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TOURISM: HOW SOCIAL ECONOMY CAN MAKE IT MORE SUSTAINABLE



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Tourism can play an important role in improving the attractiveness and well-being of places and communities, not only as destinations to visit, but also to live, work and invest. To guarantee that tourism will address contemporary challenges (e.g. overtourism), a new business model is necessary: one that embraces sustainability, social impact, digitalization and promotes connectivity between hosts and guests. Social economy represents this business model that has the potential to:

- connect the purpose-led businesses and the customers.
- contribute to the green and digital transitions by supplying sustainable goods and services and bridging the digital divide, that take into account the needs of citizens, employees and other stakeholders [1] for instance in the fields of the circular economy, organic agriculture, renewable energy, housing and mobility.
- bring value to local economies and societies by fostering their inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability.
- provide solutions for those impacted by the green and digital transitions, for example through training and reskilling workers, and by providing job opportunities.

The link between Tourism and Social Economy seeks to enhance social innovation, supports the development of the social economy and boost its social and economic transformative power.

For this reason, the role of social economy and tourism has been recognized and enhanced by several EU policy instruments; such as the recently published Social Economy Action Plan, the recommendation of the OECD on the social and solidarity economy and social innovation [1] and the Transition Pathway for Tourism.

During an online event on the relations and synergies between Social Economy and Tourism industrial ecosystems, **Diesis Network added a different topic that could be considered:**

“The development of social and sustainable tourism models, like the ones offered by the social economy, the promotion of sustainable tourism destinations should go hand by hand with the promotion of not only environmentally-responsible options, but also a particular attention on the social and cultural impact that tourism has on the destinations. Sustainability on the long term is possible if there is an effective integration of the touristic activities with the life of the community, and if the offer proposed is inclusive and accessible to a broad public.”



The social economy offers many examples of community-based enterprises in the field of tourism. The best practices from different European countries show the benefits of tourism social entrepreneurship as a place-based strategy, such as:

1. catalyst positive change for communities;
2. transformation of extractive economic activity to a generative activity that invests back into places;
3. a search for meaning;
4. transformational visitor experiences.

Governments can contribute in two broadways to creating the conditions for tourism social entrepreneurship to flourish: they can develop policies that support and encourage the development and operation of social enterprises as part of an inclusive and sustainable tourism system. They can also assist in the creation of institutional conditions that encourage, legitimize and synergize social entrepreneurship. [2]

The question is now: what comes next for sustainability in tourism? Often answers can be found within our sector, and social economy enterprises contribute to achieve this goal. Regenerative Tourism is also an interesting approach. A concept that goes beyond "not damaging" the environment and that looks to actively revitalise and regenerate it, resulting in a positive impact on local communities and economies: sustainable regeneration. [3]



References:

- [1] OECD Legal. (2022). Recommendation of the Council on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation. Tratto da <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0472>
- [2] Dredge, D. (2016). Institutional and Policy Support for Tourism Social Entrepreneurship . In R. D. Pauline J. Sheldon (A cura di), Social Entrepreneurship and Tourism - Philosophy and Practice (p. 19). Springer. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46518-0>
- [3] Acciona. (s.d.). REGENERATIVE TOURISM: DISCOVERING THE WORLD SUSTAINABLY. Tratto il giorno 05 27, 2022 da https://www.activesustainability.com/sustainable-development/regenerative-tourism/?_adin=02021864894