TASK FORCE ON CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Towards an effective transferring of tourism project results for the Intermediterranean Commission Regions in a post COVID context

July 16, 2021

WELCOME ADDRESS AND OPENING SESSION

Ms Elodie Nunes, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission (CPMR-IMC), opens the Task Force meeting announcing that it will address the challenges of the tourism sector after the pandemic. In particular, a series of tools produced by some cooperation projects on sustainable tourism will be presented, with the objective of contributing to regional policies and nourishing reflections on the recovery. The meeting will be divided in two times: a first session, moderated by the CPMR staff, will introduce the results of a survey launched in spring 2021 on the impacts of COVID-19 on the territories of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission member regions and beyond, as well as the tools elaborated by two Interreg MED projects for which the CPMR is full partner, HERIT DATA and WINTER MED; a second session, hosted by the Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community, will present three more projects and the related tools, which may be used in the future in the different territories.

To introduce the Task Force meeting, Mr George Alexakis, Vice Governor of Kriti Region and Coordinator of the Intermediterranean Commission Task Force, recalls some background elements such as the strong interest of Mediterranean regions in tourism, as well as the Political Agenda adopted in 2018 by the Commission on Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean. He mentions the main priorities defined by the Agenda and the Task Force on tourism, including: to stimulate performance and competitiveness; to improve knowledge in the field; to strengthen sustainability; and to enhance the mainstreaming of sustainable and cultural tourism. In line with these priorities, indeed, the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission projects on sustainable tourism deal with management and planning aspects, indicators and decision support systems, ecotourism, seasonality, innovative technologies and open data, governance, and empowerment/capacity building of and for the tourism sector.

He underlines that the huge shock provoked by the COVID-19 related crisis requires a renewed commitment to build a more resilient tourism economy, throughout stronger coordination and multi-level governance. In this sense, the meeting is a first step to respond to the needs identified throughout the survey and help regions to transfer and capitalize appropriate solutions: the meeting’s outcomes should help public administrations orient priorities but also feed policy recommendations, by integrating the project results into policymaking.
**INTRODUCTION**

Ms Claudia Guzzon, Project and Policy Officer at the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission, recalls that the Intermediterranean Commission is also strongly involved in advocacy actions oriented to reinforce the resilience of the tourism sector. As a follow-up to last year's Intermediterranean Commission broad Study on the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in the Mediterranean, this year the Commission distributed a second survey among its regions in order to gather more updated information on the recovery of the sector. This survey was also shared with members from the Islands (CPMR-IC) and the Balkan & Black Sea Commissions (CPMR-BBSC), to gather broader insights on the situation. In particular, this 2021 Survey mainly focused on the needs and kinds of support that the regions need towards a sustainable recovery of the tourism sector, and it placed special attention to potentially useful tools and methodologies stemming from EU cooperation projects. With the help of the MED Sustainable Tourism Community, great efforts have been made to match the priorities and support needs identified through the survey with existing available tools and methodologies. The agenda of the meeting of the Intermediterranean Commission Task Force on Culture and Sustainable Tourism has been therefore built according to the outcomes of the survey and this matching exercise presented in detail to the participants.

Ms Lou-Anne Ritter, Project and Policy Officer from the CPMR Islands Commission, highlights that sustainable maritime & coastal tourism in EU islands is a priority area within the Islands Commission tourism strategy. Based on the EU Blue Economy Report 2021, tourism has been one of the hardest hit sectors by the COVID-19 crisis and Mediterranean islands, that strongly rely on the sector, have been heavily affected. Therefore, islands’ situation should be specifically considered when undertaking any actions tackling the impact of the crisis and the recovery of the sector. To this end, the Islands Commission is currently developing a technical and political note on tourism to integrate the special islands’ view within the reflections on the future of the sustainable tourism policies. Additionally, the Islands Commission insists on the importance to ensure that the Recovery and Resilience Plans will effectively support the recovery in the islands’ tourism sector and regions have a key role to play in this. Additional public funds and smart solutions for the recovery of air and maritime flows appear to be crucial for the islands, as it is the development of a European Tourism policy with a strong territorial dimension and the creation of a Directorate General specifically dealing with tourism issues from the European Commission.

**SESSION 1 - TOOLS FOR BETTER MANAGING TOURIST FLOWS AND ITS NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON TERRITORIES ON THE EVE OF THE POST-COVID RECOVERY**

**HERIT DATA**

Moderation: Ms Lise Guennal, Senior Project Officer at the CPMR

Mr Davide Bruno from Regione Toscana, Lead Partner of HERIT DATA, presents to the audience the project’s partnership and approach. He stresses that the aim of the project is to benefit citizens and tourists at the same time but also, in general terms, reach every single actor involved in tourism. As a four-year project it is currently in its implementing phase. The first benchmark phase allowed to get a summary of the pilots’ cities status, plus a dashboard. Stakeholders were able to collect data input during the COVID-19 pandemic: in this sense, although tourist flows were reduced, and thus some data missing, the project activities managed to keep running. In the framework of HERIT DATA, one of the main outputs presented during the meeting is the Snap4city platform, an “umbrella” platform collecting data to support local policies and integrate already existing apps which work with tweets flows. In this sense, the project open platform intends to create synergies with local and pre-existing apps developed by the competent authorities in order to access to wider information and data.
**Political and technical feedback from member Regions**

**Dr. Georges Patoulis**, Governor of Attica Region, stresses the importance of integrating coastal tourism strategies into the Blue Economy, in order to strengthen the interest of civil society in the topic. Indeed, despite the COVID-19 pandemic context, authorities have been systematically working for the development of the islands and the coastal area of Attica region, with a focus on integrated planning for marine tourism - and especially for yacht tourism, diving activities but also health tourism. Local authorities have a strong interest in promoting a central role for coastal and island areas first and foremost in the innovation of the Blue Economy, also investing for the benefit of local communities. In this context, it’s worth mentioning that the European Committee of the Regions drafted an opinion on a more sustainable tourism for the municipalities and regions of the European Union, highlighting the potential of navigation and water sports. Attica Region perceives Blue Growth as "a new development mindset" for the sustainable development of the maritime/marine economy, while recognizing the importance of protecting the marine ecosystem and the sustainable use of resources. In relation to the topics discussed in the session, he closes mentioning an inspiring project related to the development of the cultural - tourist route of the Sacred Way of the Sea, designed to promote the regions of Western Attica and, in particular, the municipalities of the sea route from Piraeus to Elefsina.

**Ms Angelika Sauermost**, Tourism Quality Project Manager from Occitanie Region, partner of HERIT DATA, presents the Pilot Site of Pont du Gard (Occitanie Region, France), which is the most visited site of the region, and as an open ancient and historical spot is not easy to manage. However, a sustainable approach is being applied to this pilot site and interaction tools are created to invite visitors to choose the best moment to come and visit it, for instance, helping avoid overcrowded situations. Transferring results and lessons learned from this pilot activity to other Occitanie Heritage sites as well as other regions, like for example Region Sud, is key to help make strategic decisions to better orient the tourism management of territories.

**WINTER MED**

*Moderation: Ms Flora Leroy, Project and Policy Officer at CPMR Intermediterranean Commission*

**Dr. Eudokia Balamou** from Larnaca and Famagusta Districts Development Agency (Cyprus), partner of WINTER MED, presents the project partnership, its calendar, key outputs and its main goal, which is to implement an integrated transnational strategy for all-year-round sustainable and responsible tourism in Mediterranean island destinations. Following a brief explanation of the reasons for Cyprus' participation, and how the tourism sector works in this territory, she describes the Tourism Action Plan developed for Cyprus as an all-year round destination, supporting participation processes with several tourism actors and close collaboration with citizens as a priority. She finally introduces the 2030 Cyprus Vision and its strategic Map, providing some examples of drivers and measures that have been considered and outlining the key action areas where Cyprus is mainly involved.

**Political and technical feedback from member Regions**

**Mr Jean Dominique Cesari**, Project Officer at Corsica Tourism Agency, partner of WINTER MED, explains the project approach in Corsica highlighting that the French region, as is the case for other partner regions, is addressing seasonality with the help of a road map. The main aim for the region is to no longer be considered as a beach destination but rather a cultural destination: for instance, as Corsica is a mountainous destination exploiting this aspect seems crucial to convert this “beach destination” perception. The connectivity element as well is a priority to be considered by regional authorities as after the summer season, transports’ connections are usually reduced. Investments allowing to expand the tourism period as much as possible and keep the jobs all-year around are therefore of outermost importance.
Ms Lorena Vidas, Project Manager at ANCI Toscana, Lead Partner of WINTER MED, shares the Italian experience of Tuscany Region within the project, explaining that a co-methodology involving public and private stakeholders have been applied in order to implement specific actions for the tourism sector in a short period of time. She highlights, furthermore, the importance of building capacity within the region and among municipalities as well as ANCI capacity to build a larger connection with other municipalities within the association.

Conclusion: Opening the way for Capitalization

Ms Flora Leroy, Project and Policy Officer at the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission recalls that the capitalisation phase of WINTER MED project officially started in July 2021 and that more results will be available by the end of the year, among which the transnational strategy and a policy paper based on the key conclusions of the regional action plans. In addition to that, a Protocol Agreement to foster tools replication will be promoted, and an Advocacy Campaign will be launched through events such as the one planned in October 2021 with the EP SEArica Intergroup. Finally, the project will continue to engage new Mediterranean regions also through a new Tourism Task Force meeting foreseen at the end of the year 2021. In the meantime, bilateral meetings might be also organised to share more detailed information on WINTER MED’s methodology and available tools.

Ms Lise Guennal, Senior Project Officer at the CPMR points out that HERIT DATA also continues to develop the activities of the transfer and capitalisation phases, and the partnership is available to provide any further information to help replicate the tools presented. The capitalisation strategy is being implemented with Region Occitanie, and in this context, a mainstreaming tool will be delivered soon, as well as a Memorandum of Understanding to be approved before the final conference in 2022.

Session 2 - Towards a sustainable recovery of tourism in the Mediterranean

Mr Josep Rodriguez from Diputació de Barcelona, Lead Partner of the MED Sustainable Community (MED STC) Projects, introduces the second session of the Task Force meeting. Among 24 projects which are part of the MED STC, three projects have been selected throughout the 2021 Survey launched by the Intermediterranean Commission to be presented in this session. A catalogue including previous projects and 39 outputs ready to be used and transferred is also available online. As a general remark, he also points out that, despite most of the projects were designed in a pre-COVID context, the outputs produced could be perfectly adapted to current trends and scenario.

EMBLEMATiC

From the EMbleMatiC network, Mr Konstantinos Zapoundis, Pieriki Anaptixiaki: Local Development Agency, Communication Manager of EMbleMatiC project, presented the main features of the project funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The network gathers Mediterranean territories facing common challenges and selected throughout specific criteria, among which “institutional recognition”, “power of inspiration”, “Mediterranean cultural identity”, “picturesque landscape”, “particular ecosystem” and “historic places”. After a studying phase of the “emblematic” aspects of the territories, the project led to the creation of 9 ecojourneys, conceived with local inhabitants and stakeholders, which have then been transferred to local policy makers. Having been asked how to replicate the EMbleMatiC methodology, the project representative invites anyone interested to join the network to work together on the creation of an ecojourney.

MEDCYCLETOUR

Ed Lancaster and Ivan Ratkovic from the European Cyclists’ Federation presented the MEDCYCLETOUR project of which they were partners. This project ran for over three years aiming to further develop and promote the EuroVelo 8 – Mediterranean Route and use it as a tool to influence regional and national
policies in favour of sustainable tourism, with a focus on cycling tourism. To this end, the project issued two key capitalisation tools. On the one hand, the so-called Charter for sustainable and responsible cycle tourism in the MED area, to transfer the knowledge gained in the framework of the project. The Charter, still open to regions willing to sign up, seeks to contribute to the economic sustainability of destinations and to develop and promote cycling tourism in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the partnership developed a series of Policy Recommendations to influence policy actions to achieve quality cycling routes and destinations. Once the project reached its end, the consortium decided to extend some of the actions and activities through a Long-Term Management Agreement. Therefore, the project is now seeking destinations interested and placed around the EuroVelo 8 (Albania, Italy, Montenegro, Greece & Cyprus) to join.

**SHAPETOURISM**

**Mr Dario Bertocchi** from the University of Ca’ Foscari in Venice presented the project ShapeTourism, a one-and-a-half-year project consisting of a single studying module. The project identified indicators to better understand and provide information on tourism in the Mediterranean to effectively support the decision-making. Crossing several typologies of regional and national indicators, big data and visitors’ opinions, ShapeTourism led to the creation of an Observatory, taking inspiration from the Travel Tourism Connectivity Index of the World Economic Forum. In particular, the Observatory shows information on competitiveness, destination performance and regional variability, and displays data on an interactive map of the Mediterranean divided into regions (NUTS2). A second tool presented, the Caring Capacity Scenarios Simulator, monitors growth and impacts in terms of intensity, density and employment, and is able to make predictions. The data available, based on Eurostat and ESPON datasets, are currently updated to 2015, but more recent data will be uploaded by August 2021.

**Debate with participants & MED STC assessment questionnaire**

A question is raised for **Mr Kostantinos Zapoundis** on how other destinations may uptake the EMbleMatIC ecojourneys and meet the necessary criteria. He answers by inviting the interested regions to contact the network in order to verify the parameters.

Successively, **Mr Stavros Kalognomos** shares some information on opportunities for further exchanges between the CPMR Intermediterranean and the Balkan and Black Sea Commissions. He firstly mentions the AINURECC PLUS Initiative, which operates in the fields of sustainable tourism, cultural and creative industries and circular economy, capitalizing on the results of previous initiatives. The first related event on sustainable tourism will take place in autumn 2021 and its activities will contribute to the implementation of cultural and creative regional ecosystems in the ADRION macroregion. He particularly points how cultural and creative industries have direct impact in tourism and the value chain of other sectors as food or fashion. Actions in this thematic area are led by Western Greece, Tuscany and Aragon regions. He also mentions the project CultourE4Youth, supporting youth entrepreneurship in cultural tourism for coastal areas, engaging young people up to the age of 30, governments agencies, business operators, and training institutions in coastal communities in the geographical area of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine. The project will have the Mersin Region as a case study and will consolidate its results in a dedicated workshop in Batumi, Georgia.

Following a Mentimeter interactive survey to better understand the interest of regions in replicating the tools presented, **Mr Josep Rodríguez** raises a question related to the issues identified in view of the replication of those tools. In this context, **Dario Bertocchi** points out in particular the lack of some “data translator actors” that would help use the data provided by ShapeTourism. Indeed, he claims the need to have this kind of profiles in tourism management offices, to enhance a data driven approach for tourism strategies. As for the MedCycleTour project, **Ed Lancaster** expresses the need for more networking, being tourism organisations only a part of the different stakeholders of sustainable tourism: infrastructures managers, local cycling groups, experts, public transport operators, service providers are also crucial.
actors to be involved. Mr Kostas Zapoundis also reiterated the need to bring together different actors and organisations, to ensure and better support the replication of these tools.

To conclude, Mr Josep Rodriguez finally makes some comments on the issue of funding, which is indeed a crucial aspect to allow a proper replication of the tools presented. In this regard, he also mentions that the MED STC in the next six months, is planning to analyse to what extent the recovery plans in Mediterranean countries and programmes of the 2021-2027 agenda will include investments for sustainable tourism. In that sense, he hopes that the tools produced will be somehow integrated in mainstream programmes. Moreover, the MED STC will then contribute with some concrete policy recommendations on what type of investments and activities should be funded.

**Conclusions and Next Steps**

Ms Claudia Guzzon Project and Policy Officer at CPMR Intermediterranean Commission recalls that the regions keen on replicating some of the tools showcased can contact the Intermediterranean Commission team or the MED Sustainable Tourism Community to arrange bilateral meetings with the project representatives. The Intermediterranean Commission is planning to organize a follow-up meeting by the end of 2021 that will be focused on presenting tools of other ongoing projects in which the Intermediterranean Commission together with the Islands Commission are involved as partner: SMARTMED, BESTMED and DESTIMED PLUS. Finally, she mentions the recently launched call for replication of the INCIRCLE project, in which the Commission is associate and asks interested regions to get in contact for further details.

Ms Elodie Nunes, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission closes the meeting recalling to participants that the EU Commission has recently launched an interesting Stakeholders consultation on the transition pathway for tourism that will be open until mid-September. She encourages both regional administrations interested and the Sustainable Tourism Community to participate and ideally share their answers with the Intermediterranean Commission, who will also provide its input.