



ATHENS DECLARATION

Of the INTERREG MED Sustainable Tourism Community

We, members of the Sustainable Tourism Community of the INTERREG MED Programme, participating to its 2nd Community building event: « Making tourism more sustainable: Sharing methodologies for a joint action » held in Athens, Greece, on the 4th-5th of October 2017:

- Recognizing the urgent necessity of preserving the exceptional tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage of the Mediterranean basin which attracts each year millions of tourists;
- Concerned by the environmental and social negative impacts of massive seasonal tourist flows, littoralisation and urbanisation of coastal areas in the Mediterranean region and the need for sustainability as well as coordinated approaches to the development, management, and planning of tourism;
- Acknowledging the importance of supporting economic growth and the inclusiveness of all public and private stakeholders within the tourism sector in the Mediterranean region, in a sustainable way that respects both local inhabitants and travellers;
- Recalling the principles of several policies and instruments regulating Coastal and Maritime activities, among which sustainable tourism, including the Maritime Spatial Planning, the Integrated Coastal Zone Management instrument, the UNEP/MAP Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Blue Growth Strategy, the BLUEMED Initiative, the Bologna Charter Initiative and the Integrated Regional Development policies on sustainable tourism;

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- Considering other Mediterranean initiatives aiming to promote the sustainable development of Mediterranean territories, such as the European Commission's West Med Maritime Initiative, the European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, as well as the work of the Union for the Mediterranean on blue economy;
- Taking into account the framework of the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development;

We aim at reaching the four following objectives by the end of 2019:

1) To contribute to address tourism pressures in the Mediterranean region

Convinced that the environment of the Mediterranean basin is exceptional, unique and un-replaceable, and it is essential to preserve it, finding ways to address the issues of urbanization, waste generation, land, water and air pollution, climate change and to reduce the overall footprint of tourism;

Acknowledging the urgent need for solutions to reduce cultural impacts and social gaps generated by mass tourism, exacerbated in some destinations with the development of alternative welcoming services;

Taking into account the need for sustainable management strategies of material, natural and cultural resources in order to avoid conflicts of use, especially regarding energy, water, land and ecosystems; and to address issues related to over-consumption of these resources;

Recognizing a territorial imbalance between coastal areas and hinterlands that needs to be addressed but also represents an opportunity for developing and promoting more responsible and sustainable tourism models, especially in less worldwide known cultural and environmental sites;

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We propose:

- To study planning, management and governance alternatives in marine, coastal and inland areas in order to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism destinations and their surrounding communities;
- To tackle issues regarding water supply and energy demand, for example through alternative waste management processes as opportunities to improve islands energy resilience;
- To ensure an efficient use (consumption) of water and energy as a crucial factor for the sustainable development, the reduction of costs and the increase of the competitiveness of the tourism sector;
- To support exchange of experiences and mutual learning within key actors in tourism destination, in diversification and deseasonalisation of tourist offer, and the identification of more sustainable alternatives for tourism.

2) To enhance attractiveness and tourism offer in the Mediterranean region

Aware of the benefits that the tourism sector is providing to the Mediterranean region and the need to ensure these benefits contribute to the socio-economic development of local populations in the Mediterranean destinations;

Convinced by the high attractiveness of Mediterranean tourism destinations regarding their cultural and natural heritages and the wide diversity of marine, coastal and inland activities;

We aim:

- To adapt tourism offer in an equitable way, respecting and giving voice to both local inhabitants and tourists, respecting the Mediterranean environment and preserving Mediterranean identity, while maintaining a high standard for quality of the visitor experience;

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- To develop strategies for promoting the diversification of tourism offer and the development of inland activities, taking into account the specificities of Mediterranean identity: climate (including foreseen climate change scenarios), landscapes, ecosystems (in the limits of their carrying capacity), stocks of natural resources, social and cultural uses such as architecture, diet, traditions and lifestyle.

3) To strengthen planning and management practices towards sustainable tourism

Concerned by the need for a more coordinated, sustainable and integrated management of tourism and the lack of knowledge, accessible indicators or data available in diverse tourism sectors in the Mediterranean region:

- We aim to develop management and planning strategies and long-term governance mechanisms that will contribute to a better coordination and monitoring of the tourism sector and its interactions and synergies with other sectors in the Mediterranean region;
- We encourage the development and combination of double approaches bottom-up (results at local level can support decision makers and policy makers) and top-down (policies designed taking into account local results can then be better improved at local level);
- We must ensure the tools and strategies developed in the framework of the INTERREG MED Sustainable Tourism Community are relevant, transferrable and user-friendly enough for Mediterranean stakeholders, and that we develop mechanisms to ensure they are maintained and used beyond the project life cycle.

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4) To build a strong community of projects and stakeholders

Emphasizing the need for collaboration and coordination to reach our objectives of developing and promoting sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region:

- We aim to build a community with a positive and significant impact on policy and decision-makers to strengthen initiatives for sustainable tourism;
- We highlight the necessity of taking into account all kind of stakeholders and local actors of the tourism sector to propose inclusive solutions towards sustainable tourism, in particular, tourism enterprises represented through regional and sectorial organisations;
- We believe in a community with the ability to transfer its vision and its knowledge towards Mediterranean non-EU countries and across Europe.

Athens, October 4th-5th, 2017

The INTERREG MED Sustainable Tourism Community

ALTER ECO, BLUEISLANDS, BLUEMED, CASTWATER, CO-EVOLVE, CONSUME-LESS, DestiMED, EMbleMatiC, MEDCYCLETour, MEDFEST, MITOMED+, ShapeTourism, SIROCCO, TOURISMED*

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* the signatory projects are the ones approved by the Interreg Med Programme until January 2017.

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