

LIFE PROJECT INFORMATION REPORT

“Strategies and Tools for a sustainable tourism in Mediterranean coastal areas”

Today tourism is considered as among the economic sectors having the strongest trend of growth for the next decade, and many observers believe that it is destined to gain the world primacy. Despite the fact that tourism was not listed among the subjects tackled by the treaties, in the latest years the European Union have put great emphasis on the need of boosting integrated policies of environment protection within different national tourist contexts, paying greater attention to the coastal areas, which are more sensitive to the effects caused by a massive seasonal concentration of tourists.

The title of our Life-Environment Project, “Strategies and Tools for a sustainable tourism in Mediterranean coastal areas”, clearly explains the main goals of the project, that is, on one hand, to develop and make accessible new strategies and tools as to actuate a real sustainability within the tourist sector and, on the other, to do not narrow down the tourist context of reference to a regional or national scale but to focus on all coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea.

In other words, given that the relationship between tourism and environment in coastal destinations is widely accepted as an important element of stability for the holiday market and its future development, our Life project aimed to find ways and tools to reduce the environmental pressure caused by tourist flows.

It was clear that the accomplishment of this project represented an ambitious challenge, even of greater proportions if we consider that our firm intention was to create a model of sustainable tourism available for mass-tourist destinations such as the province of Rimini (Italy) and Calvià (Balearic Islands – Spain), which are areas characterised by an intense and mature tourist development and, with 40 million tourists per year, they rank among the leading destinations in the Mediterranean Basin.

In both destinations – though in different times and ways – the massive tourist development of the last decades produced, on one hand, an indiscriminate exploitation of the natural resources reaching in some cases the verge of critical breakdowns; on the other, the ravelled progression of the building sector and the growing urbanization with little planning gave rise to remarkable problems together with important signs of degradation and pollution.

Rimini and Calvià chose to bring together their forces as to identify and test a new model of sustainable tourist development that is able to harmonise a social economic development with the environment in the whole and to fully satisfy the tourist. Life project is amongst the fundamental elements supporting our intent of creating a lasting tourist development.

The fact that the European Commission trusted our project proposal and financed up to 50% a project that could well be considered as one of the biggest investment in the sustainable tourism research field ever made during the last years, was a matter of great satisfaction and, in turn, it surely generated within us a bigger sense of responsibility.

The partnership started up by Rimini and Calvià with Ambiente Italia Institute of Researches and Federalberghi, the main Italian association of hotel runners, added to our wealth either from a scientific point of view and from a more factual one.

An equal importance must be attached to the role played by other two international partners that – even if not official ones- had been strongly involved in the actuation of the project:

- UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program), through the PAP/RAC offices of Splitz, cooperated with us in carrying out the CCA research study of the Rimini tourist model;
- ICLEI (International Council Local Environment Initiatives) took part to the development of the “Cities for Sustainable Tourism” Network and was in charge of the organisation activities.

The same relevance must be given to the cooperation that started with ANPA (National Agency for Environment Protection, today called APAT) from the first stages of the actuation of the LIFE project. ANPA – a national board charged by the European Commission to prepare the proposal of Ecolabel of Tourist Services, decided to have a privileged relationship with our LIFE project, that is to say it cooperated to the analysis and the evaluation of the collected data with questionnaires jointly drawn up, took part in the meetings with the operators and in the drawing up of the guidelines on the Ecolabel. Also we shared the organization of public meetings and congresses (starting from “Bit” Trade Fair in Milan at the beginning of 2002) and such a tight cooperation added to one another mutual wealth.

The main goals of the project, mentioned above, had been divided in three main objectives:

- To integrate tourism and European environmental strategies, starting from the study and the implementation of ICZM (Integrated Coastal Zone Management) Plans of Rimini and Calvià;
- To improve the environmental performance of the line of the tourist product towards the implementation of the labels of environmental quality for hotel runners, which took into account their specific characteristics and economic needs.
- To raise the awareness of the tourist market on the advantages of a sustainable tourism so that Tour Operators and tourists will be involved in the virtuous circle of continuous improvement of the holiday sites and growing levels of satisfaction.

The participation of public and private stakeholders – and more generally that of all local communities – throughout the various phases of the project (analysis, definition of the scenarios, identification of the actions to be taken and their factual actuation, etc.) is a fundamental element when framed in the process of Local Agenda 21. Officially launched in Calvià in 1994, the process of Local Agenda 21 had been actually triggered by our Life project in Rimini since it was clear that there was a

strategic need of doubling the re-definition of Rimini tourist model with the logic of participation and concertation suggested by Agenda 21.

The structure of our LIFE Project had to be necessarily complex so that the above-mentioned objectives could be carried into effect. Nevertheless it had been centred schematically around two main guidelines which were complementary and inseparable to one another: first we worked out methods, contents, tools and action, and factual actions, second we disseminated the end results, involved the stakeholders and local communities and facilitated the exchange of good practices in similar tourist contexts.

The packages of main activities had been worked out to the full and new methods and tools are now available. At the end of the project we would like to stress the basic features of such workpackages.

We previously mentioned that the cooperation with UNEP/PAP/RAC proved to be crucial for the assessment of the Carrying Capacity-CCA for the tourist development of the Province of Rimini. That allowed us to prompt a powerful and innovative tool – that is to say the CCA – which was first tested on a mass-tourist destination such as Rimini and evaluated by UNEP “Good Practice in Tourism Carrying Capacity Assessment”. In other terms the experience of Rimini was included in an international report issued by UNEP.

The assessment of the Carrying Capacity played a fundamental role for a better structuring of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan of the province of Rimini.

The ICZM Plan was created either by Rimini and Calvià accordingly to the procedures proposed by the EU. For the first time two mass-tourist destinations were engaged in outlining a new model of tourist development by using the ICZM approach and worked it out so that the environment was considered as a primary resource of the every tourist destination. Also the fundamental lines of action had been decided involving public and private stakeholders and, more in general, the local community.

Among the main actions planned for the actuation of the ICZM Plan, a number of “Pilot Actions” was picked to prove their real feasibility as well as the entire potential of such tool, at the same time the environment of the two destinations could immediately start to profit from them.

More specifically “The Sustainable Bath” – an action aiming to re-qualify a bathing establishment located on Riccione beach to the benefit of the control of the environmental impact – won praise in Rimini.

Saving of water resource by recycling the water of the shower, reduction of the energetic consumption by installing photovoltaic panels, differentiated collection of the tourists’ waste, info point on the quality of the bathing waters: for the first time in Italy we showed that it was possible to increase the sustainability of a bathing establishment and quantify the water and energetic costs actually saved.

The improvement of the land and the environment in which the tourist activities of Rimini and Calvià are strongly rooted, played a central role in our project and allowed to find a long-term factual solution by using the ICZM Plans. However our project also focused on another central element, that is to say the improvement of the environmental performance of the producers of the tourist industry and, in the first place, that of the hotel runners.

We believe that the “toolbox” created for the hotel runners have been the most advanced experience in Italy as it was able to translate the concept of sustainable tourism into an effective entrepreneurial management. Furthermore Federalberghi, the main Italian association of Hotel Runners, shared with us the enthusiasm for the project a fact that is confirmed by its constant engagement in the planning phase and the dissemination one. This “toolbox” was created through the direct involvement of those tourist operators who showed to be more motivated during all the phases of the project: “state of art” analysis, suggestions of improving criteria, its trial actions. Finally we outlined three set of guidelines: Guidelines for Ecologic Purchase in the

Hotel, Guidelines for the European Ecolabel, Guidelines for a Simplified System of Environmental Management, which have been translated into English and published in specific manuals included in a CD-Rom created to maximize the intrinsic potential of the guiding tools for hotel runners by using the Personal Computer.

The success of the Guidelines mainly derives from the agreement drawn up by the Province of Rimini and Legambiente-Tourism, which is one of the partners – together with the Council House of Riccione and the local association of hotel runners – involved in the main and most popular voluntary label of environmental quality called “Hotels Suggested for the Engagement in the Environment Protection”, which is also member of the “Visit” European Network.

The third package of main actions suggested tools and proposals for the tourist market based on significant and up-to-date concepts aiming to raise the awareness of tourists and tour operators on higher levels of sustainability in tourist destinations, especially in Rimini and Calvià.

The first and fundamental step towards our goal consisted in a research carried out by the University of Bologna, site of Rimini, on the incidence of environmental demand in Rimini and Calvià as well as on the degree of satisfaction of 1100 tourists interviewed on the control of the environmental impact. Besides the above-mentioned survey on tourists, another research examined the environmental variable in the tourist packages proposed by the main European and Italian Tour Operators as to identify features and trends of the offer in comparison to the changes of the demand.

On the basis of the results of the research we set “Ten Golden Rule of the Sustainable Tourist”, the first code of good conduct ever written up in Europe with 150 thousand copies printed in 2003. The ten golden rules are included in a wider Educational Kit translated in four languages, which was created to be popularised through Hotels and Tourist Information Offices and it is composed of a ten-minute video, a CD-Rom, a brochure, a poster, a bill and a newsletter on our Life project. Such Educational Kit make use of images, written texts, a multimedia CD-Rom, first to explain to what

extent Rimini and Calvià are engaged in bringing forth to a more sustainable tourism and second to invite the tourists to change their present attitude towards their holidays as to facilitate the control of a negative environmental impact.

Having concluded the brief presentation of the end results achieved in the main activities of the project, we would like to dwell upon the so-called complementary activities – which are nevertheless of major importance. Basically they can be grouped under those actions designed to assure a more widespread dissemination of the end results.

First of all, it is worth mentioning the remarkable role played by the “International Conference on Sustainable Tourism” organised by the Province of Rimini at the beginning of our Life project in June 2001. In the course of this event the three days of intense discussions and debates gave birth to the “Chart of Rimini on Sustainable Tourism”. In January 2003 a second international conference bearing the title “Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Mediterranean Tourist Regions”, took place in Calvià and was targeted on the methods of integrated coastal zone management that had been implemented in Rimini and Calvià through their specific ICZM plans. Within this framework we also mention the Workshop on the “Assessment of the Carrying Capacity for tourism in the Mediterranean: experiences and opportunities” held in Rimini in 2003 with the joint organisation of the Province of Rimini and UNEP-PAC-RAC. In that occasion over a 100 participants from different Mediterranean countries – Spain, Croatia, Greece, Italy, France, ect. – debated for the first time on the modes of implementation of the CCA method in Rimini, a case-study of a mass-tourist destination hereby widely discussed.

Finally, during Conference of Rimini “The Challenge of Sustainable Tourism in Mass-Tourist Destinations” held in December 2003, we presented the end results of the actions carried out in the course of the Life project through a multimedia DVD available to all participants, Italians and European ones. Many are the national and international initiatives on tourist sustainability in which we took part as to

disseminate the results that we were gradually achieving. For example in 2002 we were asked by the DG Enterprise–Tourism Unit of the European Commission to be member of the Steering Group to prompt a European proposal of the “Agenda 21 for Tourism” – which has been recently approved. Also we have been chosen by ICLEI among its European partners to bear witness of our good practices on sustainable tourism during the World Congress in Athens 2003, that was a very important occasion for drawing the attention on the results of our Life project.

During the actuation of the project our website - www.life.sustainable-tourism.org, which have been active since September 2001, played an important role. Not only it counted around 20 thousand visitors – which testifies in itself the great interest stirred up by the project – but it also proved to be a useful archive where to search documents and papers filed in different workpackages.

We believe that the work accomplished so far – the wide range of initiatives, documents, dissemination actions – especially in the last 12 months of the project, has made us aware of an interest that largely crosses the national borders and that has put us under the spotlight as the most active and debate-prone subject on matters of tourist sustainability.

According to the spirit that inspired all Life projects, we also tried to facilitate the exchange of the best practices, strategies and tools previously outlined. To this aim in cooperation with ICLEI (International Council Local Environmental Initiatives) we created a Network of Cities and Local Authorities called “Cities for Sustainable Tourism” that counts at present 16 members coming from all over the Mediterranean (Israel, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Tunisia, Spain). Furthermore it has recently adopted a short and long-term programme of action that assures its continuity even after the conclusion of the project. In the short term (6-12 months) we scheduled to produce documents introducing the Network, to be present in 1 or 2 European trade fairs in the beginning of 2004, to advertise the Network (Logo, brochures/flyers, code of behaviour of the sustainable tourist) and to create a service of monitoring for sustainable tourism through the websites presently available on internet. In the

medium-long term (1-3 years) we will tackle topics such as the EU Agenda 21 for tourism, the creation of a code of conduct for a sustainable tourism involving the Tour Operators (especially UNEP-T.O.I.'s initiative), the popularization of the Ecolabel for the tourist services, measurement and assessment of the environmental externalities, new relationships with other tourist Networks, further co-operations with local universities and the identification of possible partnerships in applicatory projects for European funding.

Knowing that the transfer of methods and tools to other tourist contexts at the end of the project is certainly one of goals shared by all Life projects, we can assert that the recognition received in 2003 – when the Province of Rimini was awarded for the innovativeness and effectiveness of our LIFE project with 1st prize of the "Carmen Diez de Rivera" European Award for Sustainable Tourism promoted by the Government of the Balearic Islands and the Royal Awards Foundation with the support of the European Agency for Environment – represent a quality sign of the results achieved and their actual replication.

Therefore we trust that the end results of the project, which ended in October 31st 2003 – in terms new methods, technical tools and “good practices” – can be actually used in many European tourist contexts characterised by big numbers of visitors and tourists. As far as the Province of Rimini is concerned, for the next years we intend to be increasingly engaged in this field so that the tourism of Rimini will be more and more sustainable, and that is because this is the FUTURE WE WANT.