

## GROUNDS AND MECHANISMS OF ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE EU

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**Intro.** Tourism not only creates jobs and income, and promotes intercultural relations and mutual understanding. It also contributes to the increasingly well-known side effects on people and populations, nature and culture caused by the enormous amounts of transportation, the consumption of resources, inadequate preparation of travel and inappropriate behaviour at the destination. Sustainable tourism with equal-ranking ecological, social and economic goals is obviously more than just environment, jobs and profits. Economic prosperity and well-being, cultural diversity, and social peace are significant goals; but none is more important than the maintenance of the natural preconditions for life as "*conditio sine qua non*". Without economies and trade, sustainable development cannot be expected within the natural limits of growth. The "*key to success*" in the long term for a "*tourism with future*" lies in conditional orientation along ecological limit values and figures.

**The EU environmental laws** help protect against water, air and noise pollution and control risks related to chemicals, biotechnology and nuclear energy within the Union. It refers to the EU 5th Environmental Action Program (1992-97) and the European Council's meanwhile approved "*European Strategy for Biological Diversity*", which also contains recommendations for environmentally-directed tourism and leisure activities.

The overall direction of EU environment policy is laid out in the latest action program – "*Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice*". It concentrates on 4 priority areas: climate change; nature and biodiversity; environment and health; and natural resources and waste. Also, an Environment and Health Action Plan for 2004-2010 promotes a close relationship between health, environment and research policy. The EU treaty-based notion of "*sustainable development*" adheres to this practice by integrating environmental requirements into the definition and implementation of other EU policies and activities (i.e. tourism).

The ultimate goal of sustainable development is to achieve a form of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. With the "*International Convention on Climatic Change*", and the Berlin Declaration on "*Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism*" made by the International Conference of Ministers of the Environment (1997) in Berlin should help to convert these general goals into more concrete and binding ones, and help to give a sense of direction to the growing worldwide economic sector of tourism.

**The European Ecolabel** was originally created to reward tourist accommodation services and tourists that respect the environment. In 2004, the European Commission also established criteria for camp site services. Since 2005, camp site services can apply for the European Ecolabel.

The European Ecolabel signals environmental good performance as it is an added quality value when consumers are choosing a resort. Enterprises bearing the Flower Logo have officially been distinguished as being amongst the most environmentally friendly in their area.

Tour operators are also being questioned about limiting the particularly serious environmental pollution caused by the rising and increasingly energy-intensive amounts of transport produced by tourism.

Today there are approximately 50 certificates and environmental management systems for "*green*" tourism in Europe. Within the European LIFE project published these certificates here on ECO-TIP.

In 2001 the leading European eco-labels for accommodation, situated in Austria, France, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Nordic Countries, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom and the Blue Flag International started to collaborate and built up a common platform for eco-labels called VISIT. In 2004 a

milestone in the establishment of sustainable tourism in practice has been achieved: the VISIT Association, the European platform for partnerships and further progress, is launched.

**Conclusion.** Through increased cooperation in EU local networks and through joint marketing, tourism resorts and EU regions can make use of the synergies which they urgently need to survive and to write off or amortise their environmental investments. In tourism without frontiers, here above all European policies with their aid programs are required, particularly if it is to do with reducing pollution and environmental pressures caused by the continual increase in tourism and goods traffic.

Besides the weak “soft” instruments such as voluntary commitments and environmental audits, ecological seals / ecolabels and environmental awards & prizes, networks and seminars “hard” instruments such as drinking water prices and refuse collection charges, the removal of tax exemptions on aviation fuel or a CO<sub>2</sub>/energy tax to implement the “polluter pays principle” are indispensable. The sooner and the more clearly the policies on regional as well as at international (the EU) level impose the appropriate legal and tax regulations, the sooner binding environmental plans in the style of “*Sustainable Netherlands*” can be worked out and introduced in the form of a development framework at EU national level, the suppliers of tourism products will be able to better calculate and invest more securely.