

Photo by Valsugana Lagorai

VALSUGANA
LAGORAI

VALSUGANA LAGORAI

THE CASE STUDY 1/4

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INTRO

WENATOUR PROJECT

WeNaTour is an Innovation Alliance project (ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PI-ALL-INNO) funded with support from the European Commission - Erasmus+ program under Grant Agreement No 101111561. The project aims at training new professionals for sustainable tourism and exploring emerging markets while keeping the well-being of local communities and preserving the environment at the core of its strategies, towards a more responsible and sustainable future.

As part of its efforts, WeNaTour highlights four case studies of certified sustainable tourism destinations. These destinations, selected for their commitment to sustainable tourism, include Valsugana Lagorai in Italy, Colinele Transilvaniei in Romania, Siena in Italy, and Nassfeld Lesachtal Weissensee in Austria. Each case study is presented in a factsheet format, offering insights into its approach to sustainable tourism destination management and practices.

The case studies were developed by Etifor with the collaboration of Carinthia University of Applied Sciences - CUAS and the Transylvania University of Brasov - UNITBV.



For more information on WeNaTour, its training opportunities and outputs you can visit www.wenatour.eu and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

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THE DESTINATION



Case Study
Area

DESTINATION PROFILE

	Valsugana Lagorai	Name
	Trento Autonomous Province, Trentino Alto Adige Aut. Region, Italy	Location
	www.visitvalsugana.it	Website
	62.787 inhabitants	Population
	49 km ²	Extention

DESCRIPTION

Subregion area including 29 municipalities, mix of urban and mountain/natural area

The destination is mainly a mountain area and includes several towns, major and small lakes, farmed areas, industrial areas, industry and remote mountains. The destination generates consolidated tourist flows each year (around 1.3 million presences and 320,000 arrivals, of which 54% are foreigners), on an average stay of 4.2 days. Tourism is all year round but mainly in summer for biking and hiking. The main assets are Lake Caldonazzo, the Tesino Plateau for nature activities, Levico Terme for spa-wellness activities and the Valsugana centre with historic centres and valleys.

MANAGING ORGANISATION AND ITS FOCUS OF OPERATION

The organisation in charge of managing the destination is the ApT (Agency for Territorial Promotion) Valsugana Lagorai, which deals with planning the strategic lines of tourism development in the territory regarding tourist information, reception and promotion.

The ApT is a cooperative society established and supported by public and private members, financed partly by public contributions and partly by annual membership dues, funding and sponsorships. Representatives of the public sector, the private sector, and civil society are among the members' assembly, which is the group responsible for implementing the strategic plan.

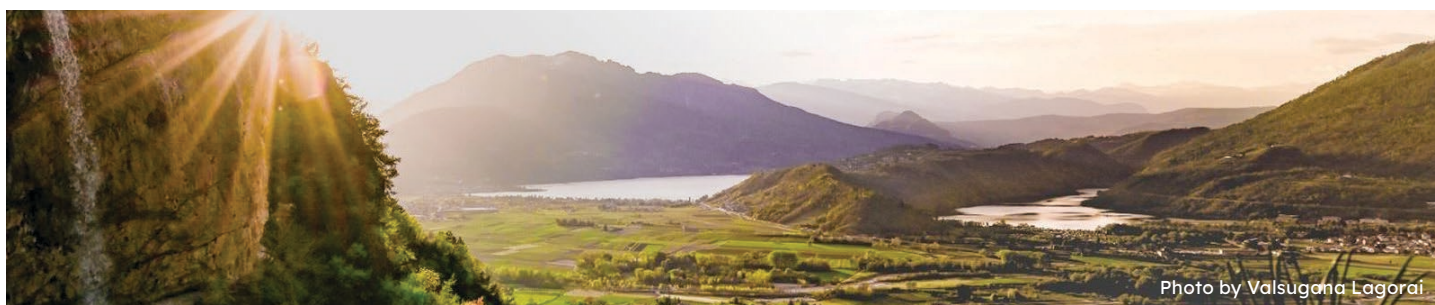


Photo by Valsugana Lagorai

SUSTAINABILITY

HOW THE DESTINATION ENVISIONS AND PRACTICES SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATIONS AND SPECIAL FEATURES

- ✓ Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) for Destinations
First year of Certification: 2019, renewed in 2023
- ✓ First GSTC-certified destination in Italy and at a global level

HOW SUSTAINABILITY IS EMBEDDED IN THE DESTINATION'S VISION AND MISSION

The vision for Valsugana Lagorai is to become a leading sustainable destination, where every aspect of travel—from lakes and outdoor mountain adventures to art, culture, and wellness—embodies environmental responsibility.

Further, their **vision** is to be the ideal place to live, permanently or even for a few days, for the values they “cultivate” and the quality of living.

The **mission** is to integrate sustainability in all tourist activities, especially by creating programmes and projects to deliver these values, such as educational programs for youth and residents, guidelines for tourists, and collaborative projects with local municipalities. By prioritising sustainable practices, Valsugana Lagorai aims to create an enriching and eco-friendly experience for all visitors.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PRACTICE

For Valsugana Lagorai, a tourism that is regenerative means prioritising the well-being of residents over tourists by developing projects and services that enhance the local community's quality of life year-round.

They implement initiatives like **wellness packages** in partnership with local thermal baths and hotels, and organise programs that foster a deep connection with nature, such as yoga by the lake and forest bathing. Additionally, they support **social projects** that provide work opportunities for individuals with disabilities, promoting both economic and social well-being in the destination. Additionally, a good practice implemented to communicate and disseminate the results of the work on sustainability is the **publication of a guideline** with the action plan for sustainable events, available at www.visitvalsugana.it.

HOW SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES



Socio-cultural valorisation

Adopt a cow (“**Adotta una mucca**”): the project allows visitors to “adopt” a cow and in exchange receive dairy products when visiting the hut during the summer, making an important economic contribution to mountain pastures’ activities and favouring a type of farming that has little impact and respects the ecosystem, the maintenance of the landscape, and the care of pastures - an important source of biodiversity. Part of the contributions collected for the adoption of the cows are given to charity to local associations dealing with the elderly, treating illnesses, and supporting people with disabilities.



Good Health And Well-Being: by reinvesting part of the revenues in local volunteer initiatives.



Responsible Consumption And Production: by supporting the preservation of biodiversity and job creation through the production and sale of local products.



Photo by adottaunamucca.org

Community involvement

Young Ambassadors of the territory and mountains Project (“**Progetto Giovani Ambasciatori del territorio e della montagna**”) offers training for young people aged from 18 to 26 on how to promote and communicate their local area. Participants learn about the role and activities of the ApT, the certification path, and tourism-related topics. Scholarships are awarded to the best students to practice their skills during ApT’s events and activities.



Quality education: by providing training opportunities aimed at creating a skilful workforce.



Gender equality: by empowering women through skill development, so that helping them in finding of jobs and gaining income in tourism.



Photo by visitvalsugana.it



ARTESELLA
THE CONTEMPORARY
MOUNTAIN

AMBIENTE

Collaboration with local actors

The work done with **Arte Sella** open-air museum to promote art and nature immersion initiatives.

The work done with **Amambiente** (local water and waste management society) and municipalities on environmental sustainability projects aimed at rainwater harvesting and aquifer recharge. This has led to aquifer restoration initiatives from municipalities and improved waste management guidelines and practices in partnership with companies.



Partnerships for the goals: by activating public-private partnerships with the aim to stimulate entrepreneurship and develop better policies.

WHICH ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Residents

Make them aware of the value of the area in which they live. In the words of the Sustainability Manager “When we live in a place, we do not realise how lucky we are and we need to change this”.

Visitors

Raising awareness that climate change has altered the cycle of the seasons and on alternative activities to do when there is no snow, for example.

WHICH NEEDS AND STRATEGIES TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES

Communication and awareness for residents

Part of the training and promotion of the certification process should focus on residents first rather than the visitor, targeting also schools. The ApT already raises awareness from primary schools to universities, explaining its roles, activities, international efforts and the value of certification and related projects.

Communication and awareness for tourists

The communication of packages and commercial offers is also reviewed in view of local climate change issues.

Collaboration

Increased collaboration with municipalities and activities usually only open in winter would be essential to promote non-canonical seasons and alternative activities.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

ApT's staff is trained and updated on the destination activities, and the Sustainability Manager obtained the GSTC Professional Certificate in Sustainable Tourism. With the establishment of the Sustainable Tourism District, the hope is to provide aggregated training on certification and regional actions to all four ApTs staff. For residents, the ApT organises annual conferences on tourism's value and sustainability initiatives.

NEW TRENDS FOR THE DESTINATION

#SustainableServices
#SystemInnovation



Photo by visitvalsugana.it

INNOVATION AND CERTIFICATION

THE ROLE OF CERTIFICATION IN INNOVATING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

WHY CERTIFICATION

Valsugana Lagorai decided to obtain the GSTC certification as a unique element that would allow it to differentiate itself from other destinations in Trentino Province.

HOW CERTIFICATION IS SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT: KEY ASPECTS (KA)

KA1: Governance structure

Expansion: the certification turned out to be an element that evolved from a promotional tool into a path towards sustainability at a territorial level, expanding the ApT's operations and competencies to activities not purely related to tourism.

KA2: Management and funding

Vision: by obtaining certification, the focus shifted from putting the visitors first to putting the residents first, implementing works and services thinking first of the residents who live in the area all year round.

Cooperation: it allowed for the first time cooperation between the ApT and the municipalities or other businesses not involved in the tourism system.

Inspiration: the work done inspired the Province to start working on sustainability issues to the extent that three other destinations have been certified and have formed the first Sustainable Tourism District in Italy, with the support of the Trentino Province.

Funds: not directly, but more efficient use of resources and green procurement procedure. The advantage for the municipalities resulted in access to European grants.

KA3: Stakeholder engagement

Community engagement evolution: initially focused on creating local activities, community engagement has transformed into a space dedicated to education and the exchange of information between the area and its residents. Community consultation has become a primary focus, especially through visioning and strategic planning sessions dedicated to specific areas, to gather expectations and opinions on future development.

Supporting local initiatives: significant efforts have been made to engage with the local community, including providing training and supporting the management of local sites that would otherwise remain closed, such as the Biologo di Castel Tesino and various museums. This support often involves agreements with municipalities to keep these places open and accessible.

Training: training opportunities are organised for operators both yearly and regularly (e.g. "The Thursdays of the Operator") to build common knowledge, disseminate information, and improve territorial promotion.

Awareness: through constant involvement in various initiatives, the operators understood the value of the certification, and the fact that Valsugana Lagorai obtained a certification represented a stimulus for them to get it themselves.

Opportunity: the destination started a pilot project for creating a GSTC certification group for single operators. The aim was to support operators with knowledge, network and resources to incentivise certification.

KA4: Monitoring and assessment

Data: working on the certification allowed to ask for and access data also involving multiple stakeholders, thereby enhancing detail and effectiveness. It improved the understanding of what to monitor, identified key areas needing attention, enhanced the use of available resources, and enabled better identification, intervention in critical areas, and prevention of recurring issues.

KA5: Nature conservation/restoration

Environment & biodiversity: the new knowledge gained on monitoring in protected areas led to activating partnerships with their management entities to support their activities and improve the communication to visitors.

KA6: Socio-cultural valorisation

Socio-cultural heritage: the certification process activated new collaborations with associations managing sites of cultural interest to ensure openness and appropriate promotion of cultural heritage.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Valsugana Lagorai is a territory that started from a condition of already advanced **sensitivity on sustainability related issues** (e.g. mobility, waste). This, combined with the **activation of effective synergies** with the various businesses in the area, has been a key element in obtaining and maintaining the certification raising the bar from year to year. Having organisations and businesses in the area interested in working in the direction of sustainability and certification was crucial.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned about the certification process was understanding that the audit does not provide an assessment in terms of numbers but cues for **continuous improvement**—the Certification Body's main and periodic audits always end with suggestions for improving the actions taken from time to time.

FUTURE COMMITMENTS

The future commitments cover several topics:

- **Mobility** interfacing with both the local and national transport operators (Trentino Trasporti and Trenitalia), as well as with municipalities for new cycle zones and services for cycling and trekking;
- Improve **data management and analysis** to ensure that as many companies as possible in the area use renewable energy;
- Continuous **residents' involvement** with school training and awareness activities;
- Working side by side with local **tourist attractions** to ensure they are accessible to all, increasing the opening periods of attractions, and offering guests other activities and types of stay in low-season periods (for example, replacing accommodation closed with flats or huts).

WENATOUR EMERGING MARKETS

THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE DESTINATION ON THE 3 EMERGING MARKETS IN TOURISM THAT ARE THE FOCUS OF THE PROJECT WENATOUR



Green care: The ApT is creating synergies with local operators to develop new products to offer that are not purely curative but consider an holistic approach to wellness. A project called “Benessere Valsugana” (Wellness Valsugana) is carried out which combines psycho-physical well-being with experiences in nature to take care of the body, mind and emotion through thermal waters experiences, yoga and meditation practices among the forests, healthy, organic and km0 food tastings. While the destination aligns with green care tourism, it is not a current priority.



Company welfare: The ApT organises team building events for its partners with a local company focused on sustainable projects (i.e. VAIA), offering visits to the area, overnight stays and tree planting activities while informing them on the certification process and highlighting both the VAIA product and the ApT’s work. In this way participants learn about reforestation efforts after the 2018 storm that felled more than 42 million trees, as well as meet the craftsmen and see how they work with wood. While valuable, this collaboration is considered a pilot, but also this topic is not a priority for the destination at the moment.



Accessibility: Accessibility is not one of the core assets because of some structural problems, but it is considered important to allow more tourists to enjoy the destination. Various initiatives of the ApT, among which:

- Collaboration with the Cooperativa Archè in the project “Senza Ostacoli” (Without Obstacles) to map services, facilities and experiences that could be used by people with different disabilities as well as by people with reduced mobility;
- Collaboration with Cooperativa La Rete, which promotes paths and culture of social inclusion of people with disabilities, organising information, awareness and community involvement actions through the promotion of voluntary work and active citizenship;
- Involvement in the “Trentino Open” project active at the provincial level, which aims to strengthen the Trentino destination as a national reference point as a welcoming and inclusive destination.



“The certification was chosen because it has the most comprehensive approach to tourism, validated by a third party, and its ability to provide ongoing growth opportunities and new methods of action each year.”

*Gemma Buccella,
Sustainability Manager at ApT Valsugana Lagorai*

Photo by visitvalsugana.it

WENATOUR EMERGING MARKETS

THE POINT OF VIEW OF AN OPERATOR ON THE 3 EMERGING MARKETS IN TOURISM THAT ARE THE FOCUS OF THE PROJECT WENATOUR



ARTESELLA
THE CONTEMPORARY
MOUNTAIN

OPERATOR PROFILE

	Arte Sella - Open-air museum	Name
	Trento Aut.Province, Trentino Alto Adige Aut. Region, Italy	Location
	www.artesella.it	Website

Arte Sella is an open-air museum whose activity began in 1986 in an experimental form, with the aim of the three founders to invite artists to spend a limited amount of time and space in Val di Sella to investigate the relationship between man and nature in the valley through the language of art. Over time, the project transformed and became what it is now, always keeping the foundation characteristics: the centrality of the artist as creator and builder of artworks, and the aspect of impermanence - indeed, the artworks are not built to last forever but to fit into the cycle of nature. Arte Sella started out as a cultural project that gradually became a tourist attraction to the point of becoming one of the most important for Valsugana and for the whole Trentino Province (in third place for visitor flow in the cultural field).



Innovation in tourism

Innovating for Arte Sella means looking towards the future, not stopping at proposing a static experience to the visitor but proposing an image of a dynamic territory that changes its identity over time, working with evolved and borderline artists who create works that are always attractive and able to continue to intrigue people.



Green care

Arte Sella's activities are intrinsically linked to green care. Arte Sella is a pioneer in and a symbol of the art-nature relationship in Trentino Province. Being the first in Trentino to have this approach, they have proposed something that was not done before and which is now rooted. Arte Sella Education offers holistic experiences to children and adolescents, including forest walks, art encounters, and workshops that encourage physical engagement with nature and artistic creation.



Company welfare

Different activities are offered to its larger partners as free entrance tickets for all their employees and guided tours for selected group managers. It is also working on team building activities in an experimental form, and redesigning innovative ideas on welfare within the companies themselves: instead of bringing companies to Arte Sella, it uses art as a relational welfare method.



Accessibility

Arte Sella is designed to be more accessible than a traditional museum, as the works are mainly habitable, touchable, and experienceable through various senses. To further enhance accessibility, the project "Arte Sella Accessibile" was launched. This initiative involved people with different disabilities to identify and address accessibility issues. As a result, structural improvements were made, starting from the route of Villa Strobele, which is used as a prototype for an accessible approach with small activities that have transformed accessibility: handles, braille plates, levelled hills, etc. Additionally, an upcoming app with audio content will help visually impaired visitors experience the museum through sound in addition to touch.

“A whole context that moves globally in the same direction makes you stronger. When the whole territory realises that sustainable tourism is a strategic asset for the growth of the area, Arte Sella can only benefit from and contribute to this vision. The ApT is doing a big job of making everyone aware of how strategic tourism is in Valsugana Lagorai. GSTC certification is strategic, [...] it certainly raises the level of qualitative and imaginative perception of this place.”

*Giacomo Bianchi,
Arte Sella President*



Photo by Arte Sella