

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT FOR EUROPEAN INSULAR DESTINATIONS

1. Tourism Planning and Management of EU Insular Regions

According to the World Tourism Organization "a local tourism destination is a physical space in which a visitor spends at least one overnight. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within one day's return travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness. Local tourism destinations incorporate various stakeholders often including a host community, and can nest and network to form larger destinations."

Tourism Planning is a systemic, comprehensive and comprehending process that, prospectively, attempts to set both the objectives and strategies required for a tourism destination which, clearly specified within a specific action plan, aims to sustainably develop or consolidate the territory and the businesses therein, whatever their sizes are.

Its milestones are focused upon obtaining the profitability of its businesses and the competitiveness of the territories with the implied emotional and cultural profitability. No business can be profitable within uncompetitive territories and, besides, these cannot be so without successful businesses.

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (WTO).

European insular regions are attractive tourism destinations, hosting a big number of tourists.

The most widely used tourism development model in islands is based on seaside summer holidays ("sun and beach"), and the attainment of quantitative goals.

Tourism products in islands are mainly designed by tour operators which, in fact, are only large distribution platforms guided the existence of a sufficient lodging supply within a given destination and able to justify its inclusion within their programs, thus capitalizing their investment in programming, distribution and transportation. About two third of the generating income, returns to the hands of less than 10 tour operators from northern Europe.

Many of the European islands are dependent on tourism as their main source of income. It is therefore imperative that these destinations are managed for long-term viability.

With the introduction of the concept of destination management, many destinations have had to adapt their approach to tourism planning and development in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry in their destination.

Destinations seeking to find a balance between their economic, social and environmental aspirations are engaged in destination management.

Most European islands have developed with little or no planning at all. Presently, the persistent increase in competition amongst destinations, globalization, and the continuous process of change, both at micro and macro levels, stresses out the dire necessity of strategic planning for insular tourism destinations as a key element either to avert their decline or to ensure their growth and contribution to the development of their countries, the profitability of their businesses, the increase of their citizens' quality of life and the general social progress where the tourism fact takes place.

The Forum of Evia will examine a number of tools and case studies, specifically adapted to islands, to help in effective destination management, as far as the destination planning, implementation and performance: online tools and applications, strategic planning guides and templates and best practice case studies. These tools and initiatives will help and assist destination managers and tourism stakeholders in identifying and implementing innovative and relevant planning, development and marketing processes for managing tourism in their islands.

2. Smart and Innovative Tools for Destination Planning and Management

Innovation in Tourism Planning and Management is the introduction of new or improved components which intend to bring tangible and intangible benefits to tourism stakeholders and the local community improves the value of the tourism experience and the core competencies of the tourism sector and hence enhances tourism competitiveness and /or sustainability.

- **European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destination management**

In the context of sustainable tourism development, indicators are information sets which are formally selected for regular use to measure changes in assets and issues that are important for the tourism development and management of a given destination.

ETIS is a Europe-wide system, elaborated by the European Commission, to encourage destinations to adopt a more intelligent approach to tourism planning. It a **management tool**, supporting destinations who want to take a sustainable approach to destination management, a **monitoring system**, easy to use for collecting data and detailed information and to let destinations monitor their performance from one year to another, and an **information tool** (not a certification scheme), useful for policy makers, tourism enterprises and other stakeholders. The question is how to adapt this instrument to insular destinations

- **Tourism Experience Managers (TEMs)**

TEMs are small or micro companies, originated within the very destination or territory, that shape offers based upon the local resources and attractions, and market them directly to consumers or through other channels (internet, incoming Travel Agencies, Tour Operators,

etc.). Besides, ensure the success of the experience within the destination through a customized service, improving their loyalty and facilitating quality measurement. Without the TEMs, for small businesses reaching the wholesale distribution channels, retailers and individuals outside the immediate area of operations where the products are becomes a difficult, even impossible, task.

To encourage the creation of TEMs may be strategic for the development of poorly known or even depressed areas that are, however, well endowed with offers and potential resources, owing to their creation of specialized tourism products and their contribution in marketing and services that, as a matter of experience, are increasingly demanded. Their contribution to regional development through tourism is both capital and evident.

- **What a destination? the example of the Adriatic-Ionian Macro Region Strategy (EUSAIR)**

Conservation areas and areas which may require specific management of cultural or environmental resources do not always fit within national boundaries. Partnerships will be particularly instrumental in the management of such resources. The EU Adriatic-Ionian Strategy is a good example of showing the evolution of the concept of “tourism destination” and an opportunity to examine how islands of this region could be considered as a whole destination (for example in cruise industry).

- **Certification Schemes**

Tourism certification programs cover a wide range of initiatives and provide a logo to those organizations that exceed a baseline standard which should be assessed and reviewed at regular intervals. There is a proliferation of such certification programs. For example: (The Blue Flag program, the Aegean cuisine project, the cultural routes, etc).

- **E-tools**

Over the past ten years, the Internet has achieved huge market penetration, with more than a billion users world wide. Travel and tourism are key areas for the application of the Internet in all major markets. The major growth markets for international travel will consist predominantly of Internet users. The Internet is the primary medium for accessing travel information for planning in all major markets. This requires a complete transformation in the way in which tourism destinations and suppliers do their business.