Explorative Proposal for a Thematic Partnership under the Ljubljana Agreement

Sustainable Tourism

Challenge: Cities are increasingly dealing with issues of unregulated (over) tourism where they lack the appropriate tools and legal capacities to monitor, guide and regulate the industry. This lack of control has led the way to many unintended consequences. This includes the rise of a low quality tourism industry, undermining the resilience of the sector and bringing adverse consequences to the quality of life in cities. At the same time smaller and medium size cities can also identify tourism as potential economic opportunity on the condition that they could provide for proper infrastructures and that it would not prevent the sustainable development of their territory.

Most member states are actively developing and implementing national policies on tourism. At the European level, tourism-policies are being developed by the European Commission (in particular by DG GROW) and also at the EU Council tourism is a recurrent policy domain, for instance as part of the priorities of the revolving EU Presidencies. Under the former Portuguese Presidency, the Council adopted conclusions in which it called on member states and the Commission to come forward by the end of 2021 with a co-designed European Agenda for Tourism 2030/2050. In a recent resolution, the European Parliament called for an EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism. Among other things, it called for the renewal of the European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism.

Tourism is one of the ecosystems of the EU Industrial Strategy, and as such it is already addressed and tackled in many Commission initiatives (mostly DG GROW and CNECT) of relevance for cities, including Intelligent cities initiative, Living in the EU, European Green Capital, etc.

In other words, this is a policy-area where a multilevel approach in the form of a Thematic Partnership may be of added value to different stakeholders.

From the urban-perspective, in many cases the lack of control on tourism has been damaging the liveability and social fabric of city centres due to on a high concentration on certain economic activities and retail such as souvenir shops, restaurants and fast foods, etc., an increasing pressure on the housing market to accommodate tourists, and a cultural and entertainment sector too much focused on tourist interests, among others. The over reliance on tourism in certain city areas has generated an important economic recession during the pandemic, confirming the risks associated with a mono-sectorial economic model.

Yet the pandemic has also revealed a new interest for a more local tourism and smaller and medium sized cities but also regions are exploring how to answer this new demand while preserving their natural and cultural heritage as well as keeping their urban centres alive throughout the whole year.

City administrations have been looking for ways to regulate the sector to find a balance between citizens needs and touristic ambitions, but they cannot do it alone. Working in a multi-level set-up is necessary to find the appropriate support and coordination, as well as developing tools, funding schemes and regulation that can help them take back control of the sector and lead it to a sustainable path.

Opportunity: The unprecedented amount of resources made available in the EU recovery have the potential to transform the tourism sector in cities and make it more sustainable and resilient against future shocks. Resources and investments are only part of the solution, and there is an opportunity to couple them with enabling conditions that will put city administrations, national administrations as well as the European Commission in a better position to align their different policies and legislative initiatives.

The potential provided by the digital revolution is still today largely untapped. Cities have been looking at data and metrics as tools to track tourism trends as well as to tackle social and environmental shortcomings of the industry. However, major barriers remain such as the lack of access to many datasets still kept

privately and an administration not yet ready to interpret and use them. Developing digital skills is not only an important opportunity, but also a competitive factor for the sector as a whole which can greatly benefit from digitalisation.

Taking back control of the sector means also co-creating comprehensive and long-term strategies for the sector in dialogue with stakeholders and citizens, identifying priorities and goals to make the best of innovation. Many cities are already experimenting and working on transforming their tourism industry, for instance by assessing how they can bring in circular economy principles in the tourism sector, or by looking at how they can revive their crafts local production, or by exploring how they can boost innovation in SMEs.

Mission of the proposed thematic partnership: This TP would bring together the experts working on tourism-policies from local, regional, national and European level, with a view to initiate a mapping and scoping exercise from the perspective of accelerating sustainable tourism in European cities. The TP would, from this exercise, jointly decide on the areas of collaboration and develop (and implement) an action plan on Better EU legislation, Better use of EU funding and Better exchange of Knowledge.

Contributing to Green, Productive and Just cities and building on good urban governance: Fields of action may include the transformation of tourism in cities into a sustainable and resilient sector, particularly by tapping on the potential of digitalisation while addressing related challenges (e.g. platform economy) and contributing to climate neutrality objectives.

Such mission would contribute to a more productive city in the long-term. Sustainable tourism is in fact one EU main industrial ecosystems strongly centred in cities, and as such a main contributor to GDP and employment in cities. Its value chain links with transport, accommodation, experience and intermediation, among others. Bringing innovation in the sector towards high-quality services and products is fundamental and will make the sector more sustainable and performing in the future.

At the same time, transforming the sector can contribute to reduce its carbon footprint, which today is responsible for 8% of CO_2 emissions. In doing so, it can make cities greener and more liveable, supporting climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, as well as supporting switches to soft mobility, multimodal and sustainable collective transport system, buildings energy efficiency.

Finally, a transformed sector would contribute to a just city as it would be better equipped to provide quality work, and not rely as much on underpaid short-term employees. It would equally better address issues related to housing shortages, city centres diversity, etc.

Tourism is a key component of Next Generation EU and as such prominently tackled in the NRRPs put forward by member states. It is strongly connected with the European Strategy for data and the European Skills Agenda (and Pact for Skills in tourism/ upskilling strategy and contributes to the objectives of the European Green Deal, particularly in areas such as transportation, building renovation, circular economy, etc. Finally, it is strongly aligned with the EU social agenda, and in particular to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPRS).

Various recent and forthcoming regulations are of relevance, including the European Data Strategy, the Data Governance act / common data spaces and the Digital Single Market, Digital services Act.

With the forthcoming implementation of the digital services act there is a window of opportunity for cities and STRP to exchange data and maximise the value offered by digital platforms.

Building on previous TPs: This thematic partnership would build on the work of previous partnerships such as the digital transition partnership (e.g. action Access and reuse of private sector data of general interest by the public authorities; Strengthen the ability for cities to act within the digital transition), the housing partnership (e.g. action Recommendations on improvement of EU urban housing market data); jobs and

skills (e.g. action on Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS3) 2.0), urban mobility, culture (e.g. action on Data Collection and Smart Use Applied to the Management of Tourist Flows; Regulating Phenomena of Sharing Economy; Guiding Principles for Resilience and Integrated Approaches in Risk and Heritage Management in European Cities)