

Tourism and Sustainable Development

Recommendations and Proposals for Action formulated by the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) and adopted by the Eleventh Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Malta, 1999)

Extracts

The full text of the Recommendations may be downloaded from Plan Bleu site at:

<http://www.planbleu.org/publications/tourisme.pdf>

[...]

As a vector of deep-running changes more often than not irreversible, much more than other activities, tourism begs the general question of societies' ability to control development, provide long-term protection for their environment and promote balanced national planning. The Mediterranean experience indeed shows that controlling tourist development is especially hard in a very attractive region with considerable geographic constraints. It also shows a wide variety of situations with 3 general kinds of areas:

- already “mature” destinations that can report on their positive and/or negative experiences,
- more recent destinations in full growth that must endeavour not to repeat the problems encountered elsewhere,
- coastal or inland areas with real developmental possibilities but which are at present little or not developed and that might even invent new forms of development.

Work by the MCSD brought to light three main proposal lines (controlling impact on the environment, promoting tourism in better harmony with sustainable development and developing Mediterranean co-operation) [...].

1. Controlling tourism's territorial and environmental impact

Although tourism depends on quality environment and countryside, it is all too often a factor in their deterioration, especially on coasts. Thus the quality of the Mediterranean coasts—one of the Mediterranean's most precious assets—must absolutely be better preserved in the tourist destination areas. To this end the following guidelines have been proposed.

1.1 Anticipate and reduce the negative impact of developments, urbanisation and tourist infrastructures on coastlines

The handsomest locations on the Mediterranean coastline are the prime sites desired by domestic and international tourism. Uncontrolled development of infrastructures and tourist-related urbanisation (especially yacht harbours, tourist accommodation and second homes) can lead to irreversible deterioration of ecosystems (sand dunes, wetlands and so forth) and coastal landscapes. These sometimes very rapid developments are hard to control especially because of the many players involved, the lack of shared common vision and the non-enforcement, even the non-existence, of development regulations.

This is how many mature destination areas have seen their environment damaged, which in some cases has led to serious economic and/or environmental crises.

What is at stake for the Mediterranean is to rehabilitate the damaged mature tourist destinations as far as possible and, above all, avoid such degradation in the areas now undergoing growth or not yet developed.

Recommendations

The Mediterranean states and local authorities are urged to:

- acquire the instruments needed to evaluate the environmental impact of tourist programmes and large-scale projects,
- carry out evaluations of destination sites' carrying capacity and taking steps necessary for ensuring that the offer be limited to the carrying capacities thus defined,
- strengthen or establish legislative tools, regulations and property management leading to controlling tourist urbanisation and protecting the most precious natural sites. Among other things this means:
 - ✓ providing coastal zones subjected to strong tourist developmental pressure with plans for development and land management that take environmental questions into account,
 - ✓ avoiding generalised urbanisation too close to coasts and the building of roads parallel and close to coastlines that promote this kind of urbanisation and generate traffic that alters the quality of the destination areas,
 - ✓ identifying the most remarkable coastal sites (such as wetlands, sand dunes, and so forth) and implementing measures that ensure their protection, e.g. creating natural reserves or land agencies for procurement wherever possible.
- implement programmes enabling the rehabilitation of mature destination areas favouring the environment,
- implement mechanisms enabling (whenever possible) a financial contribution from the tourist sector for protecting and managing natural and cultural sites.

1.2 Reducing consumption of natural resources and the pollution caused by tourist accommodation and activities

Tourism causes heavy consumption of natural resources (especially water, soil and energy) and produces a lot of waste. This consumption and waste production come on top of those generated by the resident population. These effects are all the more considerable for the fact that tourism in the Mediterranean is concentrated mostly over a short period (July and August), which leads to inordinately large amount of amenities and an increase in the problems of water management in the most critical period.

The tourist sector can and must play an innovative role in these environmental questions. Some professionals have, moreover, already implemented environmental charters in facilities and destination areas.

Recommendations

Mediterranean States and local authorities are urged to:

- ensure good environmental management of tourist facilities and destination sites;
- encourage quality environmental procedures (certification, charters and so forth) with possible regional financial support,
- develop all means that may lead to spreading the tourist season over the entire year,
- promote the tourist sector:
 - ✓ to fight against waste and pollution in the water areas (reduced consumption, purification and recycling), energy waste (energy savings and use of renewable energy, especially solar energy) and waste (minimisation, selective collection, recycling and so forth),
 - ✓ to promote clean and innovative technology in this sense,

- ✓ to promote and implement the certification process (EMAS, ISO 14000, etc.) of facilities and destination areas and develop voluntary tools such as environmental charters.

1.3 Controlling the development of tourist leisure activities affecting the sea and coastal environment

The generalised use of beaches and the development of boating and new leisure activities (jet skis) and underwater tourism can seriously affect the environment, especially certain protected species (cetaceans, turtles among others).

Recommendations

Mediterranean States and local authorities, in concert with the professional players involved, are urged to take the necessary steps so that:

- pleasure boats do not discharge their waste water at anchor or, even less, in ports,
- yacht harbours be furnished with the necessary facilities for taking solid and liquid waste,
- new leisure forms likely to affect the environment, especially protected species, only be authorised once their impact has been assessed and are shown to conform to the tourist strategies of the areas concerned,
- access and use of beaches by the public as well as their use by professionals be regulated, if need be, and managed in accordance with environmental factors.

2. Promoting tourism as a factor in sustainable social, cultural and economic development

Suitably guided and controlled, tourism can become a powerful vector of sustainable development for many Mediterranean regions benefiting both local populations, tourists, environmental protection and the highlighting of natural and cultural heritage.

2.1 Developing national and local strategies aimed at better reconciling tourism, the environment and sustainable development

Aware of the need to better integrate tourism and the environment, many Mediterranean States and local authorities have already implemented negotiation procedures between services and the pertinent players, which have resulted in conventions, agreements and protocols and in defining strategies and programmes. These steps remain too limited, however, and are in general insufficiently operational.

Recommendations

The Mediterranean States and local authorities are urged to:

- develop and strengthen the in-depth confrontational/negotiation methods between authorities dealing with tourism, the environment and regional development and the pertinent players to define strategies that enable:
 - ✓ the setting of mid-term result goals,
 - ✓ better defining and sharing out the roles of the various partners,
 - ✓ implementing adapted action tools,
- develop these strategies especially by depending on the observation of tourist impact (on the economy, society, the environment and cultural heritage), the producing of prospective exercises for the mid- and long-term and the

selection of pertinent indicators

- endeavour on a scale with tourist destinations to mobilise local populations, NGOs and the pertinent professionals and implement local Agenda 21s.

2.2 Promote the diversification of tourism and balanced regional development.

What is required is promoting more compatible forms of tourism with the stakes of sustainable regional improvement and development.

Recommendations

The Mediterranean States and local authorities must endeavour to:

- promote the development of cultural, ecological and rural tourism compatible with the environment. Highlighting archaeological, historical, architectural, landscape and natural heritage can be a strong contributor and should be developed.
- look into the complementarity and synergy with other economic sectors, especially agriculture, fishing and craftsmanship,
- develop the synergies between coastal tourism and inland tourism,
- implement specific action programmes adapted to the sustainable development of particularly fragile areas on the ecological and human levels, especially islands, hinterland and wetlands,
- develop appropriate tools for these objectives, as, for example, biosphere reserves and natural parks and processes of the local Agenda 21 sort, by giving them sufficient financial means and technical assistance.

3. Develop Mediterranean cooperation

Following the example of other fields of common interest and other regions of the world, the Mediterranean would benefit from building strong regional co-operation in the tourist field. Stakes are crucial and the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, along with the MAP, have a booster role to play in harmony with tourist trade professionals and NGOs.

Among other things, its goal is to:

- further the development in the tourist demand for a tourism that takes the importance of protecting the environment and sustainable development into greater account and to highlight the market role to this aim,
- define and promote operational tools adapted to national and local authorities and tourist businesses, enabling the control of tourist development and contributing to its being better integrated into the sustainable development of the areas concerned.

Recommendations

The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, along with the MAP, and in concert with tourist professionals and NGOs are urged to:

- strengthen awareness activities on a regional scale in tourist destinations as well as in the source countries,
- Organise experience-sharing between the players involved in tourist destinations of the various countries,
- develop training programmes for those players involved, especially local authorities and professionals,
- promote the implementation of Mediterranean networks (between professionals, between certain areas such as islands or certain kinds of tourism such as the cultural variety...),

- promote the implementation of Mediterranean eco-labels,
- stimulate a “regional co-operation mechanism” in this field that works in a net-work.

[...]