

Towards Excellence in Cultural Tourism Network Strategic Priorities

Background

The Towards Excellence in Cultural Tourism Network has been established within the framework of the “Towards Excellence in Cultural Tourism” project, co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union, Action 1 - Active Citizens for Europe, Measure 1.2. Networks of Twinned Towns.

The project aims at fostering cooperation at European level between municipalities on the theme of intangible cultural heritage preservation and valorization through cultural tourism. The Municipality of Sandanski is the coordinator of the international initiative and the partners are Härryda Municipality, Sweden; Local Government Association, Malta; Sociedad de Desarrollo de Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain; Municipality of Sepino, Italy, and Municipality of Agia, Greece. The development and implementation of joint coherent strategic framework, consisting of clearly defined long –term and short term strategic priorities and measures is the major objective of the initiative.

Major challenges:

The participating partners have identified the following major challenges to be addressed through the Work of the Network:

1. Inability to develop adequate strategies and products to promote and make use of their tangible and intangible heritage for tourism
2. Inefficiency regarding the valorization and continuation of the local traditions, folk arts and crafts
3. Difficulties with achieving inclusive and sustainable growth
4. Insufficient promotion of the perspective of active ageing and intergenerational learning, leading to the progressive disappearance of important cultural heritage and to difficulty to adapt tourism services for the emerging needs of the market
5. Difficulty to promote and distinguish our territories as tourism destinations in the context of globalization
6. Insufficient visibility of the partner’s territories cultural tourism offer
7. Weak involvement of the municipalities’ rural areas in tourism related activities
8. Insufficient variety and flexibility of the tourism offer and tourism services providers, seasonal distribution of tourist movements
9. Insufficient communication and cooperation among the different stakeholders on local, national and international levels



10. Insufficient know-how on effective marketing and strategic planning, cultural tourism product development, European policies and opportunities for SMEs and creative entrepreneurship sectors growth and expansion.

The Strategy

In order to address the above listed challenges the Network Members adopted long term and short-term strategic priorities to be implemented within the Towards Excellence in Cultural Tourism Network.

The primary purpose of the TECT Strategy is to improve and enhance the Cultural Tourism offer provided by the partnering territories and increase the number of national and international culturally oriented visitors, thus maximize the return to the local communities on their cultural heritage assets. By return, it should be understood the income generated for the local businesses, cultural and artistic organizations, as well as increase in revenues to local governments. The strategy seeks to accomplish this by strengthening the connections between the different stakeholders on local, national and European levels and by implementing joint actions in the following areas:

- 1. Enabling the cultural heritage assets to provide more compelling visitor experiences,**
- 2. Increasing the visibility of cultural tourism assets and products to the target market segments**
- 3. Diversifying the offer the partnering towns have already developed and encouraging the development of new cultural tourism products and attractions, thereby dramatically expanding the potential audience for the local cultural heritage tourism segments.**

I. Short-term strategic priorities

The short-term strategic priorities cover the lifetime of the Towards Excellence in Cultural Tourism project. As stated in the approved TECT project proposal, they are as following:

1. To build a structural network of towns aiming at developing and preserving the local cultural heritage in a sustainable manner as common heritage of European peoples;
2. To organize six different events, which will allow local communities to participate in the building of the Network;
3. To provide the participation of local communities in the decision-making process;
4. To affirm principles of unity and co-operation of the member communities in the light of the process of stabilization in the area;
5. To promote Network members' territories as tourism destinations;
6. To foster international, cross-sectoral cooperation;



7. To optimize cultural tourism through the exchange of good practices;
8. To develop joint projects for the achievement of the objectives of the Network;
9. To increase citizens' knowledge on European policies and the opportunities that the EU provides;
10. To show the importance of preservation and valorization of intangible cultural heritage and the opportunities it provides for entrepreneurship;
11. To promote Active Ageing and inter-generational learning;
12. To enable the youth to make new contacts, find potential employers, meet successful entrepreneurs and learn from their experience;
13. To stimulate the members to co-operate in different projects;
14. To stimulate bilateral exchanges and mutual knowledge between its members;

II. Long – term strategic priorities

The long-term strategic priorities cover the period 2014 – 2020. The long-term strategic priorities are grouped into three major categories:

- 1. Building visibility,**
- 2. Enhancing existing assets**
- 3. Creating new assets**

1. Building Visibility

This group of strategic priorities is geared for improving awareness of the Network members' assets among the target market segments. It includes the following:

A. To create and promote a Joint Events Calendar

The Calendar would be the most comprehensive expression of the core idea of the TECT Network, demonstrating the diversity of Cultural Tourism offer available in the partnering towns.

Actions to undertake:

- Promotion of the local territories through “Signature events” in order to allow the members to emphasize existing cultural events and reach wider audiences.
- Promotion of Cultural and traditional Heritage Celebrations: the partnering towns' cultural diversity provides great opportunities for its joint thematic promotion, and thus, leading to diversification of the cultural and tourism offer of the network members.



B. To engage visitors through the use of ICT

Thanks to advances in technology, there are numerous opportunities to use digital technology to reach the Network's target market segments. For example, interpretive materials available to visitors at historic sites and trails have traditionally been provided through brochures and maps. The increase of such on-site interpretation is being shifted to digital applications available to the visitor through the Web or through their cell phones.

Actions to undertake:

- Development and enrichment of ICT based promotional and dissemination services and products
- Creation of thematic joint ICT based services and products
- Organization of information and education campaigns targeted at local communities for the use of ICT for promotion of business and services
- Development of GIS maps, promoting the traditional local products and cultural events

C. To promote and enlarge the Network throughout Europe

The expansion of the Network to other European communities will highly enhance its visibility and will create further opportunities for the promotion of local cultural heritage, business and entrepreneurship development and successful creation and marketing of new cultural tourism products.

Actions to undertake:

- Invite each partner's international partners (twinned towns, etc.)
- Promote the Network – Committee of Regions, Associations of Towns, etc.
- Involve new partners in future Network initiatives
- Participate and provide information about the TECT project at ongoing youth activities
- Networking with relevant networks of culture and tourism, as:
ECTN

2. Enhancing existing Assets:



The existing cultural tourism offer and attractions can be significantly enhanced if its diverse assets are grouped in packages that appeal to different target groups of culture-oriented tourists.

Actions to undertake:

Enhancing the visitors Cultural Heritage Experience through the targeted use of the intangible cultural heritage through the following actions:

- Linking similarly themed assets, present in the different partners territories, this way promoting them jointly, increasing each partner's tourism offer and encouraging creativity and entrepreneurship through international and cross-sectoral cooperation.
- Emphasizing the importance of active ageing and intergenerational learning through the integration of traditional arts and crafts into already existing tourism assets.
- Promotion and setup of local museums of memory: the setting up of local museums set up through contributions by the local community and managed by a working group, committee or foundation made up of the local community including volunteer guides from the local community.
- Traditional costumes – encourage the research into traditional costumes and folklore as well as tangible and intangible heritage through the community and the inter generational dialogues and informal meetings as a means of keeping this living history and heritage alive within that society as a patrimony for all local residents and visitors.
- Targeting the extended family nucleus for tourism: focussing on inter generational dialogue by involving all the family in experiences of memory and tradition or folklore heritage through personal experiences.
- Visualizing an exchange of good practices on the website.
- Organize in each own town, storytelling through dramatized history tours.
- Creating a documentation database, a list of craft, art forms, musical forms that are endangered. For example bobbin lace, folk dance.
- Create the first European interactive exhibition of arts & crafts.
- Test the import and export of arts & crafts between strategic entrepreneurs among the participating countries.
- -partners should try to implement best practices from other regions from the TECT network: example: Hamrun Local Council is currently implementing a best practice observed during the visit in Agia: a video with traditional crafts/arts performed by the elderly so that the knowledge will be transferred to the younger generation
- -partners should try to contact their regional/national authorities with suggestions for improvement of the cultural tourism sector in their territories.



- Policy commitment is important part for the improvement of the network and members of the network should try to reach the highest level possible:example: Mr Paul Farrugia (president of a region in Malta) will be able to raise certain issues during the Committee of Regions (CoR) sessions.

3. Creating new assets:

A. To facilitate networking and clustering of cultural and tourism stakeholders

Actions to undertake:

Extending the collaboration among different stakeholders in the Network by 20% involving:

- Business partnerships
- Joint cultural tourism products, initiatives, campaigns
- Joint promotional initiatives
- Joint projects in the fields of education, tourism, culture, active ageing

B. To mobilize the full potential for sustainable tourism of the partnering towns

Actions to undertake:

- Developing common strategies and approaches based on environmental and social responsibility, and building on the commitment of various stakeholders
- Facilitating the exchange of best practices
- Development of joint tourism products and projects among the partners with major focus on rural areas.
- Extensive promotion of the Network within local communities
- Organization of citizens' meetings
- Active involvement of professional organizations
- Development of at least one joint initiative annually



C. To develop a Cultural Tourism product ‘agenda’ – a set of events, themes and concepts – both international and regional – on which Cultural Tourism products can be built

Actions to undertake:

- Initiating development of a shortlist of events and ‘unifying concepts’ around which experience-based offers can be built and promoted.
- Stimulating productive communications among members of the ‘supply side’ of Cultural Tourism to build products consistent with the needs of the consumers.
- Implement regular, themed meetings with the stakeholders to share insights and ideas around market opportunities and to stimulate joint product development and marketing collaboration.