

Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns

Resolution approved by the Plenary Assembly
Chioggia, 16/17 September 2004

The Adriatic and Ionian nations share a common resource that is their unique and beautiful coastal landscape. While History has for too long divided the destinies of the various countries, the physical geography of places has retained some common characteristics, despite the implementation of different models for Development. It's our duty to hand down these common characteristics to the generations that will come after us.

Our beautiful coasts and our region climate foster a rapidly expanding Tourism. Each nation is certainly aware of the potentials, the risks, and the Economic importance of Tourism in its Economy.

The Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns, held in Chioggia the 16th and 17th September, examined the need for devising a coherent and sustainable model for tourist development which is adaptable to the different areas of the region.

Tourism growth is a global phenomenon and the Adriatic nations are experiencing many differences. In the last decades some countries have already gone through an increasing pressure of the Tourist demand which has profoundly effected their economic profile, although not always in a desirable direction. Other countries which are undergoing a *boom* are the most threatened destinations. Sometimes in the initial phase of the phenomenon, critical situations can still be prevented.

The Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns is a fundamental resource to devise a common strategy in the Tourist Industry. The existence of a well-established network of cities, which is finally engaged in practical projects (AAP 2020), allows the exchange of experiences, the sharing of problems, and the mutual exploitation of the *lessons learned*. In the European language this expression refers the challenging situations, the solutions adopted, and the close analysis of the mistakes that have been made.

The first step is to look backwards - for example Italian and Greek mistakes can turn into valuable directions for those Countries where Tourism is still developing, and their mistakes might be considered as examples not to be followed. The second step is to achieve the maturity to cope with medium/long-term problems, being aware that speculations and immediate profits turn too often into irreparable damages.

The core of strategic plans is a rational use of the Tourism raw material, that is the landscape. The transformation of the coastal landscape must be limited, discouraged, and whether possible it should be banned. Within this

scope, it is very important and it assumes even a symbolic meaning, the regulation that the Croatian Government adopted few days ago, in order to forbid new construction in the coastal area. The Forum hopes that the regulations and sector laws will assume harmonic characteristics in all countries, and that the Cities will activate the Central Governments that haven't yet enacted any guidelines for the Environmental protection of their coasts.

Laws are important, but they are not enough. Italy, where theoretically the most restrictive regulations are enforced, is still undergoing disasters that in many cases are bound to last forever. Together with an effective normative framework, it is necessary to intervene within the population, to make Citizens aware of the Environmental risks and the negative economic results deriving from hasty decisions.

The Nations that today protect their territory are those where in the past irreversible damages have occurred. The Forum asks the new Adriatic Democracies to reverse this trend, as Nature and Environmental protection are the best possible Tourist offer, and the main attraction in an ever-growing market.

Even where coasts are protected and monitored Tourist offer should be evaluated in terms of Sustainability. Many accommodation facilities have acquired a sensibility to these issues that they consider extremely important to attract more aware, educated, and lastly richer customers. The Forum asks the operators to comply with programmes that are already effective, and asks the Chambers of Commerce to include Sustainable Tourism Planning among their priorities. And the Forum finally determines to deepen the cooperation with the Universities that have already networked through UNIADRION and other existing networks.

To pursue a strategy for Sustainable Tourism doesn't mean to harm Industry and the operators. On the contrary it allows to elevate the quality of the product and to become competitive in interesting and expanding markets.

The Forum hopes that the European Union will allocate more and more funds to the improvement of the tourist offer. Within their resources, the Adriatic and Ionian Cities can play a major role. They can implement an evaluation process allowing the operators of a city to check the work of their colleagues in other areas. Comparison and sharing are essential values and they allow to grow through reciprocal learning. The Forum was born to guarantee a flow of information and experiences through the different areas of the region, and it continues to retain this goal as one of its priorities. For this purpose the Forum intends to establish a Permanent Commission in charge of detecting the necessary instruments to carry out common initiatives, under the above mentioned principles.

Other information and occasions for comparison can be provided by strengthening the relations with far-off networks of cities, as they are experiencing the same problems and like us have realised that the common research of solutions and strategies is the best answer. The Forum hopes to establish solid relations and permanent cooperation with the Union of the Baltic Cities and intends to promote and form new alliances with other organizations of local authorities.

The projects originated within the activities of the Forum, which is now seven years old, and the networks and partnerships developed in various fields within the Sustainable framework should aim at strengthening the Adriatic and Ionian Euroregion within the European Union enlargement.