



AER COMMITTEE 1 PLENARY MEETING & PRESERVE CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

16-18 MARCH 2010, ALBA IULIA, ALBA (RO)

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and in many regions the single largest source of investment and employment; it is one of the economic activities with most significant potential to generate future growth and employment in the EU. In its narrow definition¹, tourism currently contributes some 4% to EU GDP. Tourism indirectly generates more than 10% of EU GDP and provides about 12% of all jobs. The importance of tourism in the EU economy is likely to continue to increase in the coming years with the expected annual growth of tourism demand slightly above 3% in the coming years.

Finding the right balance between an autonomous development of the destinations and the protection of their environment may be challenging. While it does not have the same stained image as the manufacturing industry, it is by no means environmentally benign, generating significant levels of pollution and consuming considerable amounts of natural resources. The future of European tourism relies on the quality of the tourist experience – tourists will recognize that places that care for the environment, their employees and local communities are also more likely to care for them.

Today, the tourism industry is also faced with challenges linked to the economic downturn. More than ever the overarching challenge for the tourism sector is to remain competitive. One reason that makes tourism so vulnerable to the economic crisis is that most travel and tourism involves discretionary expense. During tough economic times people conserve their cash to cover the essentials of life, food, shelter and family necessities. However, this does not mean that tourism stops. Past crises show that people continue to travel but they alter their spending habits. Those tourism and hospitality businesses that will survive and indeed thrive in the months ahead are those that can adapt to these new needs.

Regions are key players in defining policies to ensure tourism competitiveness. Local and regional authorities are already active in this field and develop projects and initiatives to ensure sustainability is synonym to competitiveness. Regions are also close to the citizens and represent an important means of reaching out to people to raise awareness. For many years now, sound tourism management has been at the heart of the collective action of AER regions.

AER has been active in the field of tourism for many years, covering all aspects of tourism sustainability. AER is currently the lead partner of the Interreg IVC project PRESERVE “Peer Reviews for Sustainable Eco Regions via Europe” along with 13 other regional actors. The main objective of PRESERVE is to contribute to an improved effectiveness of regional development policies, specifically of regional polices considering cultural heritage as an endogenous factor of economic development and supporting sustainable tourism.

¹ Traditional travel and tourism providers (hotels, restaurants, cafes, travel agencies, car rentals, airlines etc.) that supply goods and services directly to visitors. Source : Communication from the Commission - Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism /COM/2007/0621 final/

The thematic conference in Alba will be the opportunity to discuss the impact of the economic downturn on European tourism and the opportunities for future growth. PRESERVE partners will also share their experiences and good practices from the first peer reviews. European stakeholders as well as representatives from EU-wide regions will engage in discussions and exchange viewpoints on these crucial questions. As politicians discuss the opportunities that tourism policy can bring to respond to the economic downturn, citizens will also have the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding the economic crisis.

The conference will take place on Wednesday 17 March 2010 in Alba Iulia, Alba region (RO), and will be preceded by AER Committee 1 plenary meeting and the meeting of PRESERVE Steering Committee and Project Coordination on 16 March. The conference will be followed by an **AER European Citizen Forum** to address the issue of the economic crisis for citizens. **The field visits are scheduled for Thursday 18 September.** Given the topic chosen for the conference, we warmly invite political officials concerned with tourism-related matters and civil servants in charge of the issues of tourism, competitiveness and sustainability to take part in these events. There will be room for discussions and exchanges of views and ideas.

Registrations will be open in December 2009. The conference will be open to both AER and non AER regions. However, since the number of available places is limited, AER members will be accorded priority during the registration procedure. **Please note that there are no registration fees. All relevant documents, including the agenda for the conference, registration form, practical information and background papers** will shortly be uploaded on the conference webpage:

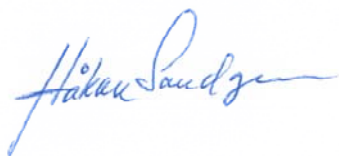
<http://www.aer.eu/events/regional-development/2010/PRESERVE-conference-tourism.html>

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Looking forward to seeing you in Alba!



Håkan Sandgren
AER Committee 1 President



Ion Dumitrel
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