas, P., Nature, F. o., Europe, N. P. o., Programme, I. E. (1994). *Parks for Life: Action for Protected Areas in Europe*. IUCN.
 27. Negrea, V. D., Fortofoi, M.-D., Rafan, L. I., Negrea, I. (2006). Sixth Environment Action Programme Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice. *Environmental Engineering & Management Journal (EEMJ)*, 5(6).
 28. Nyaupane, G. P., Poudel, S. (2011). Linkages among biodiversity, livelihood, and tourism. *Annals of tourism research*, 38(4), 1344-1366.
 29. Palmeira, M. (2017). Prejudice and Discrimination in Seaside Retailing. Comparative Analyses between Brazil and Italy. *International Journal of Economic Behavior (IJEB)*, 7(1), 63-79.
 30. Pencarelli, T., Dini, M. (2016). The Tourism Intermediation System: The Relationship between Travel Agencies and Tour Operators. *International Journal of Economic Behavior (IJEB)*, 6(1), 97-112.
 31. Reed, M. S. (2008). Stakeholder participation for environmental management: a literature review. *Biological conservation*, 141(10), 2417-2431.
 32. Scheyvens, R. (2000). Promoting women's empowerment through involvement in ecotourism: Experiences from the Third World. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 8(3), 232-249.
 33. Scipioni, A., Mazzi, A. (2011). *Gestire e promuovere un territorio. Linee guida, strumenti operativi e casi studio: Linee guida, strumenti operativi e casi studio*. FrancoAngeli.
 34. Scolozzi, R., Schirpke, U., Morri, E., D'Amato, D., Santolini, R. (2014). Ecosystem services-based SWOT analysis of protected areas for conservation strategies. *Journal of environmental management*, 146, 543-551.
 35. Sharpley, R. (2006). Ecotourism: A consumption perspective. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 5(1-2), 7-22.
 36. Shipp, D. (1993). *Loving Them to Death?: Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks*. Federation of Nature and National Parks in Europe.
 37. Stronza, A. (2007). The economic promise of ecotourism for conservation. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 210-221.
 38. Surendran, A., Sekar, C. (2011). A Comparative Analysis on the Socio-economic Welfare of Dependents of the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR) in India. *Margin: The Journal of Applied Economic Research*, 5(3).
 39. TIES. (2015). *What is ecotourism?* Retrieved 27/11/2021 from
 40. Tomićević, J., Shannon, M. A., Milovanović, M. (2010). Socio-economic impacts on the attitudes towards conservation of natural resources: Case study from Serbia. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 12(3), 157-162.
 41. UNWTO. (2013). *UN General Assembly: ecotourism key to eradicating poverty and protecting environment*. UNWTO. Retrieved 27/11/2021 from
 42. UNWTO, U.N.E.P. (2005). *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*.
 43. Vallarola, F. (2011). *Le aree marine protette*. ETS Editore.
 44. Warner, M. (1997). 'Consensus' participation: an example for protected areas planning. *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice*, 17(4), 413-432.
 45. Wood, M. (2002). *Ecotourism: Principles, Practices and Policies for Sustainability*. Herndon, USA.

46. Yin, R. K. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. *Evaluation*, 19(3), 321-332.
47. Zanni Ulisse, P., Sgattoni, M. (1983). *Cerrano ieri e oggi*. Amministrazione provinciale di Teramo.

