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Background

The Mediterranean Economic Week (MEW) is a very unique multi-partner initiative, launched in 2007 and organized annually since then thanks to its very successful set up and proactive approach behind it, capturing all relevant tendencies concerning economic development very timely and comprehensively, with a special focus on MENA region.

The MEW, bringing together actors from various backgrounds among which entrepreneurs, researchers, politicians, economists, experts, academicians, artists, operators of the social economy and civil society actors, from the two shores of the Mediterranean reaching thousands of participants over the week with the aim of providing a place for discussions and debates on the economic development of the Mediterranean and the Middle East region.

It is organized by the Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur Regional Council, the Municipality of Marseille, the Marseille Provence Métropole Urban Community, the Euroméditerranée Urban Development Agency, the Marseille Provence Chamber of Commerce, with the support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and coordinated by the Office of Economic Cooperation for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (OCEMO), located in Marseille.

Eager to follow the interests of entrepreneurs, civil society, private sector and of public institutions in charge for local economic development strategies, 2014 edition focused on the role of **'Tourism as a driver of economic development in the Mediterranean region'** due to significant importance of tourism sector in the context of economic development initiatives of many countries in the Mediterranean basin. Due to its unique nature in terms of high employment generation capacity and social interaction effect, the tourism sector is an effective and efficient tool to create a multiplier effect on the economic and social development, while generating investments and income respectively.

Tourism, as a cross-cutting sector involving large diversity of services and professions, plays a crucial role in local economies and has great impact and linkages with the territory. Despite this huge potential, many countries and regions have so far failed to make better use of it, due to the lack of consciousness and knowledge about how to orient their tourism strategies in a sustainable manner through taking full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts.

UNDP ART Panel: "A Territorial Approach to Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean Strategies, Instruments and Practices"

Being fully aware of the importance of the MEW and particularly the issue of tourism sector in the Mediterranean region and taking the relevance of territorial approach into account, building on strategic partnership with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and French decentralized cooperation partners, UNDP ART has also facilitated a panel entitled as "Territorial Approach to Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean: Strategies, Instruments and Practices" in order to showcase the importance of sustainable tourism initiatives at territorial level – socially responsible, involving and benefiting the local communities and local economies, and respectful of the environment - and highlight the uniqueness of the decentralized cooperation as a modality to support such approach.

In this context, core role and facilitation of UNDP ART initiative's in the panel in partnership with the French Delegation for the Exterior Action of Local Authorities (DAECT) provides an exceptional opportunity to promote ties and cooperation between a multitude of local and regional authorities, including their networks and associations, namely through the extensive

articulation framework enabled by the UNDP ART Initiative. The collaboration among UNDP, DAECT and other partners paves the way for exchanging and discussing the new challenges and necessary evolution of development cooperation, and for contributing, both in practice and theory, to the post-2015 development architecture, with a special focus on strengthening the coherence and effectiveness of development cooperation in the specific field of sustainable tourism. Wide range of participants appreciated the excellent platform for the Sustainable Tourism activities at a multilevel scale provided by UNDP ART Initiative.

Extensive Visioning Interventions

The panel brought together practitioners from Albania, Morocco, Tunisia, Italy (FVG) and France (Marseille) to provide first hand evidence of the challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt. The interaction between speakers and the audience allowed a rich exchange among public and private stakeholders from different Mediterranean countries and set the stage for networking and partnership building.



In the initial intervention, Ms. Naima Oussi, Responsible of Projects from **Morocco**, briefly explained the initiatives and projects such as Ecotourism; driver of territorial development in the Oasis du Sud”, “Historical and Geographical Information System to support tourism between City of Marseille and City of Tripoli”, “Touristic Integrated System with Friuli Venezia Giulia and Montenegro” in order to address current challenges faced by sustainable tourism projects.

In continuation, Ms. Mirela Koçi, Executive Director of AULEDA, made a successful promotion of integrated tourism initiatives in **Albania** complemented by Mr. Enton Diamant’s presentation giving the vision of Albania in promoting sustainable tourism at territorial level.

Governments are fully competent when it comes to promoting tourism, but LRAs have an important role to play in coordinating and supporting sustainable tourism projects through several flagship initiatives highlighted by Mr. Houcine Trabelsi who shared the vision of **Tunisia** in promoting sustainable tourism at territorial level.



These various and rich presentations sought to analyze current sustainable tourism projects and programs across Med area and to discuss the challenges faced by the tourism locally. Ms Anne Claire Gaudru, Responsible for Sustainable Tourism, Cités Unies **France**, emphasized the need to monitor and measure the impact of decentralized cooperation and to exchange good practice at local, regional and European levels and examine current measures that could be improved.

Various exchanges between representatives of Morocco, Albania and Tunisia during the event trigger the idea of preparing a Project proposal entitled as “Decentralization and Sustainable Tourism”, which could be presented to EU and to other decentralized cooperation (DC) partners. Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) Region and Champagne Ardennes representatives shared their initial interest and availability to follow up this initiative based on their strong experience with Montenegro and Oriental Region in Morocco.

With reference to strong linkages and interaction between sustainable tourism initiatives and local economic development contexts, City of Turin representative, Ms Elena Apollonio promoted the organization of the **3rd World Forum on Local Economic Development (LED)** to be held in Turin between 13th and 16th of October 2015. Most of the participants expressed their explicit willingness to participate at the 3rd World LED Forum and many of them proposed to organize a workshop about the role of Sustainable Tourism in the LED strategies in the Mediterranean basin.

Extensive discussions during the panel validate that any discussion and action on sustainable tourism needs to be contextualized within the **local economy**, relating to the political, legal, administrative and institutional frameworks of the country's ongoing local development, governance and decentralization processes, as well as the social aspects and culture.

Given the crosscutting nature of sustainable tourism, both in terms of involved stakeholders and sectors, a consistent vision can be better achieved through a **territorial approach**, involving all relevant stakeholders in a coherent and integrated strategy and linking different sectors. Consequently, the governance of sustainable tourism becomes a key element, delimiting the degree of cooperation among stakeholders and levels of government.

Under the specific context of each country and its territories, different instruments can be developed to effectively promote sustainable local tourism, i.a. public private partnerships, inter-municipal cooperation, cross border cooperation, clustering, territorial marketing strategies, value chain enhancement, vocational training, ICT, local economic development agencies, entrepreneurship promotion and financing schemes for local SMEs.

To effectively plan and implement integrated sustainable tourism strategies and develop such concrete instruments, capacity development (both at national and local level) is highly crucial. **Decentralized cooperation**, that is the development cooperation partnerships between local counterparts from different countries, emerges as a useful cooperation modality for the practical exchange of knowledge, best practices and lessons learnt among local actors in the field of sustainable tourism, connecting territories of the Mediterranean basin.

Perspectives for Future

While the panel was in general the occasion to discuss innovative territorial approaches and instruments to promote sustainable tourism at local level and showcase examples of how decentralized partnerships between territories are promoting sustainable tourism and could therefore become a way of promoting Sustainable Human Development at the local level in the post-2015 context, it particularly sought to integrate local and regional authorities knowledge in order to help shaping a sustainable MED-wide tourism strategy.

It is thus important that the panel will keep support the exchange of ideas and encourage decentralized cooperation actors to engage in thought-provoking topical debate with local and regional practitioners and policymakers at international level through engaging with the process towards the 3rd World LED Forum in Turin, 2015.

UNDP ART Initiative, through its multilevel, interdisciplinary and multi-actor approach, committed to foster mutually enriching linkages between local, national and international dimensions of development, which is becoming more and more strategic in promoting democratic decentralization and good governance.