Summary of the 12. Baltic Sea Tourism Forum plenary sessions

The 12. BSTF was organized by the Baltic Sea Tourism Center, in close cooperation with Policy Area Tourism of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and with the participation of the European Commission. The Forum was moderated by Ms. Anastasia Nekrasova.

Introduction

Opening the conference, **Mr. Bodo Bahr, Secretary General of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)**, gave a historical perspective on the establishment of the BSPC in 1991. National and regional parliaments around the Baltic Sea, including EU Member States, the Russian Federation and Norway, came together after the Fall of the Iron Curtain to form a forum for political dialogue between their parliaments and to overcome the political division of the Baltic Sea. Today, safeguarding peace and the peaceful cooperation in the region remains a fundamental objective. In this connection, he underlined that tourism plays a significant role as a policy area and unifying element in cross-border cooperation around the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. The BSPC recognizes the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum (BSTF) as the main annual tourism platform for tourism stakeholders in the whole region. Mr. Bahr also highlighted, that "the promotion and support for further development of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center (BSTC) is a central demand of the parliamentarians around the Baltic Sea, which also include the European Parliament as a member of the BSPC".

Mr. Michael Cramer, Former Member of the European Parliament (2004-2019), demonstrated the rise of the cycling movement in Europe and explained how cycling tourism became a key element of the alternative tourism industry in Europe. He stressed the importance of cycling as a driver for sustainable tourism development and its positive effects on health. Following up, Mr. Cramer focused his presentation on the cycling route "Eurovelo 13", also known as "The Iron Curtain Trail", which runs along the former Iron Curtain, the boundary dividing Europe into two separate areas from the end of World War II in 1945 until the end of the Cold War in 1992. "Eurovelo 13" (Iron Curtain Trail) stretches from northern Scandinavia (Finland) to the Black Sea, running along 10.000 km of former Eastern Bloc borderlines. He is fighting to make the entire route across Europe better accessible to cyclists.

Ms. Asa Bjering, Executive Secretary of the Baltic Sea Commission, underlined in her presentation "Share, inspire, motive" the importance of tourism as a driver of economic growth in the world. In the future, tourism experts will have to think of new ways on "how we can keep the tourists in the Baltic Sea Region". As tourism is based on interactions amongst people, investing in tourist mobility can bring mutual opportunities for tourists and residents, speaking e.g. of "better and clear transport information, easy ticketing systems, less traffic congestions, effective land use or behavioral influence". She concluded, "We work where inspiration really happens; we build up on enabling the sharing of experiences, pushing eachother that we can do even better".

Ms. Anna Pollock, Founder of Conscious.travel, shared her vision of a new approach on tourism with the audience. She explained that hosts and destinations are passing through a period of turbulent change and "enormous volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA)", in which many traditional business models are being disrupted, dealing with the impacts of overtourism, climate change, growing wealth disparity and political polarization. Anna Pollock highlighted that we should start to focus on regenerative tourism as an alternative, which she described as "bolder and more inspiring (than sustainable tourism). It aims not just to do less harm, but also to go on and restore the harm that our system has already done to the natural world, and by using nature's principles, to create the conditions of life to flourish. It views wholes and not parts, and is a very different way of looking at the world."

Mr. Janos Schmied, Program Officer of DG Grow and EEN, European Commission DG Grow, introduced the COSME Enterprise Europe Network (EEN). It is the world's largest advisory network for SMEs, bringing together 3000 experts from more than 600 business support organizations in 60 countries worldwide. SMEs who use it grow on average 3 % points more than those who do not. Mr. Schmied focused his presentation on the strengthening of links with EU instruments facilitating cross-border market access, sharing some examples of good practices and synergies between ESIF and COSME EEN.

Mr. Maciej Hofman, Policy Officer of DG EAC, European Commission, presented the topic "Cultural heritage in the EU" to the audience. He noted that individual EU Member States are responsible for their own cultural policies; the role of the European Commission is to help address common challenges and to support the innovation potential of the cultural and creative sectors. Mr. Hofman also mentioned that a new Work Plan for Culture 2019-22 was adapted in 2018. The Council selected five priorities in view of their contribution to cultural diversity, their European added value and the need for joint action: 1. Sustainability in cultural heritage; 2. Cohesion and well-being; 3. An ecosystem supporting artists, cultural and creative professionals and European content; 4. Gender equality and 5. International cultural relations.

Session 1: Share achievements

Ms. Blanka Belosevic, Representative of the EUSAIR, introduced the "Legacy of the European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region". It was jointly developed by the European Commission, together with the Adriatic-Ionian Region countries (four EU Member States: Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia; and four non-EU countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia) and stakeholders, in order to promote economic and social prosperity and growth in the region by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity. The EUSAIR is built on four thematic pillars. Pillar 4 is dealing with two specific objectives: 1. "Diversified tourism offer (products and services)" and 2. "Responsible tourism management (innovation and quality)". They are covered largely by the cross-pillar projects ADRIONet, STE-TAI, Blue Culture and ADRIONCYCLETOUR, and the mono-pillar projects Green Mapping, DES_AIR and CulTourAir.

Ms. Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło, Head of International Permanent Secretariat, Euroregion Baltic, spoke about "Success Stories of international tourism cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region". Euroregion Baltic was formed in 1998, setting the basis for long-lasting political cooperation whose main scope is to increase cross-border cooperation for economic, social and political development. ERB has been the first euroregion to include Russian partners, "proving the possibility to handle sensible cross-border issues or challenges in a friendly and trustful atmosphere". It is an important platform contributing to the development of the whole Baltic Sea Region and with particular attention to the South Baltic area.

Mr. Tomasz Naprawski, Project Manager Baltic Museums Love IT!, Interreg South Baltic Programme, gave an overview on the project, in which museums, tourist institutions and research establishments from five countries in the Eastern Region work together on IT-enabled tools for natural and cultural heritage attractions in the South Baltic Region. The focus of the project lies on game-oriented applications (gamification), which should appeal to new target groups. Furthermore, developments such as multilingual tours on one's own smartphone should offer visitors a higher visit quality. The exchange of knowledge between partners and visitors forms the basis of the project. The future users get involved. IT enthusiasts are invited to programming events (so-called hackathons) in the tourist facilities. The knowledge gathered by the project partners is also made available to non-partners via an online platform.

Ms. Ira Lahovuo, Project Manager Archipelago Access, Interreg Central Baltic Program, noted that Archipelago tourism focuses on private summer cottages and leisure boating. It is characterized by a large number of micro-enterprises, numerous municipal operators and fragmented information for the tourist. Since Archipelago tourism is still relatively small scale compared to its potential, Archipelago Access aims at strengthening sustainable nature and culture based tourism, increasing the attractiveness of the archipelago comprehensively – both in Finland and in Sweden and offering easy access to travel information. To address these challenges, the project will provide a comprehensive digital platform to facilitate tourist information, as well as two interactive and experiential exhibitions.

Mr. Niclas Fjellström, European Coordinator Baltic Sea Food, Interreg Baltic Sea Region, introduced the project, which is helping local food growers in rural areas of the Baltic Sea Region build distribution networks to develop their businesses. Therefore, the BSF project is creating an overview of locally grown products in rural districts of 10 Baltic Sea Region countries and building shorter supply chains. The aim is to help local food producers and farmers get their goods to restaurants and shops on a faster and more regular basis. With the partners' input from ten countries, the project mapped the existing situation in local food distribution in the Baltic Sea Region. A comprehensive analysis is complemented by conclusions and suggestions for improvements.

Ms. Constanze Metzger, Routes4U Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe, underlined that tourism and culture are disciplines, which are "fare too often working separately. Heritage does not stop at borders". The goal of the Cultural Routes program is to preserve and promote European heritage by encouraging people to explore their European legacies. So far, 38 Cultural Routes have been created, providing all citizens, regardless of age, with opportunities

to enjoy various types of cultural and educational activities. The Cultural Routes cover a wide range of themes reflecting European memory, history and heritage.

Session 2: Share achievements

Mr. Prof. Björn P. Jacobsen, Mr. Tjark Schlegel and Mr. Christopher Blanck, University of Applied Sciences Stralsund, focused on the question: "Seeing what is now and seeing what is next" in the BSR travel and tourism industry. Mr. Prof. Jacobsen underlined, that people underestimate what is coming up in the next 2 years and overestimate, what is coming up in the next 10 years. For this reason, the BSTC Expert Group "Market Research" developed two new tools that provide a "good overview for BSR tourism stakeholders looking for specific trend data" on BSR tourism developments – the Tourism Market Monitor® (TMM) and the Tourism Trend Radar® (TTR).

Ms. Karin Melbye Holm, Danish Tourism Innovation, asked, "What the tourism and non-tourism businesses are capable of doing, if they put their resources together". In response to her question, she introduced the "Co-development concept" - a structured process designed for joint development of new Tourism products and services or improvement of existing ones. It also includes a toolkit, which is tailored to lead diverse groups and teams through the process of discovery, creation, and completion of innovative products, offers or services. The Co-Development Toolkit is divided into 5 modules. Each module consists of hands-on tools and exercises. They all contribute to a coherent step-by-step process making progress easy.

Session 3: Create perspectives

Ms. Ramune Genzbigelyte-Venturi, Policy Officer in the Tourism Unit of DG Grow, European Commission, presented the ongoing initiatives, policy priorities, funding, and major events at EU level related to sustainable tourism. She said, "Tourism is a 'booster' for other sectors and activities, instrumental in fostering a range of additional results across its complex value-chains from its interlinkages with creative industries to its essential role in fostering sustainable infrastructures and circular models for local economies, up to the increased embeddedness of touristic products/services into ICTs and social media. For this reason, EU policies can act in complementarity."

Ms. Joanna Mouliou, Program Manager of DG Regio, European Commission, contemplated about the position of "Tourism and culture in ERDF and Interreg". She said, "It is visible that tourism and culture have developed successful programs" and "play a big role in bringing people more easily together". Both sectors "fit in a smarter Europe" (respectively under the new ERDF and ESF policy objective 5: A Europe closer to citizens). She underlined that stakeholders of all levels need to work together in order to find cross regional solutions for sustainable and responsible tourism development.

Ms. Andrea Krabbe, EUSBSR Policy Area Coordinator for Tourism, reflected on the "Future of Policy Area Tourism in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region". She said, "The future has not happened yet, so we want to be prepared, we are always in process and in progress". For this reason, PA Tourism defined three new actions (1. Transnational tourism development in remote and rural areas; 2. Investing in people, skills and technology in the tourism industry and 3. Preservation and sustainable utilization of cultural heritage and natural resources in tourism destinations) within the revision process of the EUSBSR Action Plan. The actions are linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, aiming to establish the Baltic Sea Region as a sustainable tourism destination. Summing up her presentation, she asked all tourism stakeholders to breathe life into the actions, e.g. through projects, platforms, flagships or networks.

Mr. Stefan Hyttfors, Global speaker, Author and Change agent, started his presentation reflecting about the developed world losing trust in the future. He stressed, "It depends on the decisions we make if the future will look dark or bright". Today we are electing new sorts of leaders, young leaders, leaders we did not see in the past. "It is a new way of thinking, a new way of culture". Nowadays we are living in a globalized network society. In this context, he underlined, "Culture is not where you are from; it is about attitudes". "We are not focusing on the problems of our time anymore, like resources. We do not need to wait for the IPCC reports or scientist. We can go out in nature and reflect on the fact that there are many people on the planet. For this reason, we talk about sustainability the whole day. Everything will be about sustainability at the end". He remarked, "We need to be humble about the fact that we are part of the ecosystem. If we do not start thinking of our real problems, there will be no ecosystem anymore. We are borrowing resources from the future". In his view, doing much more with much less is the context in which we have to operate. A visible example is Digitalization. With Digitalization, we create value and knowledge. He noted, "Technology can solve so many problems and create so much more value". However, what is the point of it? He said, "It is a battle between convenience and trust. We are longing for someone to trust and talk about values". So, what is the purpose of what we are doing? He declared, "We often talk about change as something difficult or hard. Change is the only natural thing. What makes change dangerous is speed. So we need to focus on speed" and ask us "For what reason do we want to make everything faster"?

Closing the conference**, Ms. Lidija Bajaruniene, Chief Official for Tourism Policy, Ministry of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania,** invited the audience to participate in the next Baltic Sea Tourism Forum, which will take place in Palanga (Lithuania) in autumn 2020.