

EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS INITIATIVES REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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The magnitude of the tourism phenomenon and the diversification of its forms have multiple consequences on the natural environment, the society and the economy. That is why, starting with the 1980's there have been preoccupations at EU level regarding policy elaboration towards a sustainable development of tourism. These policies must set clear and realistic objectives as far as the improvement of European tourism industry competitiveness is concerned, by sustainability of tourism in Europe and worldwide. Economic, cultural and environmental sustainability is a key factor for the competitiveness of tourism destinations, for the well being of the population, for new jobs creation and for the preservation of the natural and cultural tourism attractions.

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The magnitude of the tourism phenomenon and the diversification of its forms have multiple consequences on the natural environment, the society and the economy. The world states cannot remain indifferent to such activity which stands out as a distinct economic sector and a powerful space transformation agent and for this reason they apply several policies while trying to lead the evolution of the tourism phenomenon and to obtain a greater profit out of it [1].

At world level OECD has members the governments of 30 states, attached to the democracy and the free market economy principles in order to [2]:

- sustain a durable economic growth
- grow life standards
- maintain financial stability
- help other countries develop their economy
- contribute to the growth of the world commerce

OECD shares its experience that has been accumulated in over 40 years of activity and initiates exchange of ideas with over 70 developing countries.

The 30 OECD member countries have a dominant place in world tourism both as far as tourists and internal and international travels effectuated by their citizens and tourism expenses are concerned. That is why these countries give special attention to the tourism sector.

Because of its importance to the economies of the member states, tourism is one of the public administrations' fields for action, in most OECD countries.

Tourism has seen spectacular growth during the past 30 years becoming an essential component of services economy (30% of international services exchange in the OECD zone) which represents the growth engine in most OECD countries. These countries account for approximately 70% of the world tourism activity.

Globalization, the growth of the international competition, and the great sector and trans-sector evolutions have a strong influence on the role played by central administrations in the field of tourism. In this respect, the Tourism Committee is the main contact point of OECD in these matters and offers an unique

framework for debate on tourism and socio-economic, commercial, statistic, and analytic issues related to tourism. The Tourism Committee is an information exchange forum regarding the policies and the structural changes influencing the growth of international tourism, in the view of sustainable development.

Once a year, the OECD Tourism Committee gathers the high level decision makers in the field of tourism in order to debate the main evolutions that concern the sector, to adopt initiatives function of the necessities, to reunite information elements on policies and to contribute to works developing in other sectors of OECD. The Tourism Committee cooperates with WTO, EU and the Bureau of International Labor Affairs and sustains dialog with states not members of OECD, offering a framework for consultations and seminars organization among tourism, universities and other categories representatives.

The main designation of the Tourism Committee is that of helping the OECD member states to adapt their policies and actions in order to favor a development of tourism compatible to sustainable development. It also tries its best to sensitize different “actors” on international issues and to encourage international cooperation in the field of tourism.

At the European Union level, tourism is not a fully harmonized field of activity, there is no common, harmonized policy. Nevertheless, in 1992 the Maastricht Treaty introduced the possibility for the Community to take measures in the field of tourism (according to article 3.1.u) to the end of contributing to attaining convergence objectives at Community level, such as economic growth, or new jobs creation, economic and social cohesion, or sustainable development. Any Community measure in this field requires the unanimity of Union member countries votes in order to be adopted (according to article 308 of the Treaty) [3].

Even though tourism is not subject to a distinct EU policy, tourism activities are “covered” by articles 49 and 50 of the Treaty, which refer to services and are regulated directly by other provisions, such as those referring to structural funds. In a more general approach one may assess that due to the discreet peculiarity of tourism components, an important number of sector policies may affect tourism (for instance, the policy regarding enterprises, transports, environment, taxation, etc.).

Ever since the 80’s there was a certain cooperation among member states and the European Commission in this field, tourism allowing the harmonious development of economic activities within the Community, which represents, actually, one of its missions.

Both the member states and the Commission acknowledge the importance of tourism as job creator economic sector, since it enjoys a high development rate and is able to substantially contribute to attaining the objectives of the European Council set at Lisbon (March, 23-24th, 2000), respectively, to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world, based on knowledge and innovation.

The working method established by the European Council to apply the strategic objective set at Lisbon, consists of setting objectives at community level, leaving up to the member states (respecting the subsidiary principle) the possibility to reach these objectives, within the policy adopted by each state at national level. This method is also based on the association of local and regional collectivities, as well as social partners and civil society representatives.

Tourism is one of the sectors with the most favorable development perspectives with diverse tourism attractions within the same geographic perimeter.

Tourism plays an essential part in the development of the great majority of the European regions. Tourism infrastructure contributes to local economies development and the creation of new jobs, even in the regions characterized by industrial decline.

European tourism is confronting the challenge of its own sustainable development, respectively a growth that guarantees its competitiveness and respects the limitations of its basic resources and the regenerative capacity of these resources.

At the same time, tourism is a service sector, with an extremely complex product and depends on a diverse and fragmented offer, which is why it has to find its true sector identity.

The European institutions have undertaken a series of initiatives and measures toward the sustainable development of tourism.

The “Tourism and jobs” campaign launched in 1999 lead the European Commission and the member states to cooperate to the end of maximizing the contribution tourism may have to economic growth and new jobs

creation. To this end, in November 2001 a Commission communication entitled “Working together for the future of European tourism” was adopted.

This strategic document submits:

- an operational framework, based on the method of open coordination among all involved “actors”
- a (limited) series of actions and instruments, meant to be used by these actors, having as final purpose the enhancement of the information/knowledge base regarding this economic activity as well as the strengthening of enterprises’ competitiveness and the improvement in this way, of the tourism sustainable development in the EU and its contribution to new jobs creation.
- The main actions brought to attention to this end are the following:
- the implementation of the TSA in the member states, according to a common methodology elaborated by Eurostat
- the definition and implementation of Agenda 21 for European tourism
- the elaboration of quality indices necessary to follow up the quality of tourism destinations and services
- the creation of networks for good practice exchange
- the simplification of accessibility criteria for tourism sites and infrastructure in order to meet the needs of the differently able.

This communication was followed by a Council resolution on May 21st 2002 (Resolution 2002/c135/01) which adopted the actions preset by the Commission, emphasizing the economic importance of tourism and the necessity to strengthen its political recognition at community level, as well as the inclusion of tourism within other community policies, referring to other fields.

On this base the Commission engaged in 2002 and followed up during the next years the implementation of different necessary actions, under the aegis of the Consultative Tourism Committee.

In view of the strengthening of the interface between the public and private sector, the Commission organized a first edition of the European Tourism Forum on December, 10th 2002, in Brussels, leading to a second edition in November 2003, in Venice, and to a 3rd edition in Budapest, in October 2004.

On November 21st 2003, the Commission adopted a new communication regarding the Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism, which was presented to the Council on Competitiveness on November, 27th 2003. The communication was preceded by vast consultations of public authorities, industry, professional bodies, and civil society, enlisting in the impact study procedure, created for a number of legislative and non-legislative proposals regarding the new Commission governance principals. This communication is the adaptation for tourism of the Strategy for sustainable development in the European Union, adopted by the European Council at Göteborg in June, 2001, advising the member states to mobilize in order to improve the European tourism sustainable development conditions, from an economical, social and environmental point of view.

A working group entitled Tourism Sustainability Group, comprising all important tourism “actors”. On November 21st, 2003 the European Commission adopted a communication entitled Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism aiming at promoting the European and worldwide tourism evolution toward sustainability. The Commission objective is to launch the activities comprised in the Agenda 21 for European sustainable tourism in 2007, based on studies of the Tourism Sustainability Group, whose members are experts in the European tourism area. This group was founded in February 2005 and set as objective to formulate proposals and recommendations regarding a final report, representing the base of a vast consultation which should identify the guiding lines of enterprises and tourists sustainable actions and to submit a structure for a European tourism Agenda 21. To this end, 6 sub-groups were constituted, on the following issues: consumers, destinations and local communities, institutions, industry, tourism and transport.

As far as the actions of the European Parliament in the field of tourism are concerned, one may emphasize the resolution adopted on September 8th, 2005 regarding the new perspectives and challenges for a sustainable European tourism. In the same day, at the initiative of the Development Commission, the European Parliament adopted a resolution regarding tourism and development, which enlists to the EU

development policy, regarding developing countries and insists on the fundamental role of tourism in this respect.

Europe remains the most visited region of the world. Under these circumstances, one must bear in mind the risk of tourism becoming the victim of its own success, unless it develops in a sustainable manner. Biodiversity, the ecosystem function, the natural resources and cultural patrimony may be threatened by the uncontrolled development of tourism. Sustainability from an economic, cultural and environmental point of view is a key factor for the competitiveness of tourism destinations, for the wellbeing of the population, for new jobs creation and for the preservation of natural and cultural tourism attractions.

The Commission considers that the challenges of the European tourism require a politically harmonized answer at EU level. This policy must set clear and realistic objectives, shared among decision makers, employers and employees, as well as local populations in tourism destination areas and must attract most of the available resources, taking advantage of all possible synergies. Bearing in mind the actions already undertaken in this field, the policy must offer added value to national and regional policies and actions. Any European policy regarding tourism must be complementary to the policies adopted in the member states.

The main objective of the new European policy regarding tourism is the enhancement of European tourism industry competitiveness and new and better jobs creation, by sustainable development of tourism in Europe and worldwide.

The European Commission will implement this policy developing tight collaboration relationships with member states authorities and with tourism industry “actors”.

The Commission considers that the most suitable tools for implementing this policy are the coordination within the Commission and national authorities, the cooperation among interested parties and the launch of specific supporting actions.

The promotion of a sustainable tourism may be done mainly by adopting and implementing a European Agenda 21 for tourism as well as other actions developed in favor of European tourism sustainability.

Agenda 21 is an action program for the XXI Century orientated toward sustainable development, which was adopted by the countries signatory of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration in June 1992. The main purposes of Agenda 21 are: to fight the poverty and social exclusion, the production of sustainable goods and services and environment preservation.

The main objective, referring to economic growth and new job creation must be accompanied by social and environmental objectives. The renewed Lisbon strategy represents an essential element in attaining the main objective, that is sustainable development in Europe and worldwide, as it is described in EU Treaty: the improvement in a sustainable manner of wellbeing and life conditions of present and future generations.

In the communication entitled Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism, the European Commission underlined the crucial importance of economic, social and environmental sustainability of European tourism in order to contribute to sustainable development in Europe and worldwide, as well as to ensure viability, continuous growth, competitiveness and commercial success of tourism.

In 2004, the Commission launched the Tourism Sustainability Group destined to favor the synergies among interested parties and to supply the information necessary to elaborate the Agenda 21 for the sustainability of the European tourism. This group is made up of experts who represent, in a balanced manner, industry associations, tourism destinations and civil society representatives, as well as national tourism administrations in the EU member states, and international organizations, such as WTO.

The elaboration and application of an Agenda 21 for tourism is a process of great amplitude. The Commission set specific actions for promoting economic and social sustainability of the European tourism, as follows [4]:

- the identification of national and international actions meant to support the SME developing tourism related activities and the setting of good practice exchange mechanism
- the evaluation of the economic influence of tourism accessibility improvement on the macroeconomic growth and new jobs creation, on services quality and competitiveness
- the facilitation of good practice exchange in the field of tourism for all

- the publication of a guide book referring to tourism professions, in order to update tourism competences, with the participation of all interested parties
- the studying of trends regarding new jobs creations in seaside/sun lust related tourism
- the elaboration of official statistics and studies related to the implications and consequences of e-business on the tourism industry
- the following up of the Commission's initiatives and member states cooperation with tourism industry representatives and WTO in order to fight sexual exploitation of children, by also involving tourists in this matter.

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