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### **Sustainable Management of Culture and Art Tourism. Euromeeting 2012 at Art&Tourism, Florence, May 18-19, 2012**

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Opened by the Regional Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Tertiary sector of Regione Toscana, Cristina Scarletti, the two days conference, which reached its 10<sup>th</sup> edition, has for the first time taken place within the first edition of Art&Tourism, an international fair where cultural offer and the tourist sector can meet, marking a positive step towards the integration of policy makers, academics and the private sectors.

The Conference, organized by Regione Toscana with the collaboration of NECSTouR Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism, Ernest European Research Network on Sustainable Tourism and Art&Tourism, was dense, involving experts (academics, politicians, representative of associations and project managers from Tuscany, Italy and several European countries) on the theme of the management of cultural tourism, organized in three thematic areas: art cities and models of sustainable tourism management, cultural itineraries and models of management in cultural destinations.

Following the EU Commission's "Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism" (COMM 621/2007), Euromeeting 2007 produced the so-called Carta di Firenze - a framework agreement signed by 15 European regions plus 20 between supporting Institutions and Universities and titled "Towards an European network for a sustainable and competitive tourism" - which became then the basis for the creation in 2009 of the NECSTour network, now joint by 28 Regions and 30 representatives of the academic and business sector. In 2010, with COMM 352/2010 "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe", the EU Commission recognized the role of the network in the creation of a model and of a European brand of

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sustainable tourism, as well as of Euromeeting as one of the main appointments for sharing and presenting information and results in the field.

Ms Scarlett anticipated how this 10<sup>th</sup> edition of Euromeeting aimed at taking further the goals set by the 2007 Carta di Firenze by improving of 10% in the next year the indicators developed by the NECSTour network, as stated on the Memorandum distributed at the end of the Conference.

The opening session, chaired by Paolo Bongini of Regione Toscana, was the occasion to provide the institutional framework of recent policies on cultural tourism developed by the European Commission.

The European Commission recently identified tourism and cultural tourism as a priority in the Commission's work, as testified by the EU Commission representative Francesca Tudini and by the message sent by the Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani and read during the opening session, which highlighted the necessity of promoting Europe as a single destination and create therefore a brand, based on sustainable destination management, in order to overcome the increasing competition coming from outside countries.

Francesca Tudini also outlined how this priority is promoted with initiatives like EDEN, the European Tourism Day and the commitment to European itineraries, as well as collaboration with the European Travel Commission and above all funding opportunities for enterprises and institutions.

Mr Dimitrios Kalogeropoulos, President of the Commission for Natural Resources, added data on the importance of cultural tourism within the European economy and on the necessity of presenting Europe as a single destination, towards which the website [www.visiteurope.eu](http://www.visiteurope.eu) is a first step.

Ms Penelope Denu, Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, described how all efforts for the developing of Cultural Routes are trying to create a model for new tourism opportunities and models. Interests in the creation of new routes is high (20 new proposals), but progresses are slow. A recent evaluation lead to the withdrawing of certification for 7 out of the 29 existing routes. New routes are nevertheless currently under development and programmes are taken further in order to improve the quality and efficiency of initiatives funded. Among them, a study on the impact of cultural routes on SME, a programme for capacity building, the "Crossroads of Europe" conferences - this year dedicated to cultural and religious routes - and the Annual Advisory Forum.

The speech by Deirdre Shurland, coordinator of Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism of UNEP, describing projects like the Hotel Energy Solutions and the Green Passport Programme, opened up the perspective to a global level and envisaged possibilities of collaboration between EU networks and UN Institutions.

The first session focused on art cities and presentations were on the case-studies of Florence, Paris and its region, Prague, Sofia, Fiesole, Vitoria Gasteiz, Tirana.

The Italian case-studies showed the successful example of Fiesole and the persisting problems of Florence, an overcrowded medium-size art city renowned at the global level, which is nevertheless implementing strategies involving tourist cards, smart phone technologies and satellites to improve the difficult residents-tourists relationship.

How the Fiesole case showed though, there is the need to give up something in order to find more radical solutions. The small size of this town on the hills of Florence allowed a transformation which eliminated large tourist audiences (parkings have been cut) in favour of a culture of places, atmosphere, the revaluation of small cultural heritage and innovative projects for improving accessibility - to the archeological area for example - for disabled people.

Reka Csepeli, for the City of Paris, presented some first results of a survey on 10 major tourist destinations and their relationship with sustainable practices and highlighted how in this field progresses are still very minor in large cities compared to rural areas.

The examples of Prague and Sofia, where tourism is increasing rapidly, could show us all alternative models of development for art cities (despite most experts working on development projects are Italian), but changes and policies are still in progress and rely on investments, both European like the EU Capital of Culture opportunity and national.

Given the territorial characteristics of Croatia, this country is investing in "micro-city destinations" as a development model to valorize the cultural heritage and balance the unsustainable touristic model developed in the 1960s. The city of Vitoria Gasteiz in Spain was awarded the 2012 EU Green Capital Award, but needed to redevelop a derelict working class neighbourhood with a limited budget. The presentation of the artist Christina Werkmeister illustrated the successful project started by a small group of artists, which firstly alone and then involving local citizens painted creatively old buildings in strategic places of the neighbourhood and of the city. Beyond their expectations, this led to the creation of a real "itinerario muralistico" within the city that attracted not only citizens, but tourists alike. Despite the fact that the experience cannot probably be replicated - as it would not be art-based any longer, it showed the possibilities of creative, participatory art in city regeneration projects.

Piergiorgio Olivetti of Cittaslow closed the session illustrating the successful stories of small localities who invested in creating a mix of a slow lifestyle, good marketing and technological investments to promote not only a sustainable development model of tourism, but a general quality of life that can be shared by tourists and residents. The forthcoming conference in Perugia on 13-14 June will be an occasion to delve into this.

The second session was dedicated to cultural itineraries and gave the audience the chance to assess the situation through the cases of the UN Silk Road Programme, the Historical Thermal Towns Associations, the San Francesco d'Assisi itinerary in Umbria, the EU ODYSSEA Cultural Route of Ports and Mediterranean Cultures, the Danube Itinerary and the Terra Incognita Programme of the Kosice area in Slovakia.

Interventions stressed how cultural itineraries are surely precious initiatives, but monitoring and measuring of results is still lacking and would improve the future management of routes. Also, cases vary greatly in their ability to attract tourists and create real opportunities for local people. A stronger integration between countries is also necessary, in order to create real European paths with a strong identity and visibility.

The third and last session was the occasion to summarize best practices and ways forward in the management of cultural assets for a sustainable tourism.

With regard to Italy some major problems were identified, above all from the professional sectors.

First of all the necessity of a better and more integrated promotional policy and a more effective and efficient use of fundings (talk by the Regional Minister for Tourism of Regione Calabria). Following this, Paolo Corchia, for the Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Traders, also spoke of the necessity for a more unitary policy for tourism, which implies the need of selecting, qualifying and creating hierarchies, where necessary, in order to improve efficiency, create a reliable image of Italian destinations and reverse the current fragmented and old fashioned management system – of the events programmes at the regional level or of museum systems for example. Like the Cittàslow representative, he also spoke of the potentialities of micro-destinations which is at the moment underestimated by policy makers.

A representative of tuscan co-operatives was also worrying of the risk of de-professionalization and loosing out in quality, if policies do not work closely with professionals in delivering tourism products and systems.

Positive perspectives were nevertheless also highlighted.

Alice Jude talked of NECSTour and how different management systems can be shared through this platform (examples were given for Cornwall, the Bask Country and Alentejo).

Cristina Martelli for the University of Florence, Department of Statistics, illustrated the impressive effort that her team is carrying on on behalf of NECSTour in order to develop shared indicators and make cases comparable within the network. Her work focuses on language in the first instance and will lead to a common ground for describing, assessing and improving a given tourist product.

Just as a personal comment, the theme of indicators is surely important, but it would be appreciated a further effort to integrate and not duplicate existing programmes.

Teresa Caladarola, Regional Officer for Tourism, Trade and the Tertiary Sector of Regione Toscana highlighted the positive outcomes of establishing a regional Observatory of Tourist Destinations, which makes comparing, ranking and improving a more efficient process within the regional policy system.

Francesco Redi, from the European University of Tourism, described the successful case of the creation of a new tourist product, the “Network of AncientTheatres” developed in four localities: Tirana, Lecce, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Greek islands.

Last but not least, a short presentation by Ms Sazzini of Legambiente Turismo of the Smart Survey casted some updated data on the efficiency of eco-labels in the tourist sector. Tourists surely appreciate eco-labels and efforts to support a sustainable way of living and travelling. Policies and professionals should not hesitate in going this way.