

# Sustainable tourism industry and rural revitalization based on experienced nature and culture tourism:

## Case study of international regional tourism by SDGs linking urban and rural areas

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### Abstract

The Japanese government is promoting measures to apply the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to local governments under the framework of the “Regional Revitalization Policy”. As part of this, the “SDGs Future City” project was launched in fiscal year 2017. Sustainable development is strongly required in the Japanese tourism industry. The paper explores the following four research areas: (1) the changing trend from mass tourism planned by travel agents to regional destination-planned tourism; (2) management shortage problems of destination management and marketing organizations (DMOs) and tourism associations (TAs); (3) the regional tourism industry and rural revitalization planned by destination and corresponding to specific SDG goals and targets; and (4) an international case study of the tourism industry and rural revitalization linking urban and rural areas in Italy.

### Keywords

regional tourism planned by destination, sustainable tourism industry, rural revitalization, nature and culture experienced tourism, SDGs Future City

### 1. Introduction

Customer behavior, in terms of how tourists purchase tourism products and services, is changing from mass tourism planned by travel agents to regional destination-planned tourism [Honer and Swarbrooke, 2016; Sasaki, 2008]. The growth of information and communication technology (ICT) systems helps tourists put together individual, tailor-made itineraries related to the regional destination-planned tourism [Tamaki, 2018].

Developing mass package tours with attractions and amenities is the task of a central agency, which may be private. On the other hand, regional city, country, or area convention and visitors’ bureaus (CVBs) promote tourism at the local level. As they promote a specific destination, they are often referred to as destination management and marketing organizations (DMOs) [Kotler and Keller, 2016]. A DMO is an official agency charged with promoting tourism business to increase the number of visitors to a particular destination. It is typically part of a local government or quasi-governmental agency, and is responsible for formulating and implementing tourism policy, management, and marketing [Kotler et al., 2016]. However, most DMOs and tourism associations (TAs) are presently struggling because of the current shortage of human resources development.

“Transforming our world: The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030” was adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 [United Nations, 2015]. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets, are indicated in the agenda, along with the assertion that no one will be left behind. Pursuing the SDGs is a priority in Japan. Sustainable development is strongly required in the Japanese tourism

industry.

The Japanese government is promoting measures to apply the SDGs to local governments under the framework of the “Regional Revitalization Policy”. As part of this, The “SDGs Future City” project was launched in fiscal year 2017, approximately 10 excellent future city models were selected and rewarded by local governments nationwide in fiscal year 2018 [SDGs Future City, 2018].

The paper explores the following four research areas:

- The changing trend from mass tourism planned by travel agents to regional destination-planned tourism;
- Management shortage problems of DMOs and TAs;
- The regional tourism industry and rural revitalization planned by destination and corresponding to the SDG goals and targets; and
- An international case study of the tourism industry and rural revitalization linking urban and rural areas in Italy.

### 2. The changing trend from mass tourism to regional tourism planned by destination

The role of ICT is rapidly growing in the tourism industry. The evolution of ICT tools including social media has been accompanied by the rise of consumer-generated media as a means of sharing tourist experiences and evaluating customer satisfaction.

The development of the Internet and interactive social networking services (SNSs) is stimulating the growth of digital marketing, social marketing, and mobile marketing. Tourists can increasingly access information about travel and destinations and make a direct booking from their own home or office. Tour operators, airlines, and hotels can encourage this trend as the Internet is a relatively inexpensive promotional tool and direct selling eliminates the need to pay commissions to travel agents.

The growth of global distribution ICT systems will help tourists put together individual, tailor-made itineraries, by giving them access to the detailed product and service information that they require.

According to this trend, the ways in which tourists purchase tourism products and services are changing from mass tourism planned by agents to regional destination-planned tourism as shown in Table 1 [Tamaki, 2018].

However, the characteristics of the regional destination-planned tourism are that local DMOs and/or TAs at the destination must not only create and implement their own original experienced tourism plans but make attractive promotions for tourists by themselves.

### 3. Management shortage problems of DMOs and TAs

#### 3.1 What is a tourism association?

Broadly, TAs are organizations established in a given region to help develop the regional economy by promoting tourism. Thus, a TA could be defined as an organization that fulfills the conditions below [Yamamoto, 2019]:

- It is a membership organization that consists of members who engage in the tourism industry in the region,
- The principal purpose of the organization is to attract visitors to the region, and
- Members engage primarily in promoting tourism in the region and related activities.

#### 3.2 What is a destination management and marketing organization?

According to the Japan Tourism Agency, a destination management and marketing organization (DMO) can be defined as a corporation that:

- Creates tourism areas from the perspective of tourism man-

agement;

- Cooperates with diverse stakeholders;
- Devises strategies to realize the creation of local tourism communities; and
- Incorporates an adjustment function to steadily implement the selected strategy.

The Japan Tourism Agency comprises eight registered wide and multiple area DMOs [Japan Tourism Agency website, 2018]:

- Hokkaido Tourism Promotion Organization: Hokkaido;
- Tohoku Tourism Promotion Organization: Aomori, Iwate, Akita, Miyagi, Yamagata, Fukushima, Niigata;
- Central Japan Tourism Organization: Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, Nagano, Gifu, Shizuoka, Aichi, Mie, Shiga;
- Kansai Tourism Division: Fukui, Mie, Shiga, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, Nara, Wakayama, Tottori, Tokushima;
- Setouchi Tourism Promotion Organization: Hyogo, Okayama, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime;
- San'in Inbound Organization: Tottori, Shimane;
- Kyushu Tourism Promotion Organization: Fukuoka, Saga, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Oita, Miyazaki, Kagoshima prefecture; and
- Okinawa Tourism & Convention Bureau: Okinawa.

#### 3.3 The human resource shortage of DMO's and TA's

Concerning human resource development, most Japanese TAs and DMOs are struggling with the following issues [Yamamoto, 2019]:

- Shortage of principal staff;
- Shortage of professional staff;
- Shortage of teaching and seminar know-how;
- Difficulty in securing lecturers and advisers;

Table 1: Mass tourism planned by travel agent and regional destination-planned tourism

	Mass tourism planned by travel agent	Regional tourism planned by destination
Tourism style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GIT (group inclusive tour)</li> <li>• Sightseeing tour</li> <li>• First visit or non-repeat tourist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FIT (foreign independent tour), SIT (special interest tour), and VFR (visit friends and relatives)</li> <li>• Experience and Learning tourism</li> <li>• Repeat tourist</li> </ul>
Organizations planning and managing travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel agent living in the city (travel agent-planned tourism)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DMOs, local governments, tourism associations, regional companies, and residents living in the destination (destination-planned tourism)</li> </ul>
Characteristics of travel products and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized package tour</li> <li>• Mass group tour</li> <li>• Low added value</li> <li>• Mass consumption of tourism resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique tourism of individual, tailor-made itineraries created by utilizing regional resources</li> <li>• Foreign independent tour or small group tourism of friends or family</li> <li>• High added value</li> <li>• Symbiosis of regional environments and tourists</li> </ul>

Source: Authors translated the table [Sasaki, 2008] into English and revised contents [Tamaki, 2018].

- Difficulty in recruiting program attendees; and
- Shortage of support required for dispatching or introducing experts, holding training programs or seminars, and development of a model program or teaching materials for training.

#### 4. Regional tourism industry and rural revitalization planned by destination and corresponding to the SDGs

The subject of the present research is the regional revitalization SDGs. Table 2 shows the specific goals and targets selected from among the SDGs related to the research subject, regarding the tourism involving natural and cultural experiences, regional tourism planned by destination, and linking urban and rural areas.

#### 5. International case study of the tourism industry and rural revitalization in Italy

##### 5.1 Tourism industry and rural revitalization linking urban and rural areas

###### 5.1.1 Urban area “Bologna”: University of Bologna”

###### 5.1.1.1 History of The University of Bologna

The University of Bologna is considered the oldest university in the Western world. Its history is intertwined with that of many great names of science and literature, it is a keystone and a point of reference for European culture [University of Bologna, 2019].

###### 5.1.1.2 The Department of Agricultural and Food Science and Technology

The Department of Agricultural and Food Science and Technology (DISTAL) at the University of Bologna was established in 2012 as a result of the union between the departments of Agricultural Economics and Engineering, the Department of Food Sciences and the Department of Agri-Food Protection and Valorization. The name of the new department is a tangible expression of its strong will to focus on agriculture and food as binding and identity elements [DISTAL, 2019].

Professor “Andrea Segrè” and Dr. Matteo Vittuari are our research collaborators. Segrè has been a full professor of international and comparative agricultural policy since 2000. He studies on circular and sustainable ecological economics. Creator of the Last Minute Market, an academic spinoff, and of the Zero Waste Campaign, Professor Segrè is now president of the Edmund Mach Foundation in San Michele all’Adige (Trento), of the “FICO Eataly World” Foundation and the AgroFood Center in Bologna.

###### 5.1.1.3 The Department of Architecture

Associate Professor Simona Tondelli has been our research collaborator in the Department of Architecture from 2014. Her research interests concern urban and spatial planning, with particular reference to the assessment of environmental and social sustainability of the territory, sustainable mobility, and cultural and natural heritage as a driver for urban and rural regeneration. The author of over 100 publications, she is the scientific coordinator of the H2020 project RURITAGE and of the Interreg Europe project MATCH-UP.

##### 5.1.2 Rural areas: Brisighella in the Romagna region among “the most beautiful villages in Italy”

Brisighella is an ancient medieval village in the River Lamone Valley, located in the Apennine Mountains, between Florence and Ravenna. Well-recognized as the “the three hills village”, is surrounded by three rocky hills: one with a 14th-century Castle, la Rocca; another with an 18th-century church sanctuary, the Monticino; and the third having a Clock Tower of the 19th century (Figure 1) [Brisighella, 2019].

Its thermal baths and the quiet surroundings make Brisighella an ideal place to leave stress behind concentrate on relaxing and peaceful enjoyment. The mood of a long-gone world is created by a sea of greenery, old paths, cobbled streets and ancient houses in a unique picturesque setting.

This is a hospitable land, rich in traditions, flavors, and archi-

Table 2: Specific goals and targets selected from SDGs, related to “experienced regional tourism”

Relationship of research subject	Selected specific goals	Selected specific targets
Regional tourism planned by destination	Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	Target 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local and products
Protection and safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage	Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	Target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage
Regional development linking urban and rural areas	Goal 11: Same as the above	Target 11.a: Support positive economic, social, and environmental links among urban, peri-urban, and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning
Regional revitalization and job creation	Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	Target 12.b: Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

Source: Created by the authors based on the [United Nations, 2015].



Figure 1: Brisighella under the guidance of landscape design, among “the most beautiful villages”

tectural and natural beauties. Brisighella has received several top awards for excellence, including “Most beautiful village in Italy”, “Slow City”, and the “Orange flagship” from the Italian Touring Club. All this testifies to its value and quality of life.

The leading product of the region is the extra-virgin olive oil named “Brisighello”, which is recognized by the European Community for its quality as a “DOP (Protected Denomination of Origin)” product. Specialty goods of Brisighella include the local ‘Conciato’ cheese (a cheese ripened in the area’s chalky caves); the Mora Romagnola (an old local pig breed); meats from the Bovina Romagnola breed; “forgotten” fruits (such as the “Pera Volpina”), as well as peaches, nectarines, and apricots; and the “Moretto” artichoke, grown in the area’s ravines. The production of the local vineyards, is also excellent, especially the Sangiovese “DOC (Controlled Denomination of Origin)” and the Albana di Romagna “DOCG (Controlled and Guaranteed Denomination of Origin)”, of the passito wine type.

## 5.2 RURITAGE and the Quality Charter of “the most beautiful villages”

### 5.2.1 Rural Heritage–RURITAGE

The organization called RURITAGE has initiated six Systemic Innovation Areas (SIAs) as frameworks to identify unique heritage potential within rural communities: Pilgrimage, Resilience, Sustainable Local Food Production, Integrated Landscape Management, Migration and Art and Festivals [RURITAGE, 2019].

RURITAGE has provided EU inter-university consortium funding for a four-year project beginning in 2018, with Assistant Professor Simona Tondelli, as scientific coordinator. The RURITAGE consortium consists of 38 partners from 14 EU countries, Iceland, Norway, Turkey and one south American country (Colombia). The partners represent a diverse range of actors encompassing local and regional authorities, universities and research centers, international networks and organizations, non-profit associations, and innovation centers.

RURITAGE – a portmanteau created from “rural” and “heritage” – is a project aiming to revitalize rural villages through their cultural heritage and natural heritage. The aim of RURITAGE is not only to protect the heritage of the region but also to promote the development of the region and the community as a driving force for sustainable development.

Therefore, RURITAGE and its goals can serve as an excellent example for the preservation of Japanese regions and rural

villages through cultural heritage and natural heritage.

### 5.2.2 BORGIO and the Quality Charter of “the most beautiful villages in Italy”

The literal translation of “Borgio” in English is “village”. But the term village does not fully capture what “a Borgio” is. A Borgio (plural “Borgi”) is a fascinating small Italian town, generally fortified and dating to the period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. It usually arises around a castle or noble palace and is often surrounded by defensive walls and towers [Borgio, 2019].

The National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) was founded in 2001 with the aim of valorizing and promoting the great historic, artistic and cultural heritage of small Italian centers.

ANCI’s Quality Charter selects a tourist network of excellence, composed of towns appearing under a common brand name and logo, whose activities in welcoming tourists, and in the maintenance and development of tourism, are continuously monitored. The Quality Charter lays out the criteria for awarding the label of “the most beautiful villages in Italy”.

To be eligible for ANCI recognition, a town must have its architectural and/or natural heritage certified by the applying municipality and/or by the ministry of cultural heritage and environmental conservation.

Furthermore, historic buildings must dominate the total construction and must form an aesthetically homogeneous whole, offering a heritage valuable for its urban and architectural quality.

Finally, the town must demonstrate evidence of its policies of enhancement, development, promotion, and dissemination, satisfying certain to satisfy the ANCI criteria.

### 5.3 Aims of EU quality schemes

EU quality policy aims to protect the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how. Product names can be granted a geographical indication (GI) if they have a specific link to the place where they are made. The GI recognition enables consumers to trust and distinguish quality products while also helping producers to market their products better. Recognized as intellectual property, GIs play an increasingly important role in trade negotiations between the EU and other countries. Other EU quality schemes emphasize the traditional production process or products made in dif-

difficult natural areas such as mountains or islands [EU quality schemes, 2019].

### 5.3.1 Geographical indications

GIs, protected designations of origin (PDOs), and protected geographical indications (PGIs) protect the name of a product that is from a specific region and which is created following a traditional production process. However, there are differences among these designations, linked primarily to how much of the raw material comes from the area or how much of the production process must take place in the specific region.

#### 5.3.1.1 Protected designation of origin (PDO)

Product names registered as PDOs are those that have the strongest links to the place in which they are made (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Label showing geographical indication as a “Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)”

Source: EU quality schemes [2019].

- Products: food, agricultural products and wines.
- Specifications: every part of the production, processing and preparation process must take place in the specific region.
- Example: Kalamata olive oil PDO is entirely produced in the region of Kalamata in Greece, using olive varieties from that area.
- Label: PDO labels are mandatory for food and agricultural products, and optional for wine.

#### 5.3.1.2 Protected geographical indication (PGI)

The PGI designation emphasizes the relationship between the specific geographic region and the name of the product, where a particular quality, reputation or other characteristic is essentially attributable to the product’s geographical origin.

#### 5.3.1.3 Geographical indication of spirit drinks and aromatized wines (GI)

The GI designation protects the name of a spirit drink or aromatized wine originating in a country, region, or locality where the product’s particular quality, reputation, or other characteristic is essentially attributable to its geographical origin.

### 5.3.2 Traditional specialty guaranteed

The traditional specialty guaranteed (TSG) designation highlights traditional aspects such as the way a product is made or

its composition, without being linked to a specific geographical area. If a product name is registered as a TSG, this designation protects it against falsification and misuse.

- Products: Food and agricultural products
- Example: Gueuze TSG is a traditional beer obtained by spontaneous fermentation. It is generally produced in and around Brussels, Belgium. As a TSG, its production method is protected but it could be produced somewhere else.
- Label: Mandatory for all products

### 5.4 Limited application of geographical indication (GI) in Japan

In Japan, in contrast, the response to the GI designation has been limited. For example, a GI for “Wine Origin Certification Ordinance” was implemented on October, 2018, in Nagano Prefecture, and at Kosshu City in Yamanashi Prefecture (Katsunuma District). The GI of “Japanese wine” can only be applied to wine brewed domestically using domestic grapes.

## 6. Conclusion

Some highlights of the case study in Italy are the following:

- Advantages of sustainable social business innovation models and organizational structures:  
Over the years, the SDGs - Goal 11 “Target 11.a; experienced nature and culture tourism linking urban and rural areas - has been established through partnership among industry, academia, government, and finance. Communities as drivers for urban and rural regeneration the regarding inbound tourism industry, and the necessary budgets have been maintained for a long time over wide-area EU and Italian collaborative projects contracted with local authorities.  
For example, under the guidance of landscape design from professors and specialists in architecture departments, each local government has engaged in efforts to practice experienced tourism utilizing rural heritage and local resources.
- Branding of specialty products in each local area, certified as EU quality schemes:  
Many beautiful Italian villages apply organic farming. In addition to shipping and selling their organic products, local companies are engaged in the planning, manufacturing and sale of specialty goods (wine, olive oil, etc.) within the village area. Since the products are manufactured in accordance with standards that can be certified as intellectual property, GIs play an important role in trade negotiations between the EU and other countries, and can be used to acquire highly recognized brand of each specialty good. Food service quality assurance activities are also supported by professors and experts in agricultural departments.
- Worldwide promotion of each tourism destination in “The most beautiful villages in Italy” and development of international marketing channels:  
The travel agency commissioned by the “Beautiful Village

Association” in Rome attractively promotes Italy’s main tourism destinations to the world.

Certified specialty products are prepared for developing international marketing channels such as ”FICO Eataly World” and other specialty stores for domestic and foreign customers who love the certified organic-oriented luxury brands. In other words, since various channels have been developed for sales to surrounding cities and overseas markets, it is possible to sell the branded special products sustainably while maintaining high prices and value.

On the other hand, while individual Japanese rural areas have their own unique charm, most Japanese DMOs and TAs are experiencing many social problems that are difficult to solve alone, such that their urban and rural areas engage in virtually independent and dispersed activities. As building a comprehensive industrial cluster cannot occur under a partnership of industry, academia, government, and finance, it is not possible to achieve tourism industry success and rural revitalization linking urban and rural areas in Japan, compared with the EU nations (such as Italy and France) that demonstrate advanced tourism and promote their “most beautiful villages”.

#### Acknowledgements

The authors express thanks for research funding from the fiscal year 2019 “Information Media Center Research Project Fund” at Aoyama Gakuin University; the fiscal year 2019 “Global Business Research Institute Research Project” at the School of Business Management, Aoyama Gakuin University; and the fiscal year 2019 “SDGs Research Project” at Aoyama Gakuin University Research Institute.

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(Received December 1, 2019; accepted December 25, 2019)