

## PROJECT EXCOVER IS ON A SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL!

Journal of Sustainable Tourism is now the place where you can find all the results from SWOT and reputation analysis conducted within Excover project. That is all thanks to scientific partners from the Department of Economics at the University of Bologna – professors Andrea Guizzardi, Annalisa Stacchini and Michele Costa, who wrote a scientific article with the title “Can sustainability drive tourism development in small rural areas? Evidences from the Adriatic”. The study explores exactly that topic, while proposing methods and scales to analyse the perceived value of rural tourism and visitor perceived sustainability.

It needs to be noted that this is maybe the first study exploring the relationship between visitor perceived sustainability and destination image, which results indicate that measures to conserve the cultural and natural heritage can decrease the perceived attractiveness of destination image. Although it has never been tested whether a direct or indirect relation exists between visitor perceived sustainability and behavioural intentions.

“Interregional tourism development projects, like EXCOVER, constitute important catalysts of knowledge, dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, including visitors. Therefore, we recommend that EXCOVER experts and destination managers work at facilitating the establishment of SMEs networks and consortia, for developing local entrepreneurship, joint initiatives and sharing the costs of advanced services (marketing, ICT, expositions, etc.), taking carefully into account visitors’ perspectives, emerging also from this research. By involving the local communities in this Project, we are increasing social cohesion, instilling trust in the possibility for new tourism-related businesses to succeed and providing the informative basis for development”, researchers stated in the article which focuses on the whole Excover area. That is - Alfonsine, Campobasso, Carnia, Čavle, Gospić, Karlovac, Ostellato, Predappio and Sasso Simone.

One of the measured criteria was satisfaction, destination image and intention to recommend, while the questionnaires were conducted through face-to-face interviews. Their results show that a good state of conservation of the local cultural heritage is the most important indicator of perceived sustainability, followed by the observation of environmental protection measures enforced. While testing seven different hypotheses, researchers from University of Bologna concluded that sustainability is perceived as a limitation directly, but, indirectly, it appears as a booster of destinations’ competitiveness, because it increases the overall perceived value.

“We thank Excover Project Partners, destination managers and policy-makers for the collaboration. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for the useful comments and suggestions”, added Guizzardi, Stacchini and Costa in their interesting article that could encourage tourism scholars, experts, practitioners and other readers of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism in visiting and exploring hidden gems of the Excover area.