Pastures conservation in the Alps and tourists' preferences: a multivariate approach

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Abstract

Traditional extensive agriculture is the main factor of landscape management in the mountains: a large part of the Alps is modelled by agriculture. According to Soliva et al. (2008), low intensive farming systems generate extensive green areas, such as meadows and pastures. These systems substantially comprise much of the mountain landscape mosaic, the so-called semi-natural environment, reflecting their anthropogenic nature, suggesting that a large part of the Alpine mountains is modelled by agriculture. Interpreted as a multifunctional activity, including landscape modelling and maintenance, agriculture generates the conditions under which the mountain region becomes an economic resource that is potentially exploitable by tourism (Mazzocchi & Sali, 2016). Thus, tourism has acquired a central position in the debate on the future of the mountain economy across Europe, especially in the light of both the increasing recognition of several services and functions (Lee et al., 2010) and the demand for the natural environment and landscape. For the tourism contribution to mountain economy, it should be considered that management decisions should consider consumers' (tourists') demand. Several studies concerning mountain tourist profiles have been developed during the last 20 years, but none of these have focused on the tourists' motivations including their WTP for the maintenance of mountain pastures and landscape. The innovation of this work is a mixed approach, based on a multivariate analysis using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (HCA) to characterize the profiles of potential tourists of mountain pastures including their Willingness to Pay (WTP) for landscape pastures resilience. The methodology has three steps: the WTP assessment, the MCA improvement, and the HCA. The analysis has been performed with direct interviews to tourists in some municipalities of the Seriana, Brembana and Scalve Valley, located in an Alpine area within the Regional Park of Orobie Bergamasche Alps, in the northern area of the Province of Bergamo, in Lombardy Region. The survey has been realized from July to December 2015, and 429 interviews have been collected. In the first part of the questionnaire subjects were asked to express their opinion on the importance of the environment, territory, accessibility and activity of pastures. In the second part, WTP has been explicated using the double bounded method. The third part addressed the personal characteristics of the respondents. After this first step a MCA with the obtained WTP values

has been performed, followed by a HCA. Three clusters describing the profiles of mountain tourists have been obtained. The most numerous is the cluster with tourists' WTP for the maintenance of an environment with agricultural features, pastures connected by earthy roads, a high propensity for building infrastructures to connect the municipalities of the valley. A second cluster includes tourists who envision the best management model of upland farms and pastures for tourism with no interest in using these lands for grazing. This group shows a preference for the reduction of pastures in favour of woods, more interested in open-air activities and sports. The third cluster comprehends tourists not willing to pay for the maintenance of pastures who express their preference for equipping these areas only with pedestrian paths. Reflections and policy suggestions are exposed in the conclusions.