

Conference on Mediterranean Ecotourism

Gibilmanna, Italy
June 5/7 2008

www.ecoturismomediterraneo.net

Declaration of Gibilmanna

6th June, 2008

Eco-tourism is a sustainable form of tourism based on the enjoyment of natural surroundings and the development of a respectful, interesting and balanced relationship between the potentially different cultures of host and visitor.

The Coalition who formed the territory of the Mediterranean Ecotourism singled out ecotourism as a strategic product whose construction and promotion create added value in environmental, social, cultural and economic terms.

It organizes, promotes and multiplies the opportunities that underline these aspects, both in terms of common heritage and of business products.

Common heritage is administered by those institutions that safeguard natural capital, manage environmental facilities, and preserve and restore historical heritage. The products are developed by socio-cultural stakeholders – in order to make heritage and local culture more accessible, understandable and enjoyable, and by economic stakeholders who invest in the hospitality system.

The Declaration pointed out the progress of the strategy already defined by the Coalition in 2005, with the intent of setting up a new strategic, planning and designing stage, on the base of an intense cooperation with other Mediterranean countries, as foreseen in the development of the Convention of Barcelona, giving a new centrality of the Mediterranean that should assert itself in terms of projects and cultural activities.

It furthermore considered the schedule of the new EU regional programming for 2007-2013 idoneous to develop a coherent process and to see the implementation of a shared system using environmental qualification as a tool for equity, social cohesion and wellbeing.

In line with what has been developed to this point, three main levels of action are singled out – destinations, products, and accommodation. For each of them, the Coalition identified preferred partners - signatories of the Declaration - with whom to progress the knowledge network and the partnership to develop tools, indicators, participative awareness raising processes and direct actions.

Destinations. Environmental quality is a holistic system that is to be constantly monitored, promoted, and re-designed. Tools and experiences on destination certification provide the guidelines to follow in order to build a coherence between private stakeholders and public actions, to ensure high visibility and easier monitoring for the meeting programme targets.

- The signatories` commitment is to strengthen the knowledge of the certification processes and to set the strategy and tools in a coherent way with the local socio-economic and governance structures, and with the development of the natural resources already promoted by the regional programme on the Sicilian ecological network and by the whole activities of institutes, associations and scientific and professional territorial organisations. With this in mind, the intention is to guarantee a continuing and operational cooperation with eco-tourism destinations - first of all with those that have already worked together for the success of the Mediterranean Ecotourism project, through a mutual action of involvement and programme of international cooperation opportunities.

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Products. This term describes complex products able to attract visitors because of their alignment with eco-tourism principles and local resources. In this sense integration among producers (of goods and services) along the tourism supply chain (the whole of the key meeting and exchange linkages between hosts, visitors, businesses and government); interpretation of the sites; safety; diversity of the available activities; transparency and accessibility of the information; and customer satisfaction monitoring, are all fundamental elements. The setting and the control of the quality criteria is the basic condition for an efficient communication.

- The signatories' commitment is to act in a systemic way to develop an action plan that, once shared between social stakeholders, institutions, and experts, should be able to detect and overcome the weaknesses present in the tourism supply chain (information + imagination + mobility + hospitality + experience + memory + sharing) and promoting material and non-material activities. With this in mind, the visitor is taken into account as a collaborative stakeholder, on the base of his capabilities of self organization and dialogue through the new technologies of information.

Accommodation. The environmental qualification of tourist accommodation businesses is intrinsically coherent with the characteristics of the ecotourism product, being more than just a powerful tool for gaining competitive advantage. These capabilities are linked to the external system, with whom they communicate on the basis of the international targets, and to the internal one, where they act to enhance performance, vocational training and social integration.

- The signatories' commitment is to support the environmental quality targets in the accommodation structures through assistance to the entrepreneurs, spreading innovation promotion of educational exchange and business partnership, education and training of the professionals involved including the local municipality and the local development agencies experts that usually deal with entrepreneurs, and finally, monitoring progress.

Networking. Networking is a major revolution allowed by the new Information Communications Technologies. Creation of partnerships based on common aims frees up new energies that can act as innovation factors for new ways of working, multiplying it effectiveness and the system of global opportunities to which it allows access.

- The signatories' commitment is to stimulate a creative process that facilitates a local accumulation of knowledge and a positive exchange between local and international skills, promoting ongoing meetings for further development. The knowledge and exchange initiated with the international partners work towards the creation of pillars for building an observatory on sustainability, promoting a way of working oriented at an active participation in the international networks and also the communication tools used by them. With this in mind, the intention is to facilitate the learning and application of e-capabilities that allow not only to enter the online dialogue but also to promote and give life to it in order to renew the communication among business organisations, social groups, local authorities and citizens.

The programme of local and international actions, that will be developed within the objectives of the Declaration and of the institutional agreements linked to it, aim to contribute, enrich and better orient the regional development policies, focusing them towards sustainability principles, and collaborating for a renewed institutional dialogue.