



**MEETING OF THE AER COMMITTEE 1 WORKING GROUP ON TOURISM
AMARO, FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA, 21 MARCH 2007
(13.45 – 15.00)**

DRAFT MINUTES

The meeting was chaired by Thomas CARLSSON, tourism manager of Västerbotten (S) and coordinator of the AER working group on tourism.

The **draft agenda and the draft minutes of the last meeting** of the group (Strasbourg, 3 October 2006) **were adopted** without amendments.

Agenda item 4 – Possible follow-up to the seminar in Bihor (RO) with respect to the Touring Nature Label

Thomas CARLSSON mentioned that the AER successfully organised a seminar on the Touring Nature Label on 1 February in Bihor, Romania. This seminar, he explained, was targeted at the Romanian counties and aimed at promoting the AER Touring Nature Label which was launched in 2005 and firstly awarded to the Lake Tisza Region (Hungary) in 2006. Over 60 participants from nearly all Romanian counties were present at this seminar, he said. They could learn more about the added value of the Label for developing eco-tourism in the Regions, but also about the EU funding opportunities for the labelling procedure. Thomas CARLSSON underlined that this Label, in connection with the pan-European eco-tourism routes it is promoting, is a valuable contribution to the development of lively rural areas and invited all present members to apply for it. He also invited the present delegates to think about the possibility to host similar seminars as the one organised in Bihor in their own region. Interested Regions were invited to contact the AER Committee 1 Secretariat.

Agenda item 5 – Report on the CoR Conference, Palma de Mallorca, 5 March 2006

Thomas CARLSSON said that he presented the Touring Nature Label at the Seminar of the Committee of the Regions on 'Regions leading the way towards a new European tourism policy' held on 5 March in Palma de Mallorca. This Seminar, he mentioned, ended with the adoption of a Final Declaration in which many statements and remarks already formulated by the AER in its positions on tourism could be found again, such as: the role of regional authorities in promoting sustainable tourism; the importance of sustainable tourism for the renewed Lisbon strategy; or the problems of seasonality, to name but a few. Thomas CARLSSON invited the present delegates to go through this Declaration and to communicate their comments, if any, to the AER Committee 1 secretariat.

Agenda item 6 – Future possible action on social tourism

Thomas CARLSSON reported about the launch, by the International Office for Social Tourism (BITS), of a network of local and regional authorities for social and fair tourism. The launch of this network occurred on 1 December 2006. The network is aimed to support a partnership between the actors whose mission is to contribute to the development of access to tourism and holidays for the greatest number of people – young people, families, seniors – within the framework of a sustainable development of the tourism activity.

Thomas CARLSSON attended the meeting of 1 December and said that the AER had been invited to contribute to this new platform. He then opened the floor to ask the members their opinion about what should be the form and content of this cooperation.

- Västernorrland said that, talking about social tourism, we should not forget disabled people.
- The representatives of Jämtland confirmed their interest in working on social tourism and agreed with the Committee 1 policy coordinator that the problems of seasonal workers, which was underlined during the AER tourism seminar hosted in their Region in 2005, should also be looked at.
- Hans de Belder, former AER Secretary General and member of the board of the BITS, underlined the key role which the AER could play in the field of tourism, as a kind of advisory body to the European Commission, which has no direct competences in this field. He suggested to the group that the AER, before joining the network, should invite a representative of the BITS to the next meeting of Committee 1, in autumn, to explain how the new network would work. Klaus KLIPP, AER Secretary General, confirmed that the approach should be, as for the other sectoral interregional organisations members of the AER, to integrate the network within the AER.

The decision was taken that Thomas CARLSSON would convey this message to the BITS at the occasion of their next meeting on 30 May in Heraklion.

Thomas CARLSSON also mentioned the possibility to rename the working group in 'working group on sustainable and social tourism', to demonstrate the AER involvement in the field on social tourism. *Comments by the Committee 1 Secretariat: A decision on this could be taken at the next meeting of the group, once the cooperation modalities with the BITS have been defined.*

The debate on social tourism went over to the other aspects of tourism which could be dealt with by the group. Jean BEELEN, Wallonia (B), insisted on the issue of cultural diversity and languages and asked the present delegates and members of the Secretariat to talk in their own language, as far as simultaneous interpretation is available for it. The representative of Hampshire said that local languages are attraction to the tourists as well as our cultural heritage. The Committee 1 policy coordinator noted, in this respect, that the AER Committee 3 – as mentioned in the last meeting of the group – was working on the issue of culture and cultural heritage.

Agenda item 7 – Feedback on the webportal after 2 years of existence
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Estelle DELANGLE, Committee 1 assistant policy coordinator, reported about the situation of the AER tourism webportal. Started in 2005 and officially launched in April 2006 in Valencia (S), the portal now counts 20 members, she said. Newcomers are the regions of Samara, Satu Mare and Central Finland. The other Regions are: Berat (AL), Fyn, Vejle (DK), Alba, Arad, Calarasi, Dambovita, Mures, Tulcea (RO), Banska Bystrica (SK), Valencia (ES), Västerbotten (S), Noord-Brabant (NL), Odessa (UKR) and South West England (UK)

The portal is well visited: over the past 3 months, 1150 pages were consulted on the webportal, from 83% of new visitors (so who are not partners or members of the Secretariat) The two main sources of the visits are the AER main website (38,34%) and google (31,40%) For further details concerning these statistics, the participants were invited to contact the AER Committee 1 secretariat.

Thomas CARLSSON invited all Regions not partner yet to become members of the Club. It is an easy tool, accessible to everybody through the web, and which nicely promotes the Regions, their tourism projects and their territory.

He concluded expressing his wish to gather all the partners of the webportal in a meeting by the end of the year, in order to discuss possible improvements and further developments. The AER secretariat will soon suggest a possible date for such a meeting.

End of the meeting

