

TOURISM

Economic activities and sustainable development



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PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean

Tourism, a major economic sector in the Mediterranean, generating social and environmental impacts, and potentially victim of its success...

Over time the Mediterranean region has developed a unique blend of tourism activities related with sea and coastal areas, health, sports, nature, business, culture, offering consistent employment (11,5% of total employment) and wealth (11,3% of regional GDP) (WTTTC, 2015). However, the economic growth induced by tourism activities has often been to the detriment of environmental integrity and social equity. Sea-Sand-Sun (3S) dependency, cultural alteration, environmental pollution, resource depletion, climate change vulnerability, geopolitical insecurity, social instability, are the raising issues that threaten the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector in the Mediterranean.

In this complex picture, how to promote tourism activities enhancing positive impacts while reducing negative externalities? Which strategy can insure that tourism contributes significantly to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at regional, national and local level?

A growing economic sector

Thanks to its unique combination of mild climate, rich history and culture, exceptional natural resources and proximity to major source markets, the Mediterranean region has become the world's leading tourism destination, with more than 300 million international tourists' arrivals (ITAs) representing about 30% of total world tourists for 2014. ITAs have grown from

58 million in 1970 to nearly 314 million in 2014, with a forecast of 500 million by 2030 (UNWTO, 2001 & 2015). Half of these arrivals are in coastal areas, aggravating concentration of human-made pressures in coastal zones, particularly during summer season.

The tourism sector is extensively developed in the Northern Mediterranean countries, notably France, Italy and Spain, and has witnessed an important growth rate in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries such as Egypt and Turkey over the last decade. The top five destinations in the Mediterranean countries – France (84 millions ITAs), Spain (65 millions), Italy (48 millions), Turkey (40 millions) and Greece (22 millions) – represent almost 83% of the region's total ITAs in 2014.

PLAN BLEU
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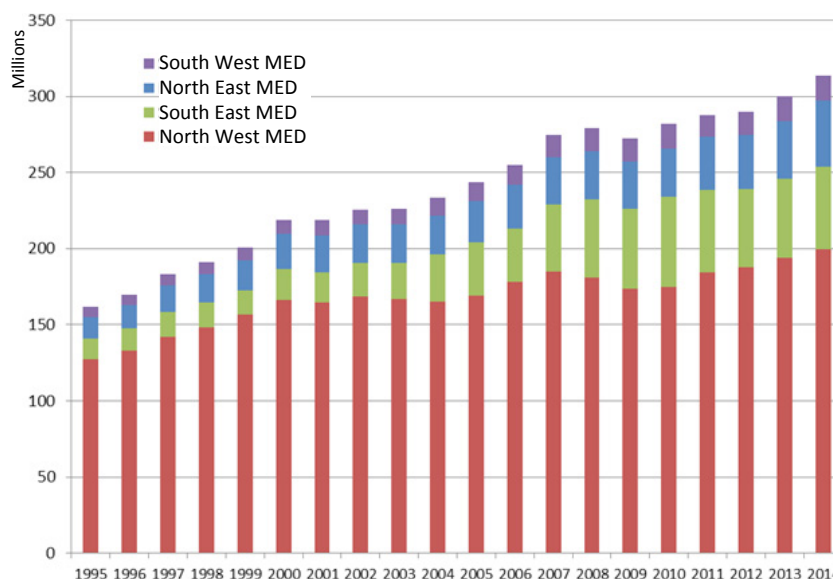
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Figure 1: Mediterranean International Tourist Arrivals (ITAs) trend (1995-2014)

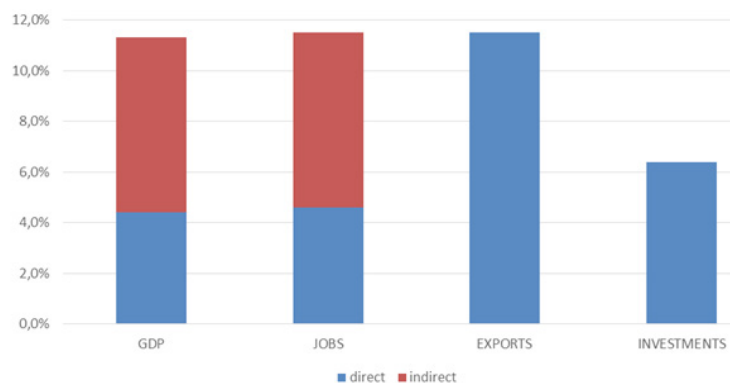


Source: Plan Bleu, 2016 (based on UNWTO Data, 2016)

Figure 2. Economic impact of Mediterranean tourism

Bringing high economic value

Tourism is one of the most important economic sectors in the Mediterranean region, particularly for countries (or regions within countries) with limited industrial or agricultural development. As shown in Figure 2, the tourism sector contributes in the region to 11.3 % of total GDP, 11.5 % of employment, 11.5% of exports and 6.4% of capital investments.



Source: Plan Bleu, 2016 (based on WTTC data, 2015)

But unstable and volatile

Since the importer (the tourist) must go to the place of production for consuming, the tourism sector is very sensitive to external and internal turbulences. Nowadays, four simultaneous crises are affecting Mediterranean tourism: social conflicts and political turmoil; terrorism and insecurity; economic slow-down and unemployment; and, climate change accelerating the depletion of water resources in particular.

An effect of the shocks linked to security and safety is the so called "connected vessels effect", i.e. the fact that part of tourist flows towards traditional destinations of Southern Mediterranean countries (seaside but also historical centers and archaeological sites) are diverted towards similar destinations in the Northern Mediterranean, considered as safer.

Box 1: Terrorism and disasters impact on tourism flows

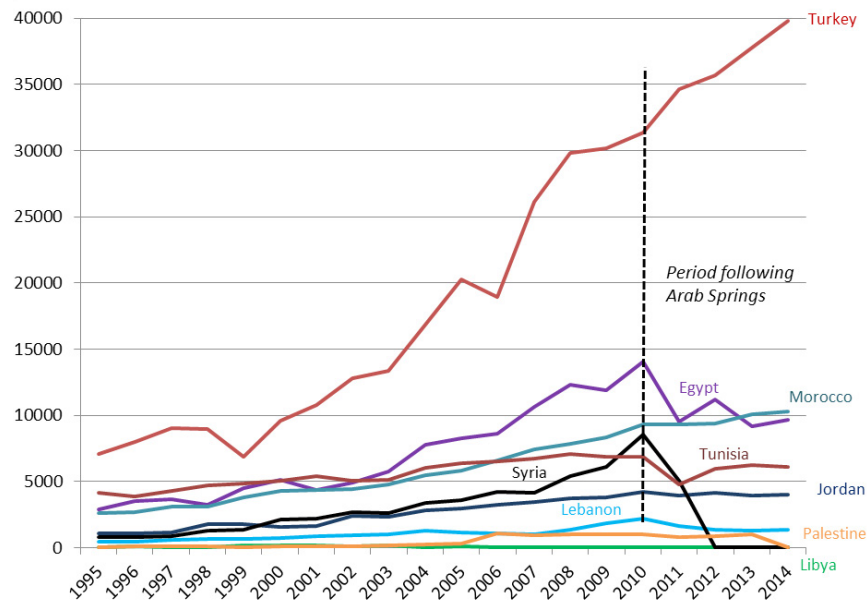
In the past years, terrorist groups have targeted specifically touristic, travel and leisure hotspots in Sousse and Tunis (Tunisia), Istanbul (Turkey), Paris and Nice (France), Brussels (Belgium), etc. The immediate effect on a destination's travel and tourism can be swift: after the Paris attacks in November 2015, the occupancy rate at hotels fell by 21% on the next day. Turkey, which has had a recent series of bombings in 2016, has seen its tourism drop by 10% in February 2016 compared to last year. According to a recent study¹, on average, it takes approximately 13 months for a place to recover from a terrorist attack. While this may seem long, tourism takes even longer to recover from diseases (21 months), environmental disasters (24 months), and political unrest (27 months). The perception and image of destinations in the south and east of the Mediterranean are often general and undifferentiated for tourists from northern countries, so that disturbance in a distant destination creates a sharp decline of arrivals in other destinations even those that are stable and secure.

1 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/terrorism-has-the-smallest-impact-on-tourism-industries/>

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Figure 3. Annual International Tourist Arrivals in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries (in thousands)



Source: WTO and World Bank data, 2016.

With different realities for different sub-regions

It is possible to divide the Mediterranean basin into four distinct geographical groups, as follows (Figure 1):

- **North Western Mediterranean** countries (France, Italy, Malta, Monaco, and Spain) where the development of tourism is already mature and ITAs represent more than a half of Mediterranean total;
- **North Eastern Mediterranean** countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, plus more mature destinations as Greece and Cyprus) are living a proper “boom” as emerging or renewal destinations.
- **South Western Mediterranean** countries follow different economic dynamics: Tunisia is strongly impacted by a difficult security environment, while Morocco is living a growth impacted by the security issues in Middle East and North Africa, and Algeria has not really entered into the international tourism market yet.
- **South Eastern Mediterranean** countries show three different situations: a constant decrease in tourism in the last five years for Egypt, Lebanon and above all Syria, due to the internal political situation and security issues, and a significant increase for Turkey – although the recent internal events will slow down such increase –, and, finally, moderate growth for Palestine and Israel.

Generating environmental damage

The mass tourism sector is responsible for environmental degradation as a major consumer of natural resources to supply visitors with a variety of goods and services, such as: water – an extremely scarce resource in many coastal areas; food – sometimes causing pressure on local production, especially of seafood, and leading to over-fishing; electric power and cooling/heating facilities – making tourism a massive consumer of energy. Moreover, the coastal tourism industry produces serious environmental impacts by causing

marine and fresh water pollution through the discharge of sewage and the disposal of considerable quantities of solid waste.

Moreover, the tourism supply and demand tend to concentrate in coastal areas, which results in territorial disparities between densely occupied coastal areas (collecting most of the economic benefits) and hinterlands where tourism activities are less developed. Climate change should create redeployments of tourist flows in space and time, thus challenging the profitability of heavy investments in coastal areas (sea side and summer tourism).

Box 2. Spatial distribution of tourist flows generating territorial imbalances

Territorial imbalances caused by Mediterranean tourism counterbalance the positive impacts of this activity. Economic growth generated by tourism activities benefits more to seaside destinations and coastal resorts encouraged by public policies. This causes a marginalization of territories with assets for the development of cultural tourism, socially responsible, limiting environmental concerns, such as rural hinterlands, cities and historical sites of high heritage value. However, although public policies continue to promote the seaside model, the reality of both the demand and supply shows that tourist hinterland destinations are emerging more and more. From the demand side, we observe changes in the behaviour of tourists and production/consumption patterns. From the supply side, populations and local actors reactive to these new demands develop new relationships to make their territories more attractive. Thus, innovative territorial governance, links between top-down and bottom-up actions and initiatives, multi-stakeholder dialogue, identity processes and promotion of local products are in move in these territories.

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Box 3. Tourism, air transport and climate change

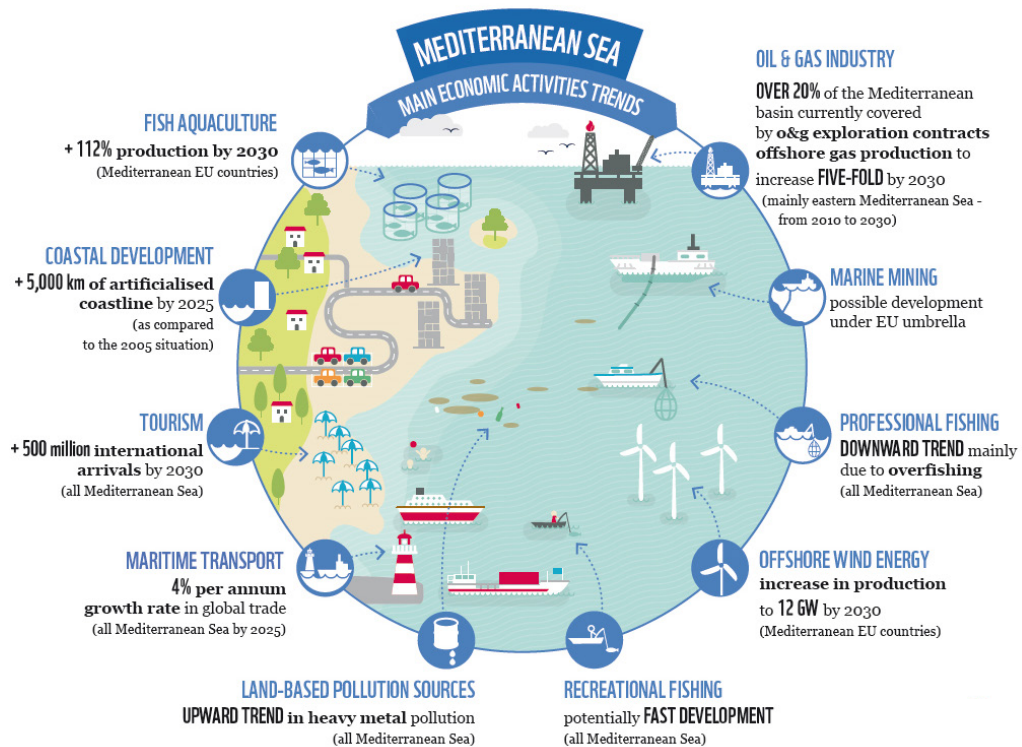
In the past decades, air transport has revolutionised international tourism: the massive development of airlines and airport infrastructures now brings the whole world just a few hours (and hundred euros) away from millions of middle-class consumers looking for new experiences. This is particularly true for Mediterranean tourism with its island countries and peripheral territories. However, air travel causes significant environmental impacts, chiefly energy consumption and carbon footprint (at least 2% of total emissions¹). Today tourism contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions (around 5% of total²), but is also one of the first sectors to be hit by climate change. Improving the carbon footprint of tourism is largely based on regulating the air transport industry (quota trading system, taxation, etc.) and the related technological and organisational innovations (e.g. higher passenger load factor). Unfortunately, air and sea transport has not been included in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. Industry, countries and environmental NGOs are currently negotiating to set up ambitious carbon reduction goals.

- 1 Aviation and the global atmosphere, IPCC Report (1999)
- 2 A report on the Paris Climate Change Agreement and its implications for tourism, Journal of Sustainable Tourism (2016)

Strongly influenced by macro-economic trends

The Mediterranean region is facing a “Blue Gold Rush” (WWF-France, 2015). Without a long-term vision for sustainable development, the Mediterranean Sea will not be able to sustain our economy and our well-being: sea-related activities, including maritime transport, tourism, aquaculture and many others, are predicted to expand substantially over the next 15 years. This is creating growing competition for limited space and marine resources, which will result in even greater pressure on an already stressed ecosystem (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Macro-economic trends in the Mediterranean



Source: WWF-France, 2015

A set of clear issues to address

From the current state-of-play of tourism in the Mediterranean (*Plan Bleu, 2016*) and outcomes of previous Mediterranean sustainability assessments, it is undisputable that the current trends indicate that human-made pressures are dramatically increasing and threaten both the environmental and social sustainability of destinations as well as the economic viability of the sector.

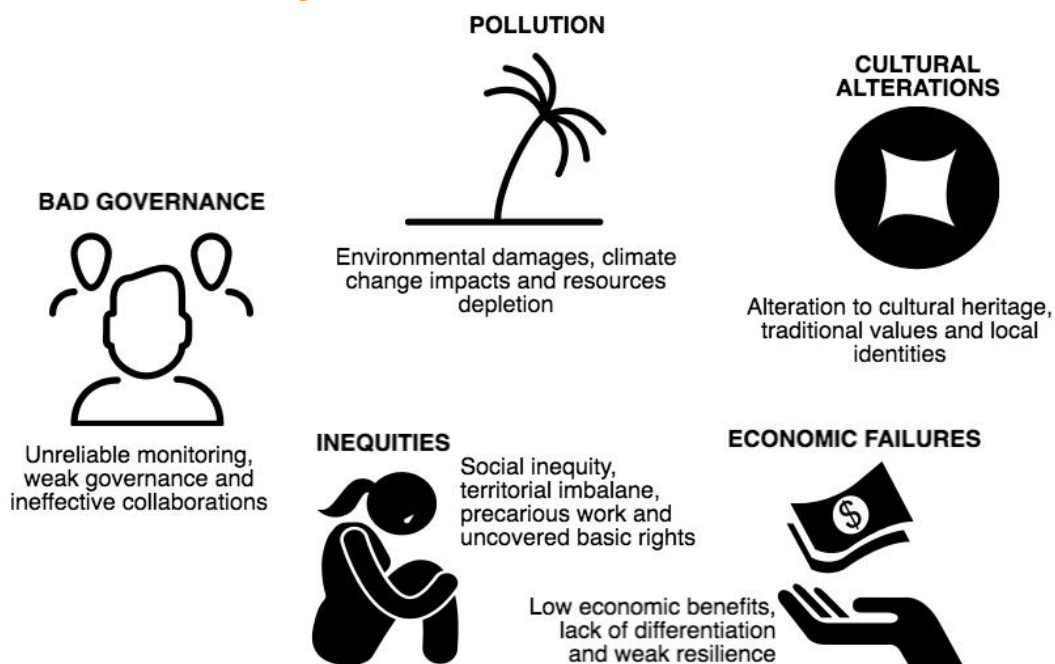
Despite a raising awareness about the societal risks linked to tourism development, sustainability principles are not yet widely applied in the facilities and destination management. Therefore, several problems are still unsolved, numerous challenges are not yet tackled, and many issues remain open.

The key issues affecting the main pillars of sustainability related to the tourism sector, are summarized in Figure 5.

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Figure 5. Main issues of Mediterranean tourism



Source: Plan Bleu, 2016

The need to include tourism in a territorial development approach

In the Mediterranean, because the potential for tourism development is high, public policies and private actors have made tourism a mono-activity in many territories. This led to a rapid economic development in those destinations, as well as negative social and environmental impacts as discussed above.

Today, due to many crises in the region and because the tourist (importer) must go to the place of production (the destination, exporting tourism products consumed on the spot), it is essential to link and harmonize tourism activities up with other sectors, particularly agriculture and handcraft. This complementarity between various sectors must be sought to mitigate the impacts of crises in the territories. Thus, such a process would decrease the relative share of tourism in local economies, allowing tourism to continue to grow.

Two key challenges for Mediterranean tourism in the XXIst century

Nowadays more than ever, the Mediterranean tourist destinations often suffer from overcrowding, exerting too much pressure on land and natural resources, whether from an environmental or social point of view. This poses the problem of the regulation of tourist flows, which refers to the question of the need to reduce the number of tourists in a given area or, at least, a better spatial and temporal distribution of tourist flows among destinations. In other words, according to a territorial approach to tourism based on sustainable development principles, are we able to guarantee access for all to certain tourist destinations?

The second challenge refers to the means that should be implemented for a wider and sustainable access of national tourists to Mediterranean destinations. This concern calls for responses to social development issues; it introduces also the question of resilience of Mediterranean tourism to mitigate or compensate the impacts of crises when tourism is mainly based on international customers.

Table 1: Main impacts for local communities by tourism products (simplified evaluation)

Type of tourism	Environmental impact (air, water, waste pollution, etc.)	Social impact (job quality, inclusiveness, etc.)	Cultural impact (richness, fairness, etc.)	Economic impact (GDP contribution, job creation, taxes raised, etc.)
Coastal tourism	---	+	- / +	++
Cruise	--	- / +	--	- / +
Cultural tourism	-	++	++	++
Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE)	-	+	- / +	++
Rural, natural and ecotourism	- / +	++	+++	+

Taking benefit of international commitments

Mediterranean countries have recently approved global sustainability objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Climate Agreement (UNFCCC COP21), the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD), as well as, under the Barcelona Convention, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025), the Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production for the Mediterranean (SCP AP), and the Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean (ICZM Protocol).

Those institutional commitments are strongly contributing to tackle some of the issues identified previously, but inherent societal characteristics and exponential development of the tourism sector create the need for a dedicated set of actions that should be embedded in a possible Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Tourism (MSST) to be approved by regional and national stakeholders such as countries, private sector, civil society and NGOs, and scientists.

Box 4. The call for a better governance

Coastal, urban and cultural tourism has increased exponentially in the past decades all over the Mediterranean region. Low cost airlines and all-in-one packages make a short trip to sunny islands or historical sites accessible to a large numbers of middle-class consumers. Unfortunately, this massification comes with a cost, in particular for the local communities that feel they are losing control of their neighbourhoods and suffering irreversible cultural or environmental damage¹. Recently, voters of touristic cities and regions (such as Barcelona, Paris, Roma, etc.) have elected politicians who propose to regulate tourism activities more stringently and enhance transparency and governance processes to increase local benefits and reduce negative environmental and social externalities

1 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/gulliver/2015/06/tourism-barcelona>

Defining a shared vision and building a common strategy

Until now, each Mediterranean country has developed separately its own tourism strategy (national strategic framework) and set of policies to regulate and encourage the development of tourism activities. However, most of the challenges defined earlier – environmental degradation, social inequalities, lack of economic competitiveness, cultural alteration, bad governance – are going beyond national borders and therefore require a regional strategy shared by all countries. To do so, a common vision has to be shaped and shared by all national and regional stakeholders.

When looking at the gaps between the vision and the identified issues, a set of objectives and strategic directions can be detailed to integrate into the tourism sector the basic pillars of sustainability on environment, society, economy, culture, and governance (Table 2 - draft version).

Proposed vision:

Promote a sustainable Mediterranean tourism in which visitors and hosts enjoy balanced, respectful and fruitful relationships valuing the unique Mediterranean environmental, human and cultural heritage, while insuring inclusive socio-economic development within the carrying capacity of healthy natural ecosystems, and promoting complementarity between business sectors in tourist destinations.

Figure 6. Strategic Objectives for a possible Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Tourism



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Table 2: Summary of Objectives and Strategic Directions for a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Tourism

Topic	Objectives	Strategic direction
Environment	1. Measure, reduce and mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism	1.1. Promote tools to assess environmental pressures on natural ecosystems and their carrying capacity
		1.2. Support cleaner technologies, resource efficiency, environmental management and eco-labelling
		1.3. Strengthen actions of control and police against wild pollution (wastewater, waste, opportunistic releases of temporary facilities, cigarette butts, oil spills...), particularly those related to tourist visits
		1.4. Balance territorial tourism development between coastal areas and hinterlands, through promotional activities of environment friendly rural tourism
		1.5. Identify, protect and restore vulnerable and damaged ecosystems
		1.6. Develop a «nature based solutions» approach with pilot projects
		1.7. Tenir compte des impacts des changements climatiques dans les futures implantations touristiques
Social	2. Guarantee social rights, decent work, equitable opportunities and resources to local communities	2.1. Promote and support the creation, ownership and development of local businesses
		2.2. Develop an inclusive and responsible tourism sector which contributes to reducing inequalities (gender, generation, etc.)
		2.3. Facilitate access to education, learning programmes for adults, and training courses on sustainable tourism
		2.4. Promote domestic tourism development by adapting the offer to the expectations of national customers and promoting social tourism policy
Economy	3. Develop a resilient, competitive and innovative tourism industry, promoting a better balance between business sectors in tourist destinations	3.1. Support the development, promotion and viability of sustainable tourism
		3.2. Monitor, assess and attract sustainable investments towards green and circular businesses within the tourism sector
		3.3. Facilitate innovation, diversification and resilience of the tourism sector, together with policy-makers, economic actors, and scientists (e.g. economic cluster, definition of ecological and tourist interest sites, etc.)
		3.4. Enable the development of agriculture and handcraft or industry, in complementarity with tourist activities at the local scale (destinations); Promote synergies between different economic sectors
		3.5. Develop new financial tools throughout public private partnerships, the polluter pays principle, etc., to implement compensation and reparation schemes to mitigate negative impacts, as well as eco-conditionality of public and international funding
Culture	4. Protect cultural heritage through balanced, respectful and fruitful relationships	4.1. Value and protect cultural assets, local identity, and traditional knowledge
		4.2. Disseminate tools to assess and monitor cultural impacts of tourism
		4.3. Educate and build capacity on responsible and sustainable behaviors, targeting local authorities, tourism operators, managers of tourist sites, tourists...
		4.4. Promote public policies encouraging links between coastal areas and hinterlands and developing their differentiated assets
Governance	5. Ensure inclusive, effective and transparent governance and partnerships	5.1. Enhance transparent, participatory and inclusive dialogue and collaboration between tour operators, local and national policy-makers, local stakeholders, populations, and representatives of the local business community (suppliers of goods, food and services)
		5.2. Organize information and awareness raising of policy-makers, including local authorities, provide them with appropriate governance tools to promote inter-sectorial planning, diagnostic and monitoring, as well as participatory approach
		5.3. Develop tourism operations as part of an integrated and systematic territorial planning approach, including integrated coastal zone management and through better links between coastal areas and hinterlands

Engaging with regional stakeholders and building a common strategy

In order to successfully implement the proposed MSST, relevant international institutions have to be involved to coordinate specific objectives, directions or actions, in particular: UNEP/MAP and its Regional Activity Centres (technical coordination), UNWTO and UNESCO (thematic expertise), OECD (policy knowledge), European Union (financing mechanisms), and Union for the Mediterranean (political back-up).

A comprehensive, transparent and reliable monitoring system with relevant indicators has also to be built to support the implementation and follow-up of the Strategy that should be fully integrated within the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025). As the budget to implement the Strategy can be significantly high, it requires innovative financial instruments to attract private and alternative investments financing concrete actions, projects and activities.

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Sustainable tourism the way forward for the Mediterranean

In addition to mass coastal tourism, which presents clear limits, a new type of tourism needs to be defined in a more eco-friendly manner and with more consideration for local populations.

The United Nations General Assembly has designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, a decision that will have a particular echo among the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. The tourism sector in those countries acts as a primary economic lever, representing up to 8.1% of GDP and 7.4% of direct employment in a country such as Morocco.

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization figures, in 2014 the Mediterranean region hosted 313 million tourists, one third of all international tourism, when its entire population is only 487 million. This obviously creates a discrepancy between the pursuit of maximum gain on one hand and the need to preserve natural ecosystems and promote local assets and stakeholders on the other. How can the coastal tourism "monoculture" that prevails today be overcome? What new avenues can be explored to provide greater diversity in product supply and promote new, sustainable development models?

Abandoning the tourism mono-activity

These are the questions that the sixty experts and decision-makers gathered at a workshop organised by Plan Bleu and the French Development Agency (AFD) in Marseille on 23 and 24 May attempted to answer. "As a channel for state development aid, the AFD is trying to better target its funds to ensure tourism does not remain the poor element of development policies. Our workshop aimed at identifying best practices and best ways of working in the tourism sector", explains Tom Tambaktis, event organiser for Plan Bleu. Actions can be taken in several areas. One of them is government policy, by facilitating the implementation of regulatory tools both at state level and by local authorities, who are on the front line and have a better grasp of the actual issues.

The coastal tourism model, with its gigantic hotel resorts, relying on seasonal flows and offering cheap prices (all inclusive), has shown its limits. In a Mediterranean region knowing political instability, it is timely to start restructuring the tourism supply and begin thinking about transforming the huge seaside resorts that are currently standing empty. This restructuring or transition should also take into account the tourism potential of the hinterlands – ensuring the mistakes that have ruined the coastal areas are not repeated – by designing products that both preserve the local areas' authenticity and take into consideration their populations. Lastly, attention must be paid to reducing the seasonality, source of imbalance, and ensuring that tourist flows are spread over the whole year. Tom Tambaktis concludes as follows: "Basically, we need to understand that our dependence on coastal tourism has to end. We also have to consider that tourism in itself is not the only driver of development for a given area".

Source: Article published in partnership with Econotrum

In the Mediterranean, seaside tourism is still the leading model, attracting in mass all social categories searching the «little paradise» in coastal areas. Given the increasing overcrowding of coastal areas and resorts, tourism generates negative environmental and social impacts. Tomorrow, tourism-based economies may collapse in too degraded areas in terms of environmental quality and services provided by ecosystems, or because those destinations no longer possess the natural and landscape assets that made them attractive and which resulted in the willingness to pay from tourists.

The Mediterranean tourism is at a crossroads. Either it integrates sustainability and good governance principles, or it will become obsolete, uncompetitive and rejected by local communities. Most of the other major economic sectors have already started their transition, more or less successfully, towards sustainability. It is now time for the whole tourism sector and stakeholders to embrace the challenges of the XXIst century and contribute to a prosperous, peaceful and inclusive Mediterranean region.

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Head of publication: Anne-France Didier
Authors: Jérémie Fosse & Julien Le Tellier, with the contributions of Luca Santarossa, Tom Tambaktis and Emanuela Manca
Editorial board: Mohamed Berriane, Pierre Torrente & Lina Tode
Design and production: Hélène Rousseaux

Printed by: IPB Office Solutions
Dépôt légal : en cours - ISSN 1954-9350