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UNWTO

Global Report on the Transformative Power of Tourism

a paradigm shift towards a
more responsible traveller

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2.9 AltoBrembo: discovering the culture of the mountain

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Alta Val Brembana is the highest part of Brembana Valley located in the Bergamo Alps (Northern Italy), 85 kilometers from Milan. Between the 60s and the 90s, this region was mainly known for its winter sport attractions, such as skiing. Meanwhile, during the summer, tourists used to spend long-term holidays enjoying fresh air and rest, far from the pollution of the city. Although these kinds of activities brought certain benefits to the destination, they did not have links with the host community, its culture and territory. In the 90s, however, the traveller's behaviour started to change, and Alta Val Brembana's attractions began to experience a stage of decline. Aware of this situation, in 2010, eleven municipalities led a specific analysis that highlighted three aspects in the tourism market's trend:

- Travellers keep looking for new experiences that go beyond the traditional 'tourist cliché' as they want to taste something they can perceive as authentic;
- Travellers prefer to live deeper experiences but in a smaller amount of time such as short break and outdoor excursions; and
- The importance of the concept of sustainability keeps growing, as a basic element in the choice of a destination.



Taking as a starting point three key-words: sustainability, slow and small; these eleven subjects gave life to AltoBrembo, a non-profit organisation and a network of public institutions, tourism operators, small handicraft businesses and agricultural firms with the purpose of develop local projects and promote the area and its peculiarities. AltoBrembo finds its roots in a new tourist offer that connects travellers to the local communities, their traditions and typical products, with the goal to make them rediscover Alta Val Brembana's heritage. Following this concept, AltoBrembo's municipalities focused their activities on three main sectors (an example for each sector has been selected):

1. **Hospitality, Ornica's Albergo Diffuso** (literally: widespread hotel). A new hosting reality run by a group of women that live in the ancient village of Ornica, hosting tourists in rooms and apartments distributed in the area, making them live an authentic experience, strongly associated with the local community and its culture;
2. **Food, Erbe del Casaro.** Among the several food-related projects organised by AltoBrembo, Erbe del Casaro is the most connected to the food traditions. During this six-day event, tourists can taste traditional dishes that blend herbs and cheeses (produced by Alta Val Brembana's cheese factories) and explore the so-called intangible heritage, discovering ancient receipts and stories; and

3. **Production activities, the Alpeggio** (seasonal Alpine farming). In recent years, the traditional activity of Alpine farming has been upgraded thanks also to the EU contribution that helped in developing its multi-functionality, giving new value to the mountains' products. This process was followed by the opening of Alpine pastures' cheese tasting centers, as well as agri-campings, food shops and other initiatives, increasing the relation between agricultural practices and tourism activities.

In 2016, AltoBrembo is ready to affirm itself as a real tool for its territory, conscious of the fact that the tourism system it generated widely helped the local stakeholders in the expansion of the three sectors mentioned above. First of all, AltoBrembo's founders observed a rising number of tourists that stay overnight in Alta Valle Brembana's hospitality facilities, a sort of no-boundaries host/guest relation strongly connected with the developed territorial projects. Secondly, restaurants are taking advantage of food events like Erbe del Casaro, that are stimulating interest in Alta Valle Brembana's recipes. Finally, local businesses are noticing a growth in the sales of local products, giving tourists a little piece of the 'Alta Val Brembana experience' to take home. In the last years, Altobrembo's founders focused on the way the benefits generated by the tourism industry can be communicated to the visitors.



From the moment of the creation of Altobrembo's network, the operators tried to build strong customer loyalty by creating a model where the tourist is not only a spectator in this development project, but also a part of the process itself. Especially the visitors that participated in AltoBrembo's initiatives from the very beginning are the ones who better understand the value generated year by year by these activities, observing the improvement of the structures and the increase in the production of local goods. Keeping in mind the causes that made Alta Val Brembana's destinations 'die' in the 90s, Altobrembo's institutions decided to avoid those exogenous factors that contributed to that decline, often dictated by private initiative or top-down approaches and that ignored the identity of its cultures and territory. Opting for bottom-up models, the subjects that are part of the association are aware of the fact that these kinds of dynamics may take longer than other immediate profit-enhancing strategies (such as the ones launched after the economic boom in the 60s) but they agree that this path will bring more long-lasting benefits and a higher quality of the tourism supply. This concept is also confirmed by the presence in the system of two eco-museums, Valtorta and Ornica, which have been created mainly for the community. Since the eco-museums' target audience are the local residents that can find a representation of their identity and culture in it,

the tourists that visit the area have the understanding that they find themselves in a destination that wants to preserve and takes care of its roots; an attention toward the future that can also be found in AltoBrembo's communications activities. From the labels on the local products to social media strategies, the association aims to transmit and keep the tourists informed about the sustainability and the quality of their bottom-up driven supply. At the moment, AltoBrembo is organizing several courses for the operators, like English for tourism and tourism economics, with the intention of giving them updated and innovative tools that are needed to work in a sector that is constantly changing and transforming itself, like the tourism one.

For more information please visit: www.altobrembo.it.