

Towards a European Network for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism

Policies and Instruments for the Consolidation of a European Strategy for a Network of Destinations of Excellence for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism

Premise

Tourism is a powerful economic sector both at European and at world wide level. According to a recent estimate from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism is one of the largest industries in the world in that it counts around 231 million employees and generates 10.4% of world GDP. According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) in 2006 alone 846 million international tourist arrivals were registered, corresponding to 584 billion euro derived solely from tourism related activities in the same period. The WTO also predicts that the tourism industry will grow by 4.1% by the year 2020. Furthermore, Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development sustains that tourism is one of the few economic activities capable of providing economic incentives for environmental preservation, in addition to representing a potential employment resource for women and for young people.

The fundamental nature of tourism and its services is reflected in all European regions and particularly in those adhering to this Memorandum of Understanding. Furthermore, the need to promote economic development in this sector without causing irreversible damage to natural and cultural heritage and to guarantee an equal distribution of wealth among the population in tourist destinations has been widely recognised.

Numerous international initiatives and strategies have been identified to promote sustainable development in tourism and to address the issues of Agenda 21. In order to optimise the work carried out on these issues by institutions and in the world of enterprise it is necessary to define shared models which can be applied and experimented in the most important European tourism destinations.

This awareness has emerged in part through the 4 previous editions of **Euromeeting** *the international seminar on European policies for sustainable tourism development*. This seminar has brought about the creation of an informal network of institutions and organisms which undertake continuous comparison on:

- the application of the objectives of Agenda 21 in regions and tourist destinations;
- the international debate on this theme and the position of international organisations (EU¹, UN², WTO³, UNEP⁴, ILO⁵ etc);
- an analysis of good practice undertaken in European regions and other areas.

¹ European Union

² United Nations

³ World Tourism Organisation

⁴ United National Environmental Programme

⁵ International Labour Organisation

The successful outcome of the previous editions of Euromeeting has been thanks in a part to the support of the European Commission, with particular reference to the Directorate General for Enterprise, which has helped to guarantee a high level of debate both in terms of identifying themes for discussion and in terms of direct participation and the involvement of international institutions and regional actors.

On the 25th and 26th of October 2007 the **European Tourism Forum** was held in Portugal. During the forum participants discussed the themes proposed in the European Commission's Communication entitled "Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism".⁶

To this end, the Commission's conclusions are fully supported to the measure in which the Communication highlights the need to launch and endorse a medium-long term Agenda in which all stakeholders undertake the necessary steps to strengthen the contribution of sustainable practices to facilitate the competitiveness of Europe as the most attractive tourism destination.

In full support of

the indications in the Communication and in particular the necessity for all interested parties to observe the following principles:

- **Take a holistic and integrated approach** - All the various impacts of tourism should be taken into account in its planning and development. Furthermore, tourism should be well balanced and integrated with a whole range of activities that affect society and the environment.
- **Plan for the long term** - Sustainable development is about taking care of the needs of future generations as well as our own. Long term planning requires the ability to sustain actions over time.
- **Achieve an appropriate pace and rhythm of development** - The level, pace and shape of development should reflect and respect the character, resources and needs of host communities and destinations.
- **Involve all stakeholders** - A sustainable approach requires widespread and committed participation in decision making and practical implementation by all those implicated in the outcome.
- **Use best available knowledge** - Policies and actions should be informed by the latest and best knowledge available. Information on tourism trends and impacts, and skills and experience, should be shared across Europe.
- **Minimise and manage risk (the precautionary principle)** - Where there is uncertainty about outcomes, there should be full evaluation and preventative action should be taken to avoid damage to the environment or society.
- **Reflect impacts in costs (user and polluter pays)** - Prices should reflect the real costs to society of consumption and production activities. This has implications not simply for pollution but for charging for the use of facilities that have significant management costs attached to them.
- **Set and respect limits, where appropriate** - The carrying capacity of individual sites and wider areas should be recognised, with a readiness and ability to limit, where and when appropriate, the amount of tourism development and volume of tourist flows.

⁶ COM (2007) 0621 – 19-10-2007

- **Undertake continuous monitoring** - Sustainability is all about understanding impacts and being alert to them all the time, so that the necessary changes and improvements can be made.

It is considered strategic, in the spirit of the Communication

- to examine in greater detail those issues connected to the concrete application of Agenda 21 in the main European tourist destinations;
- to consolidate a network of structured and lasting relationships among the main European tourist regions;
- to define shared models for the promotion of research activities applied to sustainable tourism with the aim of introducing innovative practices to the theme of sustainable development of European Tourism destinations and of guaranteeing maximum accessibility to subjects with varied levels of ability;
- to construct a model which guarantees a permanent dialogue among regions, local authorities, members states, the European Commission and also with the world of enterprise, of social entities and of consumers on issues related to sustainable tourism, thus promoting the creation of a specific European network.

The regions of Tuscany, Catatonia and Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur have taken the initiative to create an open network of regions and of other related organisms which could provide valid support to the network.

Regions, international institutions and representatives from international networks and organisations involved in the social and economic debate on sustainable tourism, gathered in Florence at Euromeeting 2007 on sustainable tourism.

Agree

- to develop and strengthen a framework for the coordination of national and regional development and research programmes in the field of sustainable tourism;
- to share and promote various forms of coordination of project activities already underway at regional level which can be rendered more efficient by an exchange of information and the implementation of *joint activities*;
- to operate in coherence with the two essential principles identified as **pillars** for the practice of sustainable tourism development: Reinforcing **social dialogue** at all levels and constant **measurability of phenomenon** related to heterogeneous tourism activities.

Commit themselves to

1. the active promotion of suitable instruments to guarantee **social dialogue** and participative processes directly concerned with sustainable tourism development;

2. to dedicating specific attention, according to relative levels of responsibility, to the following **10 priority themes** to guarantee that policies and strategic objectives for sustainable tourism are both operative and applicable:

- Impact of transport
- Quality of life of residents and tourists
- Quality of work
- Widening the relations between demand/offer (geographical and seasonal concentration of tourism)
- Active conservation of cultural heritage
- Active conservation of environmental heritage
- Active conservation of distinctive identities of destinations
- Reduction and optimisation of use of natural resources with particular reference to water
- Reduction and optimisation of energy consumption
- Reduction of waste and better waste management

3. to defining procedures and models for monitoring and measurement of phenomena related to the 10 priority themes;

4. to guaranteeing a constant exchange of information and knowledge on development programmes and research;

5. to defining common activities for sharing methods of communication and participation, indicators, operative measures and systems for revealing and correcting negative territorial characteristics and for constructing more positive ones;

6. to implementing common, shared activities related to training at interregional level;

7. to undertaking joint research activities on sustainable tourism through *joint calls*;

8. to promoting productive collaboration and cooperation in research both at interregional and regional level and in terms of public-private partnerships;

9. to jointly promoting ambitious, long term strategies in line with the European Union's policy for sustainable development which individual regions would find it hard to implement alone;

10. to promoting support actions for developing areas with the aim of creating the conditions for sustainable tourism development.

Florence, 17th November 2007