ENPI-MED PROGRAMME

PROJECT:

MEDITERRANEAN EXPERIENCE OF ECO-TOURISM (MEET)

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1 EXISTING APPROACHES

1.1 GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CRITERIA

In 2008, the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Partnership) - a coalition of more than 50 organizations working together to foster increased understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles- developed a set of baseline criteria organized around the four pillars of sustainable tourism: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits to the local community; reduction of negative impacts to cultural heritage.

The Partnership was initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are the minimum requirements that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation. To develop these criteria, the GSTC Partnership consulted with sustainability experts and the tourism industry and reviewed more than 60 existing certification and voluntary sets of criteria already being implemented around the globe. In all, more than 4,500 criteria were analyzed and the resulting draft criteria received comments from over 2000 stakeholders.

GSTC seeks to recognize standards and certification programs that comply with the GSTC Criteria for sustainable tourism, that does not refer only at creating a new standard.

Since the launch of the criteria in October 2008, the GSTC Partnership focused on engaging all tourism stakeholders – from purchasers to suppliers to consumers – to adopt the criteria.

Criteria for destinations can be checked at http://www.gstcouncil.org/sustainable-tourism-gstc-criteria/criteria-for-destinations.html

1.2 EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM (ECST) IN THE PROTECTED AREAS

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool for ensuring that tourism contributes to a balanced economic, social and environmental development of protected areas in Europe. The Charter is a voluntary agreement and aims to encourage good practice by recognising protected areas, which are meeting agreed requirements for the sustainable development and management of tourism. The Charter and the Charter Network is managed by the EUROPARC Federation, a pan-European and non-governmental umbrella organization of protected areas in Europe. For more info visit http://www.european-charter.org/home/

10 CHARTER PRINCIPLES:

    I.   Partnership

II.   Common Strategy

III.   Conservation, protection of natural resources

IV.   High quality of tourism

V.   Effective, realistic, correct communication

VI.   Typical local tourism products

VII.   Good knowledge, training of all actors involved

VIII. Not negative impact of tourism on local residents

IX.   Economical advantages for local residents

X.   Monitoring all impacts of tourism

ECST PROCESS:

Part I: for the Protected Area

1. Realization of the Diagnostic Report, a study about social, economical, environmental and tourism aspects of the territory.

2. Creation of a Forum: working table with Park and all local stakeholders (local authorities, tourism operators, associations, etc...) to discuss the diagnostic report, to identify the strategy, to elaborate the action plan, to monitor the implementation of the action plan, etc...

3. Identification of a common Strategy and elaboration of an Action Plan for the next 5 years. The Action Plan must contain actions to be implemented by all different actors of the Forum. All actions must be based on at least one or more of the 10 Charter Principles.

4. Verification by Europarc Federation.

5. If positive, ECST official Certification.

6. Next 5 years: implementation of the Action Plan + regular meetings of the Forum

7. After 5 years: re-evaluation.

Part II: for local tourism businesses

The partnership between any individual tourism sector business (local tourism service provider) and the protected area requires commitment to:

1. an understanding of needs and the impact that tourist activity has on the natural environment;

2. a mutual agreement that tourism creates a positive contribution to the social and economic development of the area, thus contributing to a better place to live in for local people;

3. analysis and agreement of the compatibility of tourism products and services within the protected area to ensure they do not destroy the natural or cultural heritage;

4. a diagnosis by the respective business on all its activity. For example:

   - the balance between what is on offer and what visitors expect (balance between demand and supply);

   - provision of local, protected area and environmental information (excellent customer service and ongoing staff training);

   - a review of environmental consideration, energy and transport in the operation of the business;

- formulation of own ideas for environmental sustainability and their practical application, in line with the protected-area management plan;
- measures to encourage visitors to contribute positively through volunteering or visitor-payback to enhance the local heritage or natural environment.

Part III: for tour operators

1. To adopt and respect the principles of sustainable tourism development incorporated in this Charter whilst adapting them to its own activity

2. To define a strategy (1 year) in close partnership with the protected-area authority, in order to include the eco-tourism principles in his own product/service

3. To present this strategy in the form of an action plan (including for instance training activities, cooperation with the Protected Area managing body, etc.)

1.3 EUROPEAN ECOTOURISM LABELLING STANDARD (EETLS) – ECOLNET PROJECT

The European Ecotourism Network (EEN) is a network of organisations aiming to ensure that ecotourism services in Europe contribute to a genuine conservation and sustainability effort.

EEN supports the development and implementation of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) - an initiative that ensures baseline standards of quality in ecotourism while avoiding at the same time green-washing and unsustainable operations.

EEN supports the training resources and the quality evaluation tools developed by the ECOLNET project, which are accessible online and free to use by all EEN members.

The European Ecotourism Knowledge Network (ECOLNET) is a 3-year project 2010-2013) co-financed by the European Commission, Lifelong Learning Programme, Transversal Programmes, Key Activity 3 – ICT Networks.

ECOLNET aims to create an Ecotourism network to bring together a variety of stakeholders and develop innovative evaluation tools and learning products for sharing knowledge among the network and facilitating quality certification through the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS). The EETLS was developed by a previous Leonardo da Vinci project (ECO-DESTINET) in compliance with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria of GST Council.

EETLS is made up of 40 specific criteria divided into the four pillars of sustainable tourism, in line with GSTC:

A. Demonstrate effective sustainable management.

B. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimise negative impacts.

C. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimise negative impacts.

D. Maximize benefits to the environment and minimise negative impacts.

For the criteria please check http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-ecotourism-standard/en-the-euro-eco-label-stand

1.4 EDEN

The award EDEN "European Destinations of Excellence" is an award offered by the European Commission to prize competitiveness and sustainability in the Tourism sector. It is in place since 2007-2008 and each year chooses a theme (crafts, natural protected areas, aquatic destinations, industrial mining heritage restoration, and accessibility) to be awarded.

Each member of the European Union selects its candidates for participation.

Despite of changing the theme each year, EDEN award follows three permanent criteria in all editions:

- Emerging destination (as the objective of EDEN is to support emerging destinations, not mature destinations or consolidated)

- Sustainability of the activities of the initiative

- Participation of actors

The EDEN award round in 2009 was devoted to the Protected Areas, with the overall criteria to "have developed a new tourism offer based on the enhancement of protected natural areas".

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATING LOCATIONS

1) It is a requirement for acceptance of application that it represents emerging and little known destinations to the general public, with a low visitor density or very low compared to the national average.

2) Candidates should base its offer in areas that are part of the European 2000 network or have the status of "protected area" in accordance with national or regional legislation.

3) The destinations must manage their own tourism offer so as to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

SPECIFIC CRITERIA (For SPAIN, developed by Spanish government)

1. Development of initiatives aimed at the recovery and conservation of protected areas and natural parks through diversified tourist offer: culinary, craft, cultural, sports and nature.

2. Development of tourism offer based on sustainable use of protected areas, natural parks and adjacent areas.

3. Quality of the offer: Quality Systems Certification and of Good Practices in force.

4. Accessibility and destination sign posting: facilities for different types of groups, proper interpretation and signalization of tourism resources, tourist information, tourist guides, maps etc

5. Participation of the local population and contribution of the tourism product to local development based on respect for nature: job creation and diversification, improvement of infrastructure and quality of life in general, establishment of public-private partnerships.

6. Effective communication of the destination to potential tourists: development of actions aimed at promoting the destination as a touristic site. Website available.

7. Teaching and educational character of tourism offer looking at raising awareness of new generations on respect for nature and the environment.

2 STEPS OF AN ECOTOURISM PLANNING APPROACH FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

1. Designing specific features of Mediterranean as ecotourism destination

2. Identifying national needs (from official policies and from actual experiences)

3. Sharing goals and expected results and benefits with all the involved Institutional actors

4. Defining a common methodology of ecotourism planning process

5. Defining a system/set of criteria for assessing ecotourism Plans

6. Defining the main contents of a Mediterranean-tailored approach

3 ACTORS TO INVOLVE

> As "approach-makers": policy makers at local/regional/national level, International Organizations, etc.

> As "approach managers: Protected Areas managing bodies, Local Administrations, public-private consortia, etc.

> As "approach beneficiaries": local communities, local economic actors, local and international Tour Operators, etc.

4 MAIN ELEMENTS FOR A PARTICIPATORY ECOTOURISM PLANNING PROCESS

A. Consistency with existing policies

It's worth mentioning that any approach of ecotourism planning for the Mediterranean should be consistent with the main relevant policies defined by "approach makers" and should clearly put into evidence the different roles played by the various "approach managers".

B. Steering the process

When a planning process is based on participation, the first question is "who" will be the "king maker" of the process: usually the Protected Area Managing body should be, but in the case it does not exist, the overall responsible Institution (e.g.: a Ministry) should identify another actor (better if public, but it could be also a PPP-based body) to start and coordinate the process. Of course, this actor must have a full mandate on the process management and on the implementation of the main decisions taken as results of the process, in order to assure an actual commitment of the Protected Area responsible Institution

C. Involving the stakeholders

Prior to the beginning of the process, the identification of all possible stakeholders ("approach beneficiaries") – at local and national level – who may be interested in an innovative perception and quality for local tourism as well as in a framework of sustainability for every project, activity or entrepreneurship, must be carefully fulfilled. In fact, depending on the specific situation, there is a large range of sectors (agriculture, handicraft, transport, etc.) that may be interested, beside the tourism-related traditional ones, and it must be decided the "degree of representativeness", i.e. if to involve any single institution, economic actor, etc., or to find a body that can represent the specific "interest". Of course this choice influences the efficiency and time length of the participatory process. Local community of course is one of the main stakeholders, but it can not be represented only by the Local administration.

D. Setting the principles

At the initial stage it is very important that all actors previously agree on a common set of principles that should inspire and influence the process (i.e.: participation and partnership, environmental and cultural conservation, quality initiatives, support for local productions, advantages for local communities, transparent communication, assessment and improvement... etc.). Criteria for the assessment of possible Action Plans should directly derive from such principles.

E. Agreeing on goals

Main goal of a participatory planning process is to elaborate a Strategy and an Action Plan for the development of ecotourism in the area. The Strategy should have at least a timeframe of 10 years,

while the Action Plan should at least go through a 5 years period and should include actual actions whose feasibility has been checked during the planning process. Strategy and Action Plan will be the official documents (signed by all the planning process participants) to be considered as the agreed basis for cooperation.

A good participatory planning process can be divided in several steps, below an indicative list with the minimum requirements.

I. Creating the Forum
Once the identified stakeholders have accepted to be part of the planning process, a "Forum" is established, and the first activity is to agree on the Rules of Procedure of such body.

II. Defining the roadmap of the Forum
The "process manager" should steer the Forum in order to design a "roadmap" of the Forum activities, made at least by the following five different steps (mainly meetings), that must be clearly scheduled and agreed by the participants:
1. internal communication and external information tools; mutual introduction; sharing principles and main elements of planning process.
2. Building up a common vision and an overall strategy (through facilitating-related working groups activities that can include "role playing", "simulations", etc.), starting from a shared knowledge of the state-of-play.
3. Definition of the main sectors of action and appointment of working groups(one esp. dealing with the design of ecotourism packages).
4. Gathering of all the actions drafted by the working groups and check of their consistency with process principles; shared definition of Priority Actions among all ones accepted.
5. Final (and formal) approval of Strategy and Action Plan which is signed by all stakeholders in a framework of shared and mutual responsibility (each actor is responsible not only for his actions but for the whole Plan).

III. Implementing the Forum roadmap
When the roadmap is agreed, the Forum should agree on the timetable, because the process for the building of Strategy and Action Plan must have an official start and a reliable closure. Usually such process can take between 6 months and one year, but some situations can need more than one year.

In the case of MEET project, the more likely period should be around 9 months, in order to have the time to implement and test the Pilot Actions (eco-tourism packages); in fact the design of the package (with the identification of the involved actors) should be fulfilled in the dedicated working group, and it must be one of the Priority Actions, in order to be immediately ready – following the signature of the Strategy and of the Action Plan – to be tested with target groups of eco-tourists.

An important element to take care of – while considering the possible effects of actions – is the environmental accountability and sustainability that each action should have, particularly in relationship with biodiversity conservation at various levels. This means that, for those actions which may have some kind of impact on local endangered species or habitats, a careful analysis should be performed in order to imagine possible ways to mitigate or fully avoid such pressures, as well as a

check of the consistency with local or national strategies for biodiversity protection.

Once Action Plan is approved and operating, its management becomes the main task for the "process manager". This management can be supported by specific operational guidelines that may include means, tools and suggestions for periodic monitoring and assessment.

Action Plan must be considered a flexible and open tool which is able to deal with any kind of change that may occur during time in the area. Every change or integration, if needed, should in any case be approved by the forum of stakeholders which is meant to meet at least once a year.

5 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

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