



European Economic and Social Committee

INT/173
Tourism for everyone

Brussels, 29 October 2003

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on

Socially sustainable tourism for everyone

On 23 January 2003 the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under the second paragraph of Rule 29 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an opinion on:

Socially sustainable tourism for everyone
(own-initiative opinion).

The Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 October 2003. The rapporteur was **Mr Mendoza**.

At its 403rd plenary session of 29 and 30 October 2003 (meeting of 29 October), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 112 votes to two with one abstention.

PART ONE: GENERAL ASPECTS

1. Introduction

1.1 Tourism is widely recognised around the world – and especially by the European Union and its institutions – as an area of economic activity of strategic importance in achieving a range of objectives which lie at the very heart of the EU's existence, its policies, and its desire to create a better Europe for present and future generations. Developing tourism has a direct impact on economic, social and environmental conditions; consequently, it can and must be an important means of enhancing European citizens' quality of life and must be used as such. However, in order to ensure that this potential is effectively harnessed in the longer term, tourism must meet sustainability requirements which all the players involved – public and private bodies, businesses and users – must in turn observe. **New forms of tourism** which are **sustainable** in economic, social and environmental terms, and which all parties seek, will be determined by this set of conditions.

1.2 The special contribution made by sustainable tourism to achieving the strategic objective of the Lisbon summit – *"to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"* – is generally recognised and must be emphasised.

1.2.1 Against a new, less dynamic economic backdrop in which fewer jobs are being created, the Brussels Council of 20 and 21 March 2003 sought to turn words into actions and ensure that the Union and the Member States live up to their undertakings – *"we reaffirm our strong personal commitment to the timely and effective delivery of reforms across the three pillars of the Lisbon strategy – economic, social and environmental"*.

The Brussels Council established new priorities which, in practical terms, mean giving *fresh impetus to entrepreneurship and innovation and strengthening the internal market as a means of enhancing competitiveness and placing it centre stage* both within the economy in general and tourism in particular.

1.3 Special care must be taken in **2003, the European Year of People with Disabilities**, to realise the right of disabled people to enjoy their leisure time and participate fully in tourism. This implies changes in ways of thinking, information, awareness and management. The European Economic and Social Committee's modest contribution to the success of the European Year and to making **sustainable tourism open to all** will be to analyse these conditions and put forward relevant initiatives.

1.4 It must also be remembered that for various social and economic reasons, tourism is still not accessible to all European citizens. The range of intrinsic benefits of tourism to all citizens – especially the young – should be taken into special account by the institutions so that they can promote new forms of tourism which are open to all and most of all to those with lower purchasing power. Creating a larger, ecologically aware, economically competitive and socially cohesive Europe, in which all citizens enjoy a good quality of life, requires resources, attention and appropriate supporting policies.

2. Tourism as part of European policy

2.1 Tourism is widely agreed to be of great importance not only economically, but also socially and environmentally, in the European Union and worldwide. Where tourism is already well-developed, people count on it to continue being what it has been in the past, a source of wealth creation, high employment and a high quality of life, while people in less-developed areas look to tourism as a potentially crucial means of escaping from poverty, securing economic progress and social development and meeting convergence objectives.

2.2 At the same time, tourism often has been, is and may in the future still be a source of economic, social and environmental imbalances, in the longer term entailing risks which may undermine its potential to generate well-being and sustainable development.

2.3 A number of paragraphs from the Commission Communication on Working together for the future of European tourism¹ merit inclusion here, as they provide a clear summary of the economic importance of tourism in the EU:

"The tourism industry in the European Union comprises some two million businesses, mostly SMEs, which account for about 5% of both GDP and employment. This figure varies from 3% to 8% depending on the Member State. Tourism also generates a considerable amount of activity in other sectors, such as the retail trade and specialised equipment, to a level of around one and a half times that of tourism itself.

In terms of turnover, over 80% of the tourism undertaken by Europeans concerns individuals or families. The remainder is business tourism, in the broad sense. It

¹

COM(2001) 665 final, 13.11.2001.

varies, depending on the country, from barely 15% to over 30% of the total volume, the highest proportion relating to Nordic Countries. EU households earmark around one eighth of their personal expenditure for tourism-related consumption, a figure which varies relatively little from country to country.

Community tourism is largely domestic. 87% of tourism activity recorded is attributed to its own citizens with only 13% to visitors from non-member countries. As for the tourism of EU citizens, three-quarters remain within the EU, the remaining quarter going to other parts of Europe and the world.

Tourism is one of the sectors of the European economy with the best outlook. Forecasts indicate a steady growth of tourism in Europe, stronger than the average economic growth. This is due to factors such as the increase in time for leisure activities and its social importance, together with global economic growth.

Over the past few years 100,000 jobs a year have been created in Europe in the hotel and restaurant sectors alone.

Europe, with the greatest diversity and density of tourist attractions, is the most visited tourist region in the world. Despite having a lower growth rate than the world average and than certain up-and-coming overseas destinations in particular, the volume of European tourism is expected to double over the next 20 to 25 years, with a net increase, in terms of expenditure and yield, of around 3% per year. Employment will rise by about 15% over the next ten years."

2.4 Although tourism is not directly part of common EU policy, a number of European institutions are engaged in measures and actions which affect tourism because of their horizontal nature, or which rely on tourism in order to achieve a range of major EU objectives, including sustainable development, employment, economic and social cohesion, etc.: in other words, a better quality of life for European citizens.

2.4.1 It is important to point out that the only reference to tourism in the EC Treaty, as consolidated at Nice, and following the revision and expansion of certain protocols, is in Part One: Principles, Article 3(u), which reads as follows:

"For the purposes set out in Article 2, the activities of the Community shall include, as provided in this Treaty and in accordance with the timetable set out therein:

(...)

(u) measures in the sphere of energy, civil protection and tourism."

2.5 Several Commission and Council documents have attached importance to tourism as an instrument for generating employment, but it may readily be agreed that tourism nevertheless has a very low profile among European policies as a whole, and that it should perhaps be strengthened and expanded in line with the universally accepted strategic importance of tourism at present and, most probably, in the future. A higher profile for tourism in the activities of the EU and of its various institutions and, more clearly, the coordination of all Community policies affecting tourism have been both called for and predicted. For this to happen, more and better data on all aspects of tourism and the way it ties in with other sectors must be available in the future, so that tourism's contribution to the quality of life and social cohesion can be accurately evaluated in both economic and social terms.

2.6 The imminent entry of new countries into the European Union requires that the impact of enlargement on tourism – in the existing fifteen and ten future Member States - be taken into account. The Commission could look into this aspect in close detail, and disseminate its findings and conclusions as widely as possible.

2.7 Careful attention should also focus on determining the future role of tourism in shaping the **Europe which will emerge from the European Convention**. There must be initiatives to ensure that tourism and tourism policy are given full recognition in terms of their economic importance and capacity to create employment, their potential contribution to culture and mutual understanding among the peoples of the world, and as a tool for creating a Citizens' Europe.

3. Tourism

3.1 Tourism is a highly complex phenomenon on account of the wide variety of factors which determine its shape, organisation and development. A number of these factors and their connections with tourism are identified with a view to gaining a clearer picture both of the forms currently assumed by tourism and of how it may in the future be designed to be **open to all and socially sustainable**, as suggested in the title of this opinion.

3.2 Some of the numerous factors interacting with tourism merit close attention, as they are of importance in ensuring consistency of objectives. The Committee considers that ten aspects are useful in identifying the ideal form most likely to achieve this objective: **tourists, employment, businesses, social cohesion, stability, culture and heritage, accessibility to persons with disabilities, the environment, peace and solidarity, and the roles of the various players**.

3.3 Initiatives of varying types and involving different parties responsible for implementation will be proposed for each of these ten facets and their connections with tourism. The aim is to encapsulate the spirit of the Brussels summit, which called for the principles of sustainable development to be put into practice. Given its strategic importance for the European economy, tourism can perhaps be a pilot-project for this aim; the **initiatives** set out in the second part of this opinion are proposals whose conceptual scope can help achieve the objective.

4. Tourism and sustainability

4.1 Thirty years after the expression **sustainable development** was first used to describe the ideal development model, it is a requirement for all human activities, whether economic (the relationship between resources and products), social (the relationship between individuals and groups) or environmental (the relationship between mankind and nature).

4.1.1 The term came of age at the 1992 Rio summit, and has since been taken on board by the entire international community; the remaining ambiguity in how the concept is formulated allows for some nuance in the way it is used. The classic definition is the Brundtland one of "**sustainable development as satisfying present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**".

4.2 Sustainability does not mean easy solutions: it involves opposition between the different objectives which society may set itself, between economics and ecology, between the present and the future, and between the local and the global. Sustainability, then, entails not only technical solutions but also values, priorities, ways of looking at problems, a fresh approach to public and private policy: in short, switching to a model which can imbue all aspects of human activity with respect for, and balance between, various commitments.

4.3 A number of EU institutions have taken up the philosophy of sustainability: the Treaty of Amsterdam, for example, which came into force in 1999, makes sustainable development one of the European Union's main tasks. Article 2 of that Treaty stipulates that "The Union shall set itself the following objectives: (...) to promote economic and social progress and a high level of employment and to achieve balanced and sustainable development, in particular through (...) the strengthening of economic and social cohesion".

4.3.1 A broad consensus exists on the two main ideas which the concept of sustainable development must, as a minimum, embrace:

- that development should possess an economic, a socio-cultural and an environmental dimension. Development will be sustainable only if it strikes a successful balance between the different factors influencing the quality of life;
- that the current generation has a duty toward future generations to leave sufficient social, environmental and economic resources for them to enjoy at least the same level of well-being as itself.

4.3.2 The triple reliance on the economic, social and environmental aspects, which must represent both the limits and connections constituting sustainable development, emerge clearly and consistently.

4.4 This triple focus is even clearer in the case of tourism. Tourism is perhaps unique among industries in that its basic product is "tourist attraction", comprising a series of ingredients in which enjoyment of nature, variety of settings and landscapes, biodiversity and respect for the environment play a crucial role in ensuring product quality and matching the product with its potential users, tourists.

4.4.1 It is axiomatic that economics are crucial to tourism. As indicated above, the tourist industry has proved to be a powerful engine for generating employment and wealth practically everywhere in the world, and in a particularly intensive way in Europe, with a special concentration in Mediterranean countries. Sustainability in relation to this factor implies the need for a strategic, long-term rather than short- or medium-term, vision. It means approaching tourist products in terms of sustainable competitiveness which is environment-friendly but at the same time capable of creating lasting, high-quality and year-round jobs.

4.4.2 Similarly, its fundamental service-oriented nature means that social factors relating to the operators and individuals involved in tourism simultaneously can and must be taken into account, so that they can not only offer a product meeting uniform standards, but also transmit social, cultural and human-contact values, celebrating the ability of different peoples to share their traditions, culture, values and experience. Tourism can and must be of significant assistance in the task of completing the EU's internal market. Active backing should be given to completing the single market in services, including the tourism sector. Free movement of persons engaged in tourism must be guaranteed as soon, and as fully, as possible.

4.4.3 It must be borne in mind that social sustainability entails removing, mitigating or at least compensating for the risks inherent in tourism for the local and family environment of those working in the sector. The working time of the sector's employees, in daily, weekly and annual terms, often cause family and social problems which are difficult to avoid, and have a negative impact on the education of young people, on the necessary balance of family and professional life, and on the capacity to forge social links and cohesion.

4.4.4 Tourism is an ideal tool for introducing the peoples of the world to each other and forging links between them. Only by getting to know each other can they understand and appreciate each other, and exchange knowledge, culture and experience. Each journey exposes tourists and travellers to emotions and experiences bringing them closer to other peoples and other ways of life which enrich them, increasing their sense of tolerance and solidarity.

4.4.5 The purpose of this opinion is to ensure – or at least help to ensure – that tourism, today and in the future, fulfils its basic function of increasing knowledge and exchange between peoples, and that it can be enjoyed by all regardless of physical ability, age, income, ethnic origin, religion or any other factor.

4.5 The need for internal consistency in the EU and its institutions requires that this opinion focus on new forms of socially sustainable tourism open to all, as part of the broader concept

of **sustainability** or **sustainable development**; the opinion also points towards practical steps which may be taken.

PART TWO: PROPOSALS

5. Ten aspects of sustainable tourism, one hundred initiatives for action

5.1 Tourism and tourists

Clearly all economic and social activity needs to focus on the individual. Tourism, like any economic activity involving personal, individual and collective relations between peoples, must above all meet the needs of people, as citizens of a nation, European citizens and, ultimately, citizens of the world.

The tourist, as consumer, must be both the beneficiary of services and the source of demand under conditions favourable to the sustainability of tourism and its availability to all.

Various **initiatives** can be adopted with a view to designing a form of tourism for the future which will meet these requirements.

5.1.1 *The exercise of responsibility by tourists* from the environmental and social points of view, involving the various links in the tourist services chain: transport, reception at the tourist destination, entertainment, accommodation, contact with nature, contact with local culture and heritage, and especially with tourism professionals and the general public at tourist destinations.

5.1.2 *Promotion by all institutions and players involved in tourism of staggered holiday periods* as a way of minimising the impact of tourism and reducing its seasonality.

5.1.3 *Promoting* a broadly based policy of training and information, awareness-raising and management on patterns of sustainable consumption throughout the tourist season in the countries of origin, during the journey and at the tourist destinations.

5.1.4 *Promoting, by all available means, energy-efficient tourism* in relation to transport, as a way of minimising the use of resources.

5.1.5 *Reinforcing the various environmental labels* which provide consumers with information and point them towards more sustainable forms of tourism and consumption.

5.1.6 *Promoting the development by tourist operators of products* based on the sustainable use of resources and avoidance of excess waste.

5.1.7 *Focus on sustainable quality* by tourist sector players, so that meeting customer requirements is the essential goal of any business; ensuring transparent prices and services at

European, national and regional level by harmonising benchmarks for service and establishment quality, and always bearing in mind sustainability criteria.

5.1.8 *Creating and disseminating sustainable models* of rights and responsibilities of tourists, agents and institutions, with special emphasis on personal safety, which is one of the main concerns of tourists.

5.1.9 *Respecting the principles of the Code of Ethical Tourism approved by the WTO*, which must become the basis of consumer behaviour for both tourists and tourist operators. In particular, sexual tourism, which must not be considered as a valid form of tourism, must be rejected.

5.1.10 *Reinforcing tourism as a fundamental, useful and necessary activity* for everyone and as an instrument of exchange of local culture and of the concept and reality of European citizenship without frontiers, making tourism into a vehicle for the human and cultural development of tourists, balancing tourists' rights and responsibilities as consumers. Promoting Europe as a whole as a sustainable and accessible tourist destination for the rest of the world.

5.2 **Tourism and employment**

Various large-scale studies have repeatedly highlighted the enormous current impact and the extraordinary potential of tourism as a source of jobs. But in order to turn this into reality, in socially and economically sustainable terms, various conditions have to be met. The fact that tourism is an economic activity fundamentally based on personal services means that any new tourist activity generates new jobs, but tourism can only be high-quality and sustainable if it generates high-quality jobs.

Various **initiatives** could be adopted with a view to ensuring that in the future tourism is able to generate more and better jobs in tourist enterprises and areas.

5.2.1 *Drawing up lifelong training plans for people* working in the tourism sector, making employees more adaptable, employable and providing scope for career development.

5.2.2 *Promoting the updating of qualifications*, specialisms and skills in order to adapt to major changes in the organisation and management of tourist activity. Creating new career profiles to meet the requirements of new forms of tourism, which is more sustainable and more open to all. An impetus must be given to tourism-related environmental jobs, as an integral part of future employment.

5.2.3 *Promoting the creation of diversified tourism products* extending over the whole year in order to avoid the excessive seasonality of tourist activity, and consequently employment. Giving priority to turning disadvantaged areas or former industrial or mining areas etc. into tourist areas, and to developing rural tourism facilities in areas affected by changes in agriculture or the Common

Agricultural Policy, as a way of providing alternative activities and maintaining employment and social cohesion.

5.2.4 Collective bargaining and legislation must *recognise the rights of part-time or seasonal workers*, with regard to work and social benefits, including pensions. The European Parliament and the social partners are asked to promote measures to consolidate the position in Europe and in the tourist industry of workers with discontinuous contracts of employment, giving them employment and social rights equal to those of permanent workers.

5.2.5 *Promoting the flexibility and transferability of qualifications* which will be favourable to stability of employment throughout the year.

5.2.6 *Researching and proposing, in the context of collective bargaining, forms and systems of labour relations* making it possible for social security contributions to continue throughout the year even when employment is limited to the period of peak tourist activity.

5.2.7 *Promoting the active participation of workers in quality improvement and certification*, ensuring that the quality of tourist activities and firms is underpinned by proper working conditions.

5.2.8 *Improving access to employment information*, employment opportunities, vocational guidance and active employment policies, preferably using information and communications technologies (ICT).

5.2.9 *Applying measures for reconciling family life and work*, especially in tourist areas with a low degree of sectoral diversification. Particularly with regard to day-care centres, housing and infrastructure.

5.2.10 *Ensuring equality of labour and wage rights, independently of gender, age, ethnic background or religion*. Given the international dimension of tourism, states should at least subscribe to Convention No. 172 of the International Labour Organisation and Recommendation No. 179 on Working Conditions (Hotels and Restaurants) of 1991.

5.3 **Tourism and businesses: entrepreneurial competitiveness and social responsibility of businesses**

Tourism is fundamentally a complex economic activity, a group of economic services and sectors governed by market rules and based on companies seeking competitiveness, wealth creation, and which ultimately create employment and quality of life for ordinary people, both as users and as workers in the sector. If this economic activity is to be sustainable, now and in the future, a number of conditions have to be met which can be underpinned by various **initiatives**.

5.3.1 *Promoting knowledge of opportunities generated by tourist demand now and in the future, as a way of generating wealth by means of new products and destinations meeting sustainability requirements.*

5.3.2 *Promoting an ongoing dialogue between the tourism sector, government, employers' organisations, trade unions and ordinary people in search of consensus and the quality and sustainability of the industry.*

5.3.3 *Reaching agreement on the responsibility of the industry for the local area, its culture, social features, environment, promoting the social acceptance of tourist activity. Firms in the sector will be encouraged to adopt corporate social responsibility policies as a commitment to sustainable tourism.*

5.3.4 *Creating support instruments for the establishment of businesses, particularly SMEs, assisting them with training, research, knowledge transfer and business cooperation.*

5.3.5 *Promoting a culture and activities conducive to high-quality tourism products and services, integrating environmental quality as an essential aspect of all quality certification.*

5.3.6 *Promoting the creation and diversification of non-seasonal products and services with a view to all-year activity, countering the dominance of seasonal products and services.*

5.3.7 *Boosting the competitiveness of firms through the introduction of management techniques, modernisation and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in firms and in their relations with customers, suppliers and employees.*

5.3.8 *Defending and promoting the role of the company in the tourism sector vis-à-vis the various illegal forms of tourism which do not contribute to the improvement of society, do not supervise the quality of their tourist services and do not protect consumers' rights.*

5.3.9 *Giving preference to forms of tourism based on the economic activity with the greatest added value and least environmental impact, as against forms of residential tourism based on ownership of land and buildings, with a low rate of annual utilisation of these assets. Tourism is essentially an economic activity which must be profitable and competitive all year round and in the long-term and not only for a limited part of the year.*

5.3.10 *Organising research, information and the promotion of tourism products and services through public-private partnerships, using information and communication technologies and e-commerce. Government to offer services to business (databases, information and promotion networks etc.).*

5.4 Tourism and social cohesion: impact and social balance of tourist activity

Tourism is a powerful means of promoting contacts between different peoples, while at the same time generating economic and social well-being in tourist areas. Often, however, social relations in the local population have been affected by a perceived loss of the traditional balance, in the face of an influx of visitors exceeding several times over the number of local residents, and a consequent trend to standardisation in products, including tourism products, and in social relations. Developing the potential of tourism in a positive way and reducing the risk of social or cultural disruption is the basis of socially sustainable tourism.

Maintaining socially sustainable tourism, from the point of view of the social cohesion of local areas and people, requires that a number of conditions be met by means of various **initiatives**.

5.4.1 *Government, with the involvement of the sector's players, laying down parameters for the volume and growth of tourism which do not exceed the sustainable absorption capacity of tourist destinations*, not only from the environmental point of view but also with a view to balance in the local population.

5.4.2 *Promoting forms of tourism which contribute to the preservation of local customs*, strengthening them and promoting diverse local identities which are attractive in tourist terms.

5.4.3 *Involving the local population in the planning and management of tourist destinations*, not only as passive hosts, but as active participants. Tourism can play an important part in improving the rural environment in the EU Member states, particularly the new ones.

5.4.4 *Obtaining maximum social consensus in the host population* in order to minimise the negative effects of tourism and maximise its positive ones.

5.4.5 *Ensuring that the local population enjoys proper conditions of health, education, and other public services*, needed for individual and community development, both for people working in the tourist industry and for the rest of the local population. Access to suitable housing is in particular a fundamental right which government and the industry must strive to guarantee for tourism sector workers.

5.4.6 *Developing broadly based social integration activities among the local population*, equal opportunities, training and jobs as the only way of preventing a hiatus between economic prosperity and social cohesion.

5.4.7 *Promoting family life in communities focusing on tourist activities*, which is frequently disrupted by the daily, weekly and annual working patterns of tourism sector workers which differ from those of school-age children.

5.4.8 *Making young people* who opt for long-term, added value training into *role models* for the large number of school drop-outs attracted by easy and immediate access to jobs in the tourism sector requiring no qualifications; ensuring that the available jobs allow them to continue full vocational training.

5.4.9 Promoting various forms of community association and participation among the local population to improve social networks in tourist areas.

5.4.10 Combating all forms of crime in tourist areas and especially the impact of tourism in terms of sexual exploitation, especially that involving children, for which legitimate tourism activities are often used as a cover.

5.5 **Tourism and stability: reducing seasonal bias**

The seasonality of tourism has been described as the sector's major outstanding issue, in that it is the cause of serious imbalances because it does not continue throughout all the potentially effective periods, with serious consequences for businesses, people employed in tourism, tourist areas, and ultimately tourism's proven capacity to generate wealth and prosperity.

Seasonality first and foremost means under-utilisation of physical capital (equipment, buildings, infrastructure etc.) as well as human capital, which is idle for much of the year. The result is clear: if there is no tourism, sector workers do not get paid and have to seek other activities or else join the ranks of the unemployed during the off-season.

In some cases this period of inactivity is long, in others short; in some cases it is during the winter and in others during the summer, but in almost all cases it will have damaging consequences throughout the year. In all cases the stability of employment, which is a precondition for the quality of employment, is under threat, and in other cases companies' profitability and competitiveness will be compromised by seasonality and consequent loss of revenue, which is a grave threat to the sustainability of employment and to the whole of tourist activity.

Bearing in mind the climatic basis for seasonality, finding a complete solution to this problem is difficult, but various initiatives can help mitigate seasonality and its damaging effects.

5.5.1 *Facilitating the staggering of holiday periods* of users, paving the way towards diverse, all-year-round tourism.

5.5.2 *Promoting, by means of special offers with public-sector support or financing,* tourism aimed at sections of society not working during periods of slack tourist activity, developing and reinforcing forms of **social tourism** already existing in some Member States, **while also broadening its objectives, activities and clientele to embrace the whole European Union.**

5.5.3 *Promoting the creation of clearly non-seasonal tourism products* in areas where this is possible as a way of compensating for under-diversified activity.

5.5.4 *Diversifying the economies of tourist areas*, combining seasonal tourism activity with other, non-tourist industries in order to mitigate the negative effects and maximise the positive effects of the spreading of risk.

5.5.5 *Promoting international student exchanges* throughout the year as a form of cultural and educational tourism, to encourage closer contact between countries. It will also offer children the opportunity to learn to speak the language of the country in question fluently and to learn about local culture.

5.5.6 *Establishing social tourism programmes in all EU Member States* under conditions making them financially accessible to everyone and conducive to the well-being of users, providing workers with all-year-round employment and underpinning the profitability of companies.

5.5.7 *Stepping up the research being done by the European Commission on forms of trans-national cooperation and coordination* at European level through the social tourism programmes which seek to promote the positive effects of cultural and social exchange and to promote European citizenship as a concept and an everyday reality.

5.5.8 *Ensuring that the pressure of new tourism activities on the environment* is contained with a view to sustainability and the social benefits which they can bring.

5.5.9 *Facilitating participation, through public-private partnership arrangements, in the management* of new products to combat seasonality with a view to improving the economic, social and environmental balance in tourist areas.

5.5.10 *Promoting trans-national exchange of experience* in this area, sharing existing good practice and investigating ways of introducing this in other countries.

5.6 **Tourism, culture and heritage**

The rich cultural heritage of towns and rural areas throughout Europe is undoubtedly a major attraction for tourists and travellers. The diversity of customs and traditions of Europe's rural areas is also a source of intangible, but very real wealth, which tourism can help preserve and exploit. Some of these intangible cultural values such as craftsmanship, music, oral traditions, customs, languages, dances, rituals, festivals, traditional medicine and remedies, cuisine etc. can form an integral part of some new forms of socially sustainable tourism. Similarly, sporting events are ideally suited to tourism and to the exchange of different values between peoples. There are two possible approaches to the relationship between tourism on the one hand and culture and heritage on the other: 1) exploiting the various aspects of this culture and heritage, with tourism as a means of maintaining, preserving and improving them, or 2) destroying these assets through irresponsible consumption. The

first option is sustainable, and the second is socially unsustainable. We can propose various initiatives to promote cultural and heritage sustainability through tourism.

5.6.1 *Taking account of tourism capacity as a fundamental variable in the tourism-culture-heritage relationship*, if we wish to ensure the sustainability of tourism, and regulate access to it and its impact in the light of socially based limits.

5.6.2 *Respecting local cultures and customs* as essential aspects of life in tourist destinations, preventing these areas being swamped or having alien customs imposed on them.

5.6.3 *Promoting the exploitation of the arts and heritage of tourist areas*, by restoring and maintaining them.

5.6.4 *Promoting the exploitation of the heritage resources of each area* in order to encourage the diversification of tourism products.

5.6.5 *Ensuring that the tourist industry brings in sufficient resources* to enable local authorities to maintain the area's culture and heritage.

5.6.6 *Encouraging authentic local crafts* throughout the added value chain of the tourist industry as a way of preserving the cultural heritage and giving a boost to the economy.

5.6.7 *Stepping up research into the local historical and cultural heritage* of every tourist area in order to enhance the area's appreciation of its history and contribute to its exploitation.

5.6.8 *Promoting trans-national cultural exchanges* in the form of networks to encourage the development of intercultural relations, bringing Europeans into contact with Europe's rich diversity. In particular promoting exchanges between young people in the framework of European programmes (Erasmus, Socrates). Similarly, promoting foreign language teaching in the Member States by means of international teacher exchanges, so that schoolchildren are taught by native speakers. This will make it easier for children to improve their linguistic skills, and exchange teachers will be able to provide direct cultural input.

5.6.9 *Improving the range of local hotel and restaurant services* as a reflection of local culture, distinct from standardised international cuisine.

5.6.10 *Promoting the management of the cultural heritage through forms of social participation, partnership and sponsorship*, with the coordinated involvement of the public, employers' organisations, trade unions and institutions.

5.7 Tourism and accessibility for people with disabilities

Tourism has become an extremely important social phenomenon involving millions of people throughout the world, especially in Europe; not only is it an unprecedented force for wealth-creation and economic progress, but also a crucial factor in improving knowledge, communication, human relations and mutual respect between different peoples.

Tourism is of major benefit to society and should be within everyone's reach, with no sector of the community being excluded whatever their personal, social, economic or other circumstances. People with disabilities – 10% of the total EU population – are becoming more integrated socially and economically and hence participating more and more in tourist activities despite all the impediments and difficulties which continue to prevent them from accessing tourist facilities and services on a regular and normal basis.

Removing and lessening these barriers is not only a must on grounds of equal rights and opportunities and non-discrimination, as championed by the EU and its Member States, but is also an effective way of including new groups of people in tourism-related activities, thus contributing to the growth of an economic sector which, especially in the southern European countries, has a direct impact on the creation of wealth and jobs in the interests of society as a whole.

No one can doubt the reality of this situation. It has led European associations for the disabled to proclaim some benchmark criteria with respect to tourism and disability which constitute a kind of ten-point statement of principles setting out their aspirations in this area. These principles could be given practical shape by the following initiatives:

5.7.1 *Ensuring that people with disabilities* and especially those with mobility and communication problems, are actually and effectively able to exercise the right to access tourist facilities and services of all kinds on a regular and normal basis.

5.7.2 *Making sure that mobility and communication problems are never used as a reason for prohibiting, denying, limiting or hedging with conditions access* to tourist facilities and services on equal terms with the rest of the population.

5.7.3 *The public authorities* at their various levels (local, regional, national and Community) *must establish and enforce uniform legal and technical rules* ensuring free access for persons with disabilities to tourist facilities and services.

5.7.4 *The public authorities must promote*, within their respective spheres of competence, *programmes and actions* designed to facilitate accessibility and the gradual removal of all types of barriers which make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to access adequate tourist services in safety and comfort.

5.7.5 *Ensuring that accessible tourism or tourism for all is not solely the responsibility of the public authorities, but also of all private players working in this socio-economic sector (tour operators, travel agents, transport companies, hoteliers, tourist attraction managers, etc.).*

5.7.6 The accessibility of tourist facilities and services should not only be regulated by the public authorities - though it is they who must ensure that the disabled can use and enjoy existing tourist facilities to the full - but the industry itself must realise that such access, besides being a social responsibility, is a business opportunity and competitive advantage.

5.7.7 *Public authorities and private operators working in the tourism sector must bear in mind, with a view to offering price and contract concessions on their products and services, that people with disabilities are already in a disadvantaged position, especially those who need the assistance of other people if they are to enjoy tourism or leisure activities.*

5.7.8 *Accessibility and the free use of tourist facilities and services by the disabled should be one of the criteria taken into account when quality ratings are handed out to tourist establishments (e.g. hotel and restaurant stars).*

5.7.9 *All tourist information material and services must provide information on the accessibility of tourist facilities and services so that persons with disabilities know precisely and in advance what they will encounter.*

5.7.10 *Promoting and disseminating the call by associations for the disabled to European authorities, national governments, regional and local authorities and to private operators in the European tourism sector, to do everything they can to make Europe - which is the centre of international tourism - an area free of obstacles, open to everyone.*

By implementing these principles and initiatives we will be opening up tourist facilities, products and services to a section of the population - people with disabilities and many older people - which until now has had only limited access. With these actions we will: further non-discrimination and access to tourism for all; enhance the range of tourist facilities and services on offer; start to address the demands of a group which has not always been taken into account as consumers of tourism products; and open up the market to more potential customers, hence generating wealth and progress.

It often happens that, besides physical obstacles, many people suffer from psychological inhibitions caused by a lack of knowledge of the real needs of the disabled which results in inconsiderate behaviour. In order to inform and alert the general public and the tourism industry to the need for these initiatives and the role that each person can play, the launch of a massive Europe-wide awareness campaign is proposed as a contribution to **2003, European Year of People with Disabilities**.

5.8 Tourism and the environment

In the recent past tourism and the environment have been seen as mutually antagonistic: the wealth generated by tourism was at the expense of the environment, exploitation of the best sites, preferably by the coast or in the mountains, without consideration for such factors as biodiversity, the resources already there, scale or the capacity to absorb development. Faced with a difficult choice between two factors which were – wrongly – presented as mutually exclusive, the general response can be clearly seen from the situation we find ourselves in today: we opted for growth, wealth-creation, even if it meant damaging the environment. And this, paradoxically, in an activity which is based on preserving the attractiveness of nature. This undoubtedly stems from two different ways of looking at things: the short-term vision of immediate real estate profits and the long-term vision of a sustainable and competitive industry. Once again we face the need to establish conditions and initiatives conducive to new forms of environmentally sustainable tourism.

5.8.1 *Striking the right balance between tourist numbers and means of transport* so as to minimise the energy used by tourism and by transport in particular.

5.8.2 *Making the planning of new tourist developments subject to strict sustainability criteria:* appropriate site, minimum and renewable use of resources, especially water and energy. Urban planning in all its different forms should be the main means of ensuring suitability and minimising the impact.

5.8.3 *Keeping a permanent eye on the population ceiling for a given area and the rate of sustainable growth*, ensuring that the rules are respected by means of inspections.

5.8.4 *Preserving the landscape, biodiversity, our natural land and marine heritage* and, in particular, coastal and alpine systems which are especially fragile, vulnerable and a prey to developers. New forms of rural and eco-tourism should help to correct the balance.

5.8.5 *Introducing advanced environmental management systems into firms and institutions* to help them manage resources (water, energy, waste) by means of coordinated action and public-private partnerships.

5.8.6 *Promoting sustainable mobility* within tourist areas, encouraging movement by foot and public transport.

5.8.7 *Encouraging environmental awareness among residents and tourists and introducing sustainable patterns of behaviour.* **Local agenda 21**, which emerged from the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit as a call to all towns and cities to prepare to meet the challenges of the 21st century, is a good integral long-term planning instrument, a methodology for overcoming the conflicts between different economic, social and environmental values and for involving the people in sustainability action plans.

5.8.8 *Promoting the use of regulatory and financial instruments and incentives in the form of eco-taxes* which can make a powerful contribution to sustainability policies and activities in tourist areas.

5.8.9 *Encouraging visitors and residents to buy environmentally-friendly products.*

5.8.10 *Establishing generally accepted eco-audit and eco-labelling systems to encourage correct environmental behaviour.* Supporting the development at European level of a common eco-label and facilitating the introduction of the tourist accommodation service eco-criteria approved on 14 April 2003.

5.9 **Tourism, peace and solidarity**

Tourism is just the opposite of war. War means the invasion of one country by another, aggression, the destruction of nature and heritage, the humiliation and even death of human beings. Tourism on the other hand means a welcome, interaction, getting to know a place, conserving the environment, wealth – in short, peace and friendship between people. If we only love what we know, tourism, as a means of bringing people closer together, is a force for harmony and peace between nations, cultures, religions and individuals. Democracy and political and socio-economic stability must certainly contribute to this objective, in the countries tourists come from and those they visit.

Understanding between peoples and the promotion of ethical values are at the root of sustainable and responsible tourism; solidarity between peoples can grow from acquaintance as tourists.

For tourism to be a real expression and instrument of peace and solidarity, and hence sustainable and accessible, various initiatives are needed:

5.9.1 *Tourists must fully respect the laws, customs and cultures of the countries they visit, recognising their richness.*

5.9.2 *The authorities must ensure the safety of tourists and their property and inform them about and prevent possible aggression.*

5.9.3 *Encouraging tourists to enjoy the natural resources and heritage but also to respect them* and see them as a means of personal and collective enrichment.

5.9.4 *Combating all forms of aggression and sexual exploitation* or affront to human dignity, especially involving children, as these go against the basic objectives of tourism.

5.9.5 *Tour agents must provide tourists with objective and truthful information on destinations.*

5.9.6 *Promoting and enforcing the right of everyone to be a tourist*, as an expression of the right to recreation, leisure and lifelong learning.

5.9.7 *Tourist areas should pool their experience of tourist developments* so that they do not make the same mistakes. This is an exercise in solidarity to avoid development models which have proved unsustainable.

5.9.8 *Generally encouraging tourism between all peoples* throughout the world as an ideal way out of poverty, of generating development and prosperity in many countries.

5.9.9 *Peace is a prerequisite for all sustainable development. Consequently the tourist industry should reaffirm and work towards establishing globally the conditions of equality, justice, democracy and prosperity under which it can flourish.*

5.9.10 Encouraging tourism in all its forms as a means whereby peoples get to know each other and of bringing about peace between nations. Supporting initiatives for recognising in symbolic fashion the role that tourism plays in bringing peace to the world: e.g. Peace through Tourism.

5.10 **Tourism and the players in the sector**

The vast range of stakeholders involved in tourism makes it advisable to differentiate the role each plays in this complex task of defining new forms of sustainable tourism.

5.10.1 *It is the responsibility of political and institutional policymakers to define the appropriate framework* in which new forms of sustainable tourism are possible and can be promoted by means of the full range of instruments at the disposal of the public authorities. The political priorities of this strategy of accessible and sustainable tourism must be geared towards ensuring that tourism is taken into account in all horizontal policies and in all relevant common policy areas. Accurate, high-quality data, e.g. in the form of Tourism Satellite Accounts, can be instrumental in drawing up appropriate policies for achieving sustainability and accessibility.

5.10.2 *Administrations, especially those at grass-roots level – regional and local – have a special role to play* insofar as they are the ones who draw up urban land use plans for tourist areas, who help to reconcile the interests of tourists and the local community and who plan economic activity, in this case tourism. They have a very important role in sustainable tourism and normally have direct or indirect powers vis-à-vis the tourism sector.

5.10.3 To enable them to exercise this important role in the interests of sustainability, *financial instruments should be made available at local and regional level* enabling them to put into practice the agreed policies and strategies.

5.10.4 *The social partners:* trade unions and employers' organisations must champion the interests of those they represent, but taking into account the need to devise policies, strategies and practices tailored to the sustainability of tourism; consequently their involvement in and co-responsibility for the planning, monitoring and assessment of tourism initiatives should be facilitated.

5.10.5 *Providers of tourist services* supply the final product, interface with consumers and draw up the basic contracts governing what they pay and what they get for their money, and ultimately they are responsible for the quality of the product as a whole.

5.10.6 *Middlemen* bring the product to potential consumers and put service users and providers in contact with each other. Their particular importance for the sustainability of the product stems from the fact that they are the ones who recommend destinations and provide responsible advice for users.

5.10.7 *Universities and other research bodies* provide knowledge, management tools and information, in short data of vital importance for the sustainability of the sector.

5.10.8 *Users* are the key to sustainable tourism; insofar as they adopt sustainable consumption patterns, they will favour destinations and products which meet these criteria.

5.10.9 *The local host community* is the necessary human resource which provides services for the tourist industry and its relations with tourists determine whether ultimately they are satisfied and will return to the destination.

5.10.10 *All of these players must be made aware of the need to work together*, to talk to each other and reach a consensus on the basis of the same principles of accessibility and sustainability. To this end, various arrangements for dialogue and participation (forums, committees, boards, etc.) must be set up from Community down to local level.

Of particular value are the European Tourism Forum sponsored by the Commission and the *EESC's cooperation with other international institutions such as the World Tourism Organisation and the International Social Tourism Bureau (BITS)*, as a way of advancing knowledge and consensus in the interests of sustainable and accessible tourism.

PART THREE: APPENDICES AND BACKGROUND

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Council conclusions on tourism and employment of 26 November 1997

Tourism in Europe: New partnerships for jobs. Conclusions and recommendations of the High Level Group on Employment and Tourism, 15 October 1998

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Follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations of the High Level Group on Tourism and Employment of 23 June 1999 (1999/C178/03)

Conclusions of the Council on tourism and employment of 21 June 1999

Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000

Report of 28 March 2001 from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Community measures affecting tourism (COM(2001) 171 final)

Conclusions and action plan of the extraordinary European Council of 21 September 2001

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Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Working together for the future of European tourism (COM(2001) 665 final)

Conclusions of the Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council of 26 November 2001

Council Resolution on the Future of European tourism (2002/C135/01)

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Integration of disabled people in society (2002/C241/17)

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Opinion of 18 September 2002 of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Working together for the future of European tourism (OJ C61, 14.3.2003)

Opinion of 10 October 2002 of the Committee of the Regions on the Commission Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Working together for the future of European tourism

CESE 1384/2003 ES/PM/ET/NT/ht

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Agenda 21. Sustainability in the European tourism sector. Reference document. European Tourism Forum 2002, 10 December 2002

Commission Decision of 14 April 2003 establishing the ecological criteria for the award of the Community eco-label to tourist accommodation service (2003/287/EC)

Cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities with regard to Tourism For All

Code of Ethics of the World Tourism Organisation

Resolutions on sustainable tourism policy of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (UITA-IUF) and the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT).

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Brussels, 29 October 2003.

The President
of the
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