

**REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL SHORT-TERM MOBILITY PROGRAM FOR
SCIENTISTS/RESEARCHERS FROM ITALY AND FOREIGN INSTITUTIONS
(YEAR 2008)**

Title of the Project: *Selling the Rural, Selling the (Un)Real?* Using rural images in the promotion of rural tourism establishments

Proponent: Dr. António Raschi – CNR/IBIMET

Beneficiary: Prof. Elisabete Figueiredo – Social, Legal and Political Sciences
Department – University of Aveiro – Portugal

Duration: 10 days – from 17th July till 27th July 2008

Place: CNR/IBIMET – Florence

Aims of the project:

The main aim of the above mentioned project was to promote a starting point for future research collaboration between CNR/IBIMET and the University of Aveiro, particularly in what concerns rural tourism and rural development. Taking this objective into account the project presented and financed by the Short-term Mobility Program of CNR represented an opportunity to commence a research about the way in which rural tourism entrepreneurs use rural images to promote their activities. In order to achieve this goal, the project also aimed to address the following questions:

- How local contexts' specificities such as local food products, handicraft, landscape, cultural traditions are integrated in rural tourism promotion?
- What is the relationship between promotional images and local social contexts?
- What kind of activities, experiences and involvement in local reality are offered to tourists?
- What kind of link exists between local agricultural productions and rural tourism?
- What impacts could have in local development opportunities the non coincidence between the images sold and the reality of rural contexts?

These questions became increasingly relevant in the last decades in a context of dramatic changes in rural areas. From food producers these areas are more and more, socially and institutionally, represented and valued as environmental and cultural *reserves*. Farming is increasingly seen as a multifunctional activity, in which agricultural productions have to be combined with a variety of other activities, playing different roles, such as environmental protection, landscape maintenance, cultural traditions preservation and rural tourism organization. Rural tourism activities, in particular are often presented as the panacea for the local development problems. This should imply the use and the promotion of real local characteristics, resources and traditional activities that in turn could receive a long term benefit from tourism, through the creation of new markets, the improvement of skills and the innovation of local traditional products. On the contrary the connection between tourism and local contexts has been proved to be very faint, thus the impact of tourism on local development is limited to a few sectors while it is unable to revitalize other local traditional activities. Moreover the images that are being sold through rural tourism promotion do not represent the real rural contexts, in which agro-food productions play the most relevant role, but are rather based on broader social perceptions of rural areas as *idyllic* spaces or the representation of some specific areas as luxury spaces.

Rural tourism entrepreneurs could be seen as the interface between local territories and tourism demand and could have a role of paramount importance in addressing tourist's requests towards real local characters. Tourism entrepreneurs' tendency to fulfil tourist's desires and needs by supporting their images and visions of rural space can depend upon both the wish to create a favourable environment for the tourists stay and the ignorance of the value that local characters may have on a global market.

The distortion of the image of local reality might lead to perverse results. It is to be expected in fact that tourism demand for the portrayed reality will have impacts on the real reality that will tend to adapt to tourist's perceptions. This, in turn, could lead to a substantial loss in terms of local traditions, skills, biodiversity, agricultural productions, etc, as well as to important transformations in local cultural identities and, above all, in the real local development opportunities.

Activities developed:

In order to achieve the main objectives of the project we selected a limited number of test site areas characterized by different geographical locations, although all of them can be described as mountain areas. The test areas selected are:

- Tuscany Region – Province of Siena: municipality of Rapolano Terme;
Province of Arezzo: municipalities of Chitignano and Ortignano/Raggiolo;
- Campania Region- Province of Benevento: municipalities of San Giorgio la Molara and San Marco dei Cavoti

These areas were chosen on the basis of previous projects run by CNR – IBIMET and of their distinct characteristics in terms of tourism development, economic activities and social and demographic contexts. Moreover the five areas represent different types of rural features and *rurality*.

In order to address the objectives mentioned in the previous section, for each area data related to the socioeconomic contexts and to the use of rural images in rural tourism were collected¹.

To perform the socioeconomic context analysis, we collected data from official documents of the municipalities, as well as from ISTAT – Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, namely data related to demography, economic characterization, social characterization, local food products, handicraft products, landscape and natural elements, cultural traditions, local cultural and sportive associations, local and regional development associations. Specifically we collected the following information at the region, province and municipality level:

- Number of inhabitants
- Number of houses/buildings
- Number of families
- Average dimension of families
- Age structure of the inhabitants
- Sex of inhabitants

¹ This task was performed with the valuable help of Francesca Ugolini from CNR- IBIMET in Florence. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to her dedication and enthusiasm.

- Level of literacy of the inhabitants
- Economic Activity of inhabitants (employed, students, housewives, retired people, unemployed)
- Sector of economic activity of the inhabitants
- Number of people served by: water, electricity, basic sanitation, telephone, garbage collection, recycling materials collection
- Number and type of schools
- Number of medical services
- Number of elderly homes and day care services
- Number and type of services and similar (like: post offices, banks, etc)
- Transport services
- Number and type of local associations (like: cultural, sports, etc)
- Number and type of commercial establishments (shops, cafes, restaurants, supermarkets, gas stations, etc)
- Number of farmers
- Number of farms
- Agricultural surface
- Forest surface
- Average dimension of farms
- Main local agricultural products
- Main handicraft products
- Cultural traditions and dates (festivals, religious activities, etc)
- Natural elements – main species in terms of fauna, flora – and physical characterization
- Roads and accessibilities
- LEADER Associations and/or other local development associations:
 - o Number of associations, geographical scope and activities
 - o Director/Manager of each association' identification and contacts

In relation to the rural tourism activities, as well as to the use of images by rural tourism entrepreneurs in their promotion, we collected the following information at the municipality level:

- Number of agro-tourism; B&B; hotels and other forms of accommodation

- Owners/manager identification and contacts
- Leaflets and other promotional material (e.g. Business cards) from each rural tourism establishment
- Web site search and collection, from each rural tourism establishment.
- Number of visitors

Based on the mentioned data we produced during the 10 day period a report about natural, cultural and socioeconomic contexts' characterization and comparison taking into account that different areas possess a diverse social and economic reality which can interfere in the rural tourism enterprises character. On the other hand, the comparison of different sites can thereafter offer a way to assess how tourism can interfere with the evolution and development of rural areas.

During the same period we began the content analysis of the rural tourism establishments' leaflets, web sites and other promotional materials, in order to compare what is being sold and the local reality. Based on a first analysis of the mentioned material we constructed two structured grids, based on the following categories:

Grid 1 - Presenting the Rural Tourism Establishments

- a. Type of materials available to tourists
- b. Location
- c. Number of bedrooms
- d. Number of beds
- e. Offered services (restaurant, parking, meeting rooms, garden, etc)
- f. Offered activities (horse riding, bicycle, relax, didactic, walking paths, picnic, etc)
- g. Offered products (home made/produced food products, handicrafts, etc)
- h. Links/relationship with local environment (use of local food and other products)
- i. Presence of a location map in the promotional materials
- j. Existence and type of pictures (interior/exterior of the house; locality, municipality, province, region) in the promotional materials
- k. Existence of a web site

- l. Existence of an email address
- m. Other promotional materials/forms of advertising
- n. Languages used in the promotional materials

Grid 2 - Presenting the Rural Areas

- o. Landscape (in what terms landscape is presented and described)
- p. Nature (in what terms nature is presented and described)
- q. Natural elements (which elements are presented and how are they described)
- r. Local typical products (in what terms and what products (food, handicrafts, etc) are described and presented)
- s. Local people (reference and description to/of local populations/figures)
- t. Local communities (in what terms local communities are presented and described)
- u. Local art (reference to museums or other art manifestations)
- v. Local architecture (reference to local architectural characteristics)
- w. Local activities (in what terms local economic activities (e.g. agriculture), are presented and described)
- x. Local traditions (in what terms local traditions (religious events, feasts, etc) are presented and described).

After designing the grid, all the promotional materials were analysed. Taking into account the amount of documents the 10 day period was clearly not sufficient to complete this activity. We are still working on this task which is expected to be completed during October 2008.

One of the activities to be developed during the 10 day period was the presentation of the results and further perspectives yielded by the project to local policy makers and rural tourism operators in two of the selected areas in order to raise a debate on the possible best practices. Within the framework of the *Convegno RETE – Officine per la Rete Turistica del Fortore*, which took place on the 26th July in San Marco dei Cavoti, Benevento, with approximately 40 participants, we prepared a presentation with the

title: *“Quanto sono reali i paradisi rurali che vendiamo ai turisti? Due canzoni, qualche foto e probabilmente neanche una conclusione”*.

The presentation started with a number of pictures of diverse rural areas, rural landscapes and rural products from various European countries, with the objective of demonstrate the similarities in the European countryside. From the observation of the pictures, and after some theoretical remarks about the transformation of rural areas in leisure and tourism areas, we discussed the importance of selling a *unique* and *diverse* rural linked with the local characteristics.

Main Findings (at this stage)²:

As mentioned above at this stage we have completed the selected areas' economic, demographic, social, natural and cultural characterization. The areas selected possess different characteristics, especially if we take into account the fact that three of the areas are located in Tuscany region and the other two on Campania region. In this sense, not surprisingly, the areas of the same region share some important features, particularly in what concerns natural elements and landscape characteristics. Nevertheless all the selected municipalities are located in mountain regions which poses some particular constraints and represent, at the same time, some opportunities.

In terms of population density and number of inhabitants all the areas (although Rapolano Terme, San Marco dei Cavoti and San Giorgio la Molara possess more than 3000 inhabitants) can be considered rural. Except for Rapolano Terme (which had lost 15% of its population in the last 40 years) the other municipalities suffered heavy losses of population during the last decades, although in the last 10 years one can report a modest increase of inhabitants mainly due to immigration. The decrease of population was first and foremost related to the abandonment of marginal farms and migration processes. In this context some differences among the areas can be reported: in Rapolano Terme migration has a commuting character, essentially to the closer industrial areas such as Siena, Arezzo and Bettola. In all the other areas migration processes assume a long duration character, consisting in movements to other regions and other countries.

In all the municipalities considered in the study, people over 65 years old are the dominant category, displaying an ageing process that is also evident in the Campania

region municipalities (San Marco dei Cavoti and San Giorgio la Molara), in spite of the high birth rate that characterises this region (in 2007 Campania is the region with the higher birth rate (10.7/1000 inhabitants) in Italy). This fact is reflected on the ageing index, being the two municipalities of Campania the ones with the lowest ageing index.

Regarding literacy levels, in all the five areas the majority of the population has an elementary or secondary school degree. The illiteracy levels in the Tuscany region municipalities are equal or under 1,5% and this situation is in accordance with the country's rate (1,3%). In the southern municipalities the illiteracy rates are higher, being in 7,7% in San Giorgio la Molara and 4,7% in San Marco dei Cavoti. The unemployment rate is also higher in the areas of Campania region, although lower than the country's, province and region values. The activity rate is in all areas about 40%. In the Tuscany region municipalities the major source of employment are industrial and commerce activities. In Campania region municipalities the majority of the population (particularly in San Giorgio la Molara) is employed in agriculture and related activities. The tourism sector is not very significant in terms of employment in all the areas considered in this study, being the percentages not higher than 7% of the active population.

In terms of infrastructures, one may affirm that the population in the five municipalities is completely served by basic sanitation, electricity, telephone lines, water, garbage collection as well as recycling materials collection. In the same sense, in all the municipalities considered there are nursing and elementary schools, although limited in number. In Rapolano Terme and San Marco dei Cavoti there is also one secondary school. Besides that, in San Marco dei Cavoti there are also two high schools. Considering the small distances between the municipalities and the nearer largest cities in the Tuscany region, the inexistence of some types of schools cannot be seen as problematic. On the contrary, San Marco dei Cavoti acts as an attraction point for students of the surrounding municipalities that are offered several options for higher education. Medical services are present in various types in the five municipalities. Not surprisingly, due to the number of inhabitants, Rapolano Terme and San Marco dei Cavoti are the townships better equipped both in terms of quantity and diversity of medical services available. Except for Ortignano/Raggiolo all the other areas

² The analysis presented here is a brief summary of the analysis performed during the 10 day period. We produced a complete report on the socioeconomic data which would be tedious to present here.

considered possess elderly care services, mainly elderly homes and/or day care centres and activities.

San Marco dei Cavoti present the highest number of social, personal and administrative services (such as banks, post offices, fireman station, police station, etc). This is clearly due to the fact that this municipality is the head of the Industrial District number 3 of the Fortore-Tammaro, as well as the administrative centre of the same mountain district (*Comunità Montana*). It is also in San Marco dei Cavoti that one can find the largest number and the high diversity of commercial establishments (107), followed by Rapolano Terme (73). Particularly in the less populated municipalities (Chitignano and Ortignano/Raggiolo) the number and diversity of commercial establishments are rather small.

All the municipalities are served by main roads, well connected to the principal network of Italian highways, as well as by public transportation services, although this services are more frequent and diversified in Rapolano Terme and San Marco dei Cavoti.

In what concerns the existence of local associations, an outstanding position is held by Rapolano Terme. In this municipality 22 associations are present, mainly related with culture and sports. Nonetheless in all the municipalities we noticed the presence of associations of social character mainly dealing with elderly care and health services. Although these associations (*Misericordias*) had had a major role in the past providing services that otherwise small and *remote* communities could not access, nowadays they still possess a relevant role supporting and complementing some State run services.

All the municipalities are benefiting from the fact that they integrated local districts (*Comunità Montana* or *Circondario*) fostering the cooperation among adjoining municipalities and running common services (e.g. police, waste collection and disposal, etc). In some cases, these inter-municipal agencies also have a cultural role, manifested in Casentino in the organization of Eco-Museum of Casentino. In the same sense, all the areas considered in this study are benefiting from the existence of Local Action Groups within the scope of LEADER programme, thus profiting from EU funds to foster local development initiatives.

As we mentioned before, agricultural activities, except in the southern areas selected, are no longer the dominant link between Man and the rural territories studied,

although they possess some significance in social terms and in landscape maintenance and preservation. The higher weight of agriculture in the two southern municipalities is also evident in the fact that the majority of the municipalities' surface is agricultural land. In these two municipalities the dimension of farms is smaller in comparison with the Tuscany region townships. On the contrary forest surface is much higher in the municipalities of Tuscany. In fact both in an Marco dei Cavoti and in San Giorgio la Molara forest covered a very limited area.

The main agricultural productions are, of course, diversified in the two regions considered. Thus, in the Tuscany municipalities studied agricultural products are olive oil, wine, and cheese (*pecorino*) as well as chestnut flour (in Ortignano/Raggiolo and, in a very limited scale, also in Chitignano). In the southern areas agricultural production mainly supports a large production of meat. In fact these areas present a impressive number of cows and sheep. This dominant production is recognized in IGP label for *vitellone bianco dell'Appennino Centrale* (white veal). In the Tuscany region municipalities labelled productions are olive oil (Rapolano Terme is part of the *Terra de Siena* DOP) and wine (mainly *Chianti Colli Senesi*) produced within or around the area possess IGT or DOC guarantee label. Rapolano Terme is also part of the National Association of Oil Towns and National Association of Wine Towns. Although not possessing any official label on chestnut production Ortignano/Raggiolo is integrated in the Consortium for Chestnut Flour of Pratomagno and Casentino. Moreover, even though in a rather small scale, the municipalities in Tuscany region also benefit from IGP label for lamb meat production.

This very brief description and analysis of the five municipalities' social and economic contexts permits to conclude that the five areas shared some characteristics, mainly in demographic terms, and possess some important distinctive features as well. These last ones are also well observable in the in terms of rural tourism establishments and activities present in each region and area.

Rural tourism establishments have no legal definition and regulation in Italy, apart from agro-tourism activities (Law 96/20, February of 2006³), which are legally defined as the “*welcome and hospitality of tourists by farmers, in their own farms, in strong connection with the farming activities*”. These activities may include

accommodation, food and drinks (ideally linked to local products), organization of cultural, educational and promotional activities, excursions and sport activities. For the rest of rural tourism units the general laws about tourism enterprises and activities are applied and they can be considered *rural* simply because they are located in the countryside, even if they have no connection with local communities' characteristics and activities. This, of course, can have important consequences in terms of local development contributions from tourism sector.

Not surprisingly the municipalities of Tuscany region (particularly Rapolano Terme) possess the larger number of accommodations for tourists as well as a higher establishments' diversification. Moreover these municipalities possess a higher number of agro-tourism units in comparison with the two municipalities of the Campania region, although agriculture (as we mentioned before) no longer possess a relevant role as source of revenue and employment in Tuscany area. In spite of that, the presence of spa units within the area considered in this study as well as the appeal of the *typical* Tuscan countryside are important attraction factors for tourists. Although Campania region has some world wide known tourism sites (such as Capri, Sorrento and Pompei), rural areas as San Marco dei Cavoti and San Giorgio la Molara do not receive a higher number of visitors. The minor investment in rural tourism and related activities in these municipalities can explain their weak ability to attract visitors.

As we mentioned before content analysis of leaflets, web sites and other promotional materials from tourism establishments is in an earlier stage. However, based on the cases already analysed one can notice important differences between the Tuscany and Campania regions in what concerns, first of all, the number and diversity of promotional materials used. In Rapolano Terme, Chitignano and Ortignano/Raggiolo materials are more abundant and the links to the region characteristics and activities much more evident in promotional objects. The scarcity of promotional materials and activities, as well as the promotion and use of regional advertising material in San Giorgio la Molara and in San Marco dei Cavoti is mainly associated with the smaller dimension and scale of tourism establishments. From the cases analysed at this stage we also can affirm that while in Tuscany region the *Tuscan brand* is used as a way to promote local tourism activities and establishments, in the municipalities of Campania

³ Agro-tourism was first regulated in 1985. The general law issued by the Italian parliament is applied accordingly to different regional regulations that deal with type of buildings, number of rooms, etc. Autonomous regions and provinces of Italy have, of course, different regulations.

no reference to the region and its characteristics is made. On the contrary, in some cases other rural areas, even outside Italy (such as Provence in France) are used as ways to promote local tourism activities and establishments. As we said in the second section of this report, we have completed the content analysis in order to produce more empirical evidence, both to confirm (or not) the project main argument and to allow more sustained conclusions. In this sense it is also our intention, at a second stage of the project, to apply questionnaires and/or structured interviews to managers/owners of rural tourism units; local populations (including a sample of farmers), local politicians and local developers (e.g. LEADER associations; other local development associations). This will permit to obtain more rich and detailed data about the different characteristics of the studied areas as well as about the *décalage* between the rural sold as an object of consumption throughout tourism activities and the real rural, i.e., the rural lived by its inhabitants.

Future activities:

Taking into account that the project financed by CNR Short-Term Mobility Program was a starting point to further co-operation research activities and taking into account what we mentioned in the previous sections of the report, it is our intention to continue to work on the same and related topics.

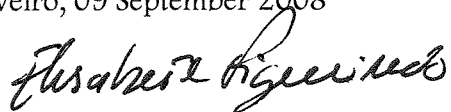
In this context we are now working in the preparation of a working group about *Selling the Rural, selling the (un)real?* to be submitted to the forthcoming *XXIII European Society of Rural Sociology – Re-Inventing the Rural: between the social and the natural*, which will take place in Vaasa, Finland, from 17th to 21st August 2009. We also intend to prepare a paper on the project results for the same congress and eventually to be submitted to an international journal on rural studies or rural tourism.

The opportunity of convene a working group in an international congress on the project's topic will be an excellent occasion to discuss it with participants from other European countries, to find new perspectives and, hopefully, also the possibility of putting together a European funded project.

Along with that, we expect to be able to apply to the bilateral co-operation program between Portugal (FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia) and Italy (CNR), in order to obtain the necessary funds to continue the project and expand the analysis to the Portuguese context. The project is foreseen to continue, in order to complete our

analysis, by the application of questionnaires and/or structured interviews to managers/owners of rural tourism units; local populations (including a sample of farmers), local politicians and local developers (e.g. LEADER associations; other local development associations).

Aveiro, 09 September 2008

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elisabete Figueiredo', written in a cursive style.

(Prof. Elisabete Figueiredo)