

Summary of the ISNART discussion – Tourism Commission

The aim of the discussion was to provide the UNITI DAL MARE association with a starting point for the creation of a new form of cooperation among tourism enterprises, particularly in the country inn, campsite or newly conceived fishing-tourism sectors, by utilizing the Italian Hospitality Quality Seal Project representing the best practice among public and private stakeholders in the territory.

Today, over 4,000 Italian enterprises and 80 Chambers of Commerce in 18 different regions take part in the Italian Hospitality Project, created in 1998 to promote the improvement of Italian tourism services. The project was developed through three macro-phases: 1) definition of the norms, 2) certification, 3) promotion.

The initial activity defined the rules and regulations in cooperation with the associations of each specific category of enterprises: hotels, country inns, restaurants, fishing-tourism, campsites, etc. By 'rules and regulations', we intend a combination of **principles/norms** for quality standards. The criterion for each standard has been established by evaluating the degree of satisfaction of every customer in all phases of accommodations and dining:

We have considered every customer touch point, from the Internet, or promotional brochures, to the response to bookings – either by phone or e-mail, from the tourists' arrival and search for accommodations to a detail as small as to where they will park the car. Furthermore, we have also taken into consideration the ambiance, the caliber of the staff, as well as every aspect of service offered. Differently to the ISO criteria, our norms are service-oriented.

The certification is carried out by a team of experts who inspect – without advance notice – the enterprises. A check list that objectively registers all points included in the rules and regulations is compiled. The certification phase is completed with the award of a quality seal by a special provincial commission; in addition, a letter informs each inspected enterprise of its assessment and identifies any area in need of improvement.

The last phase is promotion, which in Italy is traditionally implemented by publicity, guide books or a listing as a certified enterprise in the *Istituto Geografico De Agostini Guide*. However, the Internet is also utilized on a specific portal for quality enterprises (www.10q.it) and by connecting with telephone operators (Wind) in an innovative way through a multi-channel guide downloadable from the Internet through all possible channels (pdf, Google video, YouTube and iPods). The Italian Hospitality Awards, in which the public selects the recipients of the prizes, is the culminating moment.

A progressive refinement of these phases has enabled us to reach our original quality targets and assess our activities to this date. We can proudly say that our initial targets have been fully met; enterprises providing quality services have been highlighted, where needed, improvements have been indicated, and last, but not least, impartial information has been given to consumers.

In doing so, however, the importance of teamwork and the creating of a community have emerged. We have come to realize that enterprises offering quality service, which in Italy represent the framework of hospitality and the pleasant memories that every tourist carries home leading to the positive fallout that triggers his/her return, are actually isolated. They are: isolated in their choice of investments, isolated in their selection of targets, isolated in their formulation of prices, isolated in their promotion. Consequently, the quality seal has become a socializing factor, of recognition which has united not only the certified enterprises, but also the trade associations and public institutions (Regions, Provinces, etc.). A socialization based on meritocracy. A socialization that carries and exhibits the seal because it represents a reliable and recognizable process of assessment.

Finally, we have also understood that the entire process is a means of transforming even complex competitive positioning and sustainable tourism into concrete, comprehensible and feasible action. The inclusion of these topics in the norms and their verification in the field has brought about the heightening of each tourism operator's sensibility towards these problems.

To conclude, we can therefore safely affirm that the Italian Hospitality Quality Seal fosters best practice because:

- a) It helps the enterprises offering the highest quality service to emerge;
- b) It gives personalized and qualified advice to operators for the improvement of their service;
- c) It gives objective information to consumers;
- d) It brings about reciprocal recognition of valour;
- e) It raises the awareness of entrepreneurs to important issues concerning their territory.

It is precisely from these last two strong points that derives the proposal, or stimulus, that ISNART wishes to launch to the Adriatic Chambers of Commerce reunited in the UNITI DAL MARE Association in the tourism sector, which obviously implies the involvement of artisan, agricultural and food industries, that are the hallmark of their respective territories.

Our goal is to develop a model of standards that considers the **quality** of tourism service as an essential component of **competitiveness** as well as an important element of **sustainable growth**, while– at the same time – exalting the historic features of the Adriatic and fully respecting the different interpretations that are specific to each territory in the region.

Summing up, we would like to see the creation of a model of standards, similar to the aforementioned elements of quality, which have become a part of the ISNART philosophy: an excellent price/quality ratio and the sustainable growth issue duly pursued independently of the territory. In this way, your tourists will come away with great emotion and positive memories.

We envisage a model of standards to serve as a stimulus to all of your tourism enterprises and help them to join forces in their promotional efforts within the diversity of your Countries.

Finally, embarking on this journey means creating a recognizable European identity and being in line with the *global objective* expressed by the Group for Sustainable Tourism report in February 2007 as well as with the European Commission itself,¹ which evaluated the economic impact and the improvement of accessibility in the tourism industry in terms of *service quality and competitive edge* of the PMI's.

The proposal we are addressing to this Association is to develop a joint project, in line with our Quality Seal, that would certify typical Adriatic hospitality and, at the same time, unite the enterprises on our respective territories through the utilization of European funds.

¹¹¹ Communication of the European Commission 17 March 2006: “Renewal of European policy for tourism: a stronger partnership for European tourism.”