

CHAPTER 3

Meeting the citizens, human contacts, confidence-building; tourism

After the Covid pandemic, what would be more comforting than re-establishing human contacts? This would have beneficial effects on the personal, but also on the economic side.

“When we talk about sustainability, the Covid-19 crisis has to be mentioned. The pandemic has had a devastating effect on tourism and brought significant changes into the sector (high unemployment, health & safety measures, new habits and attitudes of citizens),” warns Helen, a representative of an NGO from Hungary.

European citizens can once again enjoy travelling, and as Ursula from France recalls, “the advantage of travelling is to discover others and appreciate the European motto *Unis dans la diversité*” (United in diversity).

Cultural identities are neither fixed, nor uniform – human culture is made of permanent exchanges and contacts between individuals and groups. Therefore, there cannot be a macro-regional strategy overcoming national borders without as many contacts as possible inside that macro-region.

In other words, the making of a macro-regional policy must not be the privilege of a few politicians or stakeholders. Citizens need to be involved directly to give the whole process a ‘human touch’.

Building trust in macro-regional strategies is about working together, on a cross-sectorial and transnational level. Consultation instruments give citizens the feeling that they are not excluded from processes related to the development and implementation of strategies. You end up learning that we have much more in common compared to what differs.

“Although the EU was not created originally to serve the citizens, but rather the states and public administrations, nowadays everyone knows about the importance of reaching the hearts and minds of citizens. People are not born EU citizens, they need to develop into EU citizens,” as Christiana from an Austrian civil society organisation stresses why it is essential to involve people.

As for cultural tourism and cultural heritage, they cover lots of areas – not only history, geography, culture and arts of communities participating in macro-regional cooperation, but also efficient planning, management skills and communication. This is a rather complex topic civil organisations need to deal with, in cooperation with a large number of stakeholders working at different levels.

Without the necessary management and communication skills, NGOs will not be able to take an active part in funding programmes aimed at promoting sustainable cultural tourism and preserving cultural heritage in the macro-regions. Learning is very important in this complex, multicultural environment. It can be done by developing common ideas, exchanging experiences, and testing pilot projects. As Stefano from Italy says an innovative project could be, for example, participatory tourism which is responsible tourism including every stakeholder of a certain destination in order to create authentic, new products which later on affect their everyday life.

European citizens and their organisations have an important role to play in promoting sustainable cultural tourism and preserving cultural heritage. The main objective is not to promote mass tourism, but rather innovative forms of tourism – more suited to establishing

human contacts. For instance, the growing interest in youth tourism is becoming increasingly important all over Europe.

As all macro-regions have interesting touristic attractions, promoting them also contributes to bringing these macro-regions closer to each other. It is amazing to see how different EU regions are – even the ones closest to each other. At the same time the Obelisk at Jennersdorf in the east of Austria was set up as the common landmark of Austria, Hungary and Slovenia. It became a symbol of connecting people, culture, history and traditions in the Danube macro-region.

Meelis from Estonia gives an excellent example: the cross-border Interreg Estonia–Latvia programme has been able to create many interesting projects for culture (<https://estlat.eu/>). Or, as Stanka from Serbia mentions, the Danube region also offers fantastic cultural tourism sites for active tourism in the Balkans.

“It seems to me that the EU is doing a good job in improving the touristic offer within EU regions. More should be done for regions that also include candidate countries,” writes Aleksandar from Macedonia.

The European Capital of Culture programme – managed by the European Commission – is another relevant initiative. Establishing cooperation between twin cities of macro-regions is one more great way of promoting human, cultural or natural values. United in diversity: a diversity that we should all get to know as much as possible.

Specific suggestions

- My macro-region tourist card – a macro-regional agrotourism / identity tourism digital platform could accommodate the macro-regional tourist card by giving direct access to all regional businesses registered on the platform, as well as providing sizeable discounts. This could connect potential tourists to local producers. (NN, Romania)
- NGOs should use their own international contacts, initiating cross-border programmes, organising exchange programmes, and seeking the necessary financial support. (Istvan, Hungary)
- Developing and continuously updating a calendar of programmes with cultural events of macro-regions (Stavros, Greece)

Additional quotes

“It is obvious that the macro-regional strategies are about people and our lives with challenges and opportunities.” (NN, Sweden)

“Trust is needed to encourage collaboration and human contacts are the best way to develop trust.” (Maria, Belgium)

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