Enhancing connectivity, preserving cultural heritage, and driving local excellence in European tourism: destination management and regional tourism growth

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The European Parliament adopted by 432 votes to 42, with 129 abstentions, a resolution on enhancing connectivity, preserving cultural heritage, and driving local excellence in European tourism: destination management and regional tourism growth.

Parliament highlighted the strategic role of tourism in the European economy, representing approximately **10% of the EU's GDP**, and emphasised the need for a transition to a more sustainable, balanced, and inclusive model. This sector, which encompasses transport, accommodation, culture, and leisure, depends on effective coordination between its various components.

Enhanced connectivity as a catalyst for sustainable regional tourism growth

Parliament stressed that strong connectivity is essential to balance tourism and extend its benefits to underserved areas, alleviate pressure on over-visited hotspots and support the revitalisation of local economies. It advocated for the establishment of clear, measurable, and regularly updated **benchmarks** to assess the accessibility, affordability, and quality of sustainable travel options, including progress made for people with disabilities and reduced mobility, as well as for remote, outermost, rural, sparsely populated, and island regions, with particular attention to small islands.

Members called for the EU's strategy for sustainable tourism, alongside the next MFF, to define and prioritise **clear funding mechanisms** to support the transition to sustainable tourism models in regions affected by seasonality, climate change, demographic strain, permanent or intense visitor pressure, declining attractiveness, as well as in small and medium-sized destinations and emerging destinations with high accommodation potential.

Parliament called for **increased EU financial support** to strengthen public transport services, enabling them to become more multimodal, accessible, reliable, flexible, and better adapted to local circumstances, particularly in island and remote areas. Where existing measures prove insufficient to address persistent structural disadvantages, the Commission should propose **further tools** to compensate for the structural disadvantages faced by citizens and businesses in peripheral, island, and outermost regions.

Members called for incentives and investments to support **cycling tourism** initiatives. They highlighted the crucial role of **maritime connections** in island, coastal, and peripheral regions, as well as the role of **inland waterway tourism** and waterside activities, such as cycling, walking, gastronomy, and cultural attractions, which allow visitors to discover local heritage and landscapes in an environmentally friendly way. Members called for increased investment in the EU's **rail infrastructure** and reaffirmed the need to make intermodality a strategic priority. The need to encourage sustainable management of **cruise** activity and traffic, and to distribute ship arrivals in ports in a balanced and proportionate manner, was also emphasised.

Parliament believes that **environmental tourism taxes** (eco-taxes) could produce tangible results for local communities by funding projects that support residents and the environment.

Empowering European destinations to promote local excellence

Members believe that, within the framework of the EU's industrial strategy, tourism requires **effective governance** to better distribute demand between established and emerging destinations. Consequently, the Commission and Member States are encouraged to promote **off-season travel** and strengthen the diversification and visibility of **less-frequented destinations** through data-driven planning and targeted awareness-raising activities, thereby helping to maintain Europe's position as a top global destination.

The resolution highlighted the strategic role of **Destination Management Organisations** (DMOs), whose local presence enables the creation of strong partnerships across the entire tourism ecosystem. These aspects make **structured, multi-level governance essential,** involving local and regional authorities, DMOs, and private stakeholders, to develop coherent and inclusive tourism strategies.

Because many **rural and small destinations** lack the administrative capacity to develop sustainable tourism strategies, it is essential that the EU assist them in strengthening their management capacities through targeted support. Member States should therefore strengthen Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) through financial support and technical expertise to enable them to manage destinations effectively.

Given the particular vulnerability of **high-intensity tourist destinations**, Members encouraged the strengthening of the visibility of less-visited regions and the development of regional tourism hubs grounded in heritage, gastronomy, nature and local cultural activities, in order to strengthen local excellence and promote a sustainable growth model.

Members welcome the regulation on **short-term accommodation** rentals as a positive step towards more efficient destination management. However, they are concerned about the unregulated growth of short-term rentals and their impact on the housing market. They have therefore called on the Commission to swiftly propose legislation to establish a coherent European framework defining standards for service provision and clear host categories. Only compliant short-term rental activities should be listed on digital platforms.

Recognising the current limitations of **the EU Ecolabel**, Parliament acknowledged the need for a unified approach to sustainability labelling in the European tourism sector. It called on the Commission and Member States to support the transition of tourism towards a circular economy model by promoting actions that improve water, energy and waste management efficiency, curb overconsumption, prevent habitat degradation, preserving biodiversity and minimising the environmental footprint of tourism activities on destinations.

Lastly, Parliament called for continued progress towards a **tourism labour market** based on quality jobs, fair wages, reliable social protection, and year-round employment, including during the off-season. It called for the establishment of a coordinated EU-wide agenda to upskill and retrain the tourism workforce. The Commission is invited to propose guidelines to encourage and enable citizens to engage in **cultural volunteering**, including through supportive measures that promote the recognition of cultural volunteers across the EU.