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High-Level Forum for Sustainable Tourism

14th of May

Presidency Report

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Thematic Panels

A) HOW CAN SKILLS ENHANCE A BETTER TOURISM?

During the first session of the High-Level Forum for Sustainable Tourism, focused on "How skills can enhance a better Tourism" speakers tried to find some important answered to 3 main questions:

- How to engage knowledge and industry experience to contribute to a successful strategy for the sector?
- How can tourism promote an inclusive labour market by reconciling digital skills with human capital?
- How can we enhance the skills acquired in the field of sustainability?

Tourism is made of people, is a labour sector, so the investment in qualifications and digital skills is crucial to ensure training at all levels of the sector's workforce, namely when a European Agenda for Tourism is being planned.

In the field of education and skills, tourism is faced with the challenge of ensuring the training of future professionals as agents of change, while also ensuring the integration of sustainability into educational and training projects.

From the debate emerged proposals and solutions that seek to reconcile the skills and qualification demands that have always existed in tourism sector with the challenges in enhancing digital, technological and environmental skills and the concerns that the post-pandemic period will demand of employers and workers.

During a very dynamic session, were identified 5 main pillars that should drive the European strategy for training and education on the Tourism sector, aiming to respond to digital and sustainable challenges.

1. Define public policies that reinforce the cooperation within industry, public authorities, social partners, education and business providers to deliver a well prepared and qualified industry, based on paths like upskilling and reskilling of tourism workforce.

2. Tourism must value the difference between workers, bearing in mind that not all tourism workers have the same basic skills and qualifications and that this should not be a factor for leaving anyone behind.

Given the practical nature of the tourism professions, it is important to seek a balance working on new skills, like digital literacy but also, empathy, culture awareness, authenticity, language, and collaborative skills.

Reinforce apprenticeship programs and design specific programs for SME's managers.

At the same time, we need to invest in new teaching and learnings paradigms that combine technology and culture in a more holistic approaches that involve local communities.

Tourism can be the most inclusive sector, attracting talent from different cultures, different ages, different social backgrounds, and the future skills strategy should be defined to integrate these social diversities which in fact can preserve the essence of tourism, which is diversity and differentiation.

3. Skills and training are directly linked to the labour rights component.

As we recently observed at the Social Summit, in Oporto, companies should move towards a progressive increase in the internal training dimension they provide.

In a sector where most companies are SMEs, this challenge may be difficult due to a lack of resources. This should be the fundamental role of central governments: to create and finance capacity building programs for SMEs, focused on the reorganization of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable management models, going through a deep reform of the digital training of the tourism workforce.

 So, for this is crucial to create European tools to better understand, monitoring and continuing adapt tourism skills.

4. The session highlight the importance of Pact for skills and the unique opportunity that he provides with different support mechanisms that will enable stakeholders to work towards skill development, namely by encouraging the effective involvement of individual companies, public organizations, regional and national authorities.
Reinforce the importance of the reskilling and upskilling strategies in order to respond to the speed of innovation and the multiplicity of tourist profiles.

Digitalization is one of the most important trends reshaping economies and societies, and these developments are having a profound transformational impact on tourism.

So, it is crucial that governments prioritize policies to prepare workers for many new jobs and changes to existing ones, empower people with a mix of skills to succeed in a digital world of work, get ready for a massive training challenge, and ensure good jobs for all. Build lifelong learning communities for Cross and mixed learning process.

Concrete ideas were identified, namely the creation of a European Tourism Academy, the creation of a European observatory for tourism skills, and the design of specific European finance program for tourism education and training.

5. Having in mind the previous points, it was pointed the **relevance of having the adequate financial support** to the policy measures from the EU to enhance the Tourism ecosystem and contribute for a safer, cleaner and greener brighter future.

So, in summary, education and training are key to shape skills for the future of Tourism, we have to create more stable and safe jobs, strong ethics on job recruitments, retain highly skills based on excellence, innovation and quality that value the workers.

Create a positive perception of tourism jobs, mapping future needs, prioritize tourism among the European union, building alliances, create strong and collaborative new governance models, bring together the key stakeholders for a strategic and operational approach at the same time, create a collective leadership that can be disseminated among European countries.

B) IS TOURISM ONE STEP AHEAD IN THE DIGITAL TRANSITION AND INNOVATION?

The presidency invited the experts to discuss this topic, having in mind three questions:

- What challenges might digital transformation pose to the industry in the short and long term?

- How can companies enhance visitor interaction based on knowledge of demand?

- What the EU should address to enhance the Tourism ecosystem in this digital transformation time?

The main discussions had a focus, in general, on how the Tourism sector are facing the digital transformation and how the EU can enhance all the ecosystem.

Some topics were identified:

1. The imperative of digital transformation in the tourism industry

The digitalization process of our society has accelerated significantly with the pandemic, forcing to a fast transformation and processes and an increasing importance of digital in the life of citizens and businesses.

The pandemic has also intensified the need for more and better information for consumers as a condition for restoring confidence in a context of lack of safety perception.

Not being digital means being away from consumers and a huge threat to businesses and destinations.

2. The need for a strategy to support digital transformation

This topic was quite interesting. The experts agree that technology and digital should be instrumental to support Europe's tourism strategy.

Instead of forescast, we now have to talk about backcasting.

We are in a moment of disruption and the only thing we know is that the future will be different from the past.

Therefore, Europe and destinations need to clearly define the desirable future and then work backwards to identify policies and programs that will connect that specified future to the present.

The future of tourism, as of the economy in general, will be highly competitive, where intelligence and efficient use of data will be the main conditions for the success of businesses and companies.

This clear definition of the desirable future will be instrumental in implementing the digital transformation roadmap:

- follow closely trends in technology (massive change is expected in the near future);

- investing in science and innovation to ensure the development in Europe of solutions that respond to our strategic needs;

- support investment in the adoption of the digital tools indispensable for the competitiveness of European companies and destinations;

- preparing the tourism workforce for effective use of those digital technologies.

3. The role of the EU

a) Coordination

- Promote the coordination of Member States in the recovery process. Experts pointed out the importance of the successful adoption of the Digital Green Pass as a necessary condition for a fast and effective tourism recovery.

- Ensure transparency in the information provided to consumers. With the lifting of restrictions, the only barrier to travel will be consumer confidence and we will have to give tourists all the information, using digital tools as main tools to engage.

- Promote a fair competition between global players and SME's in the access to technology.

b) Supporting Investment in the digital transformation

The effective recovery of European tourism will require a major investment effort in the coming years to guarantee the capitalization of companies, strongly affected by the pandemic, and the funding of digital transformation investments, essential to guarantee future competitiveness.

Investment in new technologies is essential to improve business models and to better engage with customers. Artificial Intelligence should be a wide used tool and the EU should provide special funding to the innovative Tourism enterprises and specialized innovation hubs to promote a more robust and resilient sector, better prepared for future shocks.

The next MFF and the Next Generation EU should have a special role on the digital transformation of the tourism industry, having in mind the role and impact of the sector within the global economy.

In terms of funding, there should be an effort to be made in terms of promoting the attractiveness of private investment in these areas, which would follow the public investment that will continue to be necessary in the coming years.

c) Creating a business-friendly environment for innovation

Boosting an innovation ecosystem in tourism at European level is essential to strengthen Europe's capacity to accelerate R&D and innovation and cooperation between countries in this field is highly recommended. This is a necessary condition to generate critical mass and to allow Europe to become a global player in travel tech, competing with other global companies.

On the other hand, it is essential to fund programs to support the generation of innovation and the creation of frameworks to facilitate the adoption of innovation throughout the entire value chain, especially by SMEs, connecting the companies and the innovative ecosystem on a continuous basis.

Data access has been also identified as a relevant element in business-friendly environment, and the EU should play an important role in the development open data sharing tools and API's, reducing the data access gap and helping companies to improve their business solutions.

d) Talent

The effective digital transition of the tourism sector requires a huge effort to upskill the tourism workforce, with a strong involvement of universities and research centres that are able to transfer knowledge to companies, in particular to SMEs.

The massive capacity building of tourism workforce in terms of digital skills was mentioned by all participants as being an indispensable strategic investment for the competitiveness of European tourism in this field.

It was also agreed on the need to develop skills in the field of management, sustainability and other relevant soft skills to manage transformation processes, such as creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation.

As mentioned, these above actions and challenges should be tackled in an EU Agenda for Tourism 2030/2050.

C) PROMOTE THE GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION ON TERRITORIES AND REGIONS

The presidency invited the speakers/stakeholders to promote the discussion, having in mind four questions:

- How tourism can help to minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services?

- Which strategies should be designed to provide a fair distribution of economic and social benefits of tourism in communities?

- How can a European Agenda for Tourism help tourism destinations and enterprises to remain competitive and able to prosper?

- How are regions and cities preparing the challenges of sustainability?

The main discussions had a focus, in general, on how the Tourism sector is facing the Green Transition and territorial cohesion, and how the EU can enhance all the ecosystem. Some topics were identified:

1. The recovery of the sector must be based on sustainability. This will allow not only resilience in the face of future crises, but also the resumption of tourism activity under the commitment to do better and with higher levels of security, from an economic, social and environmental point of view.

2. Importance of **increasing the skills of professionals in the tourism sector**, targeting to the European Green Deal objectives and actions plans.

3. Contribute for new opportunities to more **inclusive job growth and reduce inequalities**.

4. Need to leverage existing initiatives and dynamics and give visibility to good practices and inspire everyone to do better, to achieve better results in terms of revenue, the satisfaction of tourists and the preservation of our planet.

5. Rapidly moving towards environmentally safe, zero carbon footprint, and spread over several regions and not concentrated on a few destinations.

6. We need to use the green transition to transform the economy. But the green transition to occur needs the digital transition. We must acknowledge that the green and digital transition are connected, both must occur in parallel. Both are imperative.

7. Prioritizing Quality tourism by developing responsible, eco-friendly, quality tourism over unorderly quantity tourism.

8. Enhance and encourage proximity tourism, Territorial cohesion and focus on Cultural heritage, which promotes a sense of European Identity.

9. Structure an increasingly sustainable offer by qualifying the sector's agents.

10. Promote sustainable destinations and enhance the role of the Tourism ecosystem as a major tool to valorise local communities.

11. We need a European agenda, a wider plan for Europe with guidelines and metrics applied for each European country and avoid fragmented approaches.

12. Create metrics that allow **monitoring for the sector's sustainability** goals:

- Create goals for carbon neutrality in tourism enterprises.
- Sustainable construction in tourist developments.
- Ensure the increase of energy efficiency, water management and waste management, the reduction / elimination of single-use plastic.

13. Data is a powerful ally in delivering useful insights for business or policy decisions. Provide open data, both public and private, as a condition to ensure the future competitiveness of the industry.

14. It is essential to have clear and timely information that allows you to guide public and private investment decisions and evolve in terms of the tools to make this information available quickly, using data visualization tools or dashboards.

15. Promote circular economy practices in tourist destinations and re-educate tourists and tourism agents for a circular and sustainable sector – hotels, restaurants, resorts, golf, etc.

16. Tourism created economic growth, created jobs and prosperity, but before the pandemic in some cases brought also over-tourism problems. **Alternative models are needed for our cities: Mixed uses.** People that live, that work along with visitors and tourists. We need the Skilling/re-skilling of workers, Digital transition for the offer, Green urban Transition and diversification of destinations, connections between cities and surrounding areas.

17. Support local collaborative networks involving tourism, services, local communities.

18. Mobility is an essential part of tourism. Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable goals must increase the offer of sustainable transport services: promote sustainable mobility options and raise awareness of the destinations that offer green and zero-emission mobility.

- The mobility challenge must consider the insular and the periphery regions of the EU.
- The intermodal mobility should also be aware of the access to the depopulated regions and to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Digital mobility is a way that has to be enhanced for every territory of the EU, namely the utmost regions and the most depopulated regions, in order to anchor economic activities, Tourism in particular.

To ensure that the EU has a special attention to the tourism green and territorial transformation into a new sustainable long term business model. In this context the MFF and the Next Generation EU should assure that there is enough and simple financing support.

D) HOW CAN EUROPE SHAPE A EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR TOURISM?

The COVID 19 crisis places has been a major challenge to the Tourism sector and ecosystem. The sector is still on a "survival mode".

Concrete tools like the Digital Green Certificate are the way to promote a strong tourism comeback and

PE and Committee of Regions: synergies between all the players, cooperation between the European, national, regional and local communities.

The Tourism sector can play a role as a major promotor of the comeback of normality of the economic activities and the free movement of people in Europe.

Inclusive Tourism is a very ambitious target and a better tourism as a force for good.

European legislative measures that promotes free movement of citizens and protecting the consumers confidence.

Funding is a key engine for the short and medium-long term challenges of the Tourism sector, with a targeting funding of the actions and priorities that sustainable tourism.

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