



## Recommendation 1835 (2008)<sup>1</sup>

# Sustainable development and tourism: towards quality growth

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe has a long and successful history of attracting visitors: it remains the world's most visited region offering a wealth of experiences in distinct history, scenery, culture and lifestyles. Seven European countries – France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria and the Russian Federation – are among the world's 10 most visited destinations. Overall, nearly half of all visitors globally (478 million) travelled in European countries in 2007, and tourist flows in Europe are expected to double in the next two decades as mobility and the affordability of travel increase with globalisation. This is both a development challenge and an opportunity if European countries want to stay competitive in the global contest for the gains in prosperity that tourism provides.

2. People-to-people contacts generated through travel and tourism can facilitate mutual understanding and international diplomacy. They help to build a community of values in Europe which stands out as an example on the global scene. European countries, as represented by the Council of Europe, should put human beings and sustainability at the heart of their development policies, not least as regards tourism. A long-term vision and a holistic approach to development are necessary for Europe to lead the way as the most popular and successful tourist destination.

3. Expanding on average by 3% to 4% every year, tourism has grown into a major economic activity in Europe, directly accounting for some 24 million jobs, 4% of cumulative GDP and €237 billion in annual revenue. A quarter of all tourism is linked to business travel in support of wealth creation, skills and technology transfer, entrepreneurship and connections between markets. In the last few years, the development of tourism has been particularly dynamic, although uneven, in central and eastern Europe, enabling the region's countries to catch up with its western European neighbours in terms of economic development and living standards but also creating major socio-economic pressures as a result of swelling visitor flows. It is essential to concentrate efforts on promoting the development of quality tourism in these states and across the whole of Europe to allow tourism to make a substantial and lasting contribution to overall balanced and sustainable development while avoiding the excesses seen at some mass tourism destinations.

4. The quantitative and qualitative aspects can and should be reconciled through the sustainable development of tourism based on a synergy of economic, social, environmental and cultural benchmarks. Promoting diversity, authenticity and quality in tourism is the key to lasting success. Economic viability, local prosperity, quality of employment, social equity, visitor fulfilment, local control, community well-being, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity are imperatives that should be taken into account for shaping a long-term development vision and strategies.

5. Safety and security are major prerequisites for tourism and travel to prosper. Although Europe has a good reputation for safety, it is not immune to security threats. Council of Europe member states must stay vigilant and reflect on how security could further be improved at all levels in a discreet way and in full respect for human rights, ethical values and the rule of law. It is necessary for the Council of Europe member states to review their alert and crisis management systems (including evacuation plans), their communication with the

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1. *Assembly debate* on 18 April 2008 (18th Sitting) (see [Doc. 11539](#), report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr José Mendes Bota); [Doc. 11561](#), opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mrs Carina Ohlsson and [Doc. 11580](#), opinion of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Kent Olsson). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 18 April 2008 (18th Sitting).



public regarding security and their cross-border co-operation arrangements. The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly should also study more closely the legitimacy of new security demands for transatlantic travel recently presented by the United States Administration with regard to European states.

6. With new technologies, evolving consumer behaviour and simplified travel planning, congestion is increasingly frequent in transport, accommodation and tourist sites in many European holiday destinations and business hubs, while many peripheral or secondary locations, on the contrary, suffer from a lack of visitor attention. Congestion causes stress to visitors, disruption to local communities and often a deterioration of tourist sites and services. There is an urgent need to better manage tourist flows in order to optimise the use of facilities and resources geographically and time-wise.

7. Our lifestyles, well-being and economies will be gradually affected by climate change. In Europe, northern and southern regions and mountain, island and coastal areas are likely to suffer the worst effects but all countries will have to face more intense and frequent climatic disorders and extremes, such as heatwaves, droughts, heavy precipitation or storms, and related problems, including forest fires, floods, effects on wildlife and biodiversity, coastal erosion, infrastructure damage, infectious diseases, fluctuating water levels and lack of resources. As a highly climate-sensitive sector – like agriculture, energy, insurance and transport – tourism needs to adapt and contribute to global efforts to tackle climate change, essentially through cuts in greenhouse gas emissions from transport and accommodation.

8. In many countries there are provisions in general legislation and labour law guaranteeing paid holidays for employees and regulating the conditions for taking them. Europe and most of the rest of the world have opened up to tourism and have greatly simplified the administrative formalities imposed on tourists. Because the gap in incomes is increasing, as can be observed in all our countries, almost 40% of the population can no longer afford a holiday, either in their home country or abroad. Families, senior citizens, immigrants, the young and people with disabilities are particularly affected. Greater attention to the social aspects of tourism could help to reduce the seasonality of demand and excessive geographical concentrations of travellers, and support more stable year-round employment and the development of disadvantaged regions, especially if more tourists could be persuaded to travel outside the high season and/or the busiest areas. Several important issues should be addressed: the physical accessibility of tourist destinations and sites, the economic affordability of holiday travel and better information on travel options for potential travellers with special needs.

9. Tourism enriches when it takes place in a balanced way resulting in a win-win situation for both visitors and hosts. If state authorities and international institutions are primarily responsible for providing political commitment and policies conducive to sustainability in tourism, local and regional authorities are responsible as well for the promotion of environmentally friendly tourism in their respective areas. The contribution of the private sector is critical for yielding results on the ground and providing feedback to policy makers. Public and private actors should work together to agree, implement and monitor the integrated quality management approach respectful of reference-quality standards for tourism services and products. Whilst tourism and sectoral associations can act as information relays between state authorities and local actors, public-private partnerships might serve to realise pilot projects, promote corporate social responsibility and implement equitable employment schemes, improved pricing models, innovative destination marketing and investment planning compatible with environmental, cultural and social imperatives.

10. Tourism is first and foremost about people of all ages, interests and skills. Quality tourism contributes to cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Quality tourist services require dedicated and competent people involved as local inhabitants or tourism professionals. Hospitality, which implies a caring attitude towards people, traditions and heritage, and knowledge of foreign languages, plays an increasingly prominent role. It goes together with sustainability based on responsible consumption and production patterns to minimise resource waste and pollution, and emphasis on value rather than volume. These notions should be taught early on, at school. A fair share of revenue from tourism should be reinvested in local development.

11. Sustainable development of tourism holds much promise for Europe and beyond. Growth and sustainability are compatible targets when properly managed. Development challenges, which stem from evolving lifestyles, economic growth and restructuring, demographic trends and globalisation, call for calibrated national, regional and local but also collective, pan-European responses. In this context, the Assembly underlines the importance of studying the implications of tourism growth on infrastructure development in Council of Europe member states.

12. The Parliamentary Assembly therefore asks the Committee of Ministers to incite governments of the Council of Europe member states to:
- 12.1. ally long-term thinking, best practices and a sum of ambitious economic, social, environmental and cultural benchmarks for shaping national tourism development policies;
  - 12.2. screen the compatibility of national tourism legislation and policies with the principles of sustainable development and relevant Council of Europe conventions in the environmental and cultural fields;
  - 12.3. involve tourism in the implementation of existing commitments under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change with its Kyoto Protocol and contribute to the preparation of the new package of measures for the post-2012 period;
  - 12.4. support the implementation of international co-development policies, including the Millennium Development Goals, environmental agreements, the World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, the Clean Development Mechanism, and multilateral and bilateral aid programmes, in order to help the emerging economies to match their development needs with the drive for more tourism;
  - 12.5. promote domestic – intra-country and intra-European – tourism whereby distances travelled are shorter and means used can rely more on public transport;
  - 12.6. mitigate the impact of carbon emissions due to long-haul travel and transport, not least through the 'polluter pays' principle and a greater participation by European airlines in the European Union Emission Trading Scheme, as well as via tax incentives encouraging a shift from road to rail in the transport of goods through major European transit corridors;
  - 12.7. encourage responsible consumption and production patterns minimising resource waste and pollution (especially as regards water and energy use, recycling, waste management, forward planning, etc.) and propagating meaningful alternatives (such as greater recourse to renewable resources, public transport, sustainable construction, etc.) in providing tourism services;
  - 12.8. promote the sharing of knowledge and good practice on sustainable tourism development with other countries and regions;
  - 12.9. consider restructuring national tourism organisations to work as public-private partnerships;
  - 12.10. promote rural tourism, in particular in less developed regions, by using incentives – including of a financial nature – to stimulate the inhabitants of those regions to consider developing tourism as a possible secondary income;
  - 12.11. support the development of family-friendly travel and accommodation options, for example by creating foundations for the promotion of family holidays which offer suppliers an additional incentive for developing new services for the target group;
  - 12.12. accelerate the implementation of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015;
  - 12.13. encourage and facilitate travel to various European destinations by certain categories of travellers (the young, the elderly, families, repeat/experienced visitors and especially people with disabilities who have specific needs and for whom lack of adequate infrastructures can discourage them from travelling as tourists) as a means of ensuring a more even geographical and seasonal spread of visitor flows across European regions;
  - 12.14. carry out regular national and enterprise security audits;
  - 12.15. establish or designate, as may be appropriate, multilingual national tourist safety focal points and emergency call centres;
  - 12.16. encourage the provision of multilingual material in museums and other places frequented by tourists and to abandon the discriminatory practice, wherever it still exists, of not allowing foreign tourist guides who nevertheless satisfy the quality standards in force in the country visited;
  - 12.17. reassess their alert and crisis management systems (including evacuation plans), their security communication with the public and their cross-border co-operation arrangements;
  - 12.18. make better use of new security and defence technologies for civil protection, including in the tourism sector;

- 12.19. set up regulatory incentives and binding minimum targets for promoting sustainable construction and renovation of buildings;
  - 12.20. seek to channel a fair share of direct and indirect income generated from tourist visits towards the protection, maintenance and appropriate development of cultural and natural assets;
  - 12.21. support the development of tourism as an alternative source of local income and jobs in areas undergoing economic decline and depopulation, especially in rural and mountainous regions;
  - 12.22. promote quality certification schemes for tourist services and products;
  - 12.23. study the feasibility of including hospitality and sustainable development concepts into school curriculums;
  - 12.24. ensure the effective protection of tourists' consumer rights.
13. The Assembly invites the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to:
    - 13.1. study the impact and implications of low-cost travel on local development and employment conditions with a view to possibly formulating guidelines on the matter;
    - 13.2. carry out comparative studies of visitor management frameworks and prepare guidelines on the subject;
    - 13.3. ensure effective local oversight regarding the implementation of regulations on spatial planning;
    - 13.4. encourage local and regional authorities to promote rural tourism while fully respecting the principle of sustainable development.
14. The Assembly invites national parliaments to ensure that national legislation is in place with a view to orienting investors, tourists and other stakeholders and ensuring an appropriate government response to sustainable tourism development issues.