

SYNTHESIS

“Building a resilient tourism sector in the COVID 19 era: Challenges and opportunities in the Mediterranean”

- Date and time: 28th of September 2020, 11.00 to 13.00
- Webinar organized on the occasion of the UN World Tourism Day
- 204 people registered online and up to 120 were connected simultaneously

11:00 Welcome words and presentation of the webinar by *Mr Vincent Ernoux*, coordinator of the ENI CBC Programme Branch Office for the Western Mediterranean

Mr Ernoux - who also moderated the event - welcomes the participants, presents the webinar and introduces some data and figures of the current situation of the tourism industry

11:05 EU support to reboot the tourism sector under the European Cohesion Policy, *Mr Laurent de Mercey* and *Ms Joanna Moulou*, DG REGIO, European Commission

The representatives of the European Commission held a presentation under the title “Support to the tourism sector through cohesion policy in a short- and medium-term perspective”. The presentation the main budget allocations for the tourism sector under Interreg and rest of Cohesion Policy.

11:20 Current situation of the Mediterranean tourism industry and potential ways to restart, *Ms Alicia Fajardo*, CEO and founder of “Better Tourism Foundation” and co-founder of the <https://www.turismoreset.org/> platform.

Ms Fajardo focused her intervention on the main challenges of the tourism sector and the need to create a common response. She also presented her platform #TurismoReset for which all stakeholders of the tourism industry are invited to join.

11:35 The contribution of the ENI CBC Med Programme to the development of sustainable tourism, *Mr Fabrizio Paloni*, coordinator of the ENI CBC Med Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS)

The coordinator of the JTS did a short presentation explaining the overall contribution of the ENI CBC MED Programme to the tourism through the 4 funded projects, introducing their main figures.

11:45 Focus on ENI CBC Med projects: scope, good practices, opportunities. The 4 projects are pitched, followed by an open discussion under the title “getting back tourism on track in the Mediterranean”

Below are presented the participants and some of their comments:

MED GAIMS - *Mr Daniel Asmar*, American University of Beirut

“We want to prove that this type of tourism (gamification) has potential. We want this message to reach local authorities too. “

The Hackathon is open for Jordan and Lebanon until end of October 2020.

Med Pearls - *Ms Sofia Pla Oset*, Catalan Tourist Board

They are focused on how to consume slow tourism. They point out the importance of exchanging impressions with local territories. There is a research study on slow tourism open to all interested public, available for download in the project website. The project expects to launch sub-grants in two phases: the first one addressed to travel agencies and the second one to travellers.

MEDUSA- Lina Al Khaled, Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association

Following the pandemic outbreak, from the private sector perspective, instead of living the situation on a survival mode, they see it as a way to rethink the model. For instance, the concept of adventure tourism is expanding, it does not only include extreme sports but any kind of outdoor activities.

Project partners made a list of stakeholders to reach the objectives of engagement. The project is focused on non-touristic areas to create new products and set up marketing alliances among participating countries.

The project expects to provide sub-grants into 7 countries. These grants will be launched in February 2021, focused mainly on marketing.

CROSSDEV -Ms Emanuela Panke, CISP tourism expert and Ms Enas Odeh Batha, CROSSDEV sub-grant beneficiary in Palestine

The project presented a sub-grantee from Battir village in Palestine, as example of success of tourism service provider: a local guide to promote crafts, valorising the landscape as part of the trail from Beit Mersim to Battir.

Emanuela, answering a question concerning the wine and food sector in tourism: “We should think of these sectors as part of a package and not as a main activity. It’s not only about wine tasting, it can be an activity within a package that may include adventure activities or visiting archeological site”

Questions raised to the participants during the discussions:

Which kind of adjustments faced the projects arising from the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Med Pearls: Covid-19 brought the trends of slow tourism. Project partners are aware of this preference which increased during pandemic period.
- Med Gaims: Some opportunities arise from this situation, for instance, the research of digital tools to promote tourist sites. So, tourists may experience tourist visits without travelling.
- MEDUSA: a current survival mode in a more sustainable manner for private sector. Need to increase the presence of PPPs, and to use marketing tools to test tourism jobs, exploiting ICT tools to connect people around the world without travelling.
- CROSSDEV: there are touristic products which are not fully exploited.

Tourism diversification: most valuable?

- **CROSSDEV:** Projects are looking for a common vision in order to offer a collection of similar products without creating competition but cooperation among them.
- **MEDUSA:** the concept of sustainable tourism is a kind of diversification itself. The challenge is to proof how tourism can be successful within this context. The potential to create a larger economy.
- **Med Pearls:** We must think about moving away from mass tourism/massification to more specialised tourism. Cultural sites cannot be overcrowded any more.

Some other comments in chat:

- Josep Capella quoted Nicolas Dubreuil: «Nous devons apprendre à voyager moins pour voyager mieux »
- Annalisa Marocchi – CISP: “Sustainable tourism is not the goal, but the tool for socioeconomic development”
- Francisco Benitez- Andalucía Ministry of Tourism: “Some thinkers and institutions are advocating for what is called a degrowth process highlighting the fact that we can’t afford the current level of consumption”

SURVEY RESULTS

1.From which level do you think the response to COVID-19 challenges in Tourism should come first?

A. National	12 (22,2%)
B. Regional	16 (29,6%)
C. European Union	15 (27,8%)
D. Global	11 (20,4%)
E. Other	0 (0%)

2. What topics do you think tourism cooperation projects should address during the Programming period 2021-2027?

A. Diversification	20 (20,6%)
B. Deseasonality	9 (9,3%)
C. Sustainability	28 (28,9)
D. Competitiveness of MSMEs	8 (8,2%)
E. Governance	6 (6,2%)
F. Training and capacity building	13 (13,4%)
G. Innovation	13 (13,4%)

3. Could you define in a few words what is the added value of cooperation projects between Mediterranean regions, in tourism, in comparison with pure national or regional projects? (some redundant responses have been merged)

- Sharing of expertise, not re-inventing the wheel, and living in the new normal.
- It has a bigger dimension
- Anything that goes beyond local/regional is better as we live in an interconnected world. We need to get to know other countries, cultures etc.
- The exchange of best practices and with that the flow of creativity
- Cross pollination is important in capacity building and effective deployment of projects.
- Increase Tourism competitiveness
- More visibility, possibility to find new solutions to common problems through sharing best practices
- Opening minds/capacities/organization to a wider and more diversified demand
- Gaining and saving time and energies, and creating synergies between the countries and projects
- Reduce the economic differences and enhance cooperation, this will allow to enhance national economies and communities in south Mediterranean countries. somehow, this could help to avoid unemployment there.
- Raise standards and expectations among operators. Make it more likely for operators to invest in sustainability because they know others do so too and the tourist expects it (rather than undercut prices and compete in unsustainable manner, just to survive).
- Setting real common environmental goals
- Climate, character, gastronomy, connectivity
- Knowledge transfer, network, promotion, learning , cooperation
- Tourism is firstly an opportunity to unite, create bridges, promote territories' identities and differences. Making this opportunity real between Mediterranean regions we can foster tourism industry and meet tourists needs and satisfaction
- Beneficial synergies among different programmes, initiatives and project in Med. Area
- Cooperation will result in sustainable programs attracting all age segments and interesting offering diversification between adventure modern and heritage back in time to the Phoenician route cradle of civilization and the birth of religions Judaism - Christianity & Islam where all blends together with an amazing mosaic that no money can ever buy. Cooperation brings BEST VALUE EXPERIENCE MONEY CAN EVER BUY
- Different perspectives. Added value if cooperating

4. Which topics in tourism do you consider should become a priority in the next EU programmes? (some redundant responses have been merged)

- Sustainability and proximity tourism
- Cultural tourism, ecotourism
- Transport is very important in terms of sustainability
- Green Deal application to tourism. Greening the tourism industry
- Gamification will enable tourism starts at home. Storytelling and excitement could start during the preparation phase of the trip.
- Tourism in Crisis periods

- Material and immaterial cultural heritage
- Slow tourism, green tourism, virtual visits
- Energy transition, slow tourism, active tourism
- Digital technologies in cultural heritage
- Strengthen the capacity of rural communities to connect better with the cities in their area with good infrastructures
- Use of technologies, creation of experiences
- Employment and environmental issues
- Sustainability, generate jobs, diversification, reducing impact on host societies
- Capacity building, implementation of standards
- Community-based tourism, environmental protection, cultural heritage promotion, job creation, SMEs fostering
- Preservation of cultural and natural heritage through tourism
- Culture, ecology, sustainability, training
- Sub- grants and promotion activities, enhancing the local tourism
- Environmentally and culturally respectful

5. How do you think the tourism sector should innovate in the coming years? (some redundant responses have been merged)

- Value niches
- More virtual tourism, innovation in landmarks such as live streaming
- Improving transportation
- Educating the customers in sustainability at the same time they make businesses
- Reach younger crowd.
- The innovation should be in cost saving (Energy and water)
- Focus on sustainability, local systems, improve capacities of operators, link with communities
- Adventure tourism
- It should be ecotourism and sustainable development
- Augmented reality, virtual visits and outdoor activities
- Think out of the box, try to act more regional, promote Europe for the European tourists and try to diminish intercontinental flights
- It needs to combine traditions, sustainability and new technology to let people be able to experience history, culture and food tradition of the Mediterranean countries
- Use of technologies, creation of experiences
- Focus on local and internal tourism development
- Less plastic, more digitalization and just ban plastic use overall because it is urgent
- Smart destinations with sustainable tourism
- Collective solutions
- Diversifications based on seasonality, innovation in communication
- Open data and blockchain process
- Applying the model of Airbnb platforms to adventure tourism



- Innovation that makes hospitality a "must"... avoid queues, filling forms, widely inform about peak hours for visits to avoid them...
- New tours, experience, quality
- Networking and linking between countries through identifying the common identity
- Smart tourism will provide a touristic experience for every traveler