

Consultation Document on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (June 2010: Com 2010/352 Final) and the Implementation Draft Plan (November 2010)

Presented by the European Union of Tourism Officers (EUTO) Board and General Assembly

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Background

The communication for which the European Union of Tourism Officers (EUTO) is submitting this consultation document is the preview to the European Tourism Policy. EUTO, believes this could change the very way that tourism policy and strategy within the European Continent, particularly amongst the twenty seven member states , is conceived and implemented. The process would be seen as a holistic one, focussing on today's trends and challenges on a global level while also acting locally to meet those same challenges that are apparent throughout Europe. Tourism is not just a socio-economic activity , it is a socio-cultural one , an activity that presents a number of experiences to visitors that are both educational as well as mentally and physically stimulating. We need to look at this activity as one that enhances all those diverse resources – History, Culture, Natural Environment, People and Traditions- and presents them to the visitor as a means of showing synergy and cooperation between all communities worldwide.

EUTO has always supported this style of synergy and cooperation; for a number of years EUTO has benefitted from European Union Funding to carry out study visits and workshops together with our members and partners in a number of countries that are represented within the organization, such as : Iceland, Scotland, England, Latvia, Estonia, Catalonia and Malta. Each study visit focussed on different aspects of sustainable tourism and the promotion of Best Practice. EUTO is an active member of ETAG (European Tourism Action Group) and we are committed to making Europe a more lucrative tourist destination, not just in terms of quantity but as well, in terms of quality, by promoting the concept of innovation and creativity in product development as well as by cultivating a culture of tourism promotion emanating from the very roots of civilization in Europe – its people. By following this strategy in a bottom-up method, we hope to show how the unique, the authentic and the “Living History” can serve as a catalyst to achieving both quality tourism for Europe as well as making the continent the number one destination for visitors who want a taste of the old with a genuine sprinkling of the new and modern.

The Political Framework for Tourism in Europe

The stimulation of a strong economic growth and employment within the European Tourism scenario are two very positive incentives why the implementation of the Policy for Europe should be actioned. Europe already attracts 370 million visitors and is already considered the number one destination in the world; the benefits from tourism in Europe are spread among a number of key stakeholders including the 1.8 million SMEs who have invested in this activity and the 9.7 million employees who are

dependant on the industry. The industry attracts a number of visitors from th emerging BRIC nations (7.6 million) and has a significant domestic market (90% of all travel within Europe)

The communication (2010/352) states that there have been some steps to improve Europe's competitiveness even through tourism with the endorsement of the Lisbon Treaty. The communication highlights the Article 195 of the TFEU (The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) that empowers the Union (through its organs such as the Parliament and the Commission) to stimulate competitiveness, encourage best practice and develop an integrated approach to tourism. EUTO fully supports these strategies and we believe that by having a tourism policy this will ensure that all member states will maintain this common benefit while also ensuring the aspect of quality tourism through diversity in it's authentic product offering which adds value to the visitor experience. We believe that a European Tourism Policy should not be a substitute to National and Local Tourism Planning, but that this should provide the foundation on which these should be built – thus ensuring the cultural diversity of each member state.

EUTO also supports the promotion of best practice and will continue to provide the mechanism to ensure this cooperation between its member countries produces tangible results for the tourism activity in Europe.

While EUTO acknowledges the challenges facing tourism in Europe both through global competition as well as from environmental threats such as Climate Change, our support is for a policy that provides mitigation as well as adaptation to these challenges.

The Implementation of the Tourism Policy

The communication (2010/352) outlined four primary objectives to the promotion of a sustainable, competitive and socially responsible activity, these include:

1. Stimulate competitiveness
2. Promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high quality tourism
3. Consolidate the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high quality destinations.
4. Maximize the potential of EU financial policies and instruments for developing tourism.

During the European Tourism Forum held in November 2010 (Malta), an action plan for implementation of these policy issues was proposed.

Having considered the various action points mentioned in the draft implementation plan, EUTO supports the initiatives and we would add the following recommendations:

1. In ensuring Europe's competitiveness, we feel that the idea of diversifying and valorizing our common heritage as an enhancement of the tourism product is positive but we consider the concept of local tourism planning, using a bottom-up approach, as the ideal manner in which the real history and heritage can be explained and interpreted in an authentic manner. While we do appreciate the fact that it is the authorities, including the Commission and Council of Europe, who endorse any final strategy and policy implementation, the real stakeholders and beneficiaries are the local communities that these authorities should represent. In Holland, for example, our representatives feel that the Policy should include the promotion of nature and daytime recreation holidays with an emphasis on social experiences rather than activities which alienate the local or host communities. We therefore feel that the Policy should include a clear strategy on local tourism planning in Europe.

The Operational Plan should reflect support for existing European cultural routes or initiatives to consolidate or increase their impact and, further, should state support to destinations that identify the potential to create new routes. Such support would be dependent on positive results from evaluation of the impact of cross-national cultural tourism initiatives and clear demonstration of target markets for the proposed themes.

2. The development of ICT and the growth of electronic commerce can be enhanced through the support for work and reports carried out by organizations, such as EUTO, in identifying areas that need investment or further research. The European Commission needs to encourage the implementation of "Follow-Up" procedures that should implement recommendations outlined in these reports and we would recommend that funding is made available for such "Follow-Up" procedures and that these are separate from funding for projects or programmes related to tourism. By identifying such funds, the Commission should provide the catalyst for tangible results in the enhancement of value added product development .

In addition to the inclusion of tourism stakeholders, the Operational Plan should reflect the intention to access and utilise, at a European level, the extensive research carried out by individual countries into the media used by visitors to and within Europe to identify changing trends and needs amongst Europe's tourism consumers. If this is not possible, the Plan should reflect the specific intention to initiate or support dedicated European consumer research.

3. EUTO has supported the promotion and continuous development of professionalism in the European tourism industry through an annual programme of presentations, study visits and workshops to promote the exchange of best practice (see attached appendix). The programmes

showcase case studies of best practice bringing together tourism practitioners and academics from across Europe to learn together and for the cross fertilization of ideas. VOCMAT is one example of a high level pan-European Tourism Training programme, which brought tourism managers from across Europe together. We would urge the creation of a network of tourism associations and professional institutions who can work together to provide this support. Such a network could supplement the work being carried out by other networks , such as , Necstour.

Experience gained by members of EUTO through the above projects has shown that the complexity of financial administration involved in some EU financing instruments prevents wider participation - particularly by SMEs but also by larger organisations and educational establishments. EUTO supports any adaptation of existing EU programs that would lead to simplification on systems and, consequently, wider participation.

4. Planning and strategic management are two important elements of any tourism policy and the provision of data and real time information that will support these elements must be provided in a responsible manner. The concept of a tourism observatory and indicators for sustainable management are essential tools in this regard. EUTO would recommend that a number of focus groups and workshops meet regularly together, on a virtual basis, with the Commission to discuss the data collection and the analysis and interpretation of the information to produce effective results. EUTO is ready to participate in such workshops and meetings.

A starting point for this activity should be the identification of what does/does not exist at present to inform strategies; what strengthened research would look like; and to bring influence to bear so that gaps are filled. (See Appendix - Best Practice Examples - for example of Sustainable Tourism initiative, strategy & resource centre; Destination Management Handbook; and Destination Performance UK).

5. EUTO supports the continued development of a system of indicators for the sustainable management of destinations which should be designed in such a way as to demonstrate improvements in sustainable practices (social, economic and environmental) at European, national, regional and local level.
6. The discussion, during the European Tourism Forum in November 2010, gave a clear indication that any label for Quality Tourism needed to integrate the national labels that recognize eco quality and levels of hospitality and service. Perhaps the European Quality Label could act as the benchmark for these national labels while also encouraging a European Charter of Labelling and a website promoting the various organizations, sites, attractions, accommodations and other establishments and their labels.

Recognition should be given to those **existing** schemes that are based on **quality** of facilities rather than simply the **presence** of facilities and that demonstrate effectiveness in raising quality and attracting widespread adoption by the tourism industry. An example of best practice, a successful quality-based scheme, is that developed in Scotland, used by the rest of the UK, the AA and currently being considered by a number of European countries. (See

Appendix - Best Practice Examples). On the other hand, in England, it was felt, it is important to stress that initiatives taken do not result in consumer confusion and duplication at both the national as well as the European levels which result in administration bureaucracy and therefore a cost for operators. It was also felt that in England there is still a lack of understanding of the European Quality Marque and consumer awareness needs to be raised.

7. The charter for responsible and sustainable tourism needs to be applicable both to the visitor and the host community. It needs to take cognisance of any existing national strategies for sustainable tourism taking account of environmental, social and economic aspects. EUTO supports the promotion of alternative forms of tourism for both European as well as foreign visitors including coastal and marine tourism as well as any other forms of tourism such as Rural or Urban tourism.
8. The final stage of any tourism policy document should be the methods for promoting the destination and EUTO fully concurs with a European Brand that emanates the Cultural and National identities of each member state. This diversity should be the value added for any visitor experience – rather than the Europification of the brand image, the promotion of such a marque should show the many advantages to a European Holiday – from various winter sports and marine activities, from the snow covered cities of the North to the sun drenched typical villages and towns of the South.
9. EUTO would recommend that promotional activities at major exhibitions could include any initiatives such as the EDEN awards and other such events as a way of showing the synergy of European Destinations in promoting and rewarding innovation and uniqueness to non European visitors.

Conclusion

EUTO would like to thank the EU Commission for this initiative and for the opportunity for this organization to participate in the consultation phase of the development of a European Tourism Policy. Our focus will remain to provide documentation and reports of real issues that face the tourism officer in the implementation of a valuable visitor experience and we hope to be of service to the Commission and the many stakeholders of this industry through dialogue, meetings and workshops that should mark the continuous progress and effective results of such a policy.

Appendix - Best Practice Examples