Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1849 (2011)[1]
Final version

Input for local development: an innovative approach for crisis-stricken regions

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The economic and financial crisis of 2008 has hit European countries and regions asymmetrically. Some countries have experienced a much higher rise in unemployment than others. Within countries, regions with an economy highly dependent on a particular sector or company have suffered more than others. Regions less reliant on export-oriented industries and financial services seem to have been less severely affected by the crisis.

2. This phenomenon can be explained by, *inter alia*, the socio-economic disadvantages of certain regions, such as rurality, crisis or lack of traditional industries, low population density or negative population growth, unemployment and undeclared employment, lack of a sufficient workforce to sustain social welfare systems, low education levels, lack of public and private research and development, lack of innovation capacity, or difficult access to essential services.

3. However, modern approaches to the theory of economic development focus on the characteristics of endogenous development. This refers to development that is based on locally available resources such as land, water, vegetation, knowledge, skills and competencies and culture. Tradition and cultural and natural diversity, as well as spirituality, may become the starting points for possible innovations leading to economic growth.

4. Endogenous development represents a complementary approach to the ongoing technological and economic processes at a global level. It is locally determined, whereas exogenous development is transplanted into particular locations but remains externally determined. Therefore, initiatives for supporting endogenous development need to identify development niches, based on the characteristics of each local situation. In this respect, it is important to identify best practices for growth and local development.

5. Thematic tourism is one of the activities that have the potential to contribute to the economic development of disadvantaged European regions. It can be connected with the cultural and historical heritage of a specific region, with ethnography, gastronomy, traditional music and handicrafts – or with religion (for example, tourism generated by the European cultural routes, valorised in particular by the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme).

6. In this context, the Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the involvement of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) in promoting tourism and underlines the major role that local and regional authorities can play in this field. It therefore encourages local and regional authorities in member states to develop new concepts of tourism, with a view to striking a balance between the exploitation of the cultural heritage for commercial purposes and its responsible and sustainable use.

7. The Assembly also encourages the European Association of Historic Towns and Regions to work, in close co-operation with the Congress, on drafting guidelines for cultural tourism which could be applied throughout Europe as a tool, *inter alia* for the economic development of less developed regions.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2011 (see Doc. 12776, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Galati).

8. The Assembly invites member states to adapt their national institutional, legal and commercial frameworks so as to promote a more favourable environment for the economic development of crisis-stricken regions in Europe, notably by:

8.1. considering the best practices in the field of endogenous development when implementing local development policies in economically weak territories;

8.2. strengthening the development of alternative forms of tourism (thematic tourism) as a catalyst for local development, in particular in regions and areas having recently experienced economic difficulties;

8.3. implementing measures allowing the pooling together of geographically scattered tourist sites having common denominators in terms of thematic tourism, in order to create “tourism clusters” able to provide enough interest to attract a critical mass of tourists;

8.4. taking note of the specific potential represented by senior citizen tourism and encouraging its development;

8.5. encouraging the reinvestment of benefits derived from tourism in goods and services across the country (infrastructure, education and training, research and development), with a view to determining economic growth capable of promoting sustainable development;

8.6. bringing together economic players actively involved in the development of a given region, through round-table meetings which include public bodies and all potential stakeholders.