Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1433 (1999)[1]

A quality label for mountain resorts in Europe?

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In a society where leisure plays an ever-greater role, tourism is taking on increasing importance.

2. As a major and, in some cases, even an essential economic resource, tourism is also a factor for social and cultural development, with important spin-offs at local, regional, national and international levels.

3. Equally, the Assembly is aware of, and welcomes, the fact that tourism develops multiculturalism and can thus make a significant contribution to fostering understanding and tolerance between peoples.

4. Unfortunately, however, uncontrolled development and management of tourism can have serious effects on the environment and become a serious obstacle to sustainable development.

5. In fact, over-development of infrastructure and excessive numbers of tourists are exacerbated by the behaviour of these same tourists, and can result in too much pressure being put on the environment, as evidenced in the deterioration of natural resources, local environments and the cultural and social heritage.

6. These phenomena can be seen with all kinds of tourism, whether on the coast or in cities or mountains. However, given the vulnerability of the mountain environment, it seems likely that their impact is more pronounced here than elsewhere.

7. The Assembly is of the opinion that the vulnerability of mountain regions worsens the overall situation and warrants specific action at both national and European levels, in the context of the activities of certain international organisations.

8. Accordingly, it welcomes the activities developed by the Council of Europe at intergovernmental level and the texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers on this matter, especially Recommendation (94) 7 on a general policy for sustainable and environment-friendly tourism, and Recommendation (95) 10 on a sustainable tourism development policy in protected areas.

9. It fully endorses the principles of sustainable tourism described in these recommendations, which are an essential precondition to any tourist development, and believes that the implementation of a system of quality labels would correspond to the spirit of these texts.

10. On the other hand, convinced that the development of tourism and optimal management of natural resources are not incompatible, it believes that it is particularly important to develop and adopt tourist policies that reconcile necessary economic and social development with the imperatives of safeguarding the environment and natural and cultural heritage.

11. At the same time, it is also important not only to ensure that tourism does not pose a threat to the natural and man-made environment in which it develops, but that it fulfils quality criteria so that the expectations of users are met.

1. See Doc. 8556, report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, rapporteur: Mr Briane. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 4 November 1999.

12. Given their unique geophysical characteristics and the restrictions that these place on the lives of their inhabitants, and as part of a specific action aimed at mountain regions, the introduction of a quality label for mountain resorts would reflect the desire to show redoubled concern for these regions, and would usefully complement the Council of Europe's work for sustainable tourism and cultural action.

13. Furthermore, the Assembly considers that such a project would fit in appropriately with the activities being conducted under Action Theme No. 10 of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, which is concerned with mountain ecosystems.

14. It is also convinced that the draft European convention on mountain regions, currently under consideration by the Committee of Ministers, may be an appropriate context for a pan-European policy in this area and could also contribute to good tourism management by the signatory states.

15. With regard to previous initiatives on quality labels, the Assembly took note of what had been done in certain countries such as Austria and France, or by the Cotrao (Working Community of Cantons and Regions of the Western Alps), and considered that these could act as models for a European initiative.

16. However, such an approach will only be possible if criteria are defined that are applicable to the whole range of mountain resorts, that take no account of the differences in economic resources and that do not give rise to speculation, particularly in property.

17. Finally, the Assembly considers that such a system could only operate with the active participation of the groups concerned, whether these are local and regional authorities, business groups or non-governmental organisations working in this sector.

18. Having regard to the above, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

a. ask the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity to study the feasibility of a system of quality labels for mountain resorts, as part of Action Theme No. 10 (mountain ecosystems);

b. in addition, invite the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe to study this proposition with regard to the role that would be played by local and regional authorities;

c. to ensure that the non-governmental organisations concerned are involved in these studies;

d. to respond to the expectations of many Council of Europe member states and pay particular attention to the specific problems of mountain regions by adopting the draft convention on mountain regions and opening it for signature.