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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Board of the universities and partner
Committees
Greetings by University of Florence-Department of Architecture/DiDA
Greetings by Fondazione Romualdo Del Bianco-Life Beyond Tourism

SESSION 1

Civil engineering, reconstruction, sustainable construction, materials and technologies

Application of the hydrodynamic leveling method in erection work Barkhudaryan A., Barkhudaryan M.	3
The use of fuzzy inference systems to provide more intelligent hospital management system Basiri A., Basiri A., Amirian P.	9
Numerical studies for retrofitting of concrete coupling beams with stiffened laterally restrained steel plate Cheng B., Shi C., ChengZhi Q.	13
Calculation of thin-walled prefabricated type shells with model of plastic-rigid body Churchelauri Z., Kipiani G.	19
Structure style selection of the mid-tower of a three-tower suspension bridge Dong J., Feng J., Liang T.	25
Study of low-carbon and low-alloy steel recrystallization with the use of passive flux-gate test method Gordienko V., Smirnova E.	31
Evaluation of technology applying limestone powder in road pavement layers Gyulzadyan H., Ter-Simonyan V., Voskanyan G.	35
Analysis of the influence of reactive powders on the chosen high-value concrete prices Halbiniak J.	39
Application of green construction technologies in XX Project He Z., Dong J.	43
Some features for strengthening of masonry buildings in seismic regions Karapetyan L.	47
Experience with the use of risk analysis methods for working forensic expert and an alternative method of determining the value of the coefficients Kubečka K.	53

Load-carrying capacity of timber structure bolt connection subjected to double unequal shears with thick plates as outer members	
Kubečka K., Musílek J.	59
Biodegradation of composite systems applied on the cladding of panel buildigs	
Kubečková D.	63
Discussion on segregation and bleeding problems and the stability model of fresh concrete	
Li C., Zhang F., Wang H., Zhang Z.	67
Experimental study on compatibility of stone powder and superplasticizer in concrete	
Li C., Zhang F., Wang H., Zhang Z.	73
Application of hyperelastic murnaghan material to the calculation of steel structures using adina software	
Major M., Major I.	77
Climate change and water resource management of Nagorno-Karabakh	
Manukyan A.	81
Calculating method of load-carrying capacity for recycled concrete squat walls failed in mixed flexure-diagonal compression	
Peng Y., Wu H., Guo J.	87
Reuse of industrial areas conversion of the metallurgical tower to a restaurant with panoramic views	
Perinkova M. Kolarcikova L., Twrda M.	91
New laser range finder for the high-precision linear measurements	
Petrosyan H., Hayrapetyan Y.	95
Strategic planning: infrastructure development of Saint Petersburg based on dynamic model	
Petrov A., Tokunova G.	99
Contemporary buildings of filial catholic churches in Poland	
Repelewicz A.	103
Challenges in coastal and island design, construction and development	
Saldana C.	109
Several issues on protection of underground sections of buildings and structures against moisture and waterlogging with groundwaters	
Sargsyan V., Khachatryan E., Khachatryan A.	113
Interpretations of wash out process of earth dam body	
Sarukhanyan A., Kelejian H.	119
Creation and work with architectural and construction terms glossary	
Seifullin S., Zhamankulov A.	125
The influence of covering of industrial concrete floors with selected chemical agents on the improving of their performance parameters	
Selejda J., Szopa R., Urbański M.	129

The comparative analysis of different calculation methods of the long cantilever plate of beam bridge	
Si X., Dong J.	133
Temperature-moisture problems of embadded wooden ceiling	
Šubrt R., Bednářová P.	139
A numerical method for computing the thermal conductivity and thermal diffusivity of the building materials	
Tang M., Ren J., BaiY., Dong J.	145
Complex projects management in design activities for architectural and engineering companies	
Tebeyev K., Tatygulov A., Zhumanov K., Zhamankulov M.	151
The study of crack propagation attached to the base of the hard section structure having double-connective boundary line	
Ter-Petrosyan G.	157
Analysis of influencing factors affecting cable tension test based on frequency method	
Tian C., Dong J., Meng Y.	163
Construction brand on the Polish market	
Urbańska J.	169
Parameter sensitivity investigation of the large-span main beam section	
Wang X., Dong J.	173
The application of circular arc failure nomogram in the rock slope stability analysis	
Wei C., Liu F., Dong J.	179
Civil and structural engineering in adverse climatic conditions using the example of projects for Astana and Atyrau	
Yestayeva A., Vyacheslav. Shepel, Zhanabek. Zhumatayev.	183
System of tenement buildings in the architecture of European and Far East Russia cities of the early twentieth century	
Yudenok I.	187
Study on testing indexes of concrete durability	
Zhang X., Zhao D., Zhao S.	191
Review of research on prefabricated steel structure residential building industrialization	
Zhao D., Fei S.	197
Review of research on the fatigue of high strength concrete after high temperature	
Zhao D., Gao H.	201

SESSION 2

Architecture and design, urban planning, urbanism

Theoretical aspects of the formation and development of the identity of urban public spaces. By the example of the largest cities in France	
Akhtiamova R., Akhtiamov I.	207

Preconditions for large city planning structure development process management today	
Aloyan A.	213
The ruins of the Canonica dei Decimari at Magliano in Toscana	
Aterini B., Nocentini A.	217
Transformation of high valued urban territories in the Yerevan development process	
Avetisyan A.	223
The role and peculiarities of composition in the formation of wayside service objects and complexes	
Barseghyan N.	227
Architecture programmes, the issues of women and water as hazard and water as heritage in the first half of the 20th century	
Bostenaru Dan M.	231
The transformation of kindergartens	
Frolíková Palánová K., Šafářová V.	235
Vulnerable houses in the southeast of Mexico	
Galiote M., Alberto Escobar J., Cecilio V., Morillón D.	239
Analysis of urban residential environment of the far north of Russia and methods of its development on the example of the city of Ukhta	
Garshtya A.	243
Smart design for smart city. Link as a plan strategy from architecture to landscape	
Gasparini C.	249
The features of forming eco districts' large-panel buildings in Yerevan	
Ghushchyan L.	255
Techniques of modern interpretation of ethno-cultural motives in environmental design	
Gorgorova Y., Kozlov V.	261
Architect David Chislyan's contribution in the redevelopment of Armenia	
Hakobyan S.	267
Issues of modernization of school buildings of the Republic of Armenia	
Harutyunyan E.	273
Project of enhancement of natural and historical-cultural resources in Chinandega and León departments (Nicaragua), through a project of community based tourism	
Invernizzi E.	279
Mosaic from the public bath of Armenian ancient capital Artashat and restoration of its original image	
Kanetsyan A.	283
The significance and theoretical aspects of classical monuments' 3d-reconstructions for contemporary classical architecture	
Karelin D.	289

Architectural-planning particularities of open spaces in consideration of Yerevan city historical development	
Kartashyan T.	293
Architecture, too slow in developing?	
Meyers A.	297
Portuguese women architects creating the future past	
Monteiro P.	303
Improvement of attractiveness of the living environment at Russian priority development territories	
Narezhnaya T., Orlov A.	309
Formation of a “green frame” of the city as a factor of sustainable development	
Pimenova G., Koptyaev D.	313
Implementation of avant-garde architectural theory and practice in architectural images of sci-fi cinema of late XX - early XXI century	
Rusiev K.	319
The issues contributing to the realization of abandoned industrial areas	
Sargsyan E., Arakelyan M.	323
Knowledge and fruition of the rupestrian monument between past and present	
Scalzo M., Giustiniani C.	329
The impact of urban environment on ecology an example of urban growth of the cities in northern Kazakhstan	
Semenyuk O., Chernysh N.	335
The classical tradition as the foundation of the future architecture	
Shvidkovsky D., Revzina Y.	339
The issues of city architecture. Tradition and the present time	
Solkiewicz-Kos N.	343
Multi-purpose complex “The Great Silk Way” with Drama theatre, Ceremonial hall and Exhibition Center in the city of Taldykorgan in Kazakhstan	
Tatygulov A., Bairova S.	349
Assessment of vulnerability features of territories in the Republic of Armenia	
Tovmasyan S.	355
Territorial planning in up-to-date Russia: development and implementation issues	
Vaitens A., Mityagin S.	361
Urban spatial justice of intra-generations in Port Suva: another existential form of Neo-urbanism	
Wu X.	365
Investigation of development interaction between urban-rural fringe area in Beijing	
Yang A., Liu Z.	371

Landscape management in rural areas: Lithuanian case in global context	
Zaleskienė E., Gražulevičiūtė-Vilenišké I.	377

European and Polish developments in church stained glass art. Differences and similarities	
Żychowska, M.J., Białkiewicz, A.	383

SESSION 3

Environmental engineering, energy, green buildings

Electromagnetoelastic waves in layered piezoelectric medium with electric screen	
Aghayan K., Danoyan Z., Atoyan L.	391

The hyper concentrated mudflow structure dynamic impact forecast	
Gavardashvili G., Kukhalashvili E.	397

Role of prosumer energy in energy supply to buildings	
Kurzak L., Salek R.	401

Energy efficiency improvement of residential buildings during their major repairs and reconstruction	
Smirnov E., Drozdova I., Shesterov E.	405

Green rooftops in diversified urban landscape	
Tubielewicz – Michalczuk M.	409

Tunnel sewer condition monitoring	
Vasilyev V., Vasilyev F.	413

SESSION 4

Geotechnics, seismicity hazard analysis and prevention

Nonlinear continuous phase transition model of zonal disintegration of rock masses near deep-level tunnels	
Chen H., Qi C., Liu T., Yang J.	419

Analysis of stability of slope based on fractal principle	
He J., Dong J., Chuan T., Chao W.	425

Investigation of dynamical response of subway structures under the influence of the different underground water level	
Liu D., Dong J., Wang C.	429

Consolidation behavior of layered clays considering soil structure	
Ma B.	435

Free transverse vibration of long large-cross-sectional underground structure	
Qi C., Wei X., Liu T., Chen H., Yang J.	439

Research on soil-long-underground-structure dynamic interaction under the action of shear wave propagates along axial direction of structure based on Pasternak foundation Xu C., Wang J., Qi C., Liu Y.	445
Dynamic response of shallowly buried underground structure mid-pillar under vertical seismic excitation Yang J., Qi C., Wei X., Chen H., Liu T.	451
The schemes of thermal tunnel through existing subway line 6 You T., Liu J., Wang F., Zhang L.	457

SESSION 5

Construction, structural mechanics, transport problems

On taken into account the joint work structures and foundations Andreev V., Barmenkova E., Matveeva A.	465
Influence of stress-strain state of reinforced concrete flat plate on its punching shear resistance Dadayan T., Avagyan H.	471
Study of thermoelastic stiffness characteristics of double-layer conical washer Grigoryan A.	477
On a class of contact problems and problems of the mechanics of cracks for piecewise homogeneous elastic bodies Kanetsyan E., Mkhitarian S., Mkrtchyan M.	481
Stability of elastic toroid-shape shells Karpov V., Panin A., Kharlab V.	487
Gis-modelling of transportations in the logistical cluster of St. Petersburg Kotikov J., Evtiukov S.	491
Research on seismic dynamic response of submarine tunnel Liu T., Qi C., Chen H., Yang J.	497
The failure mechanism and finite element analysis of recycled concrete two-way slabs strengthened with CFRP laminates Luo J., Du C., Zong Y., Liu J.	503
Punching shear research on recycled concrete two-way slabs with anchor bolts Luo J., Zong Y., Du C., Liu J.	509
High efficiency passive solar system and mathematical model for its calculation and design Melikyan Z.	515
The modified method of rectangular finite elements with sixteen degrees of freedom for solving the problems of plate bending Pirumyan N., Gevorgyan G., Mehrabekyan N.	521

The influence of the bottom ash from biomass burning on the properties of a concrete mix and concrete itself	
Rajczyk J., Pietrzak A.	527
The problems of accessibility of public services and transport links, caused by the geographical location of the cities in the Republic of Armenia	
Safaryan Y., Tovmasyan S.	533
Statistical methods of traffic safety assessment	
Vardanyan Y., Burnusuzyan S.	539
Investigation on the performance of silt stabilized by basalt fiber	
Wang J., Peng L.	543
Advance in investigation of size effect of quasi-brittle material	
Wei X., Qi C., Yang J.	549
Torsion of a prismatic compound rod made of materials having different anisotropic properties	
Yedoyan V., Aleksanyan R., Aleksanyan D.	555
FEM mechanical analysis of a large-span steel truss transfer in steel frame structure	
Zhao C., Guo Q.	561
Finite element analysis of the hysteretic behaviors on link-to-column connection using rib-stiffened plate for d-type eccentrically braced steel frames	
Zhao C., Guo Q.	565

SESSION 6

Technologies and operational methodologies for conservation

An analysis of the evolution of architectural metric survey by comparison of two surveys of Porta all'Arco (Volterra, Italy): from 1996 to 2014	
Bevilacqua MG., Piemonte A., Caroti G., Martínez-Espejo Zaragoza I.	573
Thinking on issues of the protective zoning to the Confucius heritage in Qufu, China	
Ding Y., Liu L., Liu M.	579
Meditation to the conflicts of preservation to architectural morphology in Hui ethnic minority of Xi'an historic city	
Du B., Zhao L.	585
Evaluation criteria of a state of stone materials of ancient monuments under reconstruction	
Galstyan G., Arzumanyan A.	589
The adaptive reuse and reconstruction of the historical buildings of Yerevan	
Gasparyan M., Vardanyan L.	595
Problem of preserving and development of national distinctive character in contemporary Arab architecture	
Houssin W., Zhmurko Y.	601

Project of reinforcement and restoration of Tigranakert basilic church in Artsakh Kirakosyan L.	605
Study on typical dependent structure of 400 years old - The Shibaozhai timber tower Linan L, Chao S.	609
Emergency integrated survey of the San Francesco basilica's attics and domes in Ferrara (Italy) Martínez-Espejo Zaragoza I., Capriuoli F., Caroti G., Piemonte A.	613
The origins of the ornaments applied in early medieval Armenian architecture Mkhitaryan N.	619
Social use of wooden architecture in Tomsk –Method of preservation of the unique phenomenon of world culture Romanova L.	625
Methodologies and techniques for the conservation of cultural heritage in emergency conditions Sabelli R.	631
Reconstruction of historical ruins – Rabsztyn Castle approach Sroczyńska J.	637
Optimization of the geometric structure and kinematics of device for concrete surface treatment Urbański M., Szopa R.	641
Strategies on the protective zoning of historic ruins and the sustainability in economic developed city. A case study of the protective planning of Mudu historic ruins in Suzhou Wang X., Yue Y.	645

SESSION 7

The fruition of the heritage: cultural value-based travel,
routes and landscape/New uses and enhancement of monuments

Creation of world cultural heritage buffer zone under the influence of a new paradigm Agisheva S.	651
Developing the ouv-based management plans for Iran heritage sites in urban and rural areas, case study: world heritage vision plan for the historical site of Khorheh Ahmadinezhad S., Vahidzadeh R., Vatandoust R.	657
The meaning of Parish houses in the villages and the small cities in the modern period Augustinková L.	663
Democratic evaluation of architectural heritage restoration and conservation projects Berni M.	669
Fighting poverty through forms of community based tourism in the territories of central Karakorum Bersani E.	673

Experiences of documentation and digital survey of some Unesco World Heritage sites	
Bertocci S.	679
Heritage site management considering Sandetsky Estate as an example	
Bureeva E.V., Kazymova T.S, Klescheva O.A., Nizamova A.S., Saifullina F.M.	685
Cultural heritage and creative industries: a comparative evaluation in Campania region (It)	
Forte F.	689
Journey in Ethiopia: the church of Beta Giyorgis in Lalibela	
Giustiniani C.	695
Defining an archaeological park: the restoring ancient Stabiae Foundation master plan 2001, and work since 2007	
Howe T.N.	701
Innovative methods to organize cultural tourism in Yerevan	
Kochar K.	707
Sado island the gold and silver mines in Japan. An integrated project between archeology and contemporaneity	
Niglio O.	713
Common ground between architecture and audio-visual language – a new tourist methodology	
Polainas A., Moreira Pinto L.	717
From the survey to the representation of cultural heritage: new spreading models for knowledge and dissemination	
Puma P.	721
Prerequisites and prospects of formation of ethnographic parks in the Republic of Armenia	
Safaryan A.	727
Importance of revitalization manmade landscape of Hrazdan Gorge of Yerevan and principles of future preservation	
Shahinyan S., Petrosyan S., Davtyan S.	733
On some issues of operating open air museums	
Stepanyan K.	739
Architectural and spatial development of the village Kony from XVI to XXI century	
Zueva I.	745
Keyword Index	751
Author Index	755

SESSION 7

THE FRUITION OF THE HERITAGE:
CULTURAL VALUE-BASED TRAVEL,
ROUTES AND LANDSCAPE/
NEW USES AND ENHANCEMENT OF MONUMENTS

FIGHTING POVERTY THROUGH FORMS OF COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM IN THE TERRITORIES OF CENTRAL KARAKORUM

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Keywords

community based tourism, Karakorum, heritage

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the outcome of a recent project to develop tourism in the territories of Central Karakorum National Park (CKNP) in northern Pakistan called "PolimiforKarakorum" (Scientific responsible Eleonora Bersani, with Daniele Bocchiola, Barbara Bogoni, Massimiliano Nastri). The project was among the winners of Polisocial Award 2013-2014 and, as such, was funded by the Politecnico of Milan. For nearly a decade, with Ermes Invernizzi and Michele Locatelli I conduct research and planning for the protection and enhancement of the territories of CKNP and its surrounding villages; hence, we were involved in international cooperation projects (in particular, Karakorum Trust and SEED). We are focused on the dynamics through which it is possible to make heritage more known and accessible, in the awareness that tourism is a crucial resource either to preserve cultural resources and to allow a socio-economic development of the population living on the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

UNESCO has undertaken a number of actions within the initiative Eradication of Poverty, Especially Extreme Poverty, in order to foster the Development of Cultural and Ecotourism in the Mountainous Regions of Central and South Asia. "Sustainable tourism" has been found to be one of the most effective tools in activating the social-economical development of extremely poor populations (Pro Poor Tourism P.P.T.). One of the risks of development, when based on tourism, could be that of detriment to the environmental and cultural heritage thus causing a "consumption" of potential sources of income such as the territory, its products and its material culture.

PolimiforKarakorum is a tool to fight poverty with a specific application for the benefit of inhabitants of northern Pakistan villages, in agreement with UNESCO principles and following actions already put forward by stakeholders as Central Karakorum National Park (CKNP). Its originality mainly consists in strengthening the living conditions of an extremely poor population by inserting it within a project for territory enhancement and development of "community tourism". It's a project for social-economical development that allows the containing of social segregation, helps to reduce environmental and cultural decline, facilitates income's allocation and entrepreneurship's development within local communities. By combining the upgrading of poorer populations' living conditions and the valorization of the territory and its heritage, this project also proves its originality in using the "Politecnico" approach to the Community Based Tourism (C.B.T.) theme. As a matter of fact, this approach descends from the thought of C. Cattaneo that has been eventually shaped within our Milan School (C. Boito, A. Annoni, E. N. Rogers, ...) and is based on the firm belief that a very strong bond exists among asset management, the places and the culture of the inhabitants.

Introducing forms of socio-economical development, connected with the C.B.T., could start off new projects involving local communities as protagonists in the conservation and enhancement of both their territories and their culture. Community members would not only benefit from the outcomes of the projects, they would also take an active role in the recognition process of their own identity and resources (Bottom-Up Approach).

2. BACKGROUND

The Pro Poor Tourism is considered, by those active in fighting extreme poverty and the dynamics of socio-economic development of local residents, one of the most effective instruments to improve the quality of life of people

most in need and to enhance the environmental, historical and cultural development of the territories involved. The PPT Initiatives, also promoted by UNESCO, are often financed by international organizations. UNESCO itself has taken a number of actions that led to the realization of numerous projects for the economic and social development through the tourist development in some regions of Himalayas (Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim), Iran (Masouleh), in Bhutan (Phobjikha Valley), in Kazakhstan (Northern Tien Shen), Kyrgyzstan (Lake Issyk Kul), Nepal (Humla), in the valleys of Chitral and the Kalash, in Tajikistan (East Pamir). The flow of international and domestic tourism in the territories of the Karakoram and training, currently underway, of the Management Plan of CKNP offers a chance to experience local forms of tourism development managed by local communities and to connect it to the network of actions already initiated by UNESCO to structure the ancient caravan routes silk roads. Pakistan is a poor country and its northern regions, with its arid mountain ranges and Karakorum glaciers, are among the most poor areas of the entire country. The general conditions of degradation of the villages (just think of the problems related to drinking water) are currently a major obstacle to the spread of sustainable tourism managed by local communities. On the other hand, for the high value of its environmental and cultural heritage that territory has significant potential in the application of the forms of Community Based Tourism.

The territories of the Karakoram tell a millenary history of exchanges and meetings, crossed by the silk roads, but also the site of passage of the ancient caravan routes that linked the Indian subcontinent to Central Asia. Karakorum has always been a meeting place of people and a melting pot of cultures, where the reception of the "other" has long been considered as a value. The built heritage is the witness of the stratification of influences of different cultures and civilizations. In the villages of the mountain valleys adjacent to CKNP the living conditions are extreme and one survives thanks to a subsistence economy linked to the minute portions of arable land and few animals that live in symbiosis with men. At the same time, they have an environmental heritage and a cultural-historical one, which requires appropriate measures to protect and use, and are a popular destination for thousands of climbers willing to challenge the highest peaks in the world.

3. METHODS

The project PolimiforKarakorum aims to provide for local communities, to the National Park of Karakorum, to the Ministry of Tourism of Pakistan and to NGOs active on the spot, a concrete tool for the enhancement of local resources and to promote the socio-economic development of the population through its direct involvement in the management of all activities related to sustainable tourism "community".

The project is divided into two parts: theoretical research and experimentation, closely related from the scientific point of view and interacting at different stages of the study, evaluation and application. Both the theoretical and the applied parts of PolimiforKarakorum must present a multidisciplinary nature and partnership at all levels (Associations, Villages Communities, Park Managing Authority, Governmental Authorities). This multidisciplinary approach in a C.B.T. project is an original aspect of the research: usually the scientific approach is favored, which quite often refers only to economical and social sciences.

Both parts require that methods and tools from each discipline can be ascribed to synthesis and intervention models, that are effective for the achievement of the aims of the project and of the objectives of each task; always keeping in mind that the Bottom-Up Approach principles contribute in varied ways in organizing the research's different phases.

In the project, the participatory approach is considered a necessary tool to achieve a real and lasting socio-economical development: structural changes can only happen when the inhabitants of the involved villages take part in first person in all the project's phases, although with different degrees of responsibility. In order to activate an effective interaction with the recipients of the project, it is planned that the experts involved in the working group will undertake the active parts of the project since they are already known in the Northern Areas having previously taken part in similar projects. At the same time, to ensure the effective application of the Bottom-Up dynamics, a number of actions concerning the Top Down processes are implemented through round tables with Local Authorities.

The traditional scientific approach prevails in the theoretical part; the results being systematized in an international publication. Engaging the beneficiaries, during the sharing and dissemination of the results, is both preparatory to the setting of the project's operating conditions and an assessing tool for the research itself. In particular, in order to achieve the objective of contributing to the advancement of scientific research within the general framework of strategies for enhancing the environmental and cultural heritage, in which the CBT is a tool of social-economical development, a research was carried out on bibliography, cartography, iconography and on projects finalized according to P.P.T. models, in various geographical areas in the last decade, with a specific regard for examples of C.B.T.

Hereafter the research is aimed at finding possible applications of the C.B.T. in the Karakorum area, using the innovative approach as described on the introduction. An evaluation of opportunities, benefits and impact on the area is also carried on through: a) the touristic assessment analysis on the territory under the CKNP; b) the updating of collected data that have been processed during other projects on socio-economical development. More specifically: data collected by the Aga Khan Foundation during the AKHCP program and data already owned by the Politecnico working group active in Pakistan for the last ten years; c) the planning of programs and initiatives to fight extreme poverty so as to make sure that PolimiforKarakorum can be listed among the activities supported and financed by UNESCO or other associations.

In the experimental and practical parts it is required that all the actions are constantly undertaken following the Bottom-Up process, both when planning the Community Based Tourism project, providing a guideline manual, and when planning the feasibility project, roughly defined and applied on four building constructions on the Bagrot, Stak, Hispar and Braldo valleys, to serve as models in the dwelling improvement so as to achieve adequate hygienic levels.

4. CASE HISTORY

According to the data of "World Mortality – 2013 Report", the infant mortality rate in Italy is 3.3 children every 1000. In Pakistan the rate rises to 71 children every 1000. While in the Northern Regions of Pakistan it is 104 every 1000 (2011); 1 child every 3, under the age of 5, has been affected by diarrhea in the last month (Pakistan Millennium Development Goals Report 2013). There are 172.185 people living in villages situated on the Karakorum slopes, organized in 21.138 families (data taken from the 2012 CKNP Management Plan).

In these villages, crossed and photographed by the tourists – since considered quite picturesque – when visiting the Karakorum Park and its beautiful peaks (such as K2, Broad Peak, Gasherbrum), the infant mortality rate is dramatically higher. The main reason for such a high rate is to be found in the condition of extreme poverty and the very poor hygienic situation in which people live. Hence, the tourism development, in which UNESCO has identified one of the most effective tools in fighting against the extreme poverty of the people of the mountainous regions of Asia, finds a concrete limit in this extreme degradation of the villages and of its houses.

PolimiforKarakorum in pursuing a double direction - the upgrading of the life condition of local population and the increasing of the "community tourism" - would allow the interruption of a vicious circle and trigger a virtuous one where the improvement of the sanitary conditions and the social economic development of the population can grow with the valorization of the environmental and the historic and cultural resources.

Our project includes a plan for coordinating tourism promotion activities and interventions aimed at tackling social segregation, to reduce environmental and socio-cultural degradation, to facilitate the distribution of income and the development of entrepreneurship within the local communities. It aims to show how, through the introduction of forms of social and economic development linked to Community Based Tourism, will activate new models of tourist development involving, first, the local communities as protagonists in the project for the protection and enhancement of their territories and their culture not only being beneficiaries of development actions, but also being proactive in the process of recognition of their identity and their resources.

5. RESULTS

Starting from the potential of "sustainable tourism" as a specific tool for the activation of the dynamic of socio-economic development of populations in extreme poverty, we have identified a number of actions to promote the development of a "community tourism" within an overall project of enhancement of areas in northern Pakistan.

The main results of the project are, for the theoretical part, a critical catalog of models of tourist development of poor countries and on the forms of application of CBT, for the experimental part, a project of sustainable tourism development in the Karakorum through training guidelines, evaluation of the benefits and impact on the area and the project of four exemplary interventions at the building that will be a model of adaptation of housing to minimum housing standards (drinking water, sanitation, etc.). It is foreseen that the results obtained from the research are disseminated both in the territory, beneficiary of the project, through the active intervention of CKNP and the continuing involvement of the population, both in the international scientific community through publications and conferences. With more detail we describe actions, results (expected, in progress or on Achieved June 2015) and outcomes, phase by phase. The activities Concerning the theoretical phase are marked with the letter R, Those Concerning the experimental / applied phase with the letter S, even if they are closely related and interacting.

1. Activities : R1.a. Bibliographical research – cataloguing – critical reading; R1.b. Search for case studies with related references to multidisciplinary aspects; R1.c. Search for ongoing programmes and actions supporting and promoting poor countries' socio-economical development, based on the enhancement of the environmental and tourist resources, and directly involving the local communities; R1.d. Comparative reading of R1.a. + R1.b. + R1.c.; R1.e. Production of theoretical models also for the experimental phase; R1.f. Results systematisation for the international scientific publication. Expected/in progress/achieved results: Setting up of the multidisciplinary theoretical scientific apparatus. Output: Research report.

2. Activities: R2.a Definition of the social and economical system for the territory within the CKNP; R2.b Definition of the tourist and infrastructural system. Expected/in progress/achieved results : Definition of a comprehensive picture of the actual socio-economic, infrastructural and tourist system through the use of clear and comparable indicators. Output: Research report; Cartography index in GIS format.

3. Activities: S1.a Evaluation of the theoretical models as defined on R1.e; S1.b Definition of the intervention model; S1.c Social-economic and touristic valorisation project (C.B.T.); S1.d Guidelines definition. Expected / in progress /achieved results: Definition of the project at overall scale; Drawing up of guidelines for the development and strengthening of capacity building. Output: Research report; Project on social, economic and tourist valorisation; Guidelines; Cartography index in GIS format; Infographic.

4. Activities: S2.a Project and guidelines evaluation. Expected/in progress/achieved results: Sharing and approval of the project on tourist enhancement by the beneficiaries. Output: Research report; Project on social, economic and tourist valorisation (final version); Guidelines (final version).

5. Activities: S3.a Project on four targeted case study. Expected/in progress/achieved results: Community Guest House Project; Private House Upgrading Project; Temporary Tourist Accommodation (Camp Site) Project; Community Water Facilities for women Project. Output: Research report; Planning design documents and charts.

6. Activities: R3.a Results dissemination within the international scientific community. Expected/in progress/achieved results: Finding of interest from the international scientific community. Output: Publication; International Conferences/Exhibitions/Seminaries. R3.b Results dissemination among local authorities and communities. Expected / in progress /achieved results: Presentation of the project's results with at least two subjects operating in the CKNP territory and sharing of them with the CKNP directorate and local communities. Output: Fliers and promotional material. R3.c Results dissemination among promoters and sponsors for social economic development projects. Expected/ in progress /achieved results: Finding of interest from sponsors of social economic development projects. Output: Selection of lines of credit to fund the projects .

6. CONCLUSIONS

The relevance of the proposed theme in the project is connected to the fact that the repercussions of the increased knowledge in the field of tools for the Eradication of Poverty, Especially Extreme Poverty, thanks to a sustainable type of tourism could vocationally involve a large number of countries lacking resources and suffering from endemic poverty. This repercussion isn't only of scientific type, it basically concerns the people, beneficiaries and actors, that could potentially be involved in the processes of Pro Poor tourism (P.P.T.). These processes are raising a growing interest both for the results so far achieved in applying this tool and for its effectiveness as it is constantly proven on the field. Concerning specifically PolimiforKarakorum, the impact of the project on the context is ambivalent. On one hand it is direct, since the implementation of the guidelines and of the artifacts' projects has an effective and immediate impact in the improvement of the habitat and of its attractiveness for tourists, leaving a positive sign on the social economic situation of people. On the other side the impact is induced since CKNP and local people are equipped with a useful tool to coordinate the actions of intervention on the territory, allowing them to increase the ability to attract sponsors and to effectively articulate its use.



Fig. 1 Hispar Village.



Fig. 2 Central Karakorum National Park Surroundings.

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Author Index

A

Aghayan K.	391
Agisheva S.	651
Ahmadinezhad S.	657
Akhtiamov I.	207
Akhtiamova R.	207
Alberto Escobar J.	239
Aleksanyan D.	555
Aleksanyan R.	555
Aloyan A.	213
Amirian P.	9
Andreev V.	465
Arakelyan M.	323
Arzumanyan A.	589
Aterini B.	217
Atoyán L.	391
Augustinková L.	663
Avagyan H.	471
Avetisyan A.	223

B

Bairova S.	349
Bai Y.	145
Barkhudaryan A.	3
Barkhudaryan M.	3
Barmenkova E.	465
Barseghyan N.	227
Basiri Am.	9
Basiri An.	9
Bednářová P.	139
Berni M.	69
Bersani E.	673
Bertocci S.	679
Bevilacqua MG.	573
Białkiewicz, A.	383
Bostenaru Dan M.	231
Bureeva E.V.	685
Burnusuzyan S.	539

C

Capriuoli F.	613
Caroti G.	573
Caroti G.	613
Cecilio V.	239
Chao S.	609
Chao W.	425, 429
Chen H.	439, 445, 451, 497
Cheng B.	13
ChengZhi Q.	13, 419, 451, 497, 549
Chernysh N.	335
Chuan T.	425
Churchelauri Z.	19

D

Dadayan T.	471
Danoyan Z.	391
Davtyan S.	733
Ding Y.	579
Dong J.	25
Drozdova I.	405
Du B.	585
Du C.	503, 509

E

Evtjukov S.	491
------------------	-----

F

Fei S.	201
Feng J.	25
Forte F.	689
Frolíková Palánová K.	235

G

Galiote M.	239
Galstyan G.	589
Gao H.	197
Garshtya A.	243
Gasparini C.	249
Gasparyan M.	595
Gavardashvili G.	397
Gevorgyan G.	521
Ghushchyan L.	255
Giustiniani C.	695
Gordienko V.	31
Gorgorova Y.	261
Grazulevičiūtė-Vileniške I.	377
Grigoryan A.	477
Guo J.	87
Guo Q.	561
Gyulzadyan H.	35

H

Hakobyan S.	267
Halbiniak J.	39
Harutyunyan E.	273
Hayrapetyan Y.	95
He J.	425
He Z.	43
Houssin W.	601
Howe T.N.	701

I

Invernizzi E.	279
--------------------	-----

K

Kanetsyan A.	283
Kanetsyan E.	481
Karapetyan L.	47
Karelin D.	289
Karpov V.	487
Kartashyan T.	293
Kazymova T.S.	679
Kelejian H.	119
Khachatryan A.	113
Khachatryan E.	113
Kharlab V.	487
Kipiani G.	19
Kirakosyan L.	605
Klescheva O.A.	679
Kochar K.	707
Kolarcikova L.	91
Koptyaev D.	313
Kotikov J.	491
Kozlov V.	261
Kubečka K.	53
Kubečková D.	63
Kukhalashvili E.	397
Kurzak L.	401

L

Li C.	67,73
Liang T.	25
Linan L.	579
Liu D.	429
Liu F.	179
Liu J.	503, 509
Liu L.	579
Liu M.	579
Liu T.	419, 451, 497
Liu Y.	445
Liu Z.	371
Luo J.	503, 509

M

Ma B.	435
Major I.	77
Major M.	77
Manukyan A.	81
Martínez-Espejo Zaragoza I.	613
Matveeva A.	465
Mehrabekyan N.	521
Melikyan Z.	515
Meng Y.	163
Meyers A.	297
Mityagin S.	361
Mkhitaryan N.	619
Mkhitaryan S.	481
Mkrtchyan M.	481
Monteiro P.	303
Moreira Pinto L.	717
Morillón D.	239
Musílek J.	59

N

Narezhnaya T.	309
Nizamova A.S.	679
Nocentini A.	217
Niglio O.	713

O

Orlov A.	309
---------------	-----

P

Panin A.	487
Peng L.	543
Peng Y.	87
Perinkova M.	91
Petrosyan H.	95
Petrosyan S.	733
Petrov A.	99
Piemonte A.	573, 613
Pietrzak A.	527
Pimenova G.	313
Pirumyan N.	521
Polainas A.	717
Puma P.	721

Q

Qi C.	439
------------	-----

R

Rajczyk J.	527
Ren J.	145
Repelewicz A.	103
Revzina Y.	339
Romanova L.	625
Rusiev K.	319

S

Sabelli R.	631
Šafářová V.	235
Safaryan A.	727
Safaryan Y.	533
Sayfullina F.M.	679
Saldana C.	109
Sałek R.	401
Sargsyan E.	323
Sarukhanyan A.	119
Scalzo M.	329
Seifullin S.	125
Selejdak J.	129
Semenyuk O.	335
Shahinyan S.	733
Shesterov E.	405
Shi C.	13
Shvidkovsky D.	339
Si X.	133

Smirnov E.	405
Smirnova E.	31
Solkiewicz-Kos N.	343
Sroczyńska J.	637
Stepanyan K.	739
Šubrt R.	139
Szopa R.	641
Szopa R.	129

T

Tang M.	145
Tatygulov A.	151
Tebeyev K.	151
Ter-Petrosyan G.	157
Ter-Simonyan V.	35
Tian C.	425
Tokunova G.	99
Tovmasyan S.	533
Tubielewicz – Michalczuk M.	409
Twrda M.	91

U

Urbańska J.	169
Urbański M.	129

V

Vahidzadeh R.	657
Vaitens A.	361
Vardanyan L.	595
Vardanyan Y.	539
Vasilyev F.	413
Vasilyev V.	413
Vatandoust R.	657
Voskanyan G.	35
Vyacheslav K.	261
Vyacheslav K.	487

W

Wang C.	425, 429
--------------	----------

Wang F.	457
Wang H.	67, 73
Wang J.	543
Wang X.	173
Wang X.	645
Wei C.	179
Wei X.	549
Wu H.	87
Wu X.	365

X

Xu C.	445
------------	-----

Y

Yang A.	371
Yang J.	451
Yedoyan V.	555
Yestayeva A.	183
You T.	457
Yudenok I.	187
Yue Y.	645

Z

Zaleskienė E.	377
Zhamankulov A.	125
Zhamankulov M.	151
Zhang F.	67, 73
Zhang L.	457
Zhang X.	191
Zhang Z.	73
Zhao C.	561, 565
Zhao D.	191, 197, 201
Zhao L.	585
Zhao S.	191
Zhmurko Y.	601
Zhumanov K.	151
Zong Y.	503, 509
Zueva I.	745
Żychowska, M.J.	383

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