



## Policy recommendations to support sustainable tourism in mountain areas

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We, representatives of mountain communities from the Euromontana network assembled in Inverness on 27-28<sup>th</sup> of September 2011, assert that:

Tourism offers some of the greatest economic and development opportunities for mountain areas in Europe, and can benefit from numerous advantages such as:

- **A rich cultural and natural heritage**, including remarkable landscapes, created over the centuries by mountain communities and maintained through diverse human activities – especially agriculture, forestry and pastoralism – as well as traditional and high-quality food products and crafts, and many other cultural traditions;
- **Pure air, a cooler summer climate, a peaceful and quiet environment**, attractive for people experiencing the pressures of urban life and higher temperatures in both the lowlands and coastal areas; in particular a unique environment for the healthy and physical development of young people who are negatively affected by urban sedentary life styles;
- **A year-round choice of diverse recreational activities**, in the forests, on the water, in the air, on the slopes;

These assets make mountains valuable destinations for a category of tourists increasingly seeking transformative experiences, alternative activities, connections with nature and an authentic culture.

Tourism development can contribute to increasing the income of mountain people while giving value to precious mountain assets, making them available to European society at large and protecting these assets from degradation.

However, the development of the mountain tourism sector faces a number of challenges:

- **Climate change**, which is likely to continue to decrease the availability of snow for winter sports; increases the risks of natural disasters, affecting transport infrastructure and settlements; and will result in changes to water regimes and the attractiveness of the landscapes on which many aspects of tourism depend;
- **Increased competition** from cheaper – though not always sustainable – and more accessible forms of tourism offered to consumers in a globalized economy, which may be more attractive to both European and global travellers facing the continuing economic crisis and therefore with limited financial capacity;
- **Development of unsustainable forms of tourism in mountain areas** which, whilst making a vital contribution to the economy, endanger the environment and need to become more

efficient in terms of resource use, taking into account the preservation of landscapes and real community authenticity;

- **Lack of physical accessibility** to the many remote areas within mountains, which, though their natural and cultural heritage are rich, cannot be easily accessed using clean collective transport.
- **Still insufficient access to the latest information and communication technologies**, preventing mountain people from developing indispensable services for tourists.

These challenges endanger the capacity of mountain actors to take full benefit of territories which include today many of the most valuable tourism destinations in Europe.

Hence, we consider that the development of sustainable forms of tourism in mountain areas is not only essential for the long-term viability of this economic sector but is also the way to meet new demands from European society and achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EU 2020) both for mountain communities and more widely in Europe's regions.

The diversity of situations found in Europe's mountain areas, linked to their altitudes, assets and identities, clearly implies specific strategies. As the tourism sector in every location is intimately linked to other economic activities, it should be included in integrated regional development policies, taking full advantage of each area's specificities.

#### **A clear set of definitions, principles and indicators**

Discussing the concept of sustainability, we agreed that **the key elements of a definition of sustainable tourism, applying *inter alia* to mountain areas**, are the following:

- **Generation of income and employment on a long-term basis, distributing** this income to mountain people in a fair way and **ensuring that mountain communities receive a fair proportion of the profits** ;
- **Preservation and promotion of environmental and cultural heritage**, ensuring functioning ecosystems and securing the long-term viability of tourism activities;
- **Educating business operators as well as tourists** on the economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts of their respective actions and tourism choices;
- **Providing a framework for the participation of local actors** as well as **cooperation** between stakeholders, businesses, authorities and tourists to ensure that the benefits of tourism support other aspects of sustainable development in mountain areas.

Furthermore, we assert that our ambition, within mountain areas, is not to promote sustainable tourism as an alternative market in contrast to *inter alia* mass unsustainable tourism but to encourage all mountain communities and businesses towards sustainable forms of tourism everywhere, in large-scale destinations as well as in small-scale destinations.

## **Euromontana recommendations**

### ***Responsibilities at various governance levels***

In order to achieve this, we recommend:

#### **That the EU:**

- Seeks to encourage National Governments to recognize and value all the traditional mountain and upland areas in their countries, considering article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty;
- Progresses quickly in the elaboration of a commonly agreed **definition of sustainable tourism** and of a **set of indicators** to quantify the performance of each tourism destination;
- Establishes a **European observatory of tourism**, monitoring the progress made by the tourism sector towards better performance as regards sustainability. There is a lack of coherent systematic statistics regarding the fields of rural and mountain tourism at the EU level and even at local level. As the tourism sector represents 10% of the EU's GDP and close to 12% of its employment, this would provide an essential monitoring tool to assess progress towards sustainable growth (EU 2020);
- Provides **businesses and authorities with tools to organise benchmarking on the sustainability performance of destinations**, possibly using a **label, based on the indicators**, to provide tourists with information on the degree to which the destination meets the guiding principles;
- **Explores the possibility of convincing the Member States to harmonize, in the long run, published statements or information regarding sustainability** in all tourism destinations; examples may include marketing material, websites, and, in particular, analysing the relevance of the many existing labels;
- Includes a **clear reference to tourism in the future common strategic framework for implementation of European Territorial development policies**, encouraging Member States to adopt clear, realistic goals and objectives regarding the promotion and development of resource-efficient, socially inclusive tourism in Europe, in coherence with other sectoral policies;
- Encourages, in negotiations regarding the establishment of the Investment and Partnership contract, the Member States to adopt **targeted strategies for mountain sustainable tourism** that would bring substantial financial support for development of innovative, resource-efficient and integrated measures for sustainable tourism development in mountain areas;
- Provides an **efficient set of measures** via the rural development programmes and operational programmes for farmers, landscape managers, mountain communities and mountain businesses, to invest in and develop their tourism strategies;
- Considers establishing measures targeted at **supporting new sustainable tourism enterprises in mountain territories** (as well as other specific territories) that capitalize on traditional

activities, local products, the mountain environment and the unique culture and heritage of a mountainous area.

- Provides **specific measures**, via existing operational programmes or new initiatives, to support the development of training and employment in sustainable tourism and also include, in training and business support, specific models of employment that maximize opportunities in mountain communities. These measures should encourage the transfer of existing and traditional skills as well as the development of new skill sets.

#### That national governments:

- **Seek to harmonize, based on commonly agreed European principles, their approaches to sustainable tourism.** Current policies do not adequately include guidelines or incentives for tourism operators or awareness-raising commitments. Sustainability requires investment, and is profitable in the long term but can seem costly in the short term: it will never be achieved by market forces alone. Policies should adopt approaches which **encourage progress in the field of sustainability**, support destinations which are the most committed in that respect, without endangering the diversity of identities of tourist destinations.
- Minimise legislative and regulatory constraints, which, if they are too severe, can slow down the creation or development of businesses, especially small and medium enterprises involved in sustainable tourism;
- **Strengthen their initiatives for cross-border cooperation and transnational cooperation** for sustainable tourism: the many mountain areas that are cross-border and transnational mountain ranges need to share the solutions they have developed to address common problems and, sometimes, require common strategies.
- **Include the development of sustainable mountain tourism in their strategy for territorial development;** as a consequence, to **elaborate**, within the framework of European policies, **dedicated programmes or sub-programmes for mountain areas** which include adequate measures and support systems that meet the demands of local mountain communities.
- **Elaborate strategies and programme content in partnership with local and regional authorities, business representatives and all different types of stakeholders** involved in the implementation of strategies. These strategies should cover economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainable tourism.
- **Conduct national awareness-raising campaigns** on the environmental and social impacts, positive and negative, of tourism.
- **Consider the links between sustainable tourism and education and the development of young people** as part of national strategies and policies. Mountain areas in particular could play an important role in the development of younger generations through improvements to their health, sport and leisure awareness, alternative professional opportunities, and greater awareness of territories and peoples.

### That regional and local authorities:

- **Actively participate in the policy development process at EU and national levels** described above;
- Conduct, in partnership with business actors and local communities, **strategic and prospective analyses of challenges and opportunities facing the tourism sector in their areas**, taking, in that respect, a distinctive look at mountain areas, and, within mountain areas, the different types of tourism destinations, their markets, and their identity;
- **Develop their territorial cooperation initiatives in this field**, fostering the exchange of innovative practices;
- **Encourage** the development of adaptive operational models and innovative methodologies;
- **Take into account sustainability criteria and commitments for progress when supporting tourism development projects**;
- **Assist project leaders and communities in establishing networks, clusters and cooperation initiatives** that will help structure and improve the offer; support in that respect the work of the many volunteers while encouraging as much as possible the development of paid employment.

### That mountain businesses and stakeholders:

- Work together in **collective initiatives** to create networks and community-based projects that contribute to the competitiveness and long-term viability of their tourism businesses and their communities.
- **Raise their awareness and the awareness of tourists** regarding the environmental and social benefits and disadvantages of their actions, using playful and interpretative methods instead of normative methods.
- Find ways to **support local culture and environments** in every initiative they take.
- Seek to develop as much as possible their use of **local goods and services** and therefore their links with the different economic sectors, in particular the agro-food and crafts sectors.
- Participate in programmes that provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to travel across Europe and discover other ways to organise the tourism offer.

### **Measures**

#### That all actors involved:

- Analyse, in a prospective approach, **the demand of their current and potential visitors**, in terms of **experience** looked for, of **service quality** and of **willingness to pay**; and elaborate, on that basis, long-term strategies;
- Promote together the **advantages of sports, outdoor and cultural activities**, that can be found in all mountain areas, in comparison with other competing forms of tourism or virtual

recreational activities that tend to be more and more developed and attractive, especially to younger generations and in urban environments;

- Encourage the **development of new diversified products and services which can allow tourism businesses to lengthen the season** beyond the traditional peak season(s) of every destination, thus improving the quality of employment, adaptation to climate change, quality of life for permanent populations and attractiveness for new inhabitants seeking lively communities all year-round;
- Seek, in particular, to **develop agri-tourism**, which has an important potential for development, in the summer season, in mountain areas with a strong tradition of pastoralism. Developing **synergies between the agricultural and touristic sectors**, which share common challenges of seasonality, creation of activities and fixed employment, is vital for mountain areas;
- Provide the **framework conditions for mountain destinations and tourist businesses to be physically and virtually accessible**, in the most sustainable way:
  - **Priority development of access to broadband and high-speed broadband**, through either fixed or wireless technology, to develop **new services for tourists**, before and during their stay and to guarantee sufficient connectivity; to allow tourism actors to **promote and market their tourism offer on-line**; to **favour local entrepreneurship dynamics** in the field of ICT, including those of tourism actors; and to foster the development of networking among tourism actors and the strengthening of their skills through e-learning;
  - **Investment in transport infrastructure and mobility systems, including soft mobility systems, encouraging access via clean, CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral, collective transport systems**;
  - Development of **innovative solutions for organising the transport of visitors**, taking environmental impacts into account;
  - Guaranteed **access to fuel** in sufficient different locations, primarily for permanent residents, but also to allow tourists to reach the most remote communities where collective transport has not yet been developed.
- Encourage **cross-sectoral cooperation** for common promotion of territories and local production to tourists:
  - Encourage development of local initiatives based on **promoting the specific identity and know-how of one area or community**;
  - Better linkages between local products (food, handicrafts ...) and their local commercialization within the different elements of the tourism sector, including accommodation, restaurants, cultural sites and activities, taking full advantage of the cross-fertilizing values of common marketing of food, products and territories;
  - Encouraging **regional branding** and territorial integrated tourism approaches and products, such as routes or networks;

- Foster and support **innovation in mountain tourism**:
  - in the field of **resource efficiency**: water efficiency, waste management, energy efficiency for access to sites, operation of accommodation facilities as well as all infrastructure related to sports;
  - **Service innovation**, especially through the development of innovative tourism products or services, using for example ICT, interactive methods, new forms of interpretation at heritage, cultural and natural sites;
  - **Social innovation** by increasing the capacities of mountain destinations as places for social tourism (eg. for people with disabilities and multiple deprivations), and promoting equal opportunities and access, especially –but not only- in the low season;
- Encourage **cooperation, clustering and exchange of innovative practices** between businesses at local and/or regional level, and with authorities;
- Foster **skills development in the tourism industry** with particular emphasis on mountain areas to ensure that the employees in the destinations:
  - are well informed about the **history and identity of their own regions** – which they must be able to relay to tourists;
  - are aware of the **sustainability aspects** of their jobs;
  - are acquainted with the **different uses of mountain spaces** and the need to reconcile these different uses;
  - are well equipped to deliver the **optimum quality of services**;
  - can easily adopt and master **different uses of new technologies**, by themselves and by tourists (social networks, on-line evaluation of destinations or services...).

Maximum use should be made of e-learning and interactive learning tools. Training should preferably take place in the low season to provide complementary activities for seasonal workers. At managerial level, education should also aim at equipping managers with creativity and innovation skills.