

Milagrosa Martínez Navarro

Regional Minister of Tourism Region of Valencia, Spain

It is a reason of great satisfaction to me to represent the Valencian Community in this international event, whose main objective is to discuss and exchange experiences that help us to improve our knowledge of sustainable development and its application in the tourist sector. The participation to this debate is of great interest for the Valencian Community since tourism is a strategic sector for the economic development of our region, which we want to stimulate and to boost in a harmonious way so that it continues to fulfill its economical leadership role. Sustainable development, in its economical, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions, is an instrument which the Regional Ministry, that I run, is betting on in order to achieve these targets. The Valencian Community is one of the most prominent regions for **tourism** in the context of a tourism world power such as Spain: The Valencian Community is one of the Spanish regions with a higher contribution of tourism to the economy, exceeding 11% of the GNP of our region. Tourist activities generate a direct and indirect employment over 12% of the total of the active population of the Valencian Community, an aspect that doubtlessly leads to a distribution of wealth and affluence to a great part of the Valencian population. In the year 2003 the tourists that came to our Community have been nearly 20 millions, welcomed by the ample and varied offer of tourist lodgings in our region.

In this context, the chairman of the Valencian Government has considered this sector so strategic that the past month of September he wanted to raise, for the first time, the category of the body responsible for tourist policy to the rank of **Council**, a Regional Ministry that I have the satisfaction to run. This important decision is a demonstration of the resolute bet of the Valencian Government on this sector, acknowledging its importance for the Valencian economy, as a diversifying sector of the economic fabric, creator of employment and in the end generator of wealth and affluence.

The **Valencian tourist model** has demonstrated during decades its validity and consolidation. This model is based on the excellent natural conditions, representing a product which was traditionally called "Sun and Beaches" with an enormous projection and attractiveness, but in the recent years we have seen remarkable change in the behavior of the demand and the appearance of new competing tourist destinations. In this context the Valencian Government is boosting the diversification of the tourist product, without forgetting that the sun-and-beaches tourism is our main asset, but taking advantage of the high potential of the other tourist modalities, such as the urban-cultural one, the tourism of congress and conventions, of health-care, of golf, the nautical tourism and the cruise tourism, and in particular of the farm and inland tourism.

In addition to the steps directed to the diversification of tourism, the Valencian Government is opting for a diversification and innovation of the tourist product, through which we may reach a higher degree of competitiveness in our tourist industry. A basic pillar of the tourist policy of the Valencian Community is the resolute bet on **sustainable development**. In this meaning my department is working to the consolidation of a series of strategic actions, among which it is worth mentioning:

- the boosting of our capability of innovation and technological transfer among the enterprises of the tourist sector of the Valencian Community. To this end we shall establish the **Technological Institute for Tourism (INVATTUR)** which will be part of a program aimed at studying the changes in the tourist sector, the use of new technologies applied to the sector and to the development of the Valencian tourist industry. Among the fields of activity of INVATTUR there are the environmental and water technologies and the research for tourist models and for new trends.
- At present the Valencian Community has a total of 71 beaches and an accessible natural park and a line of aid for the upgrading of the tourist establishments. These actions are reinforced with the formulation of the **Plan for Accessible Tourism** by which we want to make the Valencian Community a reference in the tourist and leisure destinations for disabled people.
- As far as the **improvement of the quality** of the offer and of the tourist destinations is concerned, the Valencian Community has already gone a long way in this field. Since 1997 more than 170 tourist enterprises have been certified as well as about 30 coastal municipalities, both under ISO 9000 for quality, and under ISO 14000 for environment. In the same way, the program of improvement of the quality of the Valencian coast has earned us 106 "Blue Flags" in the year 2003. Even so, with the target to boost these actions, we shall draw up an **Integral Plan for the Quality of Valencian Tourism** in order to facilitate the improvement of the quality of the tourist sector in all its facets and the sensitization of the agents concerned.

- The development of the **eco-cultural tourism** through the exploitation for tourist usage of protected natural areas, by which we want to stimulate a type of tourism that, in addition to favor the local development, preserves those patrimonial resources with a cultural and environmental character which identify the municipalities located in the protected natural areas, even the most fragile, of the Valencian Community.
- The resolute bet for the sustainable development of the tourism in our inland areas through the **Plan for Farm Tourism**, which will put in motion actions of improvement of the tourist product and its marketing, and the institutional coordination and the participation, as a new drive to the enlivening actions of the rural areas which have been developed up to now.
- **Training** is a fundamental theme for the innovation and the improvement of the tourist sector. Aware of this fact, the Valencian Community has consolidated a network of training centers with the responsibility to bring the required training closer to the different areas of our region. These centers have recently transformed themselves in meeting and reference points for the tourist sector as evidenced by the fact that in 2003 more than 16.600 persons were trained in our network of these centers.
I would like to mention that in year 2001 the Valencian Community has supported the celebration in Valencia of a meeting of the **Working Group B** on training in the context of the process "Tourism and Employment", whose leadership belongs to the European Commission, and where our network of training centers has been considered as a good practice to be taken into consideration.
- We also consider the exchange of experiences among the nations as a basic pillar for the innovation and the implementation of the sustainability in tourism. In this sense we are participating in two projects in the context of the **Inter-regional Community Initiative**, where innovative ideas are taking forms about the sustainability in protected areas, the development of tourist products based on the cultural and natural patrimony and the boosting of the participation of the local agents in tourism.

Doubtlessly these implementation lines comply with the environmental, economical and socio-cultural aspects of tourism in the Valencian Community as guarantee of a path towards the implementation of the sustainable development in this sector, which we want to go on being one of our strategic sectors. Proof of the results of the tourist policy has been earning the prize "**Sustainable European Region 2003**", an acknowledgement issued by the Assembly of European Regions, co-organizer of this event.

In this final part of my intervention, I would like to congratulate with the **European Commission**, represented by Mr. Franco Ianniello, for having dedicated his latest Communication about tourism, "Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism", to this key theme for the future of tourism in the European Union and for having facilitated the participation of the agents in the sector to its preparation, a process in which the Valencian Community has participated actively.

I would also like to congratulate for the mention of tourism in the **European Constitution**, a path that must recognize to the tourist sector the role it deserves in this project of construction of the European Union. I consider that the space given to the Valencian Community when giving institutional recognition to the importance of the tourist sector, must be an example that the European institutions must take into consideration in order to put into motion the mechanisms which allow to optimize the communitarian policies which concern tourism, which are now scattered, through the improvement of the coordination inside these institutions, the build up of a stable communitarian tourist policy and the allocation of the relevant resources to implement it.

This political and institutional recognition of tourism by the European institutions must not be separated from the recognition of the tourist destinations, and therefore, of the European regions, as the basic actors in the tourist development, respecting the adequate balance between the communitarian intervention and the principle of subsidiarity, taking action where necessary and guaranteeing the adequate participation of the actors which are implementing tourist policies in the tourist destinations, places where the tourist reality lies.

To conclude, I would like to demonstrate my willingness to cooperate actively to the initiatives originating from this forum or to those that will be proposed by the bodies that co-organize this event, so that through the exchange of ideas and good practices we can proceed to the real implementation of the sustainability in a so important and complex sector such as tourism.

Many thanks

Milagrosa Martínez Navarro

The new councilor for Tourism of the Valencian Government, Milagrosa Martinez Navarro, has been mayor of the municipality of Novelda, Alicante province, in the years 1995 to 2004.

Graduated in Law at the University of Alicante, she held several offices in the Valencian Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, chairing effectively the commission for Health and as councilor of the Cooperation for Development Commission.

Her experience in the town hall, coordinating the development of daily management of all the competences of a municipality inside the Valencian Community, allows her to approach the regional tourist policy from a point of view close to the one of the citizens.

Among her main targets, in the period now beginning, she proposes to insist on the diversification of the Valencian tourist offer, supporting tourist products such as the farm, sports and culture ones, but maintaining the support for the sun-and-beaches model based on quality and sustainability.



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