

## **Sustainable Cruise Development: Challenges and prospects workshop**

The first AI-NURECC event, entitled [‘Cruise Sector in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region \(EUSAIR\) Area: challenges and future perspectives’](#), closed with a Workshop<sup>1</sup> focused on the challenges and prospects of sustainable cruise development, which concluded in the following remarks and suggestions:

It is generally accepted that cruise tourism generates multiple economic benefits to regional economies. However, in the evolutionary context, of the contemporary industry, the dominant trend of ship’s gigantism generates various concerns related to the ability of the calling destinations to manage increased traffic flows.

The participants in this workshop are aware that in the specific milieu major challenges for the sustainable development of cruise destinations in the Adriatic-Ionian region are:

- 1. Destinations’ available capacity to manage the large volumes of cruise traffic;*
- 2. Carrying Capacity of Cruise Destinations;*
- 3. To increase benefits for local communities;*
- 4. Seasonality;*
- 5. Need for a common brand.*

and understand that the AI-NURECC Initiative provides a concrete framework for sustainable and results-oriented cooperation. More precisely:

- 1. Destinations’ available capacity to manage the large volumes of cruise traffic.*

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The Workshop was organised in collaboration with the Laboratory of Research in Shipping and Port Management (ReShiP) of the University of the Aegean and conducted by Ms Evangelia Stefanidaki.

This includes both port infrastructures and superstructures appropriate to handle the new generation of super-sized cruise vessels and communal infrastructures required for the appropriate management of cruise passengers flows.

In this context, improvement of existing infrastructures is crucial for cruise destinations in order to overcome capacity problems. The AI-NURECC Initiative and stakeholders will support and encourage:

- conducting of the necessary studies to identify infrastructural gaps and needs in regional level;
- collaborating between the AI-NURECC stakeholders and cruise sector for better planning;
- follow-up and lobbying for financing opportunities.

## *2. Carrying Capacity of Cruise Destinations.*

Destinations' existing capabilities in combination with the large number of cruise passengers received generate conditions of overcrowding and congestion. This state undermines the quality of provided services and thus the experience of cruise visitors at destination level while residents' quality of life is affected.

Furthermore, the intense use of shared resources influences also the performance of other touristic activities and as such the acceptability and support of cruise tourism by local communities is questioned. These phenomena can be considered as early stages of unsustainable development and an indication, in some cases, that the carrying capacity of the destination is exceeded.

Improvement or development of new infrastructures can be considered as a managerial component that can contribute to the normalization of observed congestion phenomenon, however this requires a more holistic and long-term planning approach.

To that extend, it is necessary to conduct dedicated studies to define communities' acceptable levels and furthermore to design an appropriate indicator scheme for the monitoring of the sector's performance – economic, social, environmental – in regional and macro-regional level (short, medium and long-term). The AI-NURECC stakeholders will be encouraged to share with the AI-NURECC Initiative all information able to contribute to a better documented future planning so that the AI-NURECC Initiative lobbies both the European Institutions and the EUSAIR States.

### *3. To increase benefits for local communities*

A commonly shared concern is that local communities should receive more benefits from cruise tourism, compared to the costs and public and private resources devoted for serving the cruise sector. To achieve this, it is necessary to strengthen and coordinate actions between local policy makers and cruise companies, in order to better promote local production to cruise passengers.

From a destination point of view, the diversification of the touristic offer or supply through the creation of new products and services based on unique cultural attributes or events (fairs, festivals etc.) is perceived as an effective solution to increase economic benefits through valorising cultural resources.

Another approach suggested was the promotion of “small cruises” across the entire region, as an activity that better fits the characteristics of the Adriatic-Ionian area.

All relevant stakeholders are invited to examine with the AI-NURECC partners different approaches – such as the smart cruise concept – so that it can elaborate a concrete technical note and present it to the relevant EUSAIR TSGs, the Facility Point and the Adriatic & Ionian Initiative's Round Tables, as well as the European Commission's Directorates-General dealing with the objectives of the AI-NURECC Initiative's preparatory actions (i.e. youth, creative and cultural industries, tourism and cultural heritage, skills development and training).

#### *4. Seasonality*

Cruise tourism intensifies the phenomenon of seasonality, which is more severe in well established touristic destinations. Differentiation of the current offer was again suggested as an alternative to smooth the seasonality phenomenon through promoting winter activities and events. However, it was highlighted that local planners need to better understand the business model of cruise in order to assess the gaps and opportunities around cruise seasonality.

The AI-NURECC partners will ensure the follow-up of this topic and include it in the relevant forthcoming events of the project. The proposals that may arise out of this exercise will be communicated to the EUSAIR TSGs, the Facility Point and the Adriatic & Ionian Initiative's Round Tables.

#### *5. Need for a common brand*

A common brand for the Adriatic-Ionian destinations is stated as a significant challenge that needs to be addressed at macroregional level to better promote destinations' cultural identity. Workshops and fora for the development of a specific brand and common promotional guidelines are considered the baseline for developing common brand.

Such a brand could be elaborated throughout the project's lifetime with the active participation of the AI-NURECC stakeholders in the Initiative's events.

The AI-NURECC Initiative is ready to support this objective and present any developments to the EUSAIR TSGs, Facility Point and the Adriatic & Ionian Initiative's Round Tables as well as other international organisations active in the EUSAIR area (e.g. Union for the Mediterranean, Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation etc.).