

CYCLE TOURISM AS A FORM OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: THE IMPORTANCE OF A POLICY FOR ITS ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract. *Within the framework of sustainable tourism, that is increasingly gaining ground in industrialized countries, the cycle tourism (or bicycle tourism) represent an original tourist proposal, with a strong experiential value, that focuses on both little-known areas and on the discovery of a territory. Cycle tourism represents a concrete expression of sustainable tourism, geared not towards mass tourism or elite tourism, but toward more sustainable forms of holiday that allow low consumption of natural resources and a strong connection with the land, its culture and its traditions. In this sense, cycle tourism can lead to a range of effects on the local economy, ranging from positive economic and environmental impact to the nature conservancy and the diffusing capacity of virtuous behavior and good practices. The cycle tourism also has a longer-term economic impact that is harder to quantify, both in marketing the territory's attractions and even in job creation. After all, bike-minded improvements in infrastructure and enforcement create healthier, more economically sound places not just to visit but also to live. The ability to capitalize on the potential offered by cycle tourism requires the presence of a network of local actors, both public and private, which act synergistically to the success of the initiative. At a policy level, this implies the need to develop any projects in an integrated perspective, involving all the stakeholders of the territory. The most successful international experiences, analyzed in this study, show that the expansion of cycle tourism needs to be supported by original forms of public-private partnerships, oriented to build innovative and advanced forms of offer that combine entrepreneurial private interests with public development goals.*

Keywords: *cycle tourism; sustainable tourism; governance of local territories; public-private partnerships; territory reputation.*

Introduction. Development patterns of cycle tourism and the characteristics of demand

Within the framework of sustainable tourism that is a well-established trend in industrialized countries, it is part of cycling, original tourist offer that often favors little-known areas, looking for a particular holiday, once in the first place to the discovery of a territory. It is a form of strong experiential value tourism, which

provides direct contact with a territory, its culture, history, tradition, at a speed that can be defined on a human scale (Becken, 2006). From this point of view, cycling can be considered a form of slow tourism, which allows you to enjoy and at the same time to preserve the environment, which is the main attraction of cycling itself. As with the other desserts sports, often related to nature, cycling goes well with so-called "slow" areas, where we find the quality of the landscape, agriculture of excellence, the local culture, traditions, etc. (Dickinson & Dickinson, 2006).

In this perspective, knowing a cycling territory exceeds the clichés of the mass holiday, which often creates a barrier between the territory and its culture, placing the tourists in an artificial seeds context. The choice of the bicycle as a means and thread to pause to discover the many attractions rich territories favors, in fact, a new leisure culture and becomes a tool for disseminating good behavior and a way of life on a human scale (Lamont, 2009).

It is a widespread practice, especially abroad, particularly in German-speaking areas, which in recent years is enjoying a growing popularity in many Italian regions. This spread shows the presence of a growing audience who chooses the bicycle as a means for their holiday.

To understand the peculiarities of the cyclists, it may be appropriate for a general look at the universe of users of the bicycle, which shows an extremely varied reality. A survey conducted in 2000 by the Institute of CIRM market research on the use of the photographer cycling six categories of users of the bicycle, which correspond to different user functions:

- the city cyclist, who use the bike mainly to avoid the traffic and queues in the city and to improve air quality and the environment;
- the romantic, who likes to visit the city in the evening, to find out particularities and nuances in a different light;
- the cycling tourist, who sees the bike the way to get in touch with nature;
- the adventurer who prefers to tackle long distances and difficult;
- the amateur cyclist who, inspired by the champions of cycling, likes to use the bicycle to reach a goal;
- the professional.

This heterogeneity in the use of the bicycle as a witness, on the demand side, it is difficult to identify in detail the characteristics of the cyclists (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2014; Hungenberg, Gray, Gould & Stotlar, 2010). The scarce literature on the subject, usually due to cases in-country or regional and local experiences, identified several characteristic features of the cycling tourist-type (Ritchie, 1998; Cushing, 1997; Corneiro, Brede & Cordero, 2016; Faulks, Ritchie & Fluker, 2006; Høyer, 2000; Ritchie, 1998; Ritchie, 1999).

Simonsen and Jorgenson (1998, p.21) define the cyclists as: "A person of any nationality, who at some stage or other during his or her holiday uses the bicycle as a mode of transportation, and whom cycling is an important part of this holiday" . According to Lumsdon (1996, p.27), cycling is a "Recreational cycling activities ranging from a day or part-day casual outing to a long distance touring holiday. The fundamental ingredient is that cycling is perceived by the visitor as an integral part of an excursion or holiday, i.e. a positive way of enhancing leisure time".

The centrality of the means of transport in the experience of a cycling trip, regardless of the organization of the holiday mode, is at the center of defining cyclists proposed by Ritchie et.al (2010, p.411). "A person who is away from their hometown or country for a period not less than 24 hours or one night, for the purpose of a vacation or holiday, and for whom using a bicycle as a mode of transport during this time away is an integral part of their holiday or vacation. This vacation may be independently organized or part of a commercial tour and may include the use of transport support services and any type of formal and/or informal accommodation".

In general, the different definitions of cyclists lead to the conclusion that it can be considered as the one who spends their holiday in bicycle, preferably with a mode is itinerant, moving step by step to the final goal. These are stakeholders not only to the bicycle but, more generally, for an active holiday, comprised of more size, sport, rest, local knowledge, curiosity about the culture, traditions, food and wine, etc. The bicycle becomes the means to discover a territory from an unusual and original perspective, far from the traditional circuits (Lumsdon, 2000; Ritchie, Tkaczynski & Faulks, 2010).

As part of the application segment due to cyclists, you can find very different subjects by age, social background, level of education, however, all united by the desire to live an experiential holiday using the bicycle in order to qualify a resource that puts territory their disposal (Hungenberg, Gould & Stotlar, 2010). It is, therefore, to tourists looking for a personalized holiday that combines the physical and mental well-being, quality of life, recovery and strengthening of the link with the environment (Ritchie, Tkaczynski & Faulks, 2010).

A recent survey by the Autonomous Province of Trento identifies the traits characterizing the cyclists (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2010): it is, first, the relatively young subjects with a high level of education. Preferably, traveling family or couple and are particularly attentive and sensitive to local attractions, which tend to discover with the "soft" approach that comes from the use of the bicycle. They are concerned about the presence and the use of support infrastructures, such as public transport, and especially to the peculiar resources of an area. The research shows that there is, in fact, the propensity on the part of cyclists to combine sporting activity cultural and nature tours. The cycle path is experienced in a varied by cyclists; for some is a sort of open-air gym, for the enjoyment of the environmental and landscape resources of a territory while doing physical activity, for others an original mode and slow to live and discover a region and its attractions (Nocifora, 2011).

Attention to local tourist supply details as a whole, not just to the bike path in the strict sense, highlights the desire for this type of tourist to "live" the travel experience that captures the territory in its entirety. In this perspective, it is to outline an experience of mutual learning cycle tourist-land, a sharing of values ingrained in the history and traditions as well as a real possibility of protecting biodiversity and promoting sustainable forms of development (Lumsdon, 2000; Ritchie & Jay, 1999).

The characteristics of cycling, in fact, show that this form of tourism is attributable to a model of sustainable tourism, as a carrier, at the same time, a social value / environmental and economic.

From the environmental point of view, in many documents and studies on sustainable tourism, the environmental impact of tourism-related transport is identified as a critical element. For these reasons, the bicycle is recognized by many as the ideal means of transport to reduce emissions and thus promote sustainability-oriented behaviors.

In the report "Action for more sustainable European tourism" drawn up in 2007 by the Tourism Sustainability Group underlines the central role of the bicycle as a means of sustainable transport. Similarly, the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas* states: "Customers will be encouraged to make maximum use of collective transport or to discover the protected area by bicycle or on foot or by other non-polluting vehicles. This policy will cover both access to tourist facility, is on the move in the protected area". The bicycle represents an efficient tool from the point of view of energy, being virtually free of emissions; In this respect, a recent study of the European Cyclists' Federation shows that pedaling at least 2 km and a half a day would lead to a reduction of 25% CO₂ rate in the European Union.

The World Health Organization estimates at 110 billion euro savings in healthcare costs achievable using the bicycle. The environmental sustainability related to the use of the bicycle is further confirmed in the same behaviors of users of bicycles for tourism purposes. In this regard, a survey conducted by the European Parliament shows that cycling tourists, who carry out both day trips, that longer holidays, tend to begin their journey by bicycle or in any case to use of environmentally friendly transportation (Weston, 2012).

The use of bicycles produces positive effects, in terms of environmental sustainability level, even in relation to the target location. The territories affected by the cycling show, in fact, a reduction of vehicular traffic and consequently of emissions, noise pollution, and an increase in pedestrian mobility, even as an indirect effect of policies linked to the promotion of cycling (Formato, 2009). If properly supported by adequate national and local policies, the spread of cycling can also improve the overall level of road safety, reducing the social costs of traffic and accidents (Becken, 2006; Carneiro, Breda & Cordeiro, 2016).

From an economic point of view, to understand the value of cycling, it can be worth a look to the bicycle market as a whole. The growing importance of the bicycle market has led, in recent years, the development of specific studies on the economic contribution resulting from the use of the bicycle, studies by several parties are classified under the term bike economy. The employment figures show that in Europe the employed who work in related industries generated from cycling are more than 650 thousand (European Cyclists' Federation, 2014). In 2015 the European Cyclists' Federation has tried to calculate the economic value of bicycle use in European countries, estimating an annual turnover of about 200 billion euro, which includes the sale and rental of bicycles and components, the development of cycling infrastructure, the environment benefits, health benefits quantified as savings in health spending (European Cyclists' Federation, 2015). The same survey showed that the cycling industry moves every year in Europe, more than 44 billion euros (of which only 12 in Germany).

In the light of these considerations, it seems undeniable that cycling can become if properly managed, an important tool for territorial marketing in local development logic.

Cycling tourism as a development driver of the territories

Cycle tourism is a form of sustainable tourism, if properly built and supported, it can cause a number of positive effects on the local economy (Faulks, Ritchie & Flucker, 2006; Cope, Doxford & Hill, 1998).

International and national experiences of the successful first show that the territories that choose to present itself to the cycling experience a significant increase in tourist flows. With reference to Italy, the Italy of the bike hotels consortium data record, in the 2012 season, a million and a half cycling presence on national territory, of which 80% are foreigners. Over the past five years, the cyclists mostly from Northern Europe increased by 15%, a fact which highlights the potential of a strategic market, especially for smaller territories.

The increase in the number of tourists is accompanied by the seasonal adjustment of the offer; in most cases, the most appropriate time for a cycling holiday is the period of the low season. This potentially represents an exciting opportunity for tour operators.

The territories suited to cycling also show a significant increase in employment. From this point of view, cycling enhances the zones crossed, even those that are marginal to the tourist mass migration, with obvious positive effects on the economy of an area (hotels, restaurants, cottages, campgrounds, etc.) and encouraging the birth of local tourist business initiatives. Besides the aforementioned induced linked to cycling, in areas crossed by the cycling phenomenon of the emergence of new players such as cycling guides or new managers in tourism and sports, such as mobility manager. From this point of view, the World Health Organization has estimated that achieving high levels of cycling mobility in Europe could allow the creation of nearly 80,000 jobs.

Cycle tourism is, therefore, possible to develop territories not covered by the major axes of tourism, with the possibility to activate a process that gives rise to a number of supporting activities related to cycling tourism: hospitality points and refreshment, crafts, rental and repair bicycles, publishing, tour operator specialized in organizing trips by bicycle (Lumsdon, 1996; Lumsdon, 2000; Nocifera, 2011).

Many industry studies also show that the cycling tourist is very willing to make purchases and to make use of services, if they are available, especially in those places far from the beaten track. Tourism so-called "slow" allows tourists to look around, to interact with the local population, to have more buying opportunities. In this sense, the promotion of "sweet sports" related to nature, such as hiking and cycling trails harmonizes well with an economy based primarily on agriculture, on the excellence of the typical and food products.

In addition to the aforementioned economic and environmental impacts, a cycling project is a driving force for the growth of a culture of sustainable mobility for the resident population, with undoubted benefits across the entire region. In this way, the

cycling becomes a tool for disseminating good behavior and good practices (Corneira, Breda & Cordero, 2016; Shipway, King, Sunny Lee & Brown, 2016).

Finally, the development of cycling allows the preservation of the territory, by the recovery of the smaller existing roads, the artifacts, the sediments, the vicinal and country roads, disused railways. It is, in many cases, the existing road network, which suitably enhanced, reported, and enriched with interventions even of the modest entity, becomes heritage usable for all the sweet tourism. The renovation and conversion of existing infrastructure contribute, thus, to create a network of green streets, centers on promoting the realization of so-called green infrastructure, in line with the latest recommendations from the European Commission, which sees the latter as a network of natural and semi-natural areas planned at the strategic level, to offer a wide spectrum of services.

The survey of bicycle paths, of establishments receptive and, in general, all the infrastructure necessary for the development of a cycle tourism project, together with the analysis of the potential demand are the first step to realizing a tourism system based on the use of the bicycle. Exploiting the potential existing in the territory for the development of cycling involves the proper management, organization, and activation of important synergies with all actors involved, in the framework of a strategic plan covering all the interests at stake.

The importance of a system policy for the development of cycling

From all the foregoing considerations, it is evident that the territory that chooses to present itself to cyclists must commit to a "product" that is attractive, with a series of interventions. In this sense, marketing plays a central role in the strategy, when it can facilitate the construction of territorial offer capable of meeting the expectations of the subjects that the territory's interest to attract, depending on the model of sustainable development pursuing (Cushing, 1999; Weston, Davies, Peeters, Eijgelaar, Lumsdon, McGrath & Piket, 2012).

More specifically, articulated elaboration of a marketing strategy aimed at the development of cycling in view of a land development involves a few key steps defining the mix of structural features and services offered from the area; the identification of an appropriate system of incentives for existing and potential users of the services and facilities offered by the area; the identification of effective methods of distribution of services and products of the territory; promoting the image of the area, so that the users will perceive the intrinsic value (Di Marcello, 2016).

In this context, it is crucial to offer tourists the chance to come in contact and to qualify for a natural environment and local culture of excellence, made of products, events, traditions, economic activities, etc., through a network of cycling routes that facilitate the movement called "slow".

The local communication gains, in this perspective, a fundamental value, while presenting different elements of concern related to the complexity of the territory system. An effective communication strategy for the territory should consider two levels, the regional and local supply system. In the first case, the communication

concerns the general characteristics of the territorial system, its vocation and overall image, the factors of attractiveness. In terms of local supply, communication affects the attractiveness of the relevant factors for specific market segments and user functions.

Crucial to this end is the establishment of a planning team of public and private stakeholders of the territory, a sort of control room, with well-defined strategic tasks:

- analysis of the reference features to highlight success factors and critical issues;
- the creation of a long-term strategy, built from resources and opportunities in the territory;
- the development of an action plan, divided into intermediate steps, indicating the investments and actions needed to achieve its goals.

The orientation of the long term is related to the fact that interventions on most of the factors characterizing the territorial offer require a period of at least the medium term; This aspect emphasizes the importance of public-private partnership (Hunter Cycling Network, 2005).

The above considerations show that the cycling development is linked to the presence and/or construction of a number of elements that could be defined as "facilitators", some of which are intrinsic to the territory (such as natural resources), other effects of territorial policies. Table 1, albeit with reference to a specific regional experience is, to a good approximation, the set of factors that facilitate the development of cycling in a given geographical area.

Table 1. Factors that facilitate cycling experiences

Attractions	Built attractions	Town Restaurants Historic sites Accommodation
	Natural attractions	Scenic view Forests Lakes
Information	Maps	Hard copy & electronic should include information on accommodation, location of toilets, shop & bike storage, description of terrain, grading & surface of tracks, key attractions
	Signage along routes	
Routes	Variety of lengths	Circular or out & back day routes on quiet roads Overnight trails with various accommodation along route Longer overnight trails with accommodation and /or facilities Routes that link sites or geographic, historic & cultural interest Routes that connect towns or villages
	Variety of terrains	
Public Transport	Transport of bikes required	Trains Buses Aeroplanes
Tour Companies		Can provide: guided tours, transport for gear and luggage, support services, including organizing

		accommodation & meals
Bicycle Hire		Should be available near promoted cycle routes
Accommodation	Cycle friendly accommodation	Can be identified and promoted to potential cycle tourists
Storage and Parking Facilities	Secure storage of bikes and equipment	Cafes and restaurants Accommodation sites, including campsites & hotels
	Secure car parking	

Source: Hunter Cycling Network, Cycle Tourism in the Hunter Region, Report, Millers Point, 2005.

These factors are not necessarily connected to each other and therefore require appropriate strategies aimed at building a unified image, coherent and shared, with the aim of creating value for the demand of the bicycle tour. This therefore requires the presence of a network of operators, public and private, acting in synergy to the success of the initiative, the creation of paths, to the promotion and supply of services, information, logistics, strictly speaking, hospitality management, organization of accompanying activities, sports, games, cultural, etc.

The coordination between the various economic actors through two basic steps: the general organization of the target area system (transport system, tourist offices, etc.) and the organization of resources available in thematic products / packages that are able to meet the needs customer. A tourist must first be easily identifiable; hence the public body role in defining its own tourism strategy for the medium to long term and then coordinate the tourism offering in synergy with the private players.

This is particularly important and stresses as a prerequisite for developing the link between cycling and local development is the creation of a system policy, able to integrate into the same area different natural resources.

Many European countries, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, and Austria in the first place, for years have undertaken with conviction the path of the bicycle tourism enhancement, directing, on the one hand, public investment in the construction of bicycle routes and creating the other, and a network system of public and private operators are able to develop significant synergies.

In Italy, although the image of cycling mainly linked to the sports cycling, cycling is a world expanding rapidly, as will be noted later in this work, thanks to the great potential that our country offers the excellence landscaping plan. Although Italy discounts some delay in the development of a network of cycle paths, both in urban centers and outside, in recent years some regions are undertaking various actions to respond to a growing demand segment. Pioneering, to that effect, it is the experience of the Trentino-Alto Adige Region that, since the eighties, has created a dense network of cycle paths, you think it is for the mobility needs of residents, which cater to the growing market of cycling. In general, the offer cycling tour in Italy is rather fragmented and uneven. In some areas, the expansion and modernization of cycling paths are mostly designed as a tool to promote alternative forms of mobility and more sustainable for residents and not as an alternative tourist proposal.

Other realities have instead invested in infrastructure for the use of bicycles, to promote cycling in the first place and consequently the development of the area. In

these cases, alongside the development of cycle paths have been built networks of support services and specific forms of hospitality able to satisfy the needs of cyclists. In this framework, they insert the product club.

The successful national experiences highlight the importance of its public, which often acts as an active part in proposing and involve the various local tourism operators. The synergy between the actors is, however, one of the most critical aspects of the Italian tourism. The lack of a unified design enhancement of many existing potentials for the development of cycling as a form of sustainable tourism is, in all probability, the most critical issue to be addressed.

Only by overcoming the fragmentation of interventions and coordination of the different actions, even the streets for cycling tourism can become an important driving force for the development of areas far from main roads of mass tourism but rich in excellence and potential, activating a virtuous circle between public and private actors.

Essential success factor in this regard is the ability to structure a comprehensive and complete system of creation / enhancement of cycling networks, which overcomes the administrative and territorial boundaries, through shared activities and a coordinated effort. This implies that any cycling project has developed an integrated approach, involving all the stakeholders, through a unified strategic design.

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