

World Congress On Social Tourism: A Call For A Policy Aiming At Development And Solidarity

Aubagne (France) - Nour-eddine Saoudi

After Naples (Italy), Mexico City (Mexico) and Blankenberge (Belgium), the World Congress on Social Tourism held its latest session in Aubagne (south of France), on 10th May. In the presence of 300 deputies representing more than 30 countries, it stressed the need for respecting cultural and natural heritage, as well as the equitable distribution of incomes, so that tourism can really make a contribution to development and solidarity.

Organized bi-annually by the International Bureau of Social Tourism (BITS), this Congress is regarded as a forum of the greatest importance for the exchange of views on the means of developing social tourism. The session discussed the topic "Towards development tourism and solidarity" focusing on three themes: The first related to solidarity so that everyone would have access to holidays. It is a question of working for the realization of solidarity between generations, i.e. to allow not only the working population to profit from tourism, but also pensioners, young people, the handicapped and families.

The second theme treated the question of the development of the local space, emphasizing the importance of the local economic, cultural and social components. It is important for tourism to have positive repercussions on the local inhabitants, in terms of employment and tourist receipts. Within this framework, the experiments of France, Spain and Poland were discussed. The final theme was the question of solidarity between North-South countries. The speakers stressed the fact that interdependent tourism, integrated into a policy of fighting poverty, is an effective means to instigate and reinforce solidarity between North-South countries and comes within the framework of "Equitable Trade". Conference participants were introduced to projects carried out in Mexico, Algeria and

Togo, within the framework of the program of the World Tourism Organization (WTO): "durable tourism for fighting poverty".

Tourism Of Development Instead Of The Development Of Tourism

In his inaugural speech, the president of the BITS, Norberto Tonini, emphasised the engagement of his organization in favour of development tourism centered on the quality of products and services, respect for natural and cultural heritage and a more equitable distribution of the benefit of tourism to the host communities.

It should be noted that this congress was attended by eminent personalities, including Eugenio Yunis, the WTO's head of durable development, Francesco Lanniello, of the European Commission, Alain Bodon, from the French Ministry of Tourism, Lucio d' Amore, from Italy's Directorate General of Tourism, Alain Belviso, and Michel Vauzelle, president of the regional Council of Provence-Alp-Azure of the south of France. The work of this congress was marked by the adoption by the BITS General Assembly of one addendum to the Declaration of Montreal (Canada) of 1996 "For a humanistic and social vision of tourism" reinforcing the convictions which had been defined and integrated new realities and challenges of social and interdependent tourism. It is mainly about the call for tourism to be a real lever of durable development, bringing together different nations, encouraging a dialogue between cultures and religions in order to reinforce peace in the world. The document called for the freedom of travel for all, by facilitating obtaining tourist visas in particular for the nationals of the countries of the South, and by encouraging the travel of children and young people, in order to consolidate the traditions of exchange and friendship between the various people of the



world. BITS were formed in 1963 in Brussels (Belgium), where it has its headquarters. It is an NGO with more than 130 members (associations, co-operatives and publicly-owned establishments) from nearly 40 countries. It is a member of WTO and has a consulting role with UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It has reinforced its international presence, by the creation of its American branch in 1994 and the African branch in 2004.

The Declaration Of Montreal Or Tourism With A Human Face

Launched in 1996, in the Canadian city of Montreal, this declaration calls for "tourism for all", stressing that the individual should be the focal point of tourism development. Being a means of enrichment of individuals through its openness to other cultures and civilizations, tourism is a fundamental factor for cohesion and peace in the world. Social tourism, encompassing all social categories (young people, the less fortunate, handicapped and others), works to encourage travel for hundreds of millions of people, and generates considerable commercial activity. This should have positive repercussions on the tourist regions and their inhabitants. It is necessary to reconcile the development of tourism with safeguarding the environment and respect for the identity of the local population: this is the main aim of social tourism. Lastly, Islamic Tourism magazine was the only media representative from the Arab world in this congress. Many conference participants praised its high quality, as well as its ethical, religious and cultural dimensions. ■