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Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2005-2015): Assessment of Tourism component

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Introduction

The scope of this working document is to review the process that has led to the current tourism-related public policies at Mediterranean level, i.e. the transition from the state-of-play of early 2000s until the "Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025)", recently approved at the 19th Ordinary Meeting of Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention (COP19) held in Athens, Greece, 9-12 February 2016. The analysis takes into consideration the raising awareness – started already in the '90s – that tourism economy is one of the main driving forces providing growth, but causing at the same time severe impacts on Mediterranean ecosystems and biodiversity.

In order to tackle this concern (among other environmental challenges), the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system decided in 2001 to draft a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) for the period 2005-2015. One of the seven priority fields of action of this regional Strategy was devoted to the "Promotion of Sustainable Tourism". Following the expiration of the period covered by such Strategy, the current document assesses the gaps and issues still existing in comparison with current situation of tourism in the Mediterranean (as developed in the Plan Bleu Working Document "Tourism and sustainability in the Mediterranean: key facts and trends", June 2016), as well as the hints coming from analogous studies carried out in the past.

This assessment is then linked with the new Strategies adopted few months ago by the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention, namely the MSSD 2016-2025 and the Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Mediterranean; a reference is made also to the "Sustainable Development Goals", adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, in order to underline the strong coordination among the regional and the global level. The results of such assessment and comparison are summarized in some recommendations for future actions, both on policy planning and as far as concrete initiatives can be concerned.

Concerning concrete initiatives, a special focus is dedicated to two important issues, i.e. the recurring idea of creating a label for sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region and the need to have appropriate indicators for monitoring the sustainability of Mediterranean tourism. On these topics an assessment of existing initiatives is carried out, in order to highlight the potentialities but also the obstacles for their establishment. Specific proposals are provided, aiming to enforce the monitoring capacity of public sector in measuring the sustainability degree of tourism in the Mediterranean region and to put in value the best practices that also show innovative tools, products, marketing strategies in this regard.

The conclusion of this working document summarizes the main recommendations as proposed in the present document on the different issues examined.

Tourism in the Mediterranean needs for sustainability

Tourism activities are among the main Plan Bleu fields of analysis by Plan Bleu: starting from the '90s a specific report on the state-of-play of tourism sector was issued periodically, in order to monitor the trends of such crucial sector, equivalent to 12% of total receipts from the export of goods and services for the Mediterranean countries (compared with a 6% world average)[1].

Concerning its sustainability in the Mediterranean context, in the early 2000s it was evident from many reports[2] that the increasing trends (also due to the ongoing globalization of the world economy) and the concentration in space (coastline) and time (summer) were causing tremendous impacts to the environment (in terms of ecosystems resilience, biodiversity, quality of water and air, etc.), to the landscape, and to the socio-economic equilibrium of the most affected areas (not only coastline but also historical cities, lakes, mountains, etc.).

The main concerns referred to the pressure of mass tourism industries towards fragile hotspots like coastal seabed, wetlands and geological features, the emissions caused by all the tourism-related transports (especially air transport, in an area like Mediterranean where internal mobility is not always assured by more sustainable means like railway), the wastes from huge infrastructures (resorts, thematic parks, etc.), the sprawl of residential buildings exploited only in the peak seasons, etc.

Also the "Millennium Development Goals" (adopted in 2000 by the United Nations General Assembly) – where the concern for unsustainable production and consumption patterns as in the tourism sector was one of the main basic points – and the "Johannesburg Plan of Implementation" (adopted in 2002 by the World Summit on Sustainable Development) – calling for a greater engagement in protecting the natural resources through an increased sustainability of the economic activities like tourism – pushed for a strong and formal commitment on sustainability by the Mediterranean community.

Therefore in November 2001, the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Conventions appointed the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) to develop a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, which was adopted in 2005 by all Mediterranean countries.

A REGIONAL INITIATIVE: THE MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2005-2015

The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2005-2015 (MSSD) was adopted in July 2005 by all Contracting Parties (CPs) to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention). "Promotion of sustainable tourism" was one of the seven priority fields of action of this Strategy (Table 1).

Table 1. MSSD 2005-2015 objectives and specific targets on Tourism component

MSSD Objectives	Tourism-related targets
Obj. 1: Contribute to economic development by enhancing Mediterranean assets	Promote Sustainable tourism. Enhance value of Mediterranean assets and diversify tourism Increase added value of tourist economy for local communities in developing countries.
Obj. 2: Reduce social disparities by implementing the Millennium Development Goals and strengthen cultural identities	Develop tourism to help promoting social cohesion and cultural values

[1] UNEP-MAP-Plan Bleu (2005), A Sustainable Future for the Mediterranean, The Blue Plan's Environment and Development Outlook, Earthscane, London
[2] Lanquar, R. et al (1995) Tourisme et environnement en Méditerranée. Enjeux et prospective. Les Fascicules du Plan Bleu, no 8, Economica, Paris
EEA. (2000) State and pressure of the marine and coastal Mediterranean environment. Environmental assessment report no 5. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
Mahjoub, A. (2001) La Méditerranée : une rétrospective économique, sociale, environnementale et une brève prospective. Plan Bleu report
UNEP-MAP-Plan Bleu (1999) Report of the workshop on tourism and sustainable development in the Mediterranean, Antalya, Turkey, 17–19 September 1998. MAP Technical Report Series No 126. Athens: MAP.
UNEP-MAP-Plan Bleu (2005) Dossier sur le tourisme et le développement durable en Méditerranée = Dossier on tourism and sustainable development. MAP Technical Reports Series no 159. Athens: MAP

Obj. 3: Change unsustainable production and consumption patterns and ensure the sustainable management of natural resources	Reduce tourist pressures in environmental hot spots. Better temporal and spatial management of tourist flows
Obj. 4: Improve governance at the local, national and regional levels	Regional cooperation, ecotourism framework programme, labelling. Local governance. Economic tools. Tourism pay-back formulae. Carrying capacities

Included among the seven "priority fields of action" as a leading economic sector, sustainable tourism-related objectives were:

- Reduce the adverse territorial and environmental impacts of tourism, especially in existing coastal tourist areas;
- Promote sustainable tourism, which in turn reinforces social cohesion and cultural and economic development, enhances Mediterranean diversity and specificities and strengthens synergies with other economic sectors, especially agriculture;
- Increase the added value of tourism for local communities and actors in developing countries; and,
- Improve governance for sustainable tourism.

These Objectives were developed into the following orientations and actions (Table 2):

Table 2. MSSD 2005-2015 goals, orientations and actions related to Tourism priority field of action

Objective	Orientation & Action
Reduce the adverse territorial and environmental effects of tourism	1. Strengthen the implementation of the recommendations on tourism adopted in 1999 by the Contracting Parties, identify good practices and produce an in-depth assessment of the progress made by 2008.
	2. Promote within countries, on the basis of studies of carrying capacities, a more balanced distribution of tourists in terms of destinations and seasons.
Promote the supply of sustainable tourist facilities and increase the added value of tourism for local communities	3. Draw up, as soon as possible, not later than 2010 , a 10-year promotional framework programme for the Mediterranean together with the Ministries concerned, the private sector, sustainable tourism professionals and promoters, highlighting the assets of the Mediterranean cultural and environmental heritage, with a view to developing a "Mediterranean tourism quality label". Promote a pilot action at the regional level to support the implementation of national and sub-national programmes.
	4. Develop "tourism pay-back" formulae so that tourists contribute to the preservation of the natural environment, cultural heritage and the sustainable development of destinations.
	5. Explore the possibility of implementing taxation systems based on transport, especially sea and air transport to islands, as a means of contributing to the sustainable development of these regions.
	6. Adapt tourism more effectively to the constraints and opportunities offered by protected natural areas, especially with a view to preserving biodiversity and the natural and cultural heritage in regional parks, biosphere reserves and protected coastal areas.
	7. Encourage countries to promote rehabilitation programmes in destinations where hotel facilities and tourism infrastructure are becoming obsolete, and where historical sites are poorly maintained.
Improve governance for sustainable tourism	8. Improve coordination between countries and major operators to improve the harmonization of regulations and develop synergies at the regional level.
	9. Improve cooperation mechanisms between tourism and environmental authorities and strengthen the capacities of local authorities to manage the development of tourism and promote sustainable tourism.

GAPS OF MSSD 2005-2015 AND STILL EXISTING ISSUES RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Assessing the MSSD 2005-2015 in the implementation of its "Tourism" priority field of action must be carried out by taking into account:

- the current state of tourism economy in the Mediterranean region (see Plan Bleu Working Document "Tourism and sustainability in the Mediterranean: key facts and trends", June 2016);
- other hints from past assessments and from the MSSD Review process.

State of tourism activities in the Mediterranean

Taking into consideration an update picture of the tourism phenomenon in the Mediterranean region (see Plan Bleu Working Document "Tourism and sustainability in the Mediterranean: key facts and trends", June 2016), a comparison of the latter with the main goals as set by the MSSD 2005-2015 for tourism can be carried out, and the results can be summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Comparison between MSSD 2005-2015 goals and current situation in the Mediterranean region

MSSD tourism-related goals	Current situation in the Mediterranean region	Mismatching elements
Decrease of adverse territorial & environmental impacts	Tourism activities (mainly travel and leisure) and infrastructures (transport, accommodation, second-houses, etc.) are dramatically increasing (so their impacts) and usually do not show significant "impacts mitigation" measures	Environmental conservation tools (protected areas, EIA/ESA, etc.) are very rarely applied; Med tourism offer follows traditional paths (sustainability is not the main concern); strongest products (3Ss, cultural cities, cruises) are not investing enough on sustainability features for differentiate themselves in relation with other products/destinations
Promote sustainable tourism	Tourism services/destinations based (and promoted) on sustainable features, although increasing, remain a minority part of the overall Med offer	EU/International recognitions (certifications/labels/etc.) are not actually diffused in the Med tourism offer and are not exploitable as competitive factors in the national/international market; specific marketing of sustainable products is not significantly developed
Increase the added value of tourism for local communities in developing countries	In few cases it is occurring, usually tourism development is driven by major and foreign companies with limited benefits for local communities	Tourism development is planned and managed without local actors; whether they are involved, most of the times their influence in the decision-making is pretty low
Improve governance	Neither in the North shore nor in the South one, sustainable tourism governance has shown significant improvements, being scattered among several actors, not often cooperating among them	Governance must be top-down stimulated, where Public-Private Partnership (PPP) shows to be the most successful result of it. Establishing Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in any relevant destination should be the most effective approach, but public sector and professionals are not sufficiently proactive

Therefore, starting from the main identified issues, the gaps of the MSSD 2005-2015 in relation with the current situation can be summarized as follows in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Main issues and MSSD 2005-2015 main gaps on tourism sector

Issues	MSSD 2005-2015 gaps
Tourism in the Mediterranean region is an increasing driving force, causing manifold pressures on the environment	Sustainable tourism approach as described in MSSD did not succeed to influence significantly the tourism development pattern
Seasonal and coastline-centered are the main Mediterranean-based tourism features	Lack of governance effectiveness of MSSD
Mediterranean tourism as "mature" offer: high standardization but decreasing quality	Lack in the MSSD of governance hints and of tools/procedures for the involvement of local actors and for the valorization of Mediterranean features
Tourism development without local development	Absence in the MSSD of formal juridical and financial mechanisms for the distribution of added value to the local communities

It is worth mentioning that the South European countries cover more than 80% of the added value from Mediterranean coastal tourism. For these countries the priority is to consolidate the position in the international market and to reduce coastal tourism pressures towards the territory, while developing alternative tourism offer in both coastal areas and hinterlands. For non-EU Mediterranean countries the challenge seems to be to follow the same model (i.e., based on 3S product and mass tourism) of more advanced countries and therefore to reduce the gap with Southern Europe in terms of infrastructure, marketing capacity, traditional tourism-related skills, etc.

Within this framework there are additional existing issues that are linked with gaps of public-based policies, as follows in Table 5:

Table 5. Specific issues and related MSSD 2005-2015 gaps on Tourism sector

Topic	Issue	MSSD 2005-2015 gap
Sustainability of tourism	Lack of binding rules (e.g. carrying capacity) concerning environmental impacts in tourism planning (of a new service/infrastructure, product, destination) process	MSSD did not foresee the need of such tools as binding rules
	Lack of environmental mitigation measures in tourism planning	MSSD did not foresee the need of such measures
	New tourism offer is rarely conceived taking into consideration socio-cultural benefits for the local community	MSSD did not identify enough such socio-cultural benefits
	Lack of integration of sustainable tourism needs in the other sectors' (e.g. transport) planning	MSSD did not specify how such integration can work
	Few synergies with other sectors (e.g. agriculture)	MSSD did not identify enough such potential synergies
Competitiveness of sustainable tourism	Low level of innovation services/products/destinations	MSSD did not strongly indicate sustainability as innovative factor
	Low level of quality, because business-as-usual offer	MSSD did not strongly indicate sustainability as quality-related factor
	Low-effective marketing of new services/products/destinations	MSSD did not specify enough how marketing can be effective for new products based on sustainability
	Obsolescence of monitoring indicators (e.g. arrivals instead than added value) regarding sustainable goals	MSSD endorsed traditional tourism-related indicators
Income distribution	Lack of income distribution mechanisms for benefitting local communities	MSSD did not detail enough such mechanisms
	Low level of added value coming from local features different than the standardized ones	MSSD did not identify specific mechanisms to integrate such local features in the added value chain
Governance	Lack of successful PPPs at least in tourism promotion	MSSD did not highlighted enough such governance tool
	Lack of effective DMOs	MSSD did not highlighted enough such governance tool
	Lack of local ownership (e.g. through participatory planning) of the tourism-related business	MSSD did not foresee such governance tool

Other hints from previous assessments

In 2011, a first assessment of MSSD implementation for the period 2005-2010 was carried out by the Overseas Development Institute of London[3], in order to evaluate the work done so far and to suggest possible ways to improve and update MSSD with a particular focus on still existing environment/development issues.

The study underlined that there was no evidence about one of the most innovative expected achievements of the MSSD 2005-2015 about tourism sector, i.e. the development of a "Mediterranean tourism quality label", and very low coordination in terms of planning among tourism and other sector like transport and energy.

When considering the current situation in relation with MSSD 2005-2015 tourism-related targets, the assessment was very low, especially for lack of clear indicators for "Develop tourism to help promoting social cohesion and cultural values", "Tourist pressures in environmental hot spots" and "Temporal and spatial management of tourist flows".

In addition, Plan Bleu identified the following issues as still existing (Table 6).

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[3] Assessment on the implementation of MSSD for the period 2005-2010, June 2011, ODI Report, UNEP/MAP.

Table 6. Tourism-related issues still existing in comparison with MSSD 2005-2015

Issue	Explanation
Seaside tourism dominance	Tourism consists mainly of a seasonal seaside resort model. Around 637 million tourists (international and domestic) are expected in the region by 2025. About half of them will stay in coastal regions.
Inequitable distribution of tourist incomes, lack of control by local stakeholders	The intense competition between tourist destinations is exacerbated by the business practices of major tour operators and the lack of capacities at local level to control unsustainable trends in the development of tourism.
Standardization of tourist supply, saturation of mature destinations	There are a certain standardization in the supply of tourist facilities, insufficiently controlled development and a loss of quality in several established or rapidly developing destinations. This situation has been encouraged by public policies which emphasize tourist numbers and development of the related infrastructures, rather than added value, enhancement of Mediterranean diversity and cultural and social development. While tourism is important for the economy in many countries, the benefits have not profited a lot to the local development.
Negative externalities of tourist activities	Environmental impacts in such areas as gas emissions, noise, waste generation, the consumption of space, and the degradation of landscapes, coasts and ecosystems are not accounted for in national economic statistics relating to tourism.

CONCLUSIONS: GAPS AND POTENTIAL UPDATES

After having considered the MSSD 2005-2015 orientations/actions, some proposals for their update are presented in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Proposals for updating MSSD 2005-2015 tourism related orientations/actions

Orientation/action	Actual achievement	Update proposal
1. Strengthen the implementation of the recommendations adopted in 1999	Unfortunately the implementation of any of the MSSD recommendation lacks of actual juridical tools and of significant financial resources	Define a new strategy specifically for the tourism sector, aiming at increasing the sustainability in any tourism service/product/destination
2. Promote a more balanced distribution of tourists in terms of destinations and seasons	Not achieved	Promote an integrated spatial planning approach at NUTS 2 level, in order to set the thresholds (in terms of tourism impacts) for each destination in the different seasons
3. Develop a "Mediterranean tourism quality label"; promote a pilot action at the regional level to support the implementation of national and sub-national programmes	Not achieved (see below)	See below
4. Develop "tourism pay-back" mechanisms	Not achieved at regional level	It can be a pilot initiative, in destinations where an efficient governance can assure the paying tourist that such resources are used to increase the tourism quality
5. Taxation systems based on transport, especially sea and air transport	Not achieved at regional level	See above.
6. Adapt tourism more effectively to the constraints and opportunities offered by protected natural areas	Natural Protected Areas are starting to plan and manage the increasing flows of visitors in a more sustainable way	No need to update
7. Rehabilitation programmes in destinations where tourism facilities and infrastructure are becoming obsolete, and historical sites are poorly maintained	Not achieved at regional level. Not fully consistent with sustainability principles (where innovation does not mean automatically new facilities)	It can be a pilot initiative, in order to demonstrate what means a requalification of existing facilities for increasing the sustainability degree
8. Improve coordination between countries and major operators to improve the harmonization of regulations and develop synergies at the regional level	Not achieved	To be addressed

| 9. Improve cooperation mechanisms between tourism and environmental authorities and strengthen the capacities of local authorities to manage the development of tourism and promote sustainable tourism. | Not achieved at regional level. At national level sometimes coordination between tourism and environment authorities works, but not in a stable way. Local authorities capacities commonly are not improving as fast as the tourism dynamics | Coordination between tourism and environment authorities (at regional/national level) must remain. Building the capacities of local authorities can be a pilot initiative, in order to disseminate some common principles and approaches |

THE CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORKS

This section presents relevant international policy frameworks that address issues related to sustainable tourism.

The Rio+20 Declaration "The future we want"

In June 2012, a global summit, involving most of the countries' governments of the entire world, was held in order to update the potential interactions between environment and development: the Rio+20 Conference adopted "The future we want" Declaration[4], a document which reaffirms the possibility of integrate the economic, social and environmental aspects in a balanced way, in order to reach a sustainable development.

The Rio+20 Declaration indicates in a specific paragraph some principles concerning sustainable tourism, recalling that a well-designed and managed tourism can contribute significantly to sustainable development, and it is acknowledged the need to support sustainable tourism activities through specific capacity-building strategies.

The Declaration calls for the promotion of investments in sustainable tourism, especially for eco-tourism, and in cultural tourism-related SME's creation, easing their access to finance.

Finally, the Declaration calls for drafting guidelines and regulations for promoting and supporting sustainable tourism, because tourism must be better regulated in order to be more sustainable.

The Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, the General Assembly of United Nations Organization adopts the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[5]", which includes "Sustainable Development Goals[6] - SDGs", that must be considered as a point of reference for any global/regional strategy dealing with sustainable development.

All of the 17 SDGs have more or less an impact on the tourism sector (see "Tourism and SDGs", issued by UN-WTO in September 2015[7]), but the SDGs (and relevant targets) explicitly related to tourism are listed in Table 8 below:

Table 8. Tourism-related SDGs and targets

Goal	Target
Goal n.8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	Target 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
Goal n.12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	Target 12.b: Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
Goal n. 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

[4] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html
[5] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld
[6] Res. 70/1 "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", adopted by UN General Assembly on 25/09/2015
[7] http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284417254

The reviewed Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025)

At their 19th Ordinary Meeting (COP19) held in Athens, Greece, 9-12 February 2016, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted the renewed "Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development" (MSSD 2016-2025).

Designed through a comprehensive and inclusive process involving key regional and national stakeholders, MSSD 2016-2025 does not identify a specific objective on tourism, but the tourism component can be sort out within the different Strategic directions as follows:

Table 9. MSSD 2016-2025 Strategic directions and Action related to Tourism

Objective	Strategic direction	Action
Objective 2: Promoting resource management, food production and food security through sustainable forms of rural develop	2.1 Promote the sustainable use, management and conservation of natural resources and ecosystems	2.1.6 Develop socio-economic models for national strategic choices for water allocation between agriculture, industry, tourism and domestic use
	2.4 Promote inclusive and sustainable rural development, with a specific focus on poverty eradication, women's empowerment and youth employment	2.4.3 Prepare action plans to support the development of rural tourism that will alleviate overcrowding in coastal cities and resorts, stimulate the utilization of locally produced products and generate local employment opportunities
	2.5 Ensure access of local producers to distribution channels and markets, including the tourism market	2.5.1 Undertake actions to improve access of small-scale producers to markets, including tourism markets, through the use of innovative products and processes, cooperation schemes, market instruments, marketing plans and labelling schemes; 2.5.2 Undertake initiatives to raise awareness on environmental, economic and social benefits of consuming local products, including in the tourism
Objective 3: Planning and managing sustainable Mediterranean cities	3.1 Apply holistic and integrated spatial planning processes and other related instruments, as well as improved compliance with respective rules and regulations, to increase economic, social and territorial cohesion and reduce pressures on the environment	3.1.2 Ensure that legally-binding instruments for tourism development are put in place for those areas that suffer from tourism pressures
	3.3 Promote the protection and rehabilitation of historic urban areas	3.3.3 Create opportunities to strengthen local distinctive character both in planning and in project development in order to enhance local attractiveness, as a tool for economic development and enhancing competitive advantage 3.3.5 Develop or strengthen existing networks of historic cities in the Mediterranean, involving economic players, including the tourism sector
Objective 4: Addressing climate change as a priority issue for the Mediterranean	4.4 Encourage institutional, policy and legal reforms for the effective mainstreaming of climate change responses into national and local development frameworks, particularly in the energy sector	4.4.1 Mainstream climate change into national legislation and policies with a focus on measures concerning energy and transport and on delivering no/low regret adaptation measures across all vulnerable sectors and territories such as (…) tourism
Objective 5: Transition towards a green and blue economy	5.2 Review the definitions and measurement of development, progress and well-being.	Fundamental changes in the way societies consume and produce are indispensable for achieving sustainable development. MSSD 2016-2025 is complemented by the SCP Regional Action Plan for the Mediterranean, which highlights Tourism as one of the four priority areas.

The two approaches in tackling the tourism activities (a distinctive priority field of action in MSSD 2005-2015, a cross-cutting theme in MSSD 2016-2025) seem complementary, with the first focused on transforming the tourism industry, while the second is based on actions in sectors and geographical areas depending on, or linked to, tourism in order to improve the contribution of tourism activities to sustainable development.

The Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Mediterranean (UNEP/MAP, 2016)

On 12 February 2016, the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention adopted the "Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Mediterranean". This action plan identifies three horizontal Strategic Objectives, which are as follows:

- Strategic objective 1: establish a regional SCP framework to ensure coherence, coordination and implementation of SCP activities at the regional and national levels, and thus translate the global commitments on SCP to the Mediterranean Region.
- Strategic objective 2: develop and implement SCP Operational Objectives in the Mediterranean in order to promote and strengthen circular and green economy and support the Barcelona Convention, its Protocols and Regional Plans, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD), and other regional policy frameworks for sustainable development.
- Strategic objective 3: engage key stakeholders (international organizations, national and local public authorities, business sector, consumers, civil society, universities and research institutions) in Sustainable Consumption and Production models and circular economy measures leading to high resource efficiency and preservation, reduced pollution, and decoupling the development process from environmental degradation and promoting sustainable lifestyles.

The action plan lists also a set of "operational objectives and actions" for each of the "priority area". As far as the priority area "tourism" is concerned, the following operational objectives are indicated:

3.1: Develop and promote practices and solutions to ensure efficient use of natural resources and reduce environmental impacts of tourism, respecting spatial, ecological, and socio-cultural carrying capacities of the destination;

3.2: Promote regulatory, legislative and financial measures to mainstream SCP in the tourism consumption and production area, to reduce tourism seasonality creating green and decent jobs and to promote local community engagement and empowerment; and,

3.3: Raise awareness, capacities and technical skills to support sustainable destinations and green tourism services, and promote the development of appropriate marketing and communication tools to ensure a competitive sustainable Mediterranean Tourism.

Finally, in the Annex I "Roadmap for implementation", some regional activities are listed for each priority area, where also estimated costs, indicators, existing initiatives considered as flagship ones, and key partners are proposed.

Among them, the creation of a network among sustainable destinations (which have developed a DMO), the promotion of the Tourism Carrying Capacity Assessment as a mandatory step in the tourism planning, the organization of a Mediterranean fair dedicated to sustainable tourism destinations and green tourism operators in the region, and the development of a Sustainable Trip Advisor to market Mediterranean sustainable destinations, are the most innovative proposals for supporting a real change in the Mediterranean tourism offer.
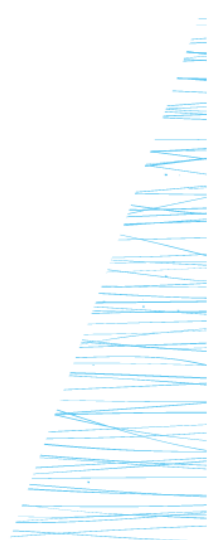
Labeling Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism

LABELS, CERTIFICATIONS AND CHARTERS

Among the numerous definitions of "label", the following is the most useful for our purpose: "ascribe a quality to or give a name of a common noun that reflects a quality"[8]. So many labels in the tourism sector have been created (most of the cases by the supplier itself) to promote/highlight the (presumed) quality of a tourism product/destination/etc.

Certification is a totally different tool (although in some cases can have similar purposes): "Formal procedure by which an accredited or authorized person or agency assesses and verifies (and attests in writing by issuing a certificate) the attributes, characteristics, quality, qualification, or status of individuals or organizations, goods or services, procedures or processes, or events or situations, in accordance with established requirements or standards"[9].

Finally, a Charter can be "a formal document (instrument) that creates a legal entity, exemption, immunity, privilege, or right. In case of an organization, a charter defines or mandates its function(s) and lays down rules for its conduct or governance"[10]. In this case, there is a "foundation", i.e. such tool certifies the creation of something new and gives a particular emphasis on how this new entity must be managed.

It is clear that a certification scheme is more complex and demanding than a label one, and for a certification you need a "third" party, in order to ensure the independence of the assessment for the certification appointment. Charters seem not to have the promotion of particular values, they have more importance as "starting act".

In the world, there are hundreds of such schemes which are supposed to measure and assess the sustainability (responsibility/solidarity/eco/etc.) degree of a service/product/destination. Currently the DESTINET platform[11] collects around 160 certifications/labels, which apparently are still alive and recognized at international level

Concerning labels, we evolve in a "jungle"[12]: focusing only on sustainability in tourism, we can find at least 140 labels in the world, set up at international or national level, so without taking in account local labels (or created just for products/services within one destination, e.g. a Natural Park-related label). Most of them have third party, but sometimes the "independency" of the latter is questionable (for instance, when it is the association representing the labelled operators), as well as the reliability of the assessment (e.g. if performed only on documents and without an on-the-spot check); few of them are recognized by a world-scale authority; some of them cannot show a significant number of labelled operators/products; most of them never demonstrated their actual impact in revenue increase for the labelled companies.

Among the certifications there are the ISO (14000, 26000, etc.) at global level, and EMAS and Ecolabel (although the name, it is a certification) at EU level. A particular tool fully dedicated to sustainable tourism refers to the "Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Sustainability Criteria"[13], which are the main guiding principles and minimum requirements to be reached in order to be "certified" by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). At European level the "European Eco-Tourism Labelling Standards"[14] goes in the same direction of GSTC but with a specific focus on European tourism-related features.

As far as "Charters" are concerned, in December 2015 UNWTO updated the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism[15] 20 years after the first edition, the "Charter of Lanzarote". In Europe two Charters deals with sustainable tourism (and have similar name): the "European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas"[16] (sponsored by Europarc – the

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[8] WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. © 2003-2012 Princeton University, Farlex Inc.
[9] http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/certification.html
[10] http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/charter.html
[11] www.destinet.eu
[12] 2014, Friends of Nature, ECOTRANS, Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development, Austria&Germany
[13] https://www.gstcouncil.org/en/gstc-criteria/sustainable-tourism-gstc-criteria.html
[14] http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-ecotourism-standard/en-the-euro-eco-label-stand
[15] http://sustainabletourismcharter2015.com/the-world-charter-for-sustainable-tourism
[16] http://www.europarc.org/nature/european-charter-sustainable-tourism/

Network of European natural Parks) and the "European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism"[17], a 2012-started initiative of the European Commission (DG GROW "Tourism Policy" Unit), not yet formalized.

Few months ago the European Commission has finalized the "European Tourism Indicator System – ETIS"[18] (see below), a tool to help European destinations to self-monitor and measure their sustainable tourism performances: some destinations tested such management assessing process and received the "ETIS award" for their efficiency in testing the tool; at the moment itis not clear the follow up of such award.

A longer-life EU initiative which could be related with our focus is EDEN, "European Destinations of Excellence", which aims to promote sustainable tourism development models across the EU. The initiative is based on national competitions and promotional campaigns that result in the selection and promotion of a tourist 'destination of excellence' for each participating country.

Assessing which is the best tool for what, and which is the most performing label/certification/charter, is out of the scope of the current work. Maybe for the Mediterranean context such study would be very useful, in order to identify the ones who can better suit to our region.

Our aim here is to see if and how this label of voluntary and sustainability-based schemes are actually impacting (i.e. increasing) the sustainability of tourism offer in the Mediterranean region, and if they are helping the destination "Mediterranean" to gain in the global competition, thanks to this increased sustainability (which we roughly link with "quality").

If we look at available data, unfortunately the total number of labelled / certified / chartered services/products/operators/destinations is very low in comparison with the total offer: it's impossible to determine an exact number for the latter, but the "formally sustainable" offer does not exceed for sure the 1% of the total offer.

Also the attractive capacity of such "certification" schemes towards the tourism market (both domestic and international) as a whole seems still very weak, because of many reasons:

- sustainability is not yet one of the main components in the consumer's selection;
- "sustainable" is still a not fully clear concept for the market, esp. in terms of products;
- the high number of different certification and labels does not support their accountability.

Therefore the issue remains open, i.e. it is not clear if just supporting the existing schemes can be sufficient to improve the sustainability of Mediterranean tourism, or policy makers should think about to select and invest on one of them, or to create a new one specifically customized for the Mediterranean region.

In the next paragraph a Plan Bleu initiative is described.

ABOUT THE MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM QUALITY LABEL

Plan Bleu in a study[19] of 2012 analyzed the existing certification schemes (labels, rules, marks, charters, certifications) in view of the proposal of a label focusing on quality in Mediterranean tourism.

Around 30 labels / certification have been analyzed, and the main conclusions were:

- market does not trust on labels, because itis not clear which are reliable among the numerous existing ones, also because not always there is a clear distinction between the ones based on a self-commitment (or declaration) and those verified by a third party;
- responsible tourism is a concept widely appreciated by the consumers, while sustainable tourism is less clear;
- sometimes labels are set up just as marketing tools, and related accountability is very poor;
- to actually increase the sustainability of a tourism, offers must be based on a strict coordination between public and private sector, involve the whole value chain, and any label/certification can be just an instrument of such process, not the main goal.

In the same year, Plan Bleu published a feasibility study for the creation of a quality label for Mediterranean tourism[20], describing the principles, the recommendations and the guidelines for any interested stakeholder, and proposing as monitoring tool the "Mediterranean Observatory of the Tourism Sustainability".

[17] https://portal.cor.europa.eu/europe2020/news/Pages/EuropeanCommission'sconsultationofstakeholdersontheEuropeanCharterforSustainableandResponsibleTourism.aspx
[18] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/sustainable-tourism/indicators/index_en.htm
[19] « Tourisme et développement durable en Méditerranée. Durabilité et labellisation des destinations méditerranéennes », 2012, Plan Bleu
[20] "Towards an Observatory and a Quality Label of tourism sustainability in the Mediterranean", 2012, Plan Bleu

At the end of 2012, a workshop with some experts proposed to change the label in a "Charter", more focusing on the process beside the performance.

Principles and guidelines

Plan Bleu proposal indicated first of all some principles, which could be assessed in relation with MSSD goals as follows (Table 10):

Table 10. Principles of the Mediterranean Tourism Quality Label and MSSD 2005-2015 goals

Mediterranean Tourism Quality Label principle	MSSD 2005-2015 goal	Matching
Develop a diversified offer based on Mediterranean features and in innovative skills (including carrying capacity)	Decrease of adverse territorial & environmental impacts Promote sustainable tourism	The importance given to local features and to carrying capacity assures the reduction of negative impacts on the environment. A diversification of tourism offer means to enhance the sustainable tourism potential of Med destinations
Attract tourists from the international markets	Promote sustainable tourism Improve governance	Tourism markets surveys confirm that when sustainable tourism is linked with local assets, it is competitive. In order to attract (and satisfy) non-Med tourists, a strong governance structure is required
Promote the Med destinations under a common brand "Med Destinations of Excellence"	Increase the added value of tourism for local communities in developing countries Improve governance	Med destinations of excellence are those who exploit the added value of local assets and assure a fair distribution of incomes. A Med-based governance system is required for selecting and supporting the "Med Destinations of Excellence"

Furthermore, some guidelines have been developed in relation with different typologies of stakeholders; feasibility of such guidelines have been assessed as follows in Table 11:

Table 11. Feasibility of the Mediterranean Tourism Quality Label Guidelines

Stakeholder typology	Guideline	Feasibility
Private company	Economic viability/competitiveness	All companies in the Med region have this requirement
	Customer satisfaction	Many existing companies already check this issue
	Employee satisfaction	Social Corporate Responsibility schemes are spreading out in the Med tourism private sector
	Use and promotion of local products and services	This is the starting pillar of Med sustainable tourism offer
	Environment protection	Awareness of private companies' owners/managers to be increased
Local authorities	Quality Mediterranean Destination" scheme	Local authorities seem interested in assessing the quality (in terms of sustainability) of their destination; the "ETIS" system could be the point of reference
	Mediterranean Destination of Excellence" scheme	The "certifying" institution must be set up, and must be independent from local authorities: Observatory would be the best solution
Tourists	Mediterranean Passport"	It cannot be operational without the setting up of the labelling system. It needs a strong governance at regional and local level
Investors	Sustainability assessment of any new investment	It cannot be operational without a strong governance at regional and local level

Such proposal became the core of a project proposal – TOTEM, developed by Plan Bleu in 2013 – for the testing of such label in some pilot areas, but this project at the moment is not yet financed.

It seems evident that the initial idea (Mediterranean label) cannot be considered feasible for many reasons (among them the lack of capacities/resources to manage it). Therefore, Plan Bleu turned out into a new proposal of quality label, focusing on destinations.

The main steps envisaged in this new version are:

- to define a set of common indicators for monitoring the sustainability of tourism activities at destination level;
- to develop/support "local" (national/regional level) observatories which use the common indicators while adding some context-related ones;
- to establish tools/mechanisms to ensure a stable dialogue with stakeholder at destination level;
- such tools could be implemented as "platform", i.e. a "decision making support system" aiming to influence the strategic and spatial planning of the destination.

This new approach seems not only more feasible, but also more effective in terms of actual impact at destination level (with a clear choice towards the involvement of local stakeholders) and of dissemination (exploiting already existing structures/similar experiences). It would be important to find out the financial resources at least for funding a "testing" phase of such proposal, in order to check the reaction of the destinations more proactive in such topic.

Beside the different paths to be followed and tools to be exploited, the basic issue remains the definition of what is "sustainability" for the Mediterranean context (and offer) and how to measure it: the next paragraph will go deeper in the latter topic, while the definition of "Mediterranean-based sustainability" is developed in "Guidelines towards a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Tourism" (on-going).

Measuring Sustainability of Mediterranean Tourism

MAIN EXISTING INDICATOR SYSTEMS

As already pointed out above, in order to promote a new Mediterranean-based offer (Sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean), any strategy needs a monitoring system, based on agreed and effective indicators, in order to measure (and therefore, to distinguish) the sustainability degree of a product/service/structure/destination (so identifying what is in and what is out of this definition).

Collecting data and information on a broad range of issues relevant to the impact on local economy, community and environment can help destinations build an accurate picture of what is really going on.

A basic principle of an indicator system is that destination responsibility, ownership, and decision-making must be shared. Engaging a group to come together and work to collect and report information is a powerful way to undertake effective destination management.

There are several sustainable monitoring schemes (recognized at international level) which use specific sets of indicators, and the main ones are:

- in 2004, the UNWTO issued the "Guidebook on Indicators of Sustainable Development for tourism destinations"[21], the result of an extensive study on indicator initiatives worldwide;
- Global Sustainable Tourism Council has developed in 2009 the "Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria"[22] (currently under revision);
- European Ecotourism Network exploits the "European Eco-Tourism Labelling Standard"[23], developed in 2011 having GSTC criteria as point of reference;
- Europarc Federation has developed within the "European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas"[24] a set of principles and also some criteria dealing with the environmental diagnostic;
- European Commission – DG GROW has developed the "European Tourism Indicator System"[25] dataset (revised recently) to be applied only to destinations, where a huge set of indicators (43 "core" plus additional 13 specifically targeted to "maritime & coastal tourism" and to "accessible tourism") are divided in four main sectors: destination management, economic value, social and cultural impact and environmental impact.

It is evident the concern from the numerous public institutions to set up a stable system of monitoring (and assessing, and somehow measuring) the sustainability of the tourism economy, but the available initiatives differ one from the other for definition of the "object" of the monitoring, for the selected indicators, for the way how to check the "quality" (reliability, exhaustiveness, update degree, etc.) of the collected data, etc.

Also an operational and shared definition of what is "sustainable" and what is "not", or is just "partially" sustainable, does not exist, so for instance a destination chooses one "awarding" system or another for reasons not primarily linked to the scientific quality of the monitoring tools.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning the huge impact on the tourism sector of such monitoring initiatives (30 years ago the sustainability was only a word to be tackled during public events), but we are still far away from an agreed set of tools (indicators, data collection modalities, check of data quality, etc.), at least at global level. In the Mediterranean region in theory it could be easier, since the smaller dimension and the prominent similarities in the tourism industry, but the huge differences in development degree, data collection capacity and reliability, etc. from one country to another makes this goal pretty difficult.

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[21] http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284407262
[22] https://www.gstcouncil.org/en/gstc-criteria/sustainable-tourism-gstc-criteria.html
[23] http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-ecotourism-standard/en-the-euro-eco-label-stand
[24] http://www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ECST_2015.pdf
[25] http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators/index_en.htm

MSSD 2005-2015 INDICATORS

Among the 34 priority indicators for the MSSD follow-up, two indicators are related to the promotion of sustainable tourism; another one (in italics) is included among the additional indicators (Table 12):

Table 12. Indicators of MSSD 2005-2015 related to Tourism sector

Goal	Indicator	n.
Diversify tourism by developing offers that enhance Mediterranean diversity (eco-tourism, cultural, urban and rural tourism)	Proportion of non-seaside beds in total number of holiday beds	13
Increase added value of tourism for local communities and actors in developing countries	International tourism receipts with assessment of effective benefits for destination countries and local populations	14
Reduce tourism's negative environmental impacts, especially coastal areas' tourism	*Tourism density along the coast*	N.A.

In 2011, Plan Bleu issued the results of a testing exercise of additional 19 tourism-related indicators[26], in order to better fine-tune such monitoring tools, as follows:

1. Breakdown of international tourist arrivals by mode of transport (air, rail, road, sea)
2. Tourist attendance of « tour routes » and other circuits
3. Evolution of tourist attendance in protected areas
4. Number of marinas and berths per km of coast
5. Seasonality of tourism in the coastal zones
6. Share of tourism companies certified ISO 14001, EMAS and HACCP in a destination
7. Number of marinas and/or destinations awarded "Blue Flag" label
8. Average salary in the tourism sector/ average salary
9. Evolution of number of visitors to cultural sites
10. Employment in the tourism sector / total employment
11. Seasonal tourism employment / employment in the tourism sector
12. Share of international tourists arriving via Tour-Operators
13. Share of FDIs (Foreign Direct Investment) in the tourism sector
14. Training programmes for local authorities on the topic "Tourism and Sustainable Development"
15. Share of the population connected to drinking water in tourist areas / share of the total population connected
16. Number of hospital beds (or doctors) per inhabitant in tourist zones compared to the national average
17. Number of students in the tourism branch per education level
18. Share of tourism companies meeting accessibility standards
19. Evolution of the distribution of tourists according to their income level

These indicators were assessed against some criteria (e.g. relevance, quality, accessibility, comparability, etc.) and it came out that some had to be revised, some others substituted, etc. but as a dataset it was acknowledged its full capacity to fulfil its goal, i.e. to monitor the effectiveness of the "Tourism" topic within the MSSD 2005-2015 "Strategic Orientations and Actions".

Other improvements (beside the ones indicated in the 2011 study) can be carried out, as for instance:

- comparison with and eventually integration of new indicators from more recently issued international datasets (see above);
- clustering of all the indicators in common topics (for instance: environment, economy, society, culture, governance);
- setting up a formal synergy with some existing data collection-related actors (UNWTO, GSTC) in order to harmonize and establish regular exchanges of available data (and related elaborations) about common indicators;
- identification of data sources additional to the institutional ones (usually Statistics Institutes), like existing observatories on specific tourism sectors (e.g. cruise sector), universities, etc.;
- testing of new dataset on destinations of different typology, in different countries, in different period of the year, for a sufficient time-span (at least 3 years), and eventually its revision, following the test results;
- creation of new indicators, more suitable for identifying the "sustainability" potential of different tourism typologies: an example could be the "sustainable profitability" index, i.e. a cost/benefit estimation of a specific tourism product/service/structure, where all the costs (i.e. also the so called "externalities") are taken in account as well as all the different benefits (not only economic ones but also social, cultural, etc.

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[26] "Testing the complementary indicators of tourism for the monitoring of the Mediterranean Strategy of Sustainable Development", 2011, Plan Bleu

Therefore it is desirable that such job does not become obsolete, i.e. as soon as an actual "Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Tourism" will be in force, this indicator dataset must be taken into consideration and exploited, in order to create and manage a stable tool for measuring the impacts of such Strategy.

The "Observatory on sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean"

In 2012, Plan Bleu issued the paper "Towards an observatory and a quality label"[27], where the need of creating a quality label for the Mediterranean destinations was the main reason for setting up an Observatory. It was stressed that "The creation of (…) monitoring systems to permanently control the performance and impact of tourism on sustainable development within the destinations (…) would be a relevant tool"[28].

The study concentrated mainly on recommendations for the stakeholders and indicators to be used for a stable and effective monitoring system, but no clear hints were provided on who could be the right actor for establishing and managing the Observatory, how and when to collect the data, etc.

In the Table 13 below, the needs that have been identified and the available proposals are assessed in relation with "Med Quality Label" (proposed in the same study, too) goals:

Table 13. Consistency between Observatory needs & proposals with "Med Quality label" goals

Observatory need	Proposal	Consistency with Med Label goals
Define a short list of mandatory variables and indicators	Create a dashboard/radar for assessing each business/destination	It is consistent esp. to assure a common ground for the sustainability concept
Define a wider list of variables and indicators for private companies	Create a dashboard/radar for allowing each company the self-assessing	It is consistent, to be deeper analyzed the relationship with existing certification schemes (ISO, EMAS, Ecolabel, etc.)
Define a wider list of variables and indicators for destinations	Create a dashboard/radar for allowing each destination the self-assessing	It is consistent, but EU is promoting ETIS as monitoring tool for destinations: to be agreed with EU

Actually, in the world there are some self-called "Observatories" on tourism (e.g. at EU level the "Virtual Tourism Observatory"[29], or the "Observatory on Tourism in the European islands"[30]) that are mainly statistical-focused institutes which collect official data (provided by national governments) and issue datasets and elaboration on specific topics, with no specific mission on measuring the sustainability of this sector.

UNWTO launched in 2004 the concept of the UNWTO Network of Observatories (INSTO)[31], to provide policy makers and tourism managers with a framework for regular gathering, analysis and communication of information related to tourism's impacts on environmental, social and economic aspects in destinations; but at the time being only ten Observatories are part of the network, and eight of them are in one country (China), so the coverage is still very weak.

Established by the University of the Aegean and with the support of the Ministry of Tourism of Greece, the first "Sustainable Tourism Observatory" in Europe opened in the Aegean Islands, the main archipelago of Greece, in early 2013, under the auspices of UNWTO. Since its mission is to monitor and implement sustainable tourism practices – in close cooperation with the tourism public and private sector – in the area of the Aegean archipelago, again the coverage is still weak.

In our opinion, a future Observatory on Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean region should have the following goals:

- update and customization (in relation with Mediterranean features) of definition of sustainable tourism for monitoring purposes;
- homogenization of existing monitoring indicators to measure the sustainability in the different components (environmental, economic, social, cultural), and to set a minimum benchmark for each component;
- stable issuing of data, reports, etc. at national and Mediterranean level;
- deeper analysis and dissemination of good practices of sustainable tourism;
- technical support to Barcelona Convention decision system;

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[27] Spilanis I., Le Tellier J., Vayanni H. (2012). *Towards an observatory and a "quality label" of tourism sustainability in the Mediterranean*, Plan Bleu Paper n.12,
[28] Ibidem, page 52
[29] https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/vto/
[30] http://www.otie.org/
[31] http://sdt.unwto.org/content/unwto-network-observatories-insto

- training towards other existing monitoring centers on how to monitor sustainability in tourism in an effective way.

Who could be the end users of such institution? For sure the following target groups:

- Policy makers at international and national level, exploiting the hints coming from the observatory in their decision making processes;
- Research centers, universities, etc., which could exchange with the observatory available data and related elaborations and develop joint researches;
- environmental associations, ONGs, grass roots groups, that can exploit data on trends and success stories to advocate for more sustainable practices in their territories;
- private sector (service providers, accommodation owners, tour operators, etc.) willing to decrease the ecological footprint and increase the appeal of their service/structure;
- DMOs (also a municipality can act as a DMO) of destinations, that can decide to set a monitoring system based on the sustainability criteria and benchmarks of the Observatory;
- public opinion, in order to be "educated" (as citizens) towards sustainability concepts and to be stimulated (as tourism consumers) by tourism products with higher sustainability (and therefore quality).

Who could endorse the task of implementing and managing the observatory, and how?

It is worth mentioning that such observatory should receive a mandate not only from the UNEP-MAP Barcelona Convention system, but also from other institutions at government level (e.g. Ministries of Tourism) and at international level (e.g. UNWTO, European Commission, Union for the Mediterranean). Such mandate should be appointed to an institution having already the skills and competencies (and there are several) but also the relationships with the main data providers. Finally, the best candidate should prove to have a deep knowledge of the Mediterranean features, both of the northern shore and the southern and eastern ones.

But one institution – although with a huge structure and relevant budget – could not assure a permanent activity in the medium/long term without a strong support from other similar institutions, joining their forces (activities and resources) with the ones of the observatory. One possible solution is to identify a network of observatories (not more than 4-5) which, under the coordination of one of them, can distribute among them the geographical areas to study (so it would be around 5-6 countries per each observatory) and the topics (for instance each of them focusing on one sustainability component).

In this way synergies would be evident and specialization would help the efficiency of the data elaboration.

It would be very important even to compare such structure (observatory network and common indicators) with similar initiatives that are growing up (in the Caribbean, in the Pacific shore of Central America, in Australia, etc.) in similar geographic contexts, in order to gain from the know-how exchange and to export the good lessons from the Mediterranean region, which is maybe the best "laboratory" in the world for testing and developing a modern concept of sustainability-driven tourism offer.

Conclusion

This working document focuses on the current tourism-related policies at Mediterranean level, and the transition from MSSD 2005-2015 to MSSD 2016-2025. A first, undisputable conclusion is that tourism in the Mediterranean region seems to have the same features as early 2000s: concentrated on coastal areas, based on a traditional (becoming obsolete) and mass-shaped offer, with increasing trends (and therefore increasing pressures and impacts on sustainability) and without a real governance, neither at local/regional level nor at national/Mediterranean level.

The UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system seems the only policy-makers' community that is trying to steer (or at least, to influence) such sector towards a somehow sustainability (in a wide sense: not only environmental one) dimension, but its low effectiveness comes firstly from its composition: Ministries of Tourism are not involved in the Barcelona Convention community. In addition, MSSD 2016-2025 has innovated in so many aspects (structure, concreteness, etc.) but still tourism remains scattered among different fields, and it is not clear the overall aim on this topic.

What can be done at this stage?

First of all, a clear and feasible framework strategy to invert the trends must be set up: to define achievable goals, identify concrete direction for actions, and list flagship initiatives. Secondly, this policy framework cannot be only under UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention auspices: in addition of Contracting Parties, other stakeholders must be involved in implementing (or at least supporting) it, like Union for the Mediterranean, UNESCO and UNWTO at international level, as well as Ministries of Tourism at national level.

Therefore, the real challenge is to discuss and find common interests and potential synergies with the private sector, both at Mediterranean level (tourism-related corporations, cruise-shipping companies, transport-related companies, etc.) and at local level, spreading out the DMO (Destination Managing Organization) approach which must be integrated with the PPP (Public-Private Partnership) component.

But after having decided the goals and involved the right actors, how to check the effectiveness of such strategy?

A reliable, integrated and cheap-to-use indicator dataset (to measure the environmental, economic, social and cultural tourism sustainability) must be developed and agreed among the main public institutions, in order to have one common system for measuring the sustainability at least of services, infrastructures and products.
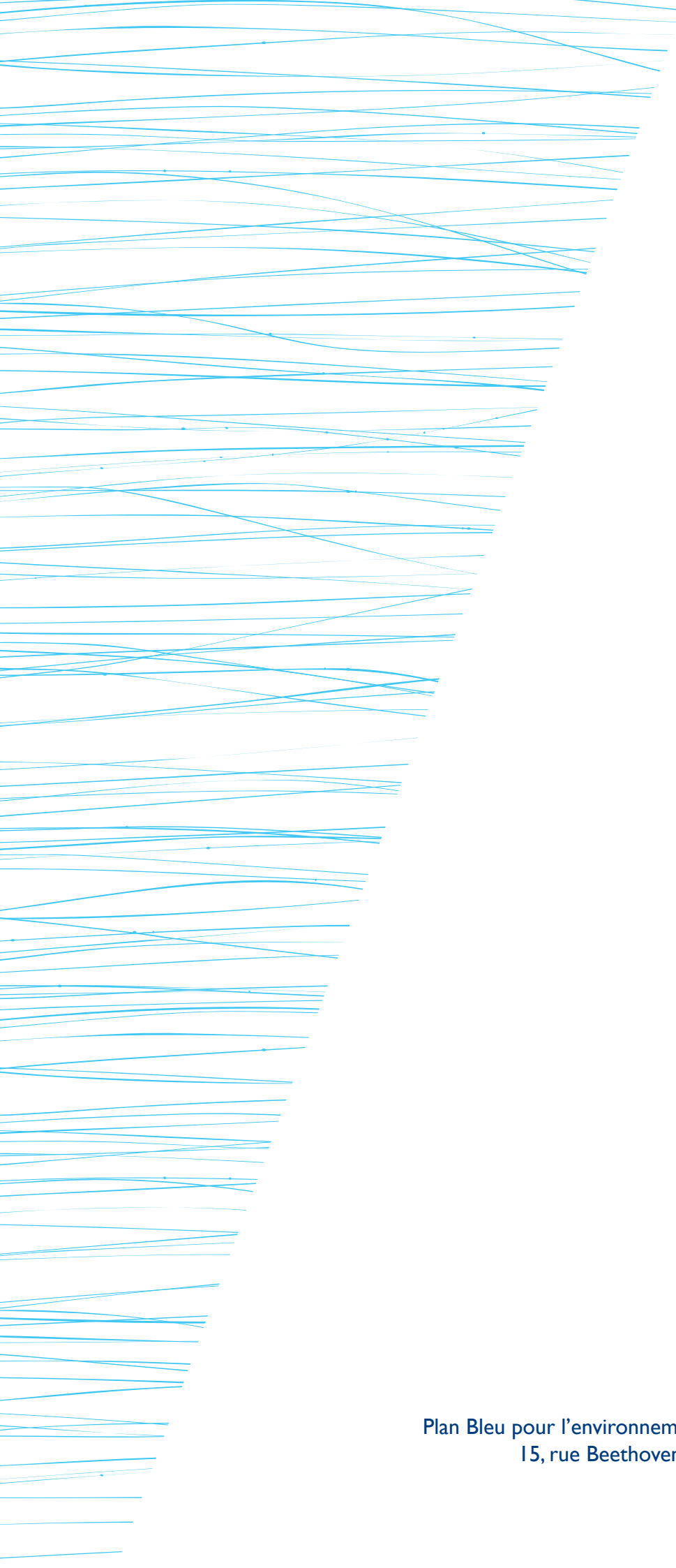
As soon as such monitoring system is set up and agreed, who can implement it permanently and ensure a wide coverage of the Mediterranean basin?

We guess that it is illusory to aim to measure the sustainability of any tourism service, infrastructure and product occurring in the Mediterranean region. At the contrary, it would be likely to set up a network of 4-5 observatories (with one as coordinator) which could monitor the best practices in the different sub-regions of the Mediterranean basin and at the same time focus on specific topics. Such system would be financially viable, efficient (because of limited dimensions) and would stimulate the most dynamic actors to develop new services, infrastructures and/or products in order to be "assessed" by such independent monitoring system, in this way allowing them to exploit the "acknowledged" level of sustainability as marketing value.

In conclusion, since tourism in the Mediterranean is among the main economies, it must be tackled by the public policies, especially for its growing impacts. But as it is mainly out of the control of the public sector, the tactic should be "step by step", and in a 10-year timeframe the enforcement of a governance system and the identification and valorization of the best practices seem to be the main feasible outcomes to be achieved.

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