



WG Action plan (Revised after Plymouth – June 2009)

Working group Social and Environmental Responsibility – SER

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Methodology according to the objectives of the WGs

During the conference in Plymouth (17-19 June 2009) NECSTouR working groups were asked to revise their action plan in order to:

- focus on one action to be developed on a voluntary basis in the short / medium term
- decide on actions to be funded in the longer term
- organise the work on indicators in coordination with the central work done by M. Bell.
- identify responsible people for the actions

The working group has decided to respond in the short run to the European Commission's call for proposal on Network's Knowledge that had very similar objectives as this working group. A project, called SMART – Sustainable Management Arguments for a Responsible Tourism, has therefore been developed, and is now waiting for the Commission evaluation.

Context

The Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER) brings together, on one hand environmental management (use of renewable energy, energy management, water management, waste management, responsible travellers, landscape integration, raising awareness among clients), and on the other, the quality of life of workers (training and lifelong learning, working conditions, human resources management...).

SER focuses on improving the operation of tourism businesses, whereas protection and conservation of the natural landscape/ wildlife within the destination are taken in charge by the working group "Heritage and identities protection". The aspect of employees' quality of life will be retained within the remit of SER group whereas the tourism for all approach will be treated separately, even if maintained in the SER working group.

2 - Market research aiming at demonstrating the green tourism business case (including key motivators for visitors' satisfaction & loyalty) and understanding business's behavioural change mechanism. Market research will investigate three main components:

⇒ **Business case factors such as** improvement of occupational rate, financial results, return on investment, Market development to new customer' segments and other positive tangible benefits; Staff retention and loyalty, staff "performance" and attitude, Community acceptance and support , also other positive benefits that can be perceived as less tangible such the anticipation of new environmental legislation, new expectations of private investors, Direct costs savings on resource consumption and owing to more resource efficient business practice, ...

⇒ **Key motivators for visitors' satisfaction and loyalty** towards green businesses / products: Business representatives, sustainable tourism networks, regional authorities as well as customers surveys, all show that green tourism products not only are badly known, but they do not really represent a strong motivation when choosing a tourism product. It is of common acceptance that waste management, energy savings and water recycling are not factors of customer satisfaction and do not contribute to an enjoyable tourist experience

It is however perceived that the "values and contents" of a green tourism product are key factors for customer satisfaction and loyalty (repeated business).

⇒ **Understand business' behavioural change mechanisms:** Behavioural change is a specifically local phenomenon, driven by social environment and allegiances, rather than rational analysis.

Concepts of trusted friend/cluster support, and positive/ social messaging are increasingly highlighted in current research. This gives significant potential to the concept of working in small tourism clusters in order to affect and influence change in business practice.

The key challenge remains to extract best practices models of influencing the green engagement of businesses and further using this panel of tools to develop sustainable tourism. Thus, the potential for identifying the best examples of the business case put forward to small tourism businesses, combined with the best method of spreading it (e.g. via networks, ambassador businesses, training events, on-line and offline support) is significant.

It is therefore proposed to identify successful methods of engagement being used across the partner regions, in order to provide tourism support agencies with a blueprint for engaging at a local / regional level and successfully delivering sustainable tourism on the ground.

Depending on the EC approval

Starting on the short term for 21 months

3- “SMART Tool-kit”: The final and completed findings will be summarised in order to give key arguments for business networks / chambers / representatives. This will enable them to encourage their members and businesses to adopt green certification-schemes and sustainable tourism practices. The project will establish dedicated communication supports, based on both summarised and ready-to-use data, as well as more detailed results.

The SMART Tool-kit will deliver :

⇒ **A dedicated SMART’s website** with ready-to-use summarised information as well as all findings:

- To be incorporated into awareness building campaigns and enterprises’ engagement actions by tourism enterprises networks
- To be used as strategical and tactical tips for tourism enterprises networks, DMOs, sustainable tourism networks, territorial authorities, or all organisation having to convince and support enterprises as well as tourism boards in promoting sustainable / responsible / ecotourism / green tourism offer to European visitors.
- To be used by the travel press to relay sustainable tourism cause to visitors and to policy makers in order to contextualise and legitimate public policies.

⇒ **A multi-languages user-friendly designed communication tools** in major tourism languages (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Czech and German) providing:

- Key findings documents to download on the SMART website for European tourism enterprises, networks, and stakeholders.
- Leaflets on SMART to distribute according to the project’s dissemination strategy.

4 - Communication and dissemination, mainly through:

⇒ **European, national and regional events and conferences:**

⇒ **Emailing campaigns, addressed** to major tourism European tourism enterprises networks and trade, major European and international institutions, key national / local bodies already involved in ecolabelling tourist services as well as regional / national / territorial actors of each SMART’ s partners .

⇒ **SMART website** promotion with maximum linkages to the website, from SMART partners, NECSTouR, and NECSTouR members, as well as from all organisations being encouraged through the emailing campaign.

⇒ **Press conferences and public relations** towards European travel press as well as environmental and business press, targeted European Commission and European institutions in charge of European policy making and targeted national, regional and local press.

III/ Gathering technical know-how on SER in Europe

Developing technical knowledge, support and implement SER in SMEs is largely available throughout Europe, or at least in certain countries.

It would however be advisable, within the framework of technical knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences, to have a “tool box” (guidelines) which would be both, general as well as specific enough and adapted to each type of work (hotel, restaurants, camping’s...) and each type of destination (seaside, mountains, countryside...).

Realising such a tool will of course require financial means and could be integrated into a European funded project. It is also important to notify that similar tools already exist, and considering the diversity of Europe, it might not be feasible to develop such a “Trans-European” tool.

**Medium /
Long Term**

III/ Harmonising regional policies towards Ecolabels in Europe

It is well known that numbers and natures of European Ecolabels/ Eco certifications need a harmonisation in order to improve the visibility of European tourists. The diversity of requirements as well as the geographical dimension (international, European, national, regional and local) and the different nature of the Ecolabels (certification schemes, internal labels, trade mark...) are indeed bringing a lot of confusion in the tourists’ and businesses’ minds since the common tourist does not really know what to expect from one destination to another. Therefore, the scope of ecolabelling efficiency is greatly diminished. If the European Ecolabel the ‘Flower’ seems to be the most adapted at European level, the certification of the association Visit 21 as well as the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria must also be taken into consideration in our approach.

However, even if this aspect is very crucial, it is not the task of regions to do such evaluation of criteria, thus as a short term approach, all voluntary aspects will currently remain promoted, since they provide a basis for “corporate social responsibility” / SER.

**Medium /
Long Term**

The 3 pillars on social dialogue, measurability and competitiveness will have to be integrated in all actions of the network as initially planned.

Conclusions

SER is a very **transversal theme** that will require strong linkages with other working groups, especially on transport, seasonality, and natural heritage conservation and quality of life for residents. Regional authorities and business federations will have to **show exemplarity** in their own internal SER policies in order to be credible with the enterprises and tourists alike.

Synergies will have to be developed among the group members in order to **develop complementarities** between the academic group and the associated members’ tasks.

Members OR Responsible people for the actions