Enhancing Rural Life: Combining Special Forest Resources with Tourism and Nature Protection

Marelli Asamer-Handler, Giulia Corradini, Riccardo Da Re, Christine Fischer, Alice Ludvig, Ivana Zivojinovic

The issue is …

Production and processing of wild forest products can bring economic benefits for rural areas. In particular it can create additional income for forest and land owners, it can create new labour and the products certainly bring benefits to the consumers. Yet there is another dimension of benefits to rural life and the fulfilment of market needs which goes beyond the sole products, fresh or processed.

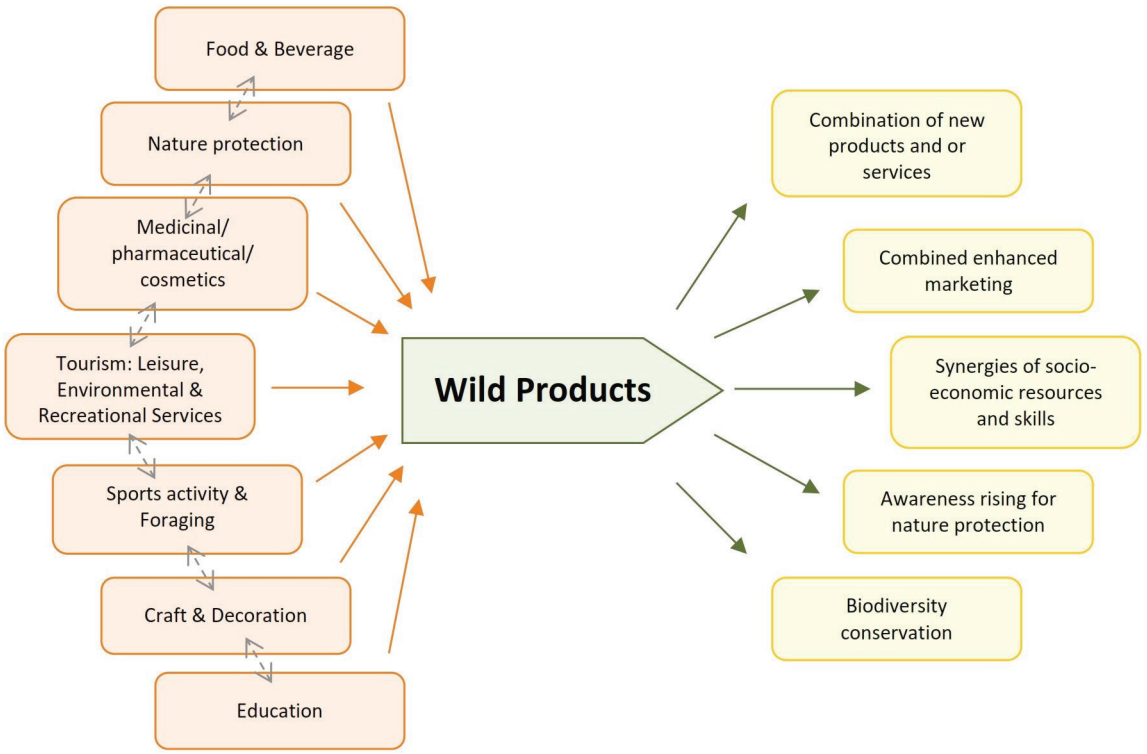
Currently there are increasing trends of combinations and fusions of such wild products with services. For instance a combination of efforts to combine tourism with nature and landscape protection goals, recreation and educational services becomes more and more salient.

From a StarTree perspective

Such undertakings create **added value to mere wild products such as mushrooms or edible fruits and specialities from forests**, thus contributing to rural development (graph below). In the end, the positive effects are seen through awareness rising amongst visitors and locals on the values and specificities of the area in concern. Another effect is community strengthening and the combat of emigration to cities by adding value to the economy of the area.

In the following we will highlight some selected creative examples that show the manifold ways of successful undertakings by combining wild forest products with connected and surrounding services. These combinations often assume cross sectoral cooperation and different modes of actors arrangements.

The combination of sectors contributing to added value of wild products:



A Close-up: Magnifica Comunità di Fiemme

Fiemme valley is located in the north west of the Trento province. The territory is characterised by forests, which span over a surface of about 25,000ha. In the valley reside 18,621 persons in 12 municipalities. Fiemme valley is a touristic place, and it is also renowned for being rich in mushrooms. Every year, a large number of people reach the valley, both for tourism and for collecting mushrooms.

In Fiemme valley there is the peculiar institution of Magnifica Comunità di Fiemme (MCF): It is an ancient institution, which is documented already back in the 13th century. It encompasses the assembly of persons living in the same place with interests or goods in common, i.e. forests and pastures. Local inhabitants have the right of using the collective resources. The revenues deriving by the management of the collective resources by MCF should be reinvested for community benefits, with a special focus to people in need; revenues should be used in activities that aim at improving social, cultural and economic well-being of inhabitants, and the revenues generated from natural resources must be reinvested in community benefits.

Mushrooms picking permits and the local rural development

Timber is the main product traded by MCF, but it is also managing the mushroom picking service in Fiemme valley since 1991. The innovative governance system adopted by MCF and local stakeholders to deal with mushrooms permits is very interesting, and it allows to manage and invest locally the annual revenues deriving from the payment of the permits. A part expenses for hiring 4 mushrooms guards, who are seasonally employed by MCF, what remains is shared between MCF, municipalities and owners of forest land with extending more than 100 ha. Revenues are invested in activities that directly and indirectly sustain the ecosystems and the territory. Direct use includes i) the maintenance of forest roads, ii) the management of grazing areas, iii) infrastructures against landslides, iv) and, during the summer period, a service of mushroom identification is provided to tourists.

Beside the direct revenues deriving from the picking permits, indirect revenues are obtained by the presence of “mushrooms tourists”, and their families, in the valley. The quantification of these indirect revenues is impressive: if we consider that every year 9,500 “mushroom tourists” reach the valley, and more than 50% buy a mushrooms permit of at least 3 days (till one month), and that they and presumably their families sojourn, have a meal, and in general take advantage of the valley facilities, we can affirm that mushrooms picking is a profitable activity to the whole Valley. More sectors take advantage of this: from the accommodation and catering sector, to the recreation one. Many sport and trekking activities are born in the last years, and the majority of these customers have as first aim the mushrooms picking.

Case 1:
Partnering across the truffle sector: truffle traders join the tourism sector (Catalonia)

Truffle production in Catalonia has been economically important in the rural sector, particularly in the oak woodlands of the Pre-Pyrenees for over 60 years. Black winter truffles, (Tuber melanosporum), collected by experienced hunters with their trained dogs are sold primarily to the French markets, providing significant income to rural families. This income varies annually depending on the quality and quantity of the wild truffles, and the fluxes in the French market.

With a growing global fascination with this culinary gem, there are new opportunities to expand truffle activities and income through collaboration with the tourism sector.

A lively example is the popularity of Truffle Fairs in the towns of Cal Rosal and Centellas in the province of Barcelona and Solsona in the province of Lleida, which began early this century and attract thousands of visitors every year, offering culinary demonstrations, truffle hunting competitions for dogs and educational presentations. Fairs are organized cooperatively by the city authorities and the Truffle Growers Association.

Direct marketing of fresh truffles to restaurants is another opportunity for truffle traders to contribute to the tourism sector. A well-known chef from the province of Barcelona – who prefers to buy fresh, local truffles – reports, that he can enhance his culinary offerings during the truffle season and, consequently, improve his overall reputation, bringing in greater business throughout the year. These activities underscore the value of good relationships across these sectors, because the chefs will continue to purchase from reliable local sources.

Taste the region – Delicacies at the Truffels Fair can be presented to a wider public as a result of combined efforts of truffle growers, municipalities and gastronomy

Additionally we have seen the growing excitement for tourists to book a guided visit to producing truffle orchards, collect truffles and partake of the local truffle cuisine and local wines. These guided visits range from a single afternoon to 10 days and provide cultural, technical and scientific offerings, as Catalonia is a reference area for Black Truffle cultivation.

Rowanberries are spots of colour in the landscape and regional specialities, more and more discovered by residents and visitors.

Case 2: "Colourful edges of woods" – Wild forest Products and Nature Protection in the Nature Park Almenland (Austria)

Several Austrian Nature Parks are currently working on an awareness-raising project: School children collect seeds of trees and shrubs which are native to the Nature Park. These are then cleaned in specialised tree nurseries, planted and grown. After 2 to 3 years, the plants are then given to the local people at a school function. The project's aim is to motivate people to plant native shrubs and trees in their gardens instead of standardised, non-native plants from garden centres.

The Nature Park Almenland even wants to go one step further and adds an economic aspect to this nature conservation project: native trees and shrubs whose fruits can be used by farmers and small processors of the region shall be planted on silvicultural and agricultural areas, like rowanberry and blackthorn. These "Colourful edges of woods" will, on the one hand, make the landscape (even more) attractive and thus serve the tourism; on the other hand, this will strengthen and reinforce the established tradition of producing rowanberry Schnaps.

Rowanberries are typical for alpine areas, where they have been cultivated and distilled since ever because due to the altitude, other fruits like apples, pears and prunes were regarded too good for distilling. Historically, rowans that came up on their own in the woods were transplanted to the edges of the woods because harvesting them was easier there. Even today, the wild forms are preferred for producing Schnaps because of their intense taste, even though their yield is lower than that of the cultivated form. Cultivated rowanberries are used for jams, liquors, syrups, etc. Regarding merchandising, there is a close cooperation between the farmers and processors and the hotels of the region who offer these products in their restaurants and, additionally, tastings and guided tours at the "Rowanberry Panorama Trail" for their guests.

Findings

The cases in focus here have three main aspects in common which are central for a successful fusion of wild products with services:

They are all **involving more than one sector**. They are all well organised by merging several, partly voluntary associations in tight cooperations. The additional value of these combinations goes beyond effects that one sole entrepreneur or farmer would achieve.

The **will to collaboration, networking, cooperation and involvement** between several involved is a crucial factor for all the involved people and associations from different sectors.

Finally, the examples show that goals like **biodiversity conservation** as well as natural **landscape protection can go hand in hand with economic profit** and marketability when it comes to such cooperations and networking across sectors in rural areas.

Further information:

www.latofonera.cat
La tofonera is a entrepreneurial business that buys and sells fresh truffles and mushroom, and offers seasonal guided activities to collect and feast on truffles and mushrooms collected.

www.creativesignatures.com/blog/la-trufa-el-producto-preferido-de-los-grandes-chefs
Creative Signatures is an online initiative by several chefs to share their culinary impression, opinions, and recipes with followers.

www.naturparke.at
Website of the Austrian Nature Parks, also with information about Nature Park Almenland

www.mcfiemme.eu/en
Website Magnifica Comunità di Fiemme

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