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REVIEW ARTICLE

# Creation of an Area Brand in the Protected Territories of Mount Etna and Alcantara River

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## ABSTRACT

The implementation of an efficient and effective strategy, capable of relaunching the economy of a territory and increasing its attractiveness, is now more desirable than ever. Among all possible tools, a particular European discipline has certainly found confirmation in areas with a high presence of quality productions and areas with a high sustainable value supply: the Area Brand.

The aim of this paper is to increase the awareness of the readers about these approaches, related to a territory with a great development potential and a high capacity of arousing great interest even among overseas consumers and stakeholders. In particular, we considered the Sicilian territory related to Protected Areas of Messina and Catania, located in the area of "GAL Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara". In this work, the brand implementation process starts with the preliminary phase, specifically with the mapping and evaluation of the production processes that may be useful and functional to a possible targeted integration of this strategy.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's society, there is a considerable increase of interest in those phenomena that concern - more or less directly - the health of ecosystems and all that is commonly defined as 'environment'. In fact, today the environment is not only perceived as a mere public good or a simple heritage to be recognized for its artistic value, and therefore according to its aesthetic characteristics, but rather as a real economic asset worthy of preservation because it is scarce and not unlimitedly reproducible. This perspective provides the basis for a broader vision that links man to environmental conditions, creating an inseparable correlation between his very survival and the natural resources at his disposal [1]. Over time, the Italian legal system has adjusted to these new and evolving needs through a series of rules that constitute and integrate a discipline aimed at protecting the natural capital present within the national borders through the adoption of various instruments, including the system of so-called Protected Areas [2]. This legislation is particularly important for Italy as it is "the European country with the greatest biodiversity in terms of number of species and ecological processes". It reflects an intersection of universal interests that move from a local, to a community, to a global dimension.

In particular, through the implementation of this system, Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda, conventionally called Life on Land, is promoted and pursued. In fact, this SDG aims to "protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss" [3].

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In the national system of protected natural areas, the Sicilian context is of great importance for the number and extension of the areas, for the richness and diversity of the natural heritage, for the plurality of subjects involved in the management (Park Authorities, Provinces, Environmental Associations, Azienda Regionale Foreste Demaniali, Universities). Sicilian legislation is one of the few in Italy to have provided for the management of nature reserves to be entrusted to environmental associations, with the attribution of public functions; this choice has made it possible to enhance the dynamism and commitment of the associations, giving a turnaround to nature conservation policies that had not been implemented for many years. In these natural areas, you can find plants that have disappeared in the rest of Europe, or are endemic, and animals in danger of extinction. They are pulsating green hearts, far from the chaotic Sicilian life. Their intact appearance, not at all, or minimally modified by human intervention, takes us back in time, to a primitive state, between water, fire, air and earth.

## OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to increase the awareness of the readers about these approaches, related to a territory with a great development potential and a high capacity of arousing great interest even among overseas consumers and stakeholders.

To achieve this objective, it was decided to carry out a case study in the territory of the GAL Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara. This is located in Randazzo and is constituted in the form of a Limited Liability Cooperative Consortium (S.C.C.A.R.L.). The Local Action Groups (GAL) are local partnerships provided for by European legislation with the task of drawing up and implementing local development strategies, starting with the Community initiative Leader, approved in the early 1990s [4].

## OUTLINE OF THE WORK

**This work is divided in three main parts:**

- Selection of the case study: GAL Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara, whose area of action consists of 26 municipalities. The public partnership is represented by the municipalities belonging to the Etna area and the Alcantara Valley, the two Park Authorities of the area belonging to the GAL and the two Universities present. The private partners are professional technical orders, numerous research bodies and institutes, protection consortia, districts and associations that promote the main typical products of the area, numerous cultural, environmental and consumer associations and an association that works in social and personal services. The GAL supports local operators and administrations to reflect on the potential of the territory in a long-term perspective, through the promotion and implementation of

integrated strategies of sustainable development concerning the experimentation of new forms of valorization of the natural and cultural heritage, the strengthening of the local economy, in order to create employment and improve the organizational capacity of the respective communities.

- Mapping and assessment of the subjects involved in the project for the creation of an Area Brand, which are a fundamental prerequisite for its creation. The latter consists essentially in the creation of an integrated and coordinated network of all the services present in the reference scenario, and will allow the enhancement of the resources and of the territory itself if in fact it will be able to increase the communication among the present operators, to bring the territorial development commitments with the different needs of the subjects using them and to promote the collaboration in the environmental, economic and socio-cultural development responsibilities of the area. The integrated network of services and the communication system also presuppose a clear identification of all the subjects present in the area, which can take place starting from the peculiarities of the area itself and clarifying which private and public subjects can contribute to its enhancement.
- Analysis of the results, drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations for improving investments from a Green Economy perspective.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Area Brand is a tool that deserves a special mention as it is successfully establishing itself on the European scene to respond to the needs of local management and promotion of the territory: it is a sort of self-certification of service, which intends to guarantee tourists (and not only), thanks to the commitment and synergic action on the whole territory of individual economic operators and public administration. It is dedicated to a defined territory, involving all the public and private entities operating in the area, aiming to create a network of collaboration and sharing that becomes the operational tool to respond to local management needs and to guide territorial marketing initiatives. The basic concept of the AB is therefore the existence of an area with characteristics that distinguishes it, which may be environmental, economic, cultural or social.

The AB is configured as a European collective mark with geographical indication [5]. This mark is characterized by signs or indications which, in trade, may serve to designate the geographical origin of goods or services. The trademark is commonly considered to be a useful tool for distinguishing goods and services on the market and a means of communication with the consumer. In this sense, the area brand becomes a decisive tool for communicating

the development strategies of territories and its repertoire of products and services as well as the reputation of the companies that adhere to it. The central elements of the brand become: the reputation of the companies; the origin of the productions both in terms of companies and geographical areas; quality of the identified products and services.

Collective marks are subject to a specific discipline that differs from that of individual marks both in terms of who is allowed to own them and the conditions to which recognition is linked, and in terms of application discipline and implementation tools. Council Regulation (EC) 40/94 on the Community trademark devotes an entire specific title to Community collective marks, Title VIII, articles 64-72, where there is a systematic regulation that goes from the definition of the collective mark to the methods of registration, to the causes of revocation and invalidity. Article 64 begins by stating that "Community collective marks may be Community trademarks designated in this way at the time of filing and capable of distinguishing the goods or services of the members of the proprietor association from those of other undertakings". The provision clearly attributes to the Community trademark the function of identifying on the market the product of the entrepreneurs authorized to use them. Hence the identification of the persons entitled to registration, namely "associations of manufacturers, producers, service providers or traders who, in accordance with the legislation applicable to them, have the capacity, in their own name, to have rights and obligations of all kinds, to conclude contracts or perform other legal acts and to be a party to legal proceedings, as well as legal persons governed by public law" [6].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Sicily, the primary sector, consisting of agriculture, forestry and fishing, recorded an added value of 3,118 million euros and 4.3% of the total regional added value. Compared to 2000, the added value of the primary sector has increased by approximately 8.7%. However, the sector is structurally weak since its growth is lower than that of the regional economy. Confirming the weakness of the agricultural sector, it should also be pointed out that the weight of agricultural value added on the total produced by the Sicilian economy has clearly decreased over the years. In particular, in rural areas the added value of agriculture is 49.8% of the total. As far as the agricultural land use of the GAL Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara is concerned, the Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA), which is 31,766 hectares, is represented by permanent meadows and pastures that occupy almost 52.5%, followed by agricultural wood crops (35.0% of which 6.6% are cultivated with vines) and finally by arable land (12.3%). Compared to the 2000 census, the UAA appears to have decreased to 30121.50 hectares. The percentage of meadows and pastures (43.19% in 2000) has increased compared to the last census, to the detriment of agricultural woodlands (46.5% in 2000) and arable land

(10.3% in 2000). The amount of unused agricultural land also decreased, from 7152.86 ha in 2000 to 4051 ha in the 2010 census. With reference, instead, to the structure of the agricultural business fabric, the number of farms in the GAL area in 2010 amounts to 5,834, with a decrease of 59.2% compared to 2000. An analysis of the physical size shows that 48% of the farms (2,711 farms) have less than one hectare of UAA and occupy only 0.19% of the regional UAA; 38.43% have a utilized agricultural area of between 1 and 5 hectares and occupy 0.48% of the Sicilian agricultural area; almost 10% of the farms are in the 5-20 hectare class, and only 1.8%, or 105 farms, are over 50 hectares. An analysis of the data from the 2000 census shows that the number of farms has decreased but their size has increased. In the year 2000, the number of farms with an extension of less than one hectare was 9452 (66,2% of the total), while those with an extension of less than 5 hectares were 3546 (24,8% of the total). There were only 73 farms with a utilized area of more than 50 hectares. This trend confirms the regional trend (6th General Census of Agriculture in Sicily, 2011). With reference to the cultivation systems, the flat areas, located near the coast, adjacent to urban settlements, develop a more intensive agriculture represented by fruit, vegetable, flower and, to a lesser extent, citrus production. On the other hand, in the more inland and mountainous areas, extensive agriculture prevails, consisting mainly of arable crops and livestock farming, which, in addition to production, plays a role in enhancing environmental and landscape resources. The number of livestock farms, according to ISTAT (Census of Agriculture, 2010) shows the presence of 139,158 animals located in agricultural units and concentrated mainly in the municipalities of Santa Venerina, Mascali and Castiglione di Sicilia (where there are mainly poultry), Francavilla di Sicilia, Mojo Alcantara, Roccella Valdemone (sheep and goats), Randazzo and Santa Domenica Vittoria (sheep, goats and cattle). The number of people employed in the agricultural sector is 6755 units, equal to 4.11% of the employed at regional level and in line with the regional and national data is decreasing. This trend denotes an overall fragility of the sector, in which the company structure is predominantly family-run and the average age of the tenants is high. There is a difficulty in generational turnover: the new generations are shifting their work interests and aspirations towards sectors with higher profitability, less management complexity and lower business risks. Average productivity in the area has risen, albeit slightly, perhaps linked to the fall in agricultural employment. Investments in the agricultural sector are also on the rise, although access to credit is still problematic, aggravated by the economic situation and the crisis in some sectors (horticulture, floriculture). The wine and fruit sectors (especially nuts) are on the rise [7].

Regarding the secondary sector, in 2011 the economic system of the GAL territory was composed of 10,895 local units, with 23,466 employees; compared to 2001, the number of local units increased (+5.6%) while the number of employees increased by 2.3%. The 15.3% of the productive

fabric of the GAL territory is made up of enterprises operating in the construction sector (absorbing 13% of the workforce); 8.6% is made up of enterprises active in manufacturing, contributing 12.5% of the territory's workforce. Most of them are small (average of 6 employees) and work mainly on a subcontracting basis, as there is no industrial system in the area. The most important manufacturing activities in the territory are represented by food industries such as oil production, bakery products, fruit and vegetable processing and preservation, dairy industry, production of other food products, processing of agricultural products in general. In the Etna Doc area there are also relevant industrial activities in the beverages sector, linked to the transformation and bottling of wine (in Santa Venerina there is a well-established production of distillates, grappa and rosolio). The food industry sector does not seem to be undergoing any crisis or reduction of any kind, even though exports of these products are not on a positive trend. In the more mountainous municipalities, close to wooded areas, there are activities for the "manufacture of wood, cork and straw products" (Nicolosi, Linguaglossa, Randazzo, Trecastagni). The presence on the volcano of several quarries also favours the activity of "stone cutting and modelling", and the "processing of non-metallic minerals" (Nicolosi, Giarre, Mascali, Pedara). The "Paper and cardboard manufacturing" is located in areas close to the Alcantara River where there are several paper mills. In the whole GAL area there are frequent activities linked to construction in general, and to specialized ones in particular. Even if the sector seems to undergo a marked downturn (also due to the real estate crisis).

With reference to the tertiary sector, the local units present in the GAL Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara territory are mainly represented by enterprises operating in the trade sector, which represent 64.5% (of which wholesale 30.0%) of the existing productive fabric. This high number of enterprises operating in the commerce sector does not, however, correspond to the strength of the sector, which due to the crisis and the reduced spending capacity of families and public accounts has led to a decrease, in line with the regional and national average. Within the tertiary sector, a significant role is played by tourism (accommodation services (hotels, campsites, holiday homes) and catering), which accounts for 24.3% of the local units present (11.7% of the workforce). To these figures must be added those derived from agricultural-based tourism activities, such as agritourism and rural tourism. Naturally, these activities are more present in the municipalities of the coastal area (Giardini Naxos, Calatabiano, Fiumefreddo, Mascali) that are affected by the attraction of Taormina, those of the Alcantara valley (Gaggi, Graniti) and those that have been the gateway to the volcano for years (Nicolosi and Zafferana) [8].

In order to fully exploit the territorial potential, a series of propaedeutic actions are indispensable, which can make

it possible to identify the pillars on which to build the sustainable tourism promotion strategy and subsequently define the best ways to develop them through targeted, synergic and integrated actions. In this regard, the creation of a new and recognizable identity for the GAL Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara territory was considered. A brand which, by exploiting the territory's main attraction, Etna, can provide a unified image capable of bringing to the attention of tourists and visitors places, flavors, smells and images of the entire territory and guarantee quality, efficiency and complete services. To this end, below is a mapping of the potential production processes collected by sector and subdivided on the basis of the ATECO codes present in the 26 municipalities of the GAL that can be included in this project and that can best create a unique, distinguishable value and above all based on the experience of the individual consumer-tourist (A = agriculture, forestry and fishing; C = manufacturing activities; H = transport and storage; I = activities of accommodation and restaurant services; 79 = activities of the services of travel agencies, tour operators and reservation services and related activities; R=artistic, sports, entertainment and fun activities). The data reported in table 1 were acquired thanks to the collaboration of the SUAP Offices of the various municipalities and integrated by some information present in the online service Telemaco - managed by the Italian Chamber of Commerce - and in the official ISTAT website.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The advantages deriving from the implementation of the Area Brand are many and highlighted in numerous empirical results deriving from strategies of the same matrix already applied in different areas of Italy. Among these, the increase in the sustainability of production processes and the greater influx of environmentally aware consumers-tourists, a target that is becoming more and more important nowadays in the face of the almost marginal nature of mass tourism, stand out.

The mapping of production activities carried out in the last chapter of this report is in fact a preparatory phase for the entire process of implementing the brand, as necessary as the collaboration and synergy that must take place between the various businesses in the area, so that they can create a unique value offer capable of arousing interest and creating customer loyalty.

In particular, in the following phases, winning territorial marketing strategies could definitely focus on the potential for developing activities that are complementary to agriculture (processing of agricultural products, forestry) and diversification (accommodation, energy production, services), taking advantage of the growing importance of the demand for tourism and hiking in rural areas, to increase the awareness that winter can be a tourist season even with limited downhill facilities, to enhance the

**Table 1:** Mapping of production processes in the LAG territory.

	A	C	H	I	79	R	total
Francavilla of Sicily	85	46	9	19	1	7	167
Gaggi	22	26	4	15	2	3	72
Yardini-Naxos	28	42	44	201	13	27	355
Granites	16	9	2	16	0	1	44
Malvagna	16	4	0	3	0	0	23
Moio Alcantara	29	6	0	6	0	0	41
Motta Camastra	23	2	1	10	1	0	37
Roccella Valdemone	42	7	2	2	0	0	53
Santa Domenica Vittoria	36	5	1	8	0	1	51
Calatabiano	85	31	6	25	1	11	159
Castiglione di Sicilia	133	62	4	29	3	6	237
Fiumefreddo di Sicilia	139	64	35	33	1	14	286
Giarre	313	243	99	173	10	43	881
Linguaglossa	95	51	20	54	6	4	230
Mascali	188	77	33	71	0	17	386
Milo	33	9	2	18	0	0	62
Nicolosi	65	67	32	102	4	14	284
Pedara	56	79	26	65	3	19	248
Piedimonte Etneo	61	28	8	20	1	4	122
Randazzo	216	89	11	65	4	7	392
Riposto	157	80	33	75	5	16	366
Santa Venerina	122	100	60	48	1	10	341
Sant'Alfio	40	11	2	14	0	1	68
Trecastagni	54	92	20	57	6	10	239
Viagrande	60	44	29	36	6	11	186
Zafferana Etnea	313	69	31	63	1	3	480

presence and importance of the Volcano (UNESCO World Heritage) and the Regional Parks as an element of attraction and organization of new flows of fruition and as a factor of activation of the offer of innovative rural services and finally to take advantage of the presence of research institutions as a vector of innovation of the agricultural economy and rural development.

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