

Place identity and war heritage: managerial challenges in tourism development in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol

Abstract

Tourism based on the valorisation of places in which historical heritage is the main attraction is one of the fastest growing segments of cultural tourism. The conservation and management of dissonant heritage - heritage with different meanings and narratives - has led to war tourism product development in various destinations. Although niche tourism at war heritage sites have received some attention by academics in tourism and management, this study area is still under-investigated. This contribution analyses the role of place identity and cultural identity in the valorisation and management of Italian war heritage sites in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol. The two Italian autonomous provinces are rich in war heritage sites including fortifications, trenches, war memorials testimonials of the Alpine warfare during the Great War (1914-1918). Special attention is given to the role of local stakeholders in the managerial choices and communication strategies in war heritage site management. Results show that a more targeted promotion of this particular war heritage could significantly contribute to enhance awareness on Italian cultural heritage. Managerial implications to overcome current weaknesses are provided.

Key words

place identity, war heritage management, tourism, local stakeholders, First World War, Italy

INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the 1990s there has been growing academic interest in the study of the strategic and managerial choices of enterprises and territories endeavouring to valorise and promote the resources and products of their tourism destinations within an integrated logic. Numerous publications, both Italian (Rispoli and Tamma, 1995; Della Corte, 2000; Napolitano, 2000; Golinelli, 2002; Sciarelli, 2007; Franch, 2010) and international (Bieger, 1996; Buhalis, 2000; Kozak and Andreu, 2006; Laesser and Beritelli, 2013) have pointed out the critical difficulties encountered in the definition of an integrated tourist offer within a multi-stakeholder context (De Nisco *et al*, 2008; Buffa, 2013; Gartner, 2014). To quote Fyall *et al* (2007:51) '[...] *the destination is widely acknowledged to be one of the most difficult products to manage and market due to the numerous products, stakeholders and organisational bodies and individuals that combine to deliver the destination 'product'*'. As destinations find themselves having to compete ever more fiercely, it is crucial that each identifies and promotes its unique resources and attraction factors. The natural, anthropological, social, historical and cultural features of the territory, which together define its identity, should all be valorised and promoted in order to give originality and authenticity to the offer (Ferrari and Adamo, 2005; Hornskov, 2007; Fan, 2014). The valorisation of the territories' distinctive features allows them, on the one hand, to respond to the growing demand within the tourism market for authentic holiday experiences (Wang, 1999; Volo, 2009; Morgan *et al*, 2010), and, on the other, to provide a competitive, hard to imitate, offer which avoids the perils of place "Disneyfication" (Zukin, 1995; Strom and Kernstein, 2015).

The cultural heritage of these destinations along with the strategic choices that shape their management and valorisation are of particular interest (Franch *et al*, 2014). A territory's cultural heritage provides the distinctively unique features required to enhance, on the one hand, authentic elements of the territory and, on the other, the experiential dimension of the visit and/or holiday (McIntosh and Prentice, 1999; Volo, 2009) (see also the Special Issue of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 'The role of culture in branding places' 3(4)/2007). War heritage sites are part of

the broader cultural heritage of different territories such as the Flanders in Belgium or Gallipoli in Turkey. An interest in war heritage and in the choices around its exploitation and management feeds the debate within tourism management on the relationship, in the broadest sense, between war and tourism (Butler and Suntikul, 2013; see also the Special Issue of *International Journal of Tourism Research* 'War and Tourism' 8(3)/2006). This paper contributes to the above debate, investigating the role of local communities and stakeholders in the identification and valorisation of war heritage sites, looking particularly at the managerial choices and communication strategies of public bodies and private businesses. Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol, two autonomous provinces in the north of Italy, were the chosen research sites: both areas were involved in the First World War (WWI), but their cultures and historic identities are very different. The study also examines whether or not cultural identity influences managerial choices related to the valorisation and promotion of the territory and underlines the uniqueness of this kind of heritage that, if conveniently managed, could contribute to emphasise place identity.

The paper first describes the most critical issues involved in place identity and the valorisation of war heritage for tourism purposes. Following the literature review the paper presents the field research results, highlighting the roles of local stakeholders and describing how the provinces' war heritage has been identified and promoted. It points out the main managerial challenges faced in war tourism development and indicates possible further research directions.

PLACE IDENTITY AND WAR HERITAGE

The term heritage tourism refers to a wide range of tourism products, including art cities, monuments, buildings, works of art, archeological sites, war sites, fortresses, trenches, intangible heritage and landscapes (Van der Borg *et al*, 1996; Garrod and Fyall, 2000; Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Tourism based on the valorisation of places in which historical heritage is the main attraction is one of the fastest growing segments of cultural tourism (Urry, 2002; Timothy and Boyd, 2003; McKercher *et al*, 2005). Through heritage tourism people can rediscover their own cultural roots,

and visiting sites where events of historical importance have taken place gives the visitor a personal insight into the past (Richards, 1996; Poria *et al*, 2003; Fyall *et al*, 2006; Rátz and Sárdi, 2007; Smith and Richards, 2013). It must be remembered, however, that the valorisation of an area's war heritage needs to take into account the latter's dissonant nature (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996) and the fact that the temporal and spatial mismatch between this heritage and contemporary visitors is the basis for the interpretations of historical events.

Considering the opportunities for heritage tourism from the demand perspective, the motivations which propel people to visit historical war sites are key. As Poria *et al* (2003) demonstrated in their research at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the different symbolical significance accorded by visitors to the site as a place of genocide is closely linked to different levels of historical consciousness and/or emotional involvement (Poria and Reichel, 2006; Biran *et al*, 2011). According to the authors, the desire to increase one's historical knowledge and understanding and to experience the emotions of being in such an emblematic site are among the motivations for visiting the concentration camp. Death, as described in studies of dark tourism, is marginal, in comparison with other factors. The political use of some cultural or war heritage sites is an important theme in research into dark tourism because it determines how historical, and often contested, events and places are understood (Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Chronis, 2012; Stone, 2012). Research conducted with visitors to the house of Anna Frank in Amsterdam confirmed that their main motivation was to create a personal connection with history and to discover something extra about these tragic events (Poria *et al*, 2003). Along with the main motivations mentioned above, many tourists added a sense of moral obligation to pay tribute to the victim. Butler and Suntikul (2013), similarly, pointed out that most tourists who visit war sites feel in some way morally obliged to do so. This suggests that war sites, full of the evocative power of human sacrifice and all its significance, are in themselves attractions. Ryan (2007) reflects on the fact that visiting battlefields can arouse strong emotions not only in the descendents of the fallen, but also in any tourist who is particularly sensitive to such events and subjects. Although the controversial nature of sites connected to war should not be ignored; the

same place may well be seen differently by tourists of different nationalities. Depending on whether the visitor's country was on the winning or the losing side in a particular armed conflict, a site may be either a source of national pride or a symbol of defeat (Prideaux, 2007; Winter, 2011). Battlefields, cemeteries, war memorials redolent with heroic values, are all part of a war's material heritage, but they are also places of commemoration, and may reinforce either feelings of pride, or of national defeat (Chronis, 2005, 2012; Frost *et al*, 2009; Winter, 2009, 2011).

From the perspective of the tourism offer, it's important to underline the fact that the exploitation of the past through the valorisation of historical sites is a process which will inevitably reflect contemporary values and cultural, social and political priorities (Chronis, 2005; Hannam, 2006; Ryan, 2007; Irimiás, 2014). The recovery of elements of historical heritage, even as a tourism resource, will always, therefore, be heavily influenced by the points of view of the various interest groups involved in its conservation and in the organization of celebrations of commemoration (Johnson, 1999; Chronis, 2012; Jones and Shaw, 2012). The planning of restoration and conservation work in war heritage sites must go hand in hand with tourism valorisation decisions which take all the complexities surrounding the sites into account. Close collaboration between academics, tourism organizations and communication experts is vital in order to deliver a message which does not offend any of the various sensibilities - generational, linguistic, historical awareness - which might influence tourists' decisions to visit war heritage sites.

The management of historical heritage must therefore be sensitive to the specificities of the particular place and theme with which it is concerned. As Garrod and Fyall (2000) outlined, the long term management of built heritage attractions is usually fraught with constraints and imperatives. The 'curatorial approach' still prevails over visitor management and economic competitiveness in heritage management. Leask (2010), in her extensive review of visitor attractions, points out that the issue of historical interpretation necessitates that war heritage attractions be distinguished from general tourism attractions. She sees the enhancement of heritage attractions not simply as a conservation issue, but as a tool to gain competitive advantage in

destination development and tourism. The opportunity for commercial gain can win policy support and make it easier to find funding, essential also in war heritage management. The need to interpret complex historical events as part of the valorisation of war heritage attractions means that their development must be achieved and communicated using a distinct approach, and targeted communication policies (Poria *et al*, 2003). The fact that certain sites may arouse strong, and indeed conflicting, emotions in visitors must also be taken into account; the promotion of these sites is therefore more problematic than that of any other tourism product (Austin, 2002) and must be approached on an *ad hoc* basis. As already mentioned, war heritage sites influence the collective memory of a - still living - past, a past which forms part of people's personal identities (Olick and Robbins, 1998).

Social memory, place identity and war heritage management are interrelated as the case study on Trentino Alto-Adige/Südtirol evidences.

RESEARCH METHODS

Our research aim is to investigate the role of local communities and stakeholders in the identification and valorisation of war heritage sites in the northern Italian autonomous provinces of Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol. Place identity in Trentino shows Italian cultural features, whereas Alto Adige/Südtirol reflects a clear Tyrolean imprint.

Cultural tourism in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol, although still secondary to active tourism, is growing in importance, particularly following recent public investment which has seen the creation of important museums (*i.e.* the Science Museum in Trento), and the reclamation of numerous artifacts and sites related to the Great War.

This choice of location was prompted not only by the area's significance in the First World War (WWI), but also by the fact that the cultures and historic identities of the two provinces are very different (Leonardi, 2009), thus allowing us to analyse managerial choices and communication strategies emerging from dissimilar backgrounds and to examine whether or not these differences

influence the decision making processes and strategic choices of public bodies and businesses. Through field work, in-depth interviews and an analysis of the tourism organizations' communication activities, we were able to evaluate to what extent the territories were able to promote a controversial, dissident cultural product. The research examines, in particular, a) whether there is an existent heritage tourism offer linked to WWI; b) where that offer exists, whether it is recognized by the local community, and, if it is, how; c) if the WWI sites are promoted, and if so, using which communication strategies.

There are three analysis *foci*: 1) an evaluation of the conservation state of the sites; 2) an analysis of the *in situ* communications material and of the tourism promotion message (on- and off-line); 3) the influence of local residents' and stakeholders' different cultural identities on narrations of the war events.

The four steps of the research were:

1) *Data-gathering*: In the first half of 2014 using www.trentinograndeguerra.it for Trentino and www.14-18.europaregion.info for Alto Adige/Südtirol, we created a database of Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol's war heritage. The database includes forts, war cemeteries, war memorials, battlefields, and thematic trails that follow military roads. In April 2015 the database was enriched with information directly obtained from the director of Superintendence of Architectural and Archeological Heritage in Trentino who being the responsible of the restoration projects regarding forts and memorials provided us with updated information. Table 1 and Table 2 summarise the database of war heritage sites in the two provinces.

2) *Content analysis*: The information provided both in promotional material (on- and off-line) and on site was considered; these analyses revealed that the sites have an identitarian connotation. In order to understand the kinds of experience being offered to visitors, the promotional material produced by the *Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra* (Italian War History Museum; www.museodellaguerra.it), the provincial DMOs (respectively *Alto Adige Marketing* (www.smg.bz.it) and *Trentino Marketing* (www.trentinomarketing.org) thematic tourist guides,

brochures and maps were also analysed. The brochures and maps were categorized according to the type of war heritage they promoted and its territorial identification such as forts, trenches and trekking paths and memorials. A total of four Italian thematic guide books were content analysed. The process involved the following phases: familiarisation with the collected data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and searching for structures between the themes. The focus was on historical narratives, place identity and the representation of Italian identity.

3) *Field research*: between August 2014 and April 2015 most of the accessible war heritage sites in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol were visited for direct observation. Twenty sites in all were visited, ten in Trentino and ten in Alto Adige/Südtirol. The criteria evaluated were: (1) accessibility, (2) state of conservation and restoration projects, (3) possible valorisation as a tourism product, (4) quality of information for tourists, (5) the sort of language used to describe the events linked to the site, and the story told, (6) the available on site edutainment facilities. Spatial familiarity was established by walking the battlefield, observing locations, taking photos documenting the accessibility and the state of conservation of the sites along with the tools of interpretation applied.

4) *In-depth interviews with key stakeholders*: between June and August 2015 twelve personal interviews were conducted with key figures from the public institutions, the lead architect responsible of the restoration projects, local DMOs, representatives from cultural associations, historians, tour guides. Each interview lasted two-two and half hours and were registered and later transcribed. The main focus of the interviews was to explore the role of war heritage as part of place identity and what strategy was applied to leverage on war heritage to tourism development.

Before presenting our research results, the following section provides a short overview of the key historical events in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol, which still influence the cultural and identity values and the place identity of these two provinces.

TRENTINO AND ALTO ADIGE/SÜDTIROL: PARALLEL HISTORIES

The histories and cultures of the area which now makes up the region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, and which was divided into two separate autonomous provinces following the Degasperi-Gruber Agreement of 1946, are strikingly diverse.

In 1815 the Congress of Vienna established that the Prince-Bishopric of Trento, which had until then been an Italian speaking, autonomous territory, was to become part of the Austrian Tyrol. For just over a century Trentino was directly ruled by Vienna, but the political relationship between the Italian population and the Habsburg authorities was strained by Trentino's desire to regain its independence. Many lives were lost among members of the irredentist movement. Trentino was the Austro-Hungarian Empire's southern bulwark and considerable effort went into its fortification and militarization: between 1861 and 1901 more than eighty fortifications were built throughout the territory.

Alto Adige/Südtirol, as one of the Counties of Tyrol, was ruled by the Habsburgs from 1363-1918; for more than five centuries its culture has been Germanic. As in Trentino, the Empire heavily fortified and militarized the province in the second half of the 19th Century.

After the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, the redrawing of borders under the Treaty of Saint Germain placed South Tyrol in Italy. The population of Alto Adige/Südtirol, predominantly German speaking, suddenly found itself a minority. During the Twenties, Fascist policies imposed the Italianization of the province, prohibited the use of German in schools and undoubtedly fuelled the desire for autonomy and cultural identity which led to more than 360 terrorist attacks, which caused numerous injuries and deaths, between 1956 and 1988 (see Stocker, 2007, for further details). Under the Degasperi-Gruber Agreement Alto Adige/Südtirol was allowed to introduce an educational system providing for both German and Italian language schools. German topography - abolished by the Fascist regime and replaced by Italian ones - were reinstated. The official restoration of the population's German culture was thus begun.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The role of local stakeholders

In the first phase of the research the websites of the institutions and entities responsible for heritage conservation were analysed, in order to provide an overview of the provinces' war heritage. This analysis of institutions involved in the restoration and valorisation of war heritage in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol revealed important differences between the provinces, both in terms of the number of institutions and their functions. In 2009 the Province of Trento founded the Trentino Great War Network, a network involving public institutions aims to preserve and valorise Trentino's war heritage. The provincial DMO and the local tourist boards, the Foundation of the Bell of the Fallen (www.fondazioneoperacampana.it) and the Historical Museum of Trentino, the Italian War History Museum in Rovereto together with the Italian Defence Ministry are the main institutions and organisations, and make up a single territorial system for the conservation and promotion of the area's war heritage. An examination of their official reports and other materials reveals that the restoration of forts, paths and trenches began more than fifteen years ago, in order to preserve the province's rich heritage of military architecture and ensure its accessibility, particularly during the then upcoming centenary commemorations. Such initiatives although considered only the conservation issues related to war heritage. Strategic choices and initiatives to develop a tourism product leveraging on war heritage or differentiate existing tourism products and services have failed to be designed. These findings also emerged from the in-depth interviews carried out with key figures.

“When we started the restoration projects we had no idea what to expect. We were surprised to see local communities to participate with such a strong willingness. It was a surprise for us that everyone was so touched by the theme of the Great War” [interview with the director of the Superintendence of Architectural and Archeological Heritage in Trentino, 2015].

The Superintendence of Architectural and Archeological Heritage in Trentino was given the task of identifying, cataloging and preserving the province's war heritage, and of organizing exhibitions,

events, publications and courses aimed at increasing awareness of this architectural patrimony and promoting it more widely. Table 1 shows the accessibility and stage of restoration of the Trentino sites in 2013. The data indicate that this war heritage could indeed be integrated within the province's heritage tourism offer, even though one third of the sites are unfortunately beyond repair.

Map. 1



Map 1: Map on Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol. Source: The authors' own elaboration based on www.d-maps.com.

Table 1

Table 1: First World War heritage in Trentino

Type	Number	Owned by	Visitable	Restoration projects
Museums	19	Autonomous Province of Trento	19	-
Trenches	15	Autonomous Province of Trento	13	300 km, from Stelvio through the Dolomites
Forts	68	4 private; 64 autonomous Province of Trento	10	6 different projects
Memorials	11	Ministry of defence	11	-
Cemeteries	12	Ministry of defence/local municipality	12	-
Monuments	7	Local municipality	7	
Thematic paths	5	Nature conservation service, local municipality	5	<i>Sentiero della Pace</i> (Peace Path) -521 km <i>Percorso della Memoria</i> (Remembrance Way) Routes to the biggest fortresses <i>Sui sentieri dei lupi</i> (on the wolves' paths) - 100 km of forts
Total	137		77	

Source: Our elaboration of data from the inventory of the Superintendence of Architectural and Archaeological Heritage and from www.trentinograndeguerra.it

As attested by the heritage tourism literature, it is crucial to understand how local communities, and contemporary society more generally, relate to particular types of cultural heritage and how these attitudes are reflected in the latter's management. The restoration and valorisation of Trentino's war heritage has been funded by the EU, the public institution of the province and a local foundation. A general restoration plan for the forts and paths was drawn up under the European LEADER II

project, which ended in 2001. By 2013 the province had restored nineteen and it is currently supervising the restoration of a further nine forts (see www.trentinograndeguerra.it) with the support of a local bank.

Photo 1. A ruined fort in Trentino as a tourism attraction



Source: the authors' own photo.

Our analysis of the available information on the province's war heritage, in conjunction with field work and the direct observation of how the forts and trenches are managed, have revealed some critical points. To date, projects have focused primarily on the preservation of the patrimony, very often almost ignoring the objective of valorising sites as tourism products. It is clear that this approach has limited the development of heritage tourism, a limitation which can only be overcome if specific plans to market the territory's historical heritage are adopted. As just underlined, planned strategy have to consider the definition of war tourism products and also the integration with the wider destination offer. A professional and high quality service offered at war heritage sites should be required to appropriately manage visitors. Although, as revealed in one of the interviews, the recruited human resources need capacity building. The responsible for a cultural association that manages one of the forts claimed that *"In the summer, during weekdays the fort is open thanks to another association that offers temporary work for unemployed people, but they know nothing about history or the fort, they only control the tickets and that's all."* In Alto Adige/Südtirol the restoration and valorisation of war heritage has involved fewer institutional actors, the roles of which are less clearly defined, than in Trentino. In the 1990s about 2,500 structures were transferred from the State to the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the management of bunkers, defensive barriers and military roads of particular interest was taken on by the department and administration

of heritage. Some places, considered of particular architectural or historico-cultural importance, have been evaluated for preservation and valorisation.

When examining the information available on the war heritage of Alto Adige/Südtirol, the first thing that strikes one is the fact that there is no one body or organization which looks after the preservation of the material and immaterial heritage of the Great War. In fact, it is difficult even to find information about it - other than that contained within the two volume list, *Bunker* and *Itinera* - because no coordinated project to collate and disseminate the historical memory of the war has yet been attempted. Military roads, mule trails and paths have been turned into high altitude tourism trails, cycle paths or bike routes, but without any information about their military origins being provided. The didactic and tourism potential of the forts and museums have not been explored. The data in Table 2 represent a tentative reconstruction of this heritage, using sources from Trentino and from interregional, European and local entities.

 Table 2

Table 2: First World War heritage in Alto Adige

Type	Number	Owned by	Visitable	Restoration projects
Outdoor Museums	5	Autonomous Province of Bolzano	5	n/a
Trenches	n/a	n/a		n/a
Forts	10	Autonomous Province of Bolzano	3	n/a
Memorials	2	Ministry of defence	2	n/a
Cemeteries	4	Ministry of defence/local	4	n/a
Monuments	1	Local municipality	1	n/a
Themed path/way	1	Local municipality	1	Great War Ski - 82.5 km
Total	23		16	

Source: Our elaboration of data from www.trentinograndeguerra.it, www.dolomiti.org, www.provincia.bz.it, www.14-18.europaregion.info

n/a no data available

No data could be found on requests for European funding for restoration projects, which have, to date, been financed by the Province itself or by the local bank in Bolzano.

Identification and accessibility of war heritage sites

Over and above the objective facts that emerge from this examination of the accessibility and management of the two Provinces' war heritage, whether a certain site be visited, or not, some

observations can be made on the different extent to which the tragic events of the WWI have been elaborated. In Trentino the sites are part of a network which includes the Italian War History Museum along with 18 local museums. This network also promotes the museums' research and makes it accessible to the public. In Alto Adige/Südtirol, by contrast, there is a sense that often the lack of access to sites linked to the war is part of a political mourning period which has still not been fully worked through. Some of the forts in Trentino have been completely rebuilt and valorised as tourism products. They provide museum space, put on exhibitions, organize events and even offer catering. The municipalities responsible for the forts ensure that they are well signposted. Museums, members of the Trentino Great War Network, have been created in some of the forts visited during fieldwork. These museums host permanent and temporary exhibitions, concerts and cultural events. The information they provide, on and offline, is available in Italian, German and English. Moreover, in the Belvedere Fort in addition to visiting traditional exhibitions of war objects, tourists can immerse themselves in 'the daily life' of the fort. In order to create a more intimate experience, a voice over reads passages from the letters and diaries of soldiers. In engaging the senses and awakening the emotions of visitors, such experiences cannot but cause visitors to reflect on the reality of war and the fragility of man. These forts have become places where visitors have the chance to really deepen their knowledge and understanding of what happened during the war. Interactive exhibitions invite visitors to reflect upon events which have profoundly influenced both personal and collective memories. Since 2013 the Italian War History Museum and the war sites promoted by the Trentino Great War Network have registered a continued and growing interest on the part of tourists (Chart 1.).

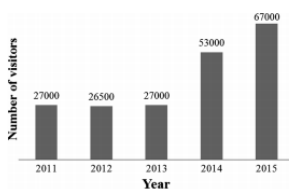


Chart 1: Estimate of visitors at the Museum of Italian History of War in Rovereto (Italy).
Note: The annual number of visitors is an approximation since there are free entry tickets and the annual tickets which generate multiple entries.
Sources: Own elaboration from data of the Museum of Italian History of War in Rovereto (Italy).

In the first six months of 2015 the war museum had 35,000 visitors, as against 22,000 in the same period in the previous year. In 2015, total visitor numbers are up just over 60% on 2013 (interview with the museum director, 2015). This strong growth is due to the fact that schools are increasingly integrating classroom based teaching on the Great War with visits to the sites themselves. This outcome has, in fact, been one of the objectives of the Province's policy on valorising its war heritage.

Given that the province has neither a database nor a specific portal, in Alto Adige/Südtirol, it was necessary to use the database accessible at www.trentinograndeguerra.it which gives a brief description of Alto Adige/Südtirol's war heritage, and some directions to sites. Most of the forts in the province cannot be visited by the public. However, neither the official tourism portal, nor even the Alto Adige/Südtirol tourism board website, informs visitors of the impossibility, whether because entry is forbidden, or just very difficult logistically, of visiting the forts. Our fieldwork revealed that the recently restored Fort of Fortezza (www.forte-fortezza.it) is the only one open to the public. The Mitterberg Fort, for example, even if it was recently restored, has remained closed and is not being used for didactic purposes, let alone a tourism attraction (Photo 2).

Photo 2. Mitterberg Fort in Alto-Adige Südtirol, closed to the public, 2014



Photo 2: Mitterberg Fort in Alto Adige/Südtirol, closed to the public, 2014.
Source: The authors own photo.

Source: the authors own photo.

Not only is the province's war heritage inaccessible to the public, even visitors who actually find their way to a site, discover no information on its history, no explanation of its features, often not

even an indication of its name. Such situations occur even in cases where a site is close to a main road, or to a ski slope crowded by tourists.

In contrast, visiting and observing the management of war cemeteries, listed as war heritage sites and as cultural products, was very revealing. The military cemeteries in Alto Adige/Südtirol unlike the forts, trenches, battlefields and military roads, are well signposted and very carefully tended. The Austro-Hungarian cemetery in Brunico/Bruneck is the most moving and suggestive of these sites. The tombs immersed in the woods are marked by wooden crosses so skilfully carved from trunks and branches that they feel in perfect harmony with their natural surroundings. The cemetery reflects the multiethnic, multifaith nature of the Austro-Hungarian army and it is one of the most suggestive of the tourist destinations offered by the small city of Brunico. It is a place for reflection and a concrete example of religious tolerance. The potential for Great War heritage tourism in Alto Adige/Südtirol is confirmed by visitors' comments on Tripadvisor; 81 posts consider the cemetery to be morally a must-see destination: a "Visit to reflect upon" and a "Unique" place, "Rich in history", "a pleasant discovery" (www.tripadvisor.it, last accessed on 19 February 2016). The cemeteries in Dobbiaco (another meaningful small town in Alto Adige/Südtirol), are also well signposted and looked after and in all the cemeteries visitors can read accounts of the events of the war connected to the site, the soldiers' nationalities are listed and information is given in Italian, German, English and sometimes in other languages too. Czech, Croat and Hungarians soldiers are buried in the cemetery in Dobbiaco while the German speakers were transferred to other cemeteries in the 1920s. In this sense, Dobbiaco is a heritage tourism destination for Hungarian, Croat and Czech tourists who want to remember their dead. Their interest in mourning the fallen is evidenced by the brief notes left on the tombs.

Information and promotion of war heritage tourism

In the two provinces information about their respective war heritage, and the way in which it is communicated on- and offline, differs considerably. Whereas in Trentino the sites are clearly

signposted and the information about them and their contents is comprehensive, in Alto Adige/Südtirol the situation is quite the opposite. The two provinces' online communication on the web portals is very similar, as they appear to have adopted promotional strategies that are, in many respects, alike. One of the thematic areas promoted on the Trentino DMO portal is the 'Great War Experience' (www.visittrentino.it/en/trentino-grande-guerra). After a brief historical account of the war, including some intriguing facts and figures about trenches, forts and soldiers, tourists are encouraged to visit the actual sites. The ease with which these can be accessed and their historical significance for Italy and, indeed, Europe are clearly expressed. The Trentino Marketing Spa is responsible for the communications projects implemented by the Italian War History Museum and the local territorial marketing organizations. The content analysis of the guide books, brochures and maps revealed that the most frequently used words to promote war heritage enhanced its uniqueness and its special role in Italian identity construction. The themes identified among the codes revealed that the «unique view on the mountain landscape», «outstanding military construction» were linked to the war topics such as soldiers' sacrifices and pain.

Results show that the conditions to develop war tourism product already exist, but the offer is limited and targeted only towards particular segments (schools), in more, this offer remains shadowed. It was observed that:

- The Trentino Great War Network coordinates all the initiatives and events connected with the centenary of the outbreak of the WWI. A rich program of events and displays has been organized throughout 2014 and 2015. Most activities have involved schools, both primary and secondary. The educational objectives of the events and the excursion packages emerge clearly from the content analysis of the DMO's and the museums' promotional material. The initiative «Trentino. From war to peace» offers Italian students educational stays of two or more days at various war heritage sites. During these stays participants visit museums, trenches, or forts, with expert guides and attend history lessons *in situ*.
- Unfortunately, the page promoting this educational experience is in Italian only, while the

website of the DMO can be accessed in Italian, English and in six European languages (German, French, Dutch, Polish, Czech and Russian), thus providing for the territory's most important market sectors. However, this is not the case for material on the war heritage sites. For example, the Czech language version of the website does not even mention the thematic offer related to the Great War, while other thematic products, like sport and food, have been translated and are reasonably well promoted. This lack suggests that the province's war heritage is only half-heartedly promoted as a war heritage tourism product.

- An examination of the promotional material provided by the local DMO of territories involved in the great war, instead, shows brochures and itineraries aimed at both the domestic and international tourism markets. The analysis of the promotional materials in Alto Adige/Südtirol depicts a different scene. On the portal of the Alto Adige/Südtirol DMO (www.suedtirol.info) there aren't information linked to the product 'First World War'. On the art and culture pages, where visits to buildings of architectural interest, museums, churches and monuments, are proposed, there is no mention of the vast war heritage - forts, cemeteries, military roads - still looked after by Alto Adige/Südtirol. The fort of Fortezza, the most important fort during the great war, is included on the architecture page, as an exceptional example of the Neo-Classical style and it is rentable for events and weddings. The Austro-Hungarian cemetery in Dobbiaco is included on the 'legends and spiritual places' page , while the itinerary 'In the Footsteps of the First World War' is down at the bottom of a page, buried in suggestions for treks, walks and excursions. The fact that there are no tourism products, that valorise the memory of the Great War highlights the lack of a strategy to respond to the interest and historical curiosity of potential visitors to war sites. At the same time, in the historical accounts that are provided, reference is quite frequently made to the fact that the territory was annexed by Italy at the end of the Great War. As we have already seen, this outcome had profound social consequences and triggered immediate demands for autonomy and for recognition of the cultural and linguistic differences within the area's new borders. The Tyrolean identity seems to want no connection

whatsoever with the tragic events of the WWI, but rather to continue to exploit the stereotype of an idyllic peasant lifestyle, with its typical products - all endorsed by images of Tyroleans in their 100% traditional costumes.

MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES IN WAR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

An analysis of the valorization of WWI heritage in Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol reveals the different approaches and management styles that, from a managerial point of view, can be connected to *a)* problems inherent in the valorization of dissonant heritage, *b)* the unavoidably complex coordination of multi-stakeholder contexts, *c)* a lack of investment in historical research. On the first of these questions, the difficulty of valorizing this kind of heritage for tourism and integrating it within the broader territorial offer, which has already been highlighted in the literature (Austin, 2002; Olick and Robbins, 1998), is confirmed. These difficulties, however, present themselves in different ways in the two territories.

In Alto Adige/Südtirol the problem is rooted in a clear lack of interest in identifying war heritage sites and making them accessible, whether for purely historico-cultural purposes, or for tourism. WWI sites are not well publicized even when they are close to tourism areas or itineraries which have been valorized. In the case of Alto Adige/Südtirol, therefore, the difficulties of coordinating public and private actors and those of integrating cultural tourism products are less salient since there is no will on anyone's part to engage in a strategy of war heritage valorization. This is true both at the governmental level, the public body has no strategies aimed at the restoration and the promotion of the war heritage and at that of the governance and management of the destination. The provincial DMO, which is a key stakeholder in the promotion of the area's tourism, is not involved in any projects to valorise war heritage. At the level of the single business or association, one particular site has been valorised (the Fort of Fortezza). Still its promotion has run into the problems met by largely bottom-up initiatives, which cannot promote themselves sufficiently because they are not contextualized, either within the creation of a wider tourism offer or in a joint development

project with key players in local development.

In Trentino, however, the research reveals a very different picture. Here there is undoubted interest in the valorisation of the province's war heritage. Numerous stakeholders are involved in its promotion. Initiatives and activities are far more than 'just conserving the sites', enable tourists to deepen their historical knowledge and experience the sites. Nevertheless, in Trentino, the valorisation of war sites for tourism does have its weaknesses, relating to planning, communication and promotion. Firstly, the war tourism product has been primarily targeted at schools. Although this choice is understandable, it unfortunately does not extend the territorial borders. The promotion of activities and initiatives is mainly connected to the local context, whereas it could target schools nationwide, and even in the other countries which fought in the Alpine warfare. If this were done, it could then generate initiatives such as the twinning of places in Trentino with partners abroad. Further, this would involve not only the school sector - the entire tourism chain would be drawn in, to provide accommodation, food and edutainment. Such an offer, in fact, could combine entertainment with learning and introduce visitors to the sites through tourism experiences. It could be extended to target families and thus strengthen the communication and promotion of Trentino's war heritage to the particular demand sector that is one of the province's most important target markets.

The potential of war tourism in the differentiation and deseasonalizing of the provincial offer deserves to be further explored. The valorization of the war heritage could encourage winter tourism, targeted at both non-skiers and at skiers, as an additional activity. War heritage could also be promoted to attract tourists in the low seasons of spring and autumn, integrating visits to the sites within current territorial tourism offers, or creating new ones.

In order to implement such initiatives, Trentino will have to strengthen its public-private network, the provincial DMO will have to become more involved and local businesses will have to devise and plan more activities and projects. An increased culture of professionalism and a stronger managerial skill will be fundamental to the private sector's ability to create convincing proposals

that the public sector will be keen to co-finance. If the role of the public sector in the local economy is going to change, it must be very prudent when evaluating the projects it intends to finance. Moreover, the private sector must become more involved in both the planning and the financing stages, thus contributing to a virtuous cycle of top-down and bottom-up collaboration between public and private actors.

CONCLUSIONS

As evidenced in the former paragraphs, studying the cases of Trentino and Alto Adige/Südtirol and comparing the roles of local actors in the two provinces has revealed some significant differences either in the accessibility as in the promotion of the war tourism product. The number of institutions involved in the restoration and valorisation of war heritage in the two provinces is very different. Trentino has a sizeable network of organizations, associations and museums which has, for a number of years, been engaged in research into, and the restoration of, sites and records of the WWI. This network generates proposals for the valorisation, both for educational and tourism purposes, of the province's war heritage and the provincial DMO relies on it to provide the data that is then used in the promotion of Trentino's First World War products.

Alto Adige/Südtirol does not have a similar network. The data collected *in situ* on the accessibility and management of war heritage partly explains the different extents to which local communities and political actors have interpreted the disastrous events linked to the WWI.

In Trentino the development of the sites is seen as an opportunity to share the research promoted by the Italian War History Museum and the aforementioned network. In Alto Adige/Südtirol, however, it seems that the lack of access to many of the sites is an expression of a still ongoing political mourning process.

The conclusion arrived at is therefore that the preconditions for the offer of a tourism product connected to the visiting of war sites exist in Trentino but not in Alto Adige/Südtirol. While in Trentino a network of public institutions and organisations (local government, museums, research

institutes, universities, DMO) was created, in Alto Adige/Südtirol such a network has not even been considered. This contrast results from the outcome of the war that deeply influenced place identity in both provinces. The different extents to which the local communities have elaborated the pain of their wartime experiences and the consequences of the Peace Treaty. The consequent difficulties for actors in Alto Adige/Südtirol in offering to tourists a heritage tourism product which the community itself still does not recognize.

The content analysis of the on- and off-line communication materials confirmed the difficulty of explaining the dissonant, controversial histories of such sites to tourists. Texts and images must therefore be chosen with the sensitivities of local communities in mind, as well as those of the visitors, who may themselves be from countries which were either winners or losers in the conflict. In some forts and trenches in Trentino tourists are offered a critical, rigorous narration of the war, while in the few accessible war sites in Alto Adige/Südtirol there is silence - no story, no facts even, as if the sites were not part of the local history.

The DMOs of the two provinces use similar online communication strategies to promote tourism, neither of them highlights their war heritage as a tourism product. In Trentino, therefore, the communication strategies have to be improved in order to increase the domestic tourist flows (especially with reference to students and families) and to catch the same segments in the international market. The better definition of communication and promotion activities however is a result of a wider destination strategy. In Alto Adige/Südtirol this implies the restoration of the war heritage and the definition of a project (and before the willingness to create it) connected to war tourism. The research shows that the basic conditions to valorise war heritage and to integrate it within a wider tourism offer are missing.

In Trentino instead a wide network of actors are involved in the valorisation and promotion of war heritage, although these are mainly public institutions working with the DMOs. This network creates the conditions to restore the war heritage and to develop tourism products to enrich the destination's tourism offer. Still, it is necessary to strengthen the network among institutions,

establish links with private actors and local communities to be involved within the wider local tourism chain. A better coordination would also be desirable: this could support the integration of the destination offer and the definition of new tourism products related to war tourism (emphasizing an edutainment approach). At the same time, a more targeted and appropriate communication strategy is needed to overcome current limitations and weaknesses.

It must be pointed out that in Trentino war heritage sites, particularly during the centenary commemorations, have become school tourism destinations. This might stimulate the involvement of other demand segments in the future, but it is also true that some weaknesses exist. The analysis of the provincial DMO website shows a missing direct connection with the website dedicated to the WWI. The section “Learn” in the “Great War” website is dedicated to schools and as such it claims *“For years we have been teaching young people about the events of the Great War and kept alive the memory of what happened through close collaborations between museums and schools, and with projects aimed specifically at students. There is an exciting range of projects designed to throw light on the history of Trentino and on its involvement in the First World War.”* (www.trentinograndeguerra.it last access on 15 February, 2016). Unfortunately, all the information about proposals/offers for schools and teachers education are not accessible in English. Though this web page seems to be available in English, not all its texts were translated. At the time being there are no conditions to create and promote this offer at an international level.

This exploratory research into the management and exploitation of war heritage in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol has revealed a number of themes which are open to further research. The role of local communities in the conservation and exploitation of war heritage and residents’ perceptions of how this heritage is managed are both subjects in need of deeper investigation. Moreover, a sensitive management and promotion of the war heritage requires an understanding of how tourists interpret the historical-cultural identity of the territory where this heritage and its memories reside. Future research might reveal how tourism itself could become a means by which local communities are able to work through and overcome the trauma of these tragic historical events.

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