



## BBSC- Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism

5 November 2015, Florence (Tuscany, Italy)

### MINUTES

**Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou**, Member of the Coordinating Team of the BBSC Tourism Working Group from the Region of Central Macedonia and Moderator of this Session, welcomed all participants to the meeting which was organised to enhance collaboration between the members of the BBSC Tourism Working Group and help them plan their future steps.

**Ms Evi Dermedesioti**, Member of the Coordinating Team of the BBSC Tourism Working Group from the Region of Central Macedonia, stated in her [speech](#) that the privilege of belonging to the Balkan & Black Sea area can help us leave our mark in the tourism sector. Ms Dermedesioti underlined that in order to participate in projects, we have to define the promotional framework, adjusted to our needs, to previous research and to the “idea” that we want to implement. Ms Dermedesioti closed her speech by reminding participants that the main goal of the BBSC Tourism Working Group is “to stress our similarities and our interesting differences that make us visit each other and make others visit us”.

**Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou**, invited all members to send their ideas and proposals regarding the implementation of the goals set to the Coordinators. In his [speech](#), Mr Nikolaou reminded participants that the top short-term priority of the BBSC Tourism Working Group is to create concrete project proposals for EU programmes and funds. The objectives and main features of these projects are to improve the implementation of policies and programmes for regional development, exchange of experiences and best practices. Mr Nikolaou then referred to the role of Tourism Routes in fostering regional development and integration.

In his [speech](#), **Mr Leonidas Tsiantis**, Member of the Coordinating Team of the BBSC Tourism Working Group from the Region of Central Macedonia, presented the role of trans-national thematic tourism products as a means of sustainable tourism development. Tourism, more than any other economic activity, can develop synergies in close interaction with environment and society. The overall objective of creating trans-national thematic tourism products is to provide added value to the tourism sector of the Balkan and Black Sea area by improving the sustainability and competitiveness of cultural and sustainable tourism and to support and promote cross-border and trans-national tourism routes/itineraries/trails, either physical or virtual, with a view to being able to contribute, directly or indirectly, to a more sustainable tourism industry. Mr Tsiantis closed by proposing activities that the BBSC members should concentrate on in order to achieve this aim.

**Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou** [summarised the speeches and suggested high-level objectives and common actions](#) for the next period, and opened the floor to participants.

**Dr Apostolos Papafotiou**, Regional Councillor of Peloponnese in charge of International Relations & European Programmes, congratulated the Coordinators and reminded participants of the importance of a brand name for the Black Sea that does not include the word “black” because of its dark connotations. Regarding thematic tourism, Dr Papafotiou highlighted the importance of thematic projects that promote

cultural heritage and the difference between “tourists” and “visitors” that should be the goal in our planning. Therefore, terms such as “tourist industry” should be avoided due to its hard connotation as not environmental-friendly. Dr Papafotiou referred to the experience of Peloponnese Region regarding thematic tourism, and more precisely the creation of a network of all types of thematic tourism offered in Peloponnese, in addition to each one separately (the network of ancient ports for instance). This approach allows the visitor to have an overall idea of the place. Dr Papafotiou concluded by underlining the importance of each person as a visitor and suggested to approach visitors through types of thematic tourism.

**Mr Nikolaou** agreed that contrary to the mass tourism model of the previous years, the thematic tourism model is the future and a model of tourism that can allow us have repeated tourists. However, Mr Nikolaou said that questioning the name of the Black Sea is not one of the Working Group’s aims.

**Mr Patrick Anvroin**, Director at the CPMR responsible for the follow-up of the Balkan and Black Sea Commission, proposed that the Work Plan be updated and said that the question of branding is not an issue to work on alone and asked if other organisations active in the area are working on this issue.

**Mr Nikolaou** answered that one of the aims of this Working Group is to cooperate with the different stakeholders in the area, such as the BSEC, and the national authorities of each BBSC member, in order to propose a common brand name.

**Ms Dermedesioti** underlined that the issue of branding should aim at super products such as *WEBLA* (Wetlands and Estuaries in the Black Sea Area) or *ACCESS* (smAll Cruise blaCk aEgean SeaS) that specialise on the types of thematic tourism that are a priority for the BBSC members.

**Mr Nikolaou** agreed with Mr Anvroin’s proposal to update the Work Plan of the BBSC Tourism Working Group and invited all members to share their ideas on future cooperation and steps. The coordinating Region of Central Macedonia encouraged its members to contribute periodically to setting up an inventory of best practice and initiatives concerning national, regional or local tourism events taking place in their territory, and conferences, seminars and workshops on thematic tourism organised by national, regional or local authorities or private organisations; to suggest travel packages of thematic tourism, offered by professional associations and/or travel agencies; to create such itineraries to exchange best practice and experiences between us; to consider initiating the creation of a network among existing national, regional, local, public or private organisations, professional associations or even educational institutions from countries which are actively involved in promoting thematic tourism; to explore ways to encourage the national associations of tour operators and travel agencies; to promote thematic tourism joint destination packages in countries outside the Black Sea area; to stimulate the launch of transnational projects in the field of sustainable thematic tourism itineraries; and to consider the possible funding and create public-private partnerships.

**Mr Giuseppe Sciacca**, Senior Policy Officer at the CPMR, suggested adding a couple of thematic priorities to the Work Plan for the next few years and focusing on the mainstreaming of tourism within regional policies, as it represents a priority for the European Commission. Mr Sciacca asked the members to present how the main results of the work carried out and achieved at European level have been able to influence their policies and how they analyse the results and input in order to change and make their policies dealing with tourism more effective, competitive and sustainable. Mr Sciacca mentioned the European Tourism Indicators System ([ETIS](#)) developed by the European Commission, the role of the CPMR in lobbying at European level and promoting the needs of its members, the need to improve our knowledge and experience on this issue and to foster mainstreaming. The development of specific links between European funds and tourism is also a priority and Mr Sciacca described the idea of a Blue Invest Platform, promoted by the CPMR. This is a European platform bringing together all European regions to discuss how European funds have helped to improve and enhance maritime sectors, within which the CPMR will pay attention to the role played by tourism and how European funds are expected to promote tourism at territorial level. He highlighted the importance, for both the CPMR and its members, of the opportunity to hold an awareness campaign among

regions and to promote best practice, capitalise on specific examples and to try to obtain information in order to discuss with the European Commission's Directorates-General during the next programming period. Mr Sciacca shares the idea of networking and creation of thematic routes, which also represents a priority for the European Union. He invited the BBSC members to focus on the content, identify the regions within the BBSC that can contribute to this, select the main priorities and then find the brand name of the routes. Mr Sciacca mentioned the cooperation between the CPMR and [NECSTouR](#), for the development of a common agenda for the next few years, and invited the BBSC members to collaborate closer with the CPMR.

**Mr Mustafa Melih Emre Beji**, Specialist from Trakya Development Agency, expressed the Agency's positive view of creating a Balkan & Black Sea brand, and the idea of developing a project on creating a brand with workshops in different countries. Thematic tourism is also of interest for Trakya Development Agency and the most successful attempt has been to create a cluster of wine producers in the region of Trakya (Edirne-Kirklareli-Tekirdag). Ecotourism and agrotourism are also among the interests for thematic tourism in Trakya. Taking into account that most visitors prefer to travel by bus/car/bike that allow them to visit the neighbouring countries in the area, Mr Beji highlighted the visa issue for non-EU citizens, and the need for collaboration with the respective authorities.

**Mr Mircea Stoian**, President of the BBSC and Tulcea County Councillor, suggested inviting representatives from the tourism industry to the next meeting of the BBSC Tourism Working Group in order to involve them in creating transnational and thematic routes, as they are the most active actors. Mr Stoian suggested that in order to avoid travel and accommodation costs, different events in each BBSC member region could be held on the same day aiming to promote good practice. The idea, based on Romanian experiences, is that each region would organise a low-cost event with local actors (NGOs, tour operators, hotels, etc.) in order to accumulate all feedback at local and regional level.

**Mr Nikolaou** invited all BBSC members to get organised and send the priority areas for promoting thematic tourism, the top three priority areas of each member region and the initiatives already developed in these areas (i.e. a short list of needs-opportunities-ideas-experiences) to the BBSC Secretariat. The creation of a database and an inventory will follow.

**Mr Sciacca** reiterated that the priorities should be to develop public-private partnerships, take into account specific needs (which should come from the internal analysis) and then move forward with some projects and routes.

**Mr Nikolaou** thanked all participants and closed the meeting.