



***NECSTouR: Towards a more sustainable European
tourism policy influenced by regions***

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Abstract

This internship report identifies my performed work as policy assistant at the Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism. The report offers a unique insight into the organisation's everyday functioning. Preceded by a literature review which is intended to examine the policy arena where NECSTouR operates. The primary target of this report is to provide an overall view on modern European tourism policy, its nature in sustainability and data. Secondly, it discovers the basis of NECSTouR and its strategy to influence policy. The paper clearly points out those areas where the EU needs to act for sustainability. In order to be able make some recommendations for the network, a qualitative research is conducted with members investigating into its strategy, strength and weakness. Conclusion and recommendation offers valuable findings to consider by NECSTouR.

Keywords

NECSTouR, European Union, European tourism policy, sustainable tourism,

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List of abbreviations (order of appearance)

NECSTouR: Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism

EU: European Union

TEU: Treaty on European Union / Maastricht Treaty

TFEU: Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union / Treaty of Rome

Council: Council of Europe

EP: European Parliament

EC: European Commission

CoR: European Committee of the Regions

COM(xxxx)xxx: Communication of the European Commission

TSG: Tourism Sustainability Group

EDEN: European Destinations of Excellence

ETC: European Travel Commission

EMAS: Community eco-management and audit scheme ()

NEZEH: Nearly-Zero-Energy Hotels

NZEB: Nearly Zero Energy Buildings

ESIF: European Structural and Investment Funds

COSME: Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

TRAN: Committee of Transport and Tourism

TTF: Tourism Task Force

INI: own-initiative reports (EP)

ETIS: European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management

CDR xxxx/xxxx: CoR Opinion number

NUTS: Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics

MICE: meetings, incentives, conventions and events

HES: Hotel Energy Solutions

UN SDGs: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

PM4SD: Project Management for Sustainable Development

SMEs: Small and Medium size enterprises

UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organisation

DG GROW: European Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry,
Entrepreneurship and SMEs

MITOMED: Models of Integrated TOurism in the MEDiterranean

ExCom: Executive Committee of NECSTouR

MEP: Member of the European Parliament

DG EAC: European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and
Culture

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WCTE: World Committee on Tourism Ethics

INRouTe: International Network on Regional Economics and Tourism

AGM: Annual General Meeting (NECSTouR)

EYCA: European Youth Card initiative

ESI Funds: European structural and investment funds

EUSALP: EU Strategy for the alpine Region

ERDF: European Regional Development fund

ADRBI: Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency

FITUR: International Tourism Fair of Spain, Madrid

OTA: Online Tourism Agency

1. Introduction

This internship report tries to review all my contribution to the Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism during my placement in the Permanent Secretariat in Brussels. Firstly, a literature review will provide the reader with necessary knowledge about modern tourism policy of the European Institutions. A chronological literature review of initiatives and scholars helps to have an overview on the needs, challenges, and lacks in tourism policy. The needs pointed out by the expert groups of the European Commission led to the birth of NECSTouR. In order to understand that need, my report wish to investigate the modern era of European tourism policy. This review will be provided to the reader to better understand the origins and the goal of the network.

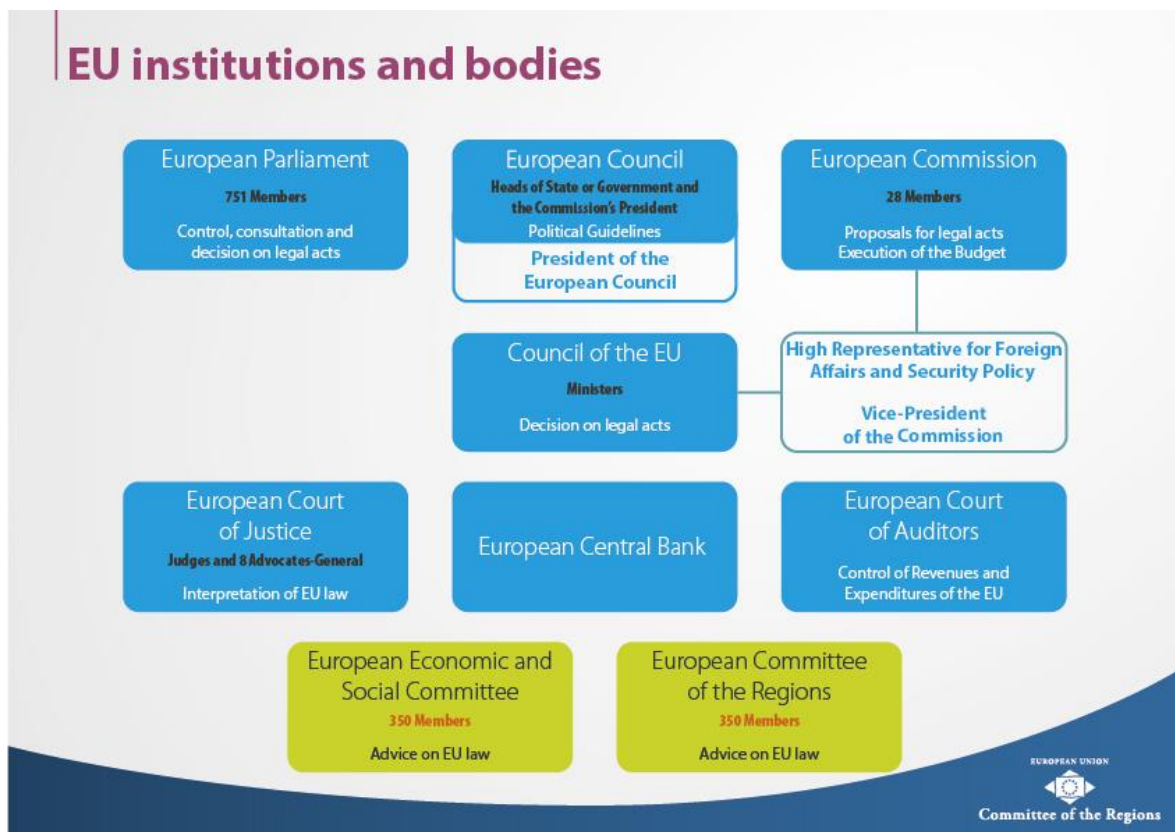
Secondly, I will discover the background, overview, and the structure of the organisations where I did my internship. Thirdly, my internship report wishes to share the knowledge I gained during several months of hard work in different areas. Fourthly, I have conducted a qualitative research in order to investigate if the vision of the leaders of NECSTouR does meet with my experiences. It will contain some professional recommendations for NECSTouR to overcome challenges in the very near future. My report tends to give a holistic approach of NECSTouR and its mission to influence the European tourism policy towards a sustainable model. The goal of this report is to show my freshly gained abilities from this experience, examine the role of NECSTouR in its environment and offer ideas for the better functioning.

Constant learning, combined with the research offers a tool that I wish to share with the network.

2. Literature review

This chapter intends to give a detailed overview on recent policies drawing attention to tourism in Europe. It is essential to see and understand the stand of the European Tourism policy where NECSTouR was called to life, where NECSTouR was born, and where NECSTouR has now to manoeuvre in order to achieve its goals. The review elaborates on the recent tourism policies with a focus on sustainability, on the findings from previous researches and scholars, continuously keeping NECSTouR in the light. This method will provide the reader with sufficient knowledge to better understand where my internship took place and why such actions were carried-out by me. Hopefully, this review will highlight the lacks of sustainability measures in this area. This is important for the final research where potentially answers will provide us a vision of NECSTouR leaders about a future tourism policy area.

Figure 1, EU Institutions and bodies



(source: CoR, 2017)

2.1. Tourism policy of European Institutions

2.1.1 European Commission

To understand the actual phase of tourism policy, firstly it is necessary to investigate the modern history of EU policy making, bearing in mind that it is a relatively complex area: Yasarata et al. (2009) warn us about the political origins of all policy making when saying that policy and planning is eradiated from political power and influence and before we understand the policy decisions we need to understand the power structure of society and politics as in the national cases politicians make policies in their own decisions which won't last until the next ruling political power. While some researchers (Richter, 1989 as cited in Airey, 2015) state "Where tourism succeeds or fails is largely a function of political and administrative actions and is not a function of economic or business expertise", it is known that politics often influenced the formulation of tourism policy. And indeed there are examples where we can recognise this even in European tourism policy, when member states rejected ideas coming from European institutions (see Figure 1) .

European tourism policy has been slowly raising in importance and some actions were arguably successful. Not only can this, but the limited research and available data on sustainable tourism negatively affect such review. Many stated a serious lack of data on sustainable tourism and also in the academic research field. "Tourism academia is a relatively small community and certainly one that is disproportionately tiny in relation to the size of the sector and its impacts." (Budeanu A., et al. (2016). p292). With more research decision makers will have a better overview and guidance on required changes.

It is important to mention at the beginning of this review that the recent history of European tourism policy does not give occasion for an in-depth analysis because resources are limited. Robinson claims that tourism was regarded less important in policy point of view then other industries (Robinson, 1996) despite its important economic contribution. One could understand that first, the aim of the policy was to respond the needs of the creation of the Internal Market while in the latest stage it is to ensure sustainable development, employment, and growth. This way, they could achieve competences above national ones. (Panyik & Anastasiadou, 2013).

Also, we need to keep in mind that from this results that tourism as a research area is underdeveloped (Kerr, 2003 as cited in Airey, 2015). Scientific papers on European tourism policy are present in a relatively scarce amount. In relation with European tourism

policy the law-making process is mostly originated from the European Commission. The Commission proposes and enforces legislations, implements policies and sets the EU budget in tight cooperation with all decision making bodies. Tourism falls under the EU competence to support, coordinate or supplement actions of the Member States, in other words the legally binding EU acts in these areas are leaving more legislative freedom (European Commission, 2017:2).

One of the most recent and most detailed papers on tourism policy was published by Judith Estol and Xavier Font from 2016. In their paper of '*European tourism policy: Its evolution and structure*' they review the background of policy-making in the European tourism arena. In their analysis they draw the line of thought beginning in the early 1990s when tourism policy served to achieve the goals in the Internal Market. In order to have a general overview on European tourism policy it is essential to investigate the fundamental European treaties. Treaties of the European Union are multiple international treaties between the member states creating the basis of the EU constitution. It is often said that the European Union is based on two core treaties: first, effective since 1993 called the Treaty on European Union (TEU or Maastricht Treaty) and the second effective since 1958 is the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU or Treaty of Rome) (Europa, 2017).

Already in 1997, the EU was criticised for not integrating environmental aspects into its tourism policy and it did not act in favour of sustainable development. Furthermore he criticised the EU for not taking environmental aspects into tourism seriously. Marx noted that the policy area is young therefore more development has to come (Marx, 1997).

A contradictory perception comes from Delgado & Palomeque (Department of Physical Geography and Regional Geographic Analysis, University of Barcelona) who mention in their article of '*The growth and spread of the concept of sustainable tourism: The contribution of institutional initiatives to tourism policy*' (2012) that the earliest actions in European level already were taking into account the environmental aspects in the early 1990s. This statement is based on the fact that in 1993 the Commission recognised tourism as one of the five decisive economic sector while including it in sustainable development.

It can be seen that there are actually two opinions on the "efficiency" of the tourism policies. It is somewhat recognised that the latter period was more meaningful in the

policy point of view. However it is not deniable that the actions did not always followed the actual necessities.

One of the fundamental treaties in European Union history was The treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) which mentions tourism under Article 6 (d) “ensuring competences to be able to support, coordinate or supplement actions in the member states”, such as tourism. It is essential to see that in this treaty tourism was listed within protection and improvement of human health; industry; culture; education, vocational training, youth and sport; civil protection; and administrative cooperation. This statement stands for the recognition of tourism as standalone industry. Furthermore in Article 195 in Title XXII the treaty calls for a common approach to encourage the creation of “favourable environment for the development of the undertakings in this sector” such as the promotion of cooperation between member states. It is a huge recognition to the industry that it is pointed out in such important legislative document.

However, in the Maastricht Treaty or Treaty on European Union, no article mentions tourism, although the Treaty of Lisbon (amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007) defines the very same notions as the abovementioned TFEU which differs only in the numeration of articles.

All these taken into consideration, the EU confirms that since 2009 tourism policy has its own legal basis (Art 6(d) and Title XXII, Article 195, TFEU).

This review intentionally does not include the period before the years 2000, as it was a long period of 25 years when the Commission made some attempts to coordinate tourism policy (Robinson, 1996). Chronologically, following the Council's '*Tourism and Employment*' document (Council, 1999) pointed out and draw attention on the tourism industry's contribution to European employment. This document has been agreed on the Luxembourg Summit based on the outcomes of discussion of the High-Level Group of experts. The expert group has called for a European Tourism policy (Estol & Font, 2015).

Paulo Rita, Assistant Professor at ISCTE School of Management, Lisbon argues on necessity as tourism as such was facing difficulties in recognition at the European area despite its clear economic contribution. The proof of this lack of recognition is that tourism became 'just' a (working) Unit (generally grouping a low number of experts) at the

Commission (that is still the case) and the reasoning for this can be found behind three points:

“1 a misunderstanding in technical and scientific terms of the tourism phenomena, and an inadequate evaluation of the real economic, social and cultural importance of tourism; 2 a political under-assessment of tourism activity in relation to its real dimension, in terms of wealth and employment generation and in relation to its potential for the future of Europe; 3 the several attempts to advance with the reinforcement of tourism in the EU systematically stumbled on obstacles impossible to by-pass, either due to the Commission, or to the incapacity of the several Presidencies, or to some countries' misunderstandings” (Rita, 2000). Rita clearly called for European promotion campaigns in third countries. Now, seventeen years later we can see clear actions supported by the European Commission for targeting China (for instance the EU-China Tourism Year 2018).

Estol & Font report in 2016, the communication that can be appreciated as a key document, *‘Working together for the future of European tourism’* from the Commission in 2001 mentions environmental protection among the main challenges for the future period. This also claims that future challenges could be tackled with new types of tourism. Interestingly the Communication recognises the lesser interest in political level which is related to the diversity and fragmented nature of the sector. At the end of Chapter II, the Communication applies the term sustainable tourism as follows:

“Tourism is an important aspect of the quality of life of EU citizens, which could be further improved by promoting sustainable, high-quality, competitive tourism in Europe, while respecting the carrying capacity of its natural and cultural areas, especially Natura 2000 sites. It also brings European citizens closer together as they discover and share common European values”(COM(2001)665 final).

Following the abovementioned ‘Tourism and Employment’ work plan it summarises the outcomes within regard especially on the promotion of sustainable tourism and environmental policy. The paper details the strategic approach of the process and proposes actions in connection with the promotion of sustainability and sustainable tourism (measure 4). In measure 8 the communication calls for an Agenda 21 in Europe. The aim of such agenda is to tackle problems of poverty and environment. Furthermore

guidance documents are promised for better harmonization on accessibility and also for a global solution on training possibly creating so called “Learning Areas”.

Still under measure 8 the Commission announces the promotion of sustainable tourism through the document on “Sustainable Tourism and Natura 2000: Guidelines, Initiatives and Good Practices in Europe” (European Commission, 2000). Natura 2000 is an initiative introduced by DG Environment, a European network of natural sites aiming to protect the home of rare and threatened species. The reflected publication deals with sustainable tourism however it does not set up new guidelines but promotes existing ones within the Natura 2000 network. Delgado & Palomeque (2012) confirm the previous statement that the two documents were aimed to support each other, and add “It was this last document which recognized the need to establish a strategy for sustainable tourism development as a global action plan, or Agenda 21”.

This aforementioned communication laid the legal foundations for a new EU framework towards sustainable development. From that moment the Commission had the appropriate basis for cooperation with tourism stakeholders. Miller states the proven, increasing environmental awareness in Europe derived from the number of “growing subscriptions to environmental non-governmental organizations” (Miller, 2003). The tourism industry could acknowledge a more fruitful period counting from 2001 until 2014 in the sense of Commission communications.

At the end of 2003 the Commission comes up with a new communication titled “Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism” (COM(2003) 716 final). It was partly the summary of a public consultation. This document directly refers back to the previous communication; however, from a technical point of view much improvement can be discovered. First of all, it states that no new initiatives are needed but existing ones need to be reinforced. Secondly, it reminds states to tackle sector-related measures on local levels to serve more the needs in the given territory. Thirdly, the Agenda 21-idea is also backed by this communication. The communication is much more detailed on the earlier referred technical terms which are important to identify. These are incorporated under ‘*Chapter II, challenges and objectives of sustainable tourism*’. The balanced approach of the pillars of sustainable tourism is written, for the first time in EU policy. Besides it describes the problem of seasonality, transportation pollution, and mass-tourism. The Commission reports on the complexity of the sustainable value chain, too. This section contains mostly information, definition and it raises awareness. It claims that

the progress is not sufficient despite the many initiatives in Europe and worldwide. In addition, it recognises that the transition of these initiatives do not reach the stakeholders due to the complex language therefore more direct channel is needed to draw tourists' attention on sustainability. In fact the opinion that that sustainable tourism's future depends entirely on action from all stakeholders has many supporters see for instance Peter W. Williams & Ian F. Ponsford, researchers from the Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, School of Resource and Environmental Management, Simon Fraser University (Williams & Ponsford, 2008). Regarding instruments the text does not exclude the possibility of future regulations as Community policy. For a common, European approach the general concept lists the need for European sustainable tourism policy measures at every level. The importance of such policy hints is phrased just like Community policies which the overall approach can rely on. In annex 4 second paragraph follows:

“Article 6 of the Treaty establishing the European Community requires the integration of environmental protection. The Council has adopted resolutions, conclusions or strategies for achieving environmental integration and sustainable development within specific policy areas, a number of which are relevant to sustainable tourism development.” and it has a meaningful message. It transmits the view on the lack of policy regarding environmental protection Commission's proposition. It was also the sign of the willingness of designing a new sustainability policy for the EU. However, due to the transverse nature of tourism industry most of the concerns on sustainability need to be covered by other policies of other industries. It is after this communication, that the Commission plans to enforce European sustainable tourism, raising awareness among the newly joined Member States in 2004. The Communication was intended to include the environmental regulations into the local management tools (Dodds, 2007). This was a sign that the Commission was ready to follow the line of thought towards a sustainable form of tourism, cooperating with tourism stakeholders.

As Delgado & Palomeque mention, despite the positive aspects of the precedent communication there was room for amending the flaws and prepare for the changing obstacles: two resolutions were issued by the European Parliament in the year of 2005 (Delgado & Palomeque, 2012). In 2006, the Commission published a Communication on *“A renewed EU Tourism Policy: Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism”* (COM(2006)134 final). Actions are presented towards growth and job potential development of the tourism sector respecting the actual EU legal framework.

Comparing to the 3 year older communication it does not differ much in stating the difficulties and challenges that the European tourism faces with. The new policy focuses on three main areas such as mainstreaming measures affecting tourism, promoting tourism sustainability, and enhancing the understanding and the visibility of tourism. The new policy making is based on the two already known aspects: the European Agenda 21 idea, and the outcomes of the Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) consultations. TSG was the expert grouping of the Commission. For promotional purposes, the communication mentions a future sharing platform called 'European destinations of excellence award' for sustainable tourism destinations. Comparing the earlier communications we can see a tendency of slowly drifting from employability to sustainability regarding the content of these documents (Panyik & Anastasiadou, 2013 as quoted in Estol & Font, 2016). The communication is not entirely based on previous papers as "new elements related with the optimal use of financial instruments, review of the current legal regulations, promotion of sustainability in tourism and greater awareness and visibility of the activity". Estol & Font also underline the goal of improving competitiveness, and supporting SMEs (Delgado & Palomeque, 2012).

Researchers agree that it was a breakthrough when a year later on 19 October 2007 the European Commission published the 'Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism' (COM(2007)621 final). The communication recognises the changes on the global sphere: tourism has to keep its competitiveness while accepting that it largely depends on sustainability. The whole communication is based on the outcomes of the earlier mentioned TSG (Tourism Sustainability Group) report. The positive effect of involving stakeholders was recognised previously by Hall '...a sustainable tourism industry requires a commitment by all parties involved in the planning process to sustainable development principles. Only through such widespread commitment can the long-term integration of social, environmental and economic, as well as cultural and political goals be attained' (Hall, 2000). The agenda calls for a holistic policy approach in order to find the perfect balance between all the factors of sustainable tourism. The Commission advises to integrate sustainability into tourism business as it could mean a competitive advantage. Tourism development should also consider sustainable destination management during the planning, development, and investments. Change is not only required from the supply side but from the demand side, therefore raising awareness on sustainable tourism is important. The Commission calls for actions in the industry: planning for the future, choosing suitable rhythm, involving stakeholders, applying latest knowledge, managing

risky outcomes, reflecting impacts in cost, respecting the carrying capacity, monitoring and assimilation without interruption are all listed in the paper. Again, more progress is needed especially in the cooperation of stakeholders. Furthermore the European Commission recognises its responsibility in this question, that is why it provides leadership for tourism stakeholders and in any policy areas the opinion of the TSG is respected. It mentions an important thought about the creation and support of knowledge sharing bodies. This also incorporates the regional and local cooperation of destinations in Europe.

This document has been the originator for the creation of the network of NECSTouR – state Delgado & Palomeque while Estol & Font remember “With the publication of Agenda 2007, the principles of sustainable and competitive tourism for European destinations, based on the EC approach, were consolidated. With NECSTouR, a platform for dialogue had been created” (Estol & Font, 2015). The continuity of EDEN (European Destinations of Excellence) project ensures the promotion of different destinations chosen by themes and national promotion through the close cooperation with the European Travel Commission and national tourism organisations including the usage of Visit Europe portal (VisitEurope, 2017).

The EU Maritime Policy’s success shows that more attention is needed in mountain, rural and even urban areas. This agenda is indeed a milestone for European sustainable tourism policy. It shows the key challenges and actions that the European Commission underlined in its communication. Without any doubt it is a completely detailed action plan, proposed for the stakeholders committed in sustainable tourism. Compared to the “Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism” Communication (COM(2003) 716 final) this one is a clearer, well-organised, and forward-looking proposal for all European actors in tourism. After these latest communications the Commission established a legal basis to develop a sustainable and competitive tourism (Estol & Font, 2015).

For sustainable future, the year 2010 was marked by a meaningful communication from the Commission, first: *'EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'* (COM(2010)2020 final). Sustainable growth is decided to be a priority to attain for 2020. It is the goal for the whole European economy to be greener and more competitive. For this purpose, under the flagship initiative to regain the competitiveness of the industry after the crisis, the EU should "enhance the competitiveness of the European tourism

sector" COM(2010)2020 final). Although, tourism can be seen as part of the whole image the quoted sentence is the only time the communication mentions the word tourism. Therefore a communication specifically targeting tourism sector was more needed than ever.

The earlier mentioned Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 came into force in 2009. Estol & Font put forward the view that the European tourism policy stepped into a new phase after that year. They argue that such formal recognition due to the art. 6 TFEU on principles and art. 195 TFEU on tourism policy happened for the first time!

Regarding the competences of the EU the publication on 'Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe' (COM(2010)352 final) defines clearly which tools are provided by the institutions. Based on the Article 195 it states that the EU can "promote the competitiveness of undertakings in this sector and create an environment conducive to their development; encourage cooperation between the Member States, particularly through the exchange of good practice; develop an integrated approach to tourism, ensuring that the sector is taken into account in its other policies".

Keeping the objectives in line with the Lisbon treaty the Commission emphasizes on the need of a more competitive sector, keeping it sustainable at the same time. It underlines the guaranteed "development of a more active tourism policy" by the Treaties and several other strategies influencing the development of tourism backed by the Commission like: 'Europe 2020', 'An industrial policy for the globalisation era', 'Innovation Union', 'A Digital Agenda for Europe' and 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs'. In addition, after the 14 April 2010 summit held in Madrid a declaration was signed, seen as an important one. Therefore it was taken into account as objectives and actions promoting tourism. These are grouped into 4 priorities to achieve:

"1) Stimulate competitiveness in the European tourism sector; 2) Promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism; 3) Consolidate the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high-quality destinations; 4) Maximise the potential of EU financial policies and instruments for developing tourism".

This builds-up the body of the new action framework which contains 21 actions in total. The most relevant for sustainable tourism policy is under objective number 2. In correlation with the environmental management of tourism stakeholders, the Commission

reminds us of the multiple tools available such as EU Eco-label, Community eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) while the reaction from stakeholders is not uniform. For the sustainable management of destinations a development of system of indicators is mentioned in the text. This is to be implemented by NECSTouR and EDEN destinations. Lucia Varra, Chiara Buzzigoli, Roberta Loro share the view on the NECSTouR model in relations to its indicators, measurement, and the involvement of stakeholders. In their publication titled: *'Innovation in Destination Management: social dialogue ,Knowledge Management processes and Servant leadership in the Tourism Destination Observatories'* they do recognise the potential of the model in destination development (Varra et al., 2012).

Under the objective, NECSTouR (and EDEN) is put as a benchmark for sustainable management of destinations regarding a system of indicators. Furthermore as a plan the Commission stated its wish to develop a label for promotional purposes based on the indicators. Cucculelli & Goffi, (2016) paper also led to the recognition that sustainability as a tool can help Europe to compete with other destinations.

Besides the initiatives of different ideas of recognition and measurement in sustainable tourism, the promotion of European tourism as a sustainable destination takes a large part of the communication. Ensuring the financial opportunities for the tourism sector is an important point for the development. The objective takes into account that tourism is transversal not only as a sector but also as a policy area. Transport, competition, internal market, taxation consumer protection, environment, employment and training, culture, regional and rural development are all policy areas where tourism can be indirectly influenced. Therefore tourism needs to be integrated into these areas in a better way.

The communication concludes that more stimuli are needed for European tourism policy. This strong statement is explained by the numerous unanswered challenges. Given the future initiatives the Commission counts on the stakeholders and a common work to attain in the future a competitive and sustainable tourism at EU level. The recommendation does not deal with transport, especially tourist transport which is a major source of unsustainability in this sector. Estol & Font remind us of previous failures which this new framework is built upon but do not deny the good direction of new initiatives such as: Heritage Label, promotion of cultural heritage, environmental policy, regulation for package travel and assisted travel arrangements.

It would be necessary to examine NECSTouR's recognitions by academics:

NECSTouR was always recognised for its indicator system. A good example for this recognition can be discovered in the research article 'Exploring the self-assessment of sustainability indicators by different stakeholders' published by André Mascarenhas, Luís M. Nunesb, Tomás B. Ramosaa. Algarve is a member of NECSTouR which made it to a valuable point of the paper for its sustainability efforts (Mascarenhasa et al., 2014). It's worth to mention that Algarve is still one of the Portugal members of NECSTouR.

Tsoutsos et al. in their research paper on '*Nearly Zero Energy Buildings Application in Mediterranean Hotels*' state NECSTouR as an organisation which ensures the disseminations of the NEZEH (Nearly-Zero-Energy Hotels) project tools around Europe. NECSTouR is a partnering organisation of the project which aimed to link the supply and demand side for those hotel owners who wished to follow NZEB initiatives. NECSTouR has ruled-out the NEZEH project in cooperation with the UNWTO.

'*A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism*' communication is dedicated to the coastal and maritime tourism (COM (2014)86 final). In connection with sustainability it is clearly stated in the paper that the healthy environment and the sustainable use of natural capital should have a positive effect in tourism. Compared to the previous communication we see it includes the expression eco-tourism and calls for its promotion within the different European tools like EU Ecolabel indicators. Development and promotion of sustainable and ecotourism are listed as advice for stakeholders in the specific areas. Reduction of waste and any kind of emission is highly recommended by the Commission and indeed this actual paper is more focused on the environmental protection and not specifically on sustainable tourism policy. It is also focused on promotion which is something slightly different from the previous ones because it is oriented towards the maritime and coastal tourism offer. The Commission proposes for these destinations to create a cultural heritage based offer; also nature and health tourism for coastal destinations. This recommendation is very concrete so we can clearly see an evolution during the years as in the earlier times the Commission's communications were not even mentioning sustainable tourism while in 2014 the same institution is giving specific examples for actions. This positive change can be seen in the section regarding financial framework ensured by the EC especially from the European

Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and financial instruments as Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) running from 2014 – 2020.

NECSTouR is mentioned as a European project and recognised by Filippo Randelli, Patrizia Romei, Marco Tortora, and Maria Tinacci Mossello at the Department of Economic Sciences of University of Florence in their article on rural tourism: '*Rural tourism driving regional development in Tuscany. The renaissance of the countryside*'. In its context Tuscany as a region is mentioned as a leading region in the NECSTouR project.

From the chronological review (see Figure 2, by author) it is visible that the Commission has published several communications which were based on the competences after the Lisbon Treaty.

Figure 2. Timeline of contemporary, Commission communications for tourism



(source: author, 2017).

It is necessary to remember that member states of the European Union have full policy competence in tourism while the EU's competence is limited to complementing, supporting, and coordinating the actions. In addition there is no harmonization of the national laws or regulations at EU level. Probably this is even more important to provide member states sufficient guidelines and financial vehicles to attain sustainable tourism standards. It is debatable if the Commission is satisfying these duties – some studies (Peeters, 2015) proves the lack of sustainable tourism policy – other institutions of the European Union are also recognise the need of sustainable tourism policy.

2.1.2. European Parliament

From this point of view it is needed to have a look into the work of the European Parliament. The tourism related issues are discussed in the Transport and Tourism Committee. As the name implies, the committee does not focus only on tourism but on transport. In the transport sector especially in the last decade many challenging moments gave opportunity to the parliament to prove its power and decision making process. Because of the more direct economic impact of the transport sector and the always growing lobby power behind it, European transportation-related topics are more frequent than the tourism ones. For example, the document published on first of July 2017 lists 69 cases as work in progress and none of them is directly dealing with tourism topic. Probably this phenomenon was the reason for creating a tourism specialised grouping within the committee itself: in 2012 European Parliament (EP) set up the Tourism Task Force. Actually the task force counts 16 members (all composed by members of the TRAN: Transport and Tourism Committee), the vice-chair and the chairwoman (European Parliament, 2017). Generally, the tourism task force meetings are incorporated into the committee meetings but it is not as always the case. In this sense the tourism focused topics are discussed during the Tourism Task Force meetings. The role of the European Parliament in European tourism policy-making can be seen in the resolutions targeting sexual exploitation of children in tourism (P7_TA(2011)0468), or the impact of visa policy and the promotion of European destinations. In its propositions the EP was in favour of a European Heritage label (active under the name of European Heritage Label supported by the Commission) and a cross-border bicycle road (active under EV13 The Iron Curtain Trail). The resolution of P7_TA(2011)0407 adopted on 27 September 2011 entitled as 'Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination' was a report of the Parliament. It is necessary to mention that the Parliament called for a programme especially for tourism in the 2014-2020 financial framework which was rejected by the European Council. The

Parliament also supported the idea of the 'European tourism quality label' (paragraph 25 of resolution P7_TA(2011)0407 and paragraph 53 of resolution (P8_TA(2015)0391) which was also rejected by the Council. In the last quarter of 2015 the Parliament called on the Commission for an updated tourism strategy, replacing the communication of 'Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination' including constructing points such as a budget line for tourism, tighten cooperation with the European Travel Commission through 'Destination Europe 2020'. It was rejected by the Council (European Parliament, 2017:2).

The members of the Parliament can use the working tool; own-initiative reports (INI). There reports can initiate a new legislative proposal expressing and investigating in different topics which can have an important role in the legislative cycle (European Parliament, 2014).

In the modern history of the TRAN Committee we can mention three INI reports. The report on Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe (2010/2206(INI)) listed above has no adopted version as it was not voted by the Council that is why it has no effect on actual European tourism policy. The more complex, adopted texts on tourism (P8_TA(2015)0391) named 'New challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in Europe' after the European Parliament's resolution of 29 October 2015 on new challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in Europe (2014/2241(INI)) can be considered as the most important tourism report until nowadays especially for sustainable point of view. Besides sustainability, responsibility and social tourism it provides recommendations in subjects as 'Branding/joint promotion of Europe as a tourist destination; Pan-European and transnational tourism products; Quality; Unlocking the potential of coastal and marine tourism. Also, it focuses on modern spheres as Sharing economy; Digitisation. Besides underlining the need of further promotion of European tourism the text puts a finger on the necessary actions for the Commission such as the finalisation of the European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism or the EDEN projects, and the European cultural trails initiative. Awareness raising by a central portal of each national tourism organisation was advised. The expression 'smart tourism' is applied in the text where it is defined to be a "combination of sustainability, experiential tourism and appropriate use of natural resources, together with the new technologies, including the aspects of physical and information communication accessibility". Integration of local residents in tourism and help for regional development thought tourism are emphasised. In many examples the text recognises the power of regional tourism and it is mentioned equally to national tourism.

Eco-tourism and eco-sustainable solutions are considered just as important tools as 'sustainable fishing tourism' or agro-tourism. Latter mentioned ones however need more interventions. From the recommendations on European, national and regional tourism we can understand that more policy is needed on climate protection and "on energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable transport and waste management".

Tourism as an industry is linked with many others therefore it is often mentioned as trans-sectorial industry. It is difficult to distinguish it from transport, especially in sustainable questions. It can be seen more in the points of sustainable transport modes such as "green routes" and also environmental friendly or electric transport forms are welcomed. Accessibility and its promotion Europe-wide is also considered as a recommendation for all member states. This report predicts that new forms of tourism can be established due to the contribution of civil society furthermore taking into consideration of the social economy in relation of sustainable tourist. Some requests from the Commission mentioned in the paper are still actual and have not been answered: impact assessment of how climate change affects tourism in these sensitive regions – economically, environmentally and socially – and of the influence it will have in the future on climate change in addition the impact of the "uncontrolled immigration on the tourism sector". Promotion of sustainable tourism in link with fishing tourism and eco-tourism both for the consumers and stakeholders is necessary – says the report (P8_TA-PROV(2017)0280) 'The role of fisheries-related tourism in the diversification of fisheries' voted on the resolution of the European Parliament of 4 July 2017 on the role of fisheries-related tourism in the diversification of fisheries (2016/2035(INI)). It is the latest report that has been voted and was published by European Parliament. In many cases (sustainable) tourism is transversal therefore it can be found mentioned under the aegis of transport topics.

Peeters, 2015 explains the findings of the research requested by the TRAN Committee, titled *'Research for TRAN Committee – From responsible best practices sustainable tourism development'* about sustainable tourism development and the lack of up-to-date data on environmental and social effects of tourism. It notes the main environmental and socio-economic issues, examines a few case studies such as European tourism policy and makes recommendations especially in sustainable tourism transport, destinations, businesses, services and products, equally improve tourism monitoring and research. Researchers collected 162 examples and from these 15 case studies were presented. The selected cases are from a wide range either geographically either for their good

practices value. Tourism and environmental policies were not found aligned by the researchers. There is a lack in the integration of tourism, environmental and transport policies. As an example the White Paper: Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system (COM/2011/0144 final) is mentioned this does not contain the word “tourism”. The research study showed that one can notice “a lack of integration between tourism, environmental and transport policies” while the EU likes to think on environmental friendly travel modes especially high-speed trains but does not cooperate on the connection with tourism as such. Under part “3 policies” the paper lists the late development of European tourism policy while claiming that “the legal basis is limited” as the EU only can support initiatives but has no regulatory power on member states so no harmonisation is possible in that sense. The findings of this research, provides policy recommendations in four areas: tourism transport, destinations, businesses and products, and monitoring and research. The research conducted by the team recommends taking sustainable tourism in a holistic way including transport, accommodation to reduce impacts. Most importantly the paper claims a lack of data on tourism impact on environment. This is also necessary where tourism is linked to transport and should be measured by social and environmental point of view. This study was officially presented in the Parliament in November 2016, almost one year after the publication.

Later in March 2017 the EP produced a briefing after the request of a member of the Committee of the Regions on Sustainable Tourism ‘The environmental dimension’ (EPRS_BRI(2017)599327). The publication confirms the EU’s role in tourism while lists its initiatives such as EDEN, ETIS, and project funding under COSME programme. The Parliament’s requested study on sustainability certificates for soft tourism services is written under the EP’s contribution furthermore an impact assessment on tourism affected by climate change in coastal regions. The integration of climate protection of European tourism and transport policies was found important. It reflects back on the findings of the previously mentioned research of the University of Central Lancashire from 2015 November and informs that the European Environmental Agency currently works on a 25-indicator based mechanism. The lack of new initiatives or new reports shows us that there is a necessary future action to make in areas of measuring, targeted funding, or even supervision.

2.1.3. European Committee of the Regions

The mentioned institutions are not the only ones intended to change the actual situation of tourism policy. The European Union's assembly of regional and local representatives, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is also committed which can be seen in several Committee opinions: CDR 3637/2015, opinion on "Age-friendly tourism"; CDR 2645/2014, opinion on "European Strategy for Coastal and Maritime Tourism"; CDR 342/2010, opinion on "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination: a new political framework for tourism in Europe"; CDR 83/2009, opinion on "The correlation between the labour market and regional needs in the area of tourism"; CDR 397/2003, opinion on "Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism"; CDR 99/2002, opinion on the future of European tourism. The most recent voted opinion of the CoR is titled on 'Tourism as a driving force for regional cooperation across the EU' (COR-2015-06648-00-00-AC-TRA). The opinion has been voted on the 120th plenary session; on 7 December 2016 therefore it can be considered as an up-to-date suggestion from the representation of regions. Recognition and the call for a more sustainable tourism development and management is identified in the opinion. The revision of the 2010 tourism strategy, the revision of the EC White Paper, and "launch an integrated EU tourism policy relating to all relevant EU policies, to improve tourist confidence in the tourism sector as a whole, to strengthen the EC's approach towards seasonality and to propose a multi-annual work programme with clear goals, indicators and measures for tourism" (Peeters, 2015) were advised to the European Commission. The importance of macro-regions is for the first time mentioned in an EU opinion, furthermore calling for a macro-regional strategy with the objective of tourism. (Macro-regions are defined in order to better aim the common goals of Member States or often third countries (non-EU member countries) in the same geographical area). Therefore cross-border tourism cooperation through cross-sectoral local and regional platforms (such as NECSTouR) is necessary to achieve a better exchange of good practices and financial tools. Similarly to the study for the EP, this opinion points out the lack of sustainability point of view in Eurostat system and also breaking it down to regional level (above NUTS 2). Not only the European funds for tourism but also a budget for promotion including sustainable and competitive tourism is a deficiency. Adaptation for sustainability of destination should be a main goal while good practices should be available for all – this is the area where Member States need to evolve. Significantly, the opinion provides examples on different forms or types of tourism under its subchapter of thematic tourism. The written example of these makes it

recognised by an EU institution. The detailed opinion draws attention to these: “wine tourism, gastronomy, ecotourism, language-learning, active tourism, cycling tourism, rural life, traditions, religion, art, education, research, various popular sports, business and conference tourism, MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and events), etc.” With this in mind its suggestion is to introduce a title of "European Capital of Smart Tourism" for destinations of sustainable and competitive tourism. Another key fact to remember is the recommendations on sustainable development. The five points provided by this section are equally important and should be recognised therefore a detailed overview is necessary: most importantly it calls on regions to consider sustainability in tourism strategy with its three pillar and providing examples of NECSTouR member regions. Also better regulation of collaborative economy as it can be less beneficial for the social pillar of sustainable tourism. Cities should use innovation technologies to protect and improve quality of life. Renewable energy usage in coastal and mountain destinations is also advised using tools as the Hotel Energy Solutions (HES) and the Nearly Zero Energy Hotels (neZEH). Likewise managing natural resources sustainably should be promoted by the Commission. Furthermore, actions need to be done on the field of education and training within a special focus on quality education of sustainability, support, safety, and marketing. Moreover the paper highlights the adaptation of UN SDGs especially goals 8, 12, and 14.

All things considered, it is unequivocal that tourism policy on EU level exists despite the fact that it is non-binding at state level. The relatively slow recognition of the economic power of tourism resulted in an out of date approach which has been somewhat renewed in the recent years. This involved the welcoming of a more environmental-friendly type of tourism protecting the local communities in a social respect but also keeping the economic benefits. While some concrete actions or initiatives were named by the Institutions it can appear that the direct financing is not common because of the trans-sectorial nature of tourism. Examples show that the result of some approaches were not examined and the financial tools do not require sustainable management therefore addressing sustainable tourism practices to Member States, Regions and tourism stakeholders (especially SMEs) would be necessary. The fact that statistics on European level are not measuring sustainable tourism makes it extremely difficult to prove the success of the projects, initiatives, or recommendations. Not only are the European Institutions the ones shaping the actual European tourism policy but other organisations and groupings. Therefore it is

absolutely necessary to look into details on the recommendations and actions of other leading tourism bodies.

2.2. Overview of recommendations on sustainable tourism by other organisations

One of the most acknowledged organisations in the European tourism family is the European Travel Commission (ETC) founded in 1948. Its main activity since the beginning is the international promotion of Europe as a tourist destination. It is an independent organisation which members are mostly European countries, national tourism boards. Due to the close cooperation with the European Commission ETC is the proud owner of projects and initiatives as the visiteurope.com website or Destination Europe 2020. In their recently published report based on the research of Silvia Fontolan, asked National Tourism Organisations: NTOs reported that sustainable tourism makes part of their management (Fontolan, 2017). It is incorporated in their strategy not only because of the environmental aspect but to attract more visitors. But at the same time, it was reported that the cooperation among stakeholders in sustainable tourism related projects is not without challenges. Facilitating therefore the action of NTOs, sharing good practices, and establishing guidelines for every case are essential in the future. For now, no other study or report was published by ETC on sustainable tourism or the efficiency of tourism policy on this field. A non-profit organisation as ETC, backed by most of the European national tourism organisations could have an excellent lobby-power to influence decision-making. A yearly summer school is supported by ETC organised by PM4SD: Project Management for Sustainable Development (ETC, 2017).

The European Tourism Manifesto is a grouping of European public and private stakeholders who signed and presented the document 'European Tourism Manifesto for Growth & Jobs'. The Manifesto calls for action in several fields but most importantly in sustainability. Planning in environmental sustainability for tackling job creation is listed. Similarly to previous opinions, it underlines the need for financial support of all tourism stakeholders from the EU. Likewise, the support of local communities in destination management, also respecting local culture and employment. With these points (32-36) the Manifesto ensures the awareness raising of the pillars of sustainable tourism such as environmental, socio-cultural and economic terms (Manifesto, 2017).

In July 2017 an open letter has been published addressing the president of the European Commission together with the European Committee of the Regions, the European

Parliament, NECSTouR, European Travel Commission, co-signed by 40 MEPs, 69 CoR members, 12 NECSTouR members, Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), European Association of Elected representatives from Mountain Regions (AEM), 10 members of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, 44 organisations of the European tourism industry through Tourism Manifesto, and 8 academic partners: Aiest International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism, DGT Deutsche Gesellschaft für Tourismuswissenschaft e.V., Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Management Centre Innsbruck, North Aegean University, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Responsible Tourism Institute, University of Girona. The letter develops the claim that further improvement in sustainability is needed. It calls for inclusion of a European Strategy for Tourism in the European Commission Work Programme for 2018 which would update the communication from 2010. With this step the Commission – argues the letter – could tackle the challenges in the relevant areas of EU policy. All destinations could profit from such strategy which should introduce indicators, and measurements in tourism. Similarly strengthening the SMEs of the sector is a request from the Commission. The letter points out the needs in the European tourism industry, the importance of regulated financing, supporting SMEs and updating the 7 years old communication (COM(2010)352 final).

It should be seen that despite the European institutions and organisations committed into tourism there are international examples which influence the European tourism industry and in many cases a fruitful cooperation is behind their work. Probably the best example for such partner is the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) of the United Nations. In 2015 the General Assembly of the UN voted 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. It recognises the role of sustainable tourism “as a positive instrument towards the eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment, the improvement of quality of life and the economic empowerment of women and youth and its contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable development, especially in developing countries.” It calls for a worldwide cooperation and to use the international year for promotion and support of sustainable tourism that, as a tool can eradicate poverty (A/RES/70/193, *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, 2017*). In the very same year, the General Assembly adopted a document on ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’. This agenda drafted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 targets for a 15 years planning. The agenda is formulated around five main subjects the so-called 5 ‘P-s’: people, planet, prosperity,

peace, and partnership (A/RES/70/1). Among those goals, tourism is included in 3, namely Goal 8, Decent work and economic growth, target 8.9:

“By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products; Goal 12, Responsible consumption and production, target 12.b: “Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”; and Goal 14, Life below water, target 14.7: “By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism” (UNWTO, 2016). Moreover the nature of tourism not only in policies but in the SDGs makes it a tool contribute to all 17 Goals. As Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of UNWTO names it “Tourism can foster gender equality (Goal 5), help build sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and end poverty (Goal 1)”. Embracing the sustainability agenda is one of the three priorities agreed on by the Executive Council for the year of 2016. It was ensured by the Beijing Declaration which claims that tourism has the ability to be a tool in the battle of climate change if responsible actions are made. It underlines the already proven lack of measurement and monitoring of the impact on poverty levels. Taking all these into account the Roadmap for celebrating together published on the occasion of the International Year of Sustainable tourism for development 2017 provides a detailed overview on the necessary actions in this field. Significantly the roadmap puts one of the goals as raising awareness among decision-makers, also sees it important to achieve change in policies. In this publication the discussion centres not only on advocacy and awareness raising but policy making. A set of activities are recommended in line of policy making for all tourism actors including governments. Policy strategies of sustainable tourism or SDGs inclusion at national and subnational level is advised. Similarly it lists the action of recognition of certified operators active in sustainability (UNWTO, 2017).

The EU ratified the Paris Agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1) in 2016. The EU was always a key player in the creation of a new agreement to reinforce of the negative, lesser success of previous agreements such as the Kyoto one (European Commission, 2017:3). However the arguments climate change made it important to react about environmental and sustainability issues (Yasarata et al. 2009). The agreement specifies the actions needed to radically reduce gas-carbon emissions. It has been stated that the transport sector emits more and while tourism's main pollution comes from the tourism transport we

can conclude that such agreement could have foreseen specific recommendations for the transport sector therefore the tourism industry. It is also true that tourism is transversal and reductions of pollutions in accommodation, transport, food market will all have an impact on it. However, without concrete policies it is quasi impossible to act in line with the agreements because of the following contradiction: global tourism is experiencing growing numbers with an increasing average of 3.3% per year and by the long term prediction of UNWTO the international tourist arrival will reach 1.8 billion by 2030. (Tourism towards 2030, UNWTO, 2011) On one hand we have a continuing growth in the sector (Rifai, 2011) and on the other hand Paris agreement requires a reduction of emission by 40% by 2030. Combining the predictions with the requirements it is more likely to meet extreme difficulties which could only be overcome by very strict policies on emission in the whole tourism industry.

2.3. Conclusion of the literature review

We tried to show that the development of European tourism policy was slower than other policy areas'. After the millennium the Commission began to recognise the need for targeted policy making in tourism. Involvement of experts made it possible that this formulation went into good direction, including sustainability measures. Although, it was argued that the escalation of such policy development was not in line with the weight of the industry. It is still the case today, when tourism despite its place in the European economy is not properly measured at official European institutions level, not properly researched by academics, not properly regulated for sustainability, not properly linked with other policies, and all above mentioned because of a highly limited legal basis. Some stated that the actual tourism policy was shaped to serve sustainable development while it would have been better to create a basis for sustainable European tourism, meaning that it is not an answer for the needs. There is room for development, sustainable tourism policy, looking upwards the Internal Market. It is self-explanatory that this, European tourism policy in its actual form is more than imperfect. Influencing the Commission seems to be a difficult and too bureaucratic way to change its view. Future decision makers should keep in mind that with recent tourism initiatives we wish to show a single destination to the rest of the world while actually it is extremely fragmented in many sense. Also, reducing the greenhouse gas emission requires more regulation in tourism transportation while the number of travellers is continuously increasing. The current situation cannot be maintained, changes need to be done learning from past mistakes. The question is, could a small number of tourism experts change the mind-set of the

European institutions? Or is it possible that European tourism policy has no more meaning for those who really make tourism more sustainable?

Without doubt, this whole phenomenon could be subject of a more detailed research on the proven figures of sustainable tourism management, and most importantly on transportation data of tourism from a sustainable point of view.

Since NECSTouR came to life and now tries to make a real change. Called to life by the Communication 'Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism' in 2007, recognised in 'Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe' in 2010, and stated as an example for cross-border tourism cooperation through regional platforms in 'Tourism as a driving force for regional cooperation across the EU', NECSTouR proved to be a successful organisation.

3. Outline of the background and specific business of the organisation

This section is dedicated to the more detailed description of the organisation where I spent the required period of internship. It is called NECSTouR: European network of regions for sustainable and competitive tourism (see Figure 3 for logo, below).

Figure 3. NECSTouR logo



(source: NECSTouR, 2016).

The statutes of the network state that it is a non-profit association registered under Belgian law with a headquarter based in Brussels, Belgium.

The association pursues the following non-profit goals:

"NECSTouR aims to develop and strengthen a coherent framework for the coordination of regional development programmes and research on sustainable and competitive tourism following the communication published by the European Commission, entitled "Agenda for European sustainable and competitive tourism" (COM (2007) 0621 - 19-10-2007).

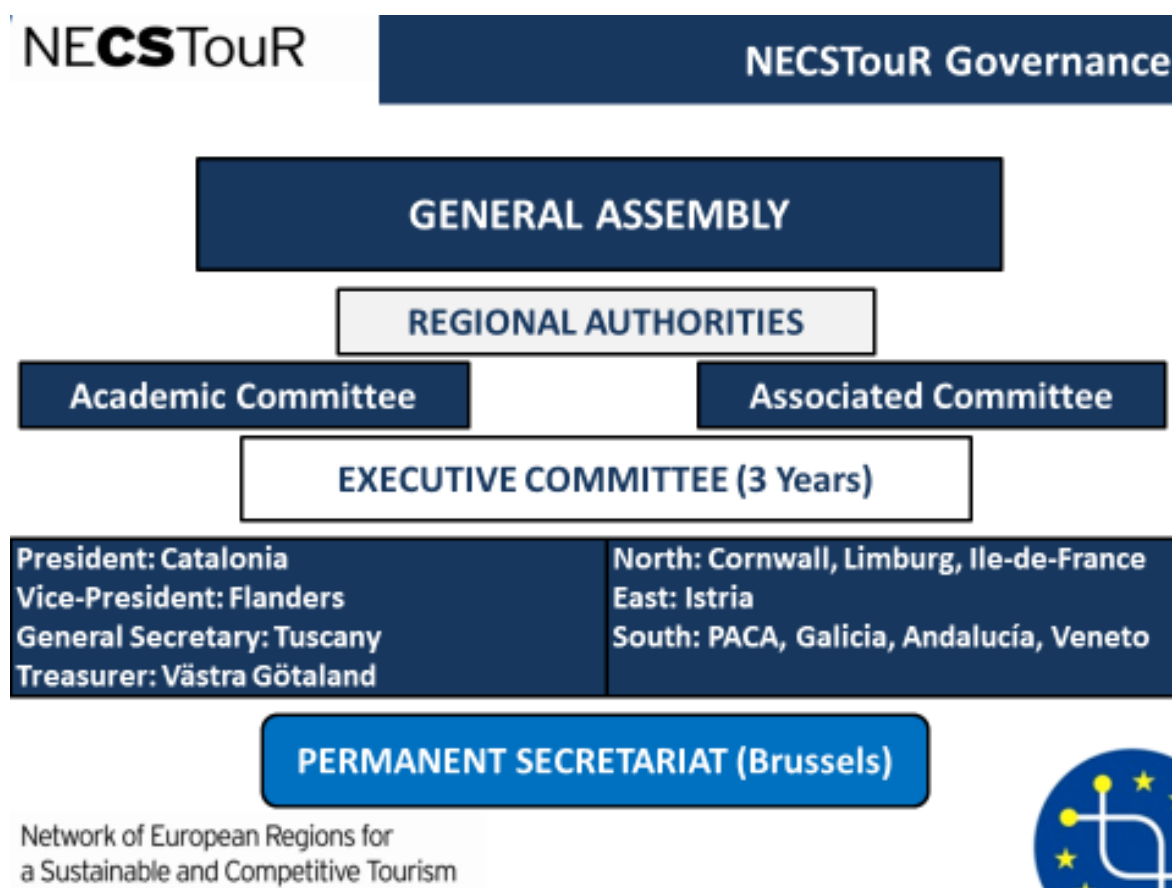
To achieve this goal, NECSTouR will develop cooperation between the regional organisations in the network to promote the application and implementation of concerted and coordinated actions within the member regions. It will involve the European institutions to develop its strategy and aims to:

- Implement applied research in sustainable tourism.*
- Share and promote each form of coordination of the projects already underway.*
- Exchange information and implement joint activities.*
- Use the European funds appropriately.*
- Unite the European regions in the preparation of the decisions, the implementation and the evaluation of the tourism policy so that they are able to guide the national government policies to promote the sustainable development tourism and encourage the competitiveness of the European supply.*

More generally, the search for innovation in all its forms must be central to sustainable development and competitive strategies." (NECSTouR Statutes, 2016, p.1-2)

NECSTouR is a membership-based association. It distinguishes different type of members by their role and competences. Those can become full, associated or affiliated members. It is also composed by founding members, namely Catalonia, Tuscany and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regions. The founding members are also considered as full members. National, European and international professional, associative, institutional, and academic or research structures and networks, destinations, local collectivises and destinations networks can become associated members. For local and regional professional, associative, institutional and academic or research structures and networks can become affiliated members after the recognition of the General Assembly. Rights and obligations differ from one type of membership to another, including the amount of the yearly membership fee.

Figure 4. NECSTouR Governance



(source: NECSTouR, 2016)

The structure of the association is divided into two bodies, the General Assembly and the Executive Committee (see Figure 4). These are supported by the Brussels based permanent secretariat. The General Assembly is composed of full members and supported by the Committee of Associated Members (composed as mentioned above) and the Academic Committee (composed mainly by universities, research institutes). The General Assembly decides the objectives, approves memberships, budget and accounts, and sets the goals (see Figure 5). Its meeting is organised annually. The other body, the Executive Committee (see Figure 6) meets more often to determine strategic direction and the action plans. Its members are the original founding members of the association plus members elected by the General Assembly full and associated members as well (see Figure 7). Their candidature is ensured for a three year long period.

Financial resources are mainly provided from membership fees. Other sources include European Projects too.

The association has also established multiple working groups, composed by its members. These groups are dealing with predetermined themes where they exchange views, share good practices and make useful information available for the other members of the network. Some of these working groups are also involved in projects. At the moment six different working groups are supporting the work of the network: EU funds for tourism, Indicators and ETIS, Digital platforms, Smart destinations, Cultural tourism & sustainability, and Innovation skills & education. Objectives and actions are approved by the Executive Committee and led by working group leaders.

Figure 5. NECSTouR's strategy



(Source:NECSTouR, 2016)

The idea of a network was launched by the above mentioned founding members in 2007 and the creation followed two years later, in 2009. The self-financed network's idea was resumed in one sentence:

“Creating the right balance between the welfare of tourists and local population, the needs and uses of the natural and cultural environment and the development and competitiveness of a destinations and its businesses.” (NECSTouR Strategy & Work Programme, presentation, p. 2) The network welcomes 35 member regions from a total of 20 European countries (see Table 1).

Table 1: NECSTouR member regions by country

| NECSTouR Members | |
|--|-----------------|
| Member region | Country |
| Alentejo, Algarve | Portugal |
| Brittany, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Midi-Pyrénées, Ile-de-France | France |
| Calabria, Emilia Romagna, Puglia, Tuscany, Veneto, Piemont, Trento, Sardegna, Liguria, Lazio | Italy |
| Catalunya, Islas Baleares, Andalucía, Galicia, Valencia, Canarias, Basque Country | Spain |
| Cornwall, Scotland | United Kingdom |
| German-speaking Community of Belgium Region, Flanders, Wallonia | Belgium |
| Gabrovo | Bulgaria |
| Region Västra Götaland | Sweden |
| Istria | Croatia |
| South-Limburg | The Netherlands |
| Central Denmark, Ringkøbing-Skjern | Denmark |
| Vojvodina | Serbia |

(source: author, 2017)

35 representatives of the academic and business sector are also members. Because of the finance requirements it is necessary to gather new members for the network. To attract new regions for whom it offers services. Within its offers we can find four main reasons to join. Members can have a direct access to targeted knowledge, best practices, information and contacts of sustainable tourism. In other words it works as a think-tank, it disseminates knowledge among its members.

Being part of an open and dynamic network full of experts is also useful at all levels like regional, national, European and international. It also offers the possibility to promote the region or organisation among the experts and towards the European or international audience. This simply gives a better visibility to less known regions.

The most important point, not just for this paper but also for members is the possibility of participation and influence of EU tourism policy.

Figure 6. Executive Committee

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Patrick Torrent, *Presidency of NECSTouR*, Catalonia

Jan Korthoutd, *Vice-President*, Flanders

Teresa Caldarola, *Secretary General*, Tuscany Region

Olle Jonäng, *Treasurer*, Västra Götaland Region

Members of the Executive Committee:

Laurent Greffeuille, *Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region*

Anya Niewierra, *Limburg Province (The Netherlands)*

Françoise Guaspere, *Île-de-France Region*

Malcolm Bell, *Cornwall Region*

Nicola Panarello, *Veneto Region*

(source: NECSTouR, 2017)

The network, especially the secretariat is organising consultations, providing access to European Funds, helping to develop project ideas and finding quality partners for these

projects. Without any doubt this is the strongest point of the association, and this is the strength that I have been following during my internship the most.

Its goals and strategies are defined for a three year period (2016-2018). Four goals are positioning NECSTouR mode of sustainable and competitive tourism, raise the profile of tourism in the EU agenda, reinforce the role of regions in the EU tourism policy, and mainstream of EU funds for tourism. To achieve these goals, strategies as membership, communication, and expertise were agreed on. The priorities englobed in the working groups are in line with the priorities of the European Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (hereinafter DG GROW) such as Attracting investment and improvement business conditions; Joint promotion of EU in Third markets; Digital revolution; Skills and training. (NECSTouR, 2017)

Figure 7. Family picture at AGM 2016



(source: NECSTouR, 2016).

Due to the professional and focused work in these areas NECSTouR had several European projects in the past worth to mention.

Recognised by the UNWTO, the Nearly Zero Energy Hotels (neZEH) has the aim to accelerate the rate of refurbishment of existing buildings into Nearly Zero Energy Buildings supporting the private sector and promoting the front runners.

An earlier project was the MITOMED which had the objective to promote an integrated management model of maritime and coastal tourism. Its geographical area was focusing on the Mediterranean regions. Its goal was to improve the quantity and quality of data, information, products, services and policies pertaining the sector.

More recent, ongoing project is Spirit Youth. It aims to discover, investigate the spiritual tourism market in Europe. As I had the opportunity to participate one of the activities of this project and also to support its project management process therefore I will share more details about it in the third chapter of my internship report.

4. Outline of the performed work in the organisation

Because of my previous work experience in the world of policy-making, the representatives of the associations have agreed that my internship placement could mostly support policy related tasks. This is the main reason I have been working close to the European Institutions, following EU tourism policy development, promoting the network towards regions, supporting internal and external meetings and events, and European projects implementation.

The Permanent Secretariat of NECSTouR is situated in Brussels, Schuman area. Office counted two people, the coordinator and the communication officer. Most of the times I was advised and I reported to the coordinator. Learning the ongoing policy areas and getting familiar with the work of NECSTouR was the first task of mine. The first year of the master not exactly dealt with European tourism policy but more with sustainable tourism related topics it was an area where my knowledge was limited. In my previous internship, the favoured areas covered more the transport sector therefore I knew transport policy better.

The learning of ongoing initiatives was essential to keep track with the changes and represent the organisation in meetings. Participating in internal and external meetings helped me to learn the insights of this area.

The first challenge was not even related to the theoretical knowledge. It was about the social interaction with colleagues. For me it was composed by the communication (English language), sharing views (based on academic knowledge), working in team (adapt myself quickly), and working in my own (prioritize tasks). So for me, learning how to work with new people was the first step. Thankfully it was a small team who I worked directly with. The Permanent Secretariat counted 2 full-time employed and one part-time employed employees. It is although important to mention that the whole network counts many more people. At the beginning, I initiated that an 'introductory' email for the members would be a nice gesture from me. After drafting a short email I sent it to the contact people of the

network. It was a positive experience that many of the addressees came back to me with a short welcoming email. I think this was the moment when I started to understand that this is much more than just an organisation.

The second biggest challenge was to get familiar with the internal tools of the network. Firstly, maybe with the members. For historical reasons we do not have much experience in regional governance and it is not well exercised neither in the European Parliament. As in most cases we firstly talk about Member States in EU jargon, the names and geographical situation of regions were the area where I had to learn the most. In addition I had to learn names and positions at the regions. For each region NECSTouR has one or more contact person. These are in multiple cases high level representatives of the regional tourism authorities. It is self-explanatory that the language of the communication had to be professional with those people. The network deals with a high amount of internal communication between its members. It makes the larger part of the internal work. The tool for these kind of information sharing is the website then via email. I had to learn both ways. Duties to be done on the website has been introduced to me. The other part of the internal work is related to the functioning and actions taken by the network. These are decided by the Executive Committee (ExCom) through various channels. ExCom meetings are important in the life of the network therefore I had to take carefully all the instruction related to these meetings. I could actively help in the preparations by drafting documents, agenda for these meetings, and obviously putting together the supporting documents. These dossiers were sent previously so participants could arrive well prepared. These meetings were taking place in the Brussels office, so the welcoming and other logistic tasks were mostly done by me. For the organisation I could base myself on previous documents. Some members had no mean to travel to Brussels therefore those people connected online through the videoconference tool. Connecting people via online tool and insure the minutes was my duty. Disseminations and drafting of these minutes were my tasks.

Getting familiar with the NECSTouR developed working groups system happened in a more paced way. These groupings are focused on different themes or topics. I could read their working documents and little by little see those activities in action. Later I was appointed to support one working group when the organisation of an event required a focused work in cooperation with a specific group. Before that in December 2016, a one day long event was organised around different titles. To be accessible for interested members the meetings were web streamed. My participation was in this was involving the

preparation of meeting documents, minutes, and helping participants to reach the venue. This was a perfect opportunity to see more insights about the working groups' actualities.

4.1. Annual General Meeting

The most challenging internal NECSTouR task was the Annual General Meeting (for logo see Figure 8). The preparations started in January of 2017 and I had the pleasure to assist in the whole process from the beginning until the very end of this AGM. I made a detailed description about the event that can be found in the 'Supplementary' chapter under Appendices. I would highly advice reading it because the content of the conferences can be interesting for tourism professionals.

Figure 8. NECSTouR Conference in Seville



(source: NECSTouR, 2017)

As Andalusia proposed to host the event in Seville the organisation could start in both sides. The 2 day-long conference's programme was ruled out in a close cooperation with

Andalusia and the permanent secretariat, involving UNWTO. The tasks were shared respecting the expertise of both parties. The secretariat was responsible for the promotion of the event, finalising the programme, preparing and sending invitations to speakers and invitees too, leading discussions with panellists, creating the discussion papers, managing travel and accommodation expenses, and being the first contact point for all interested people. A registration website was created by a local travel agency which was also issuing plane tickets and hotel rooms. The complexity of tasks was well known from the beginning. The local team was dealing with the venue and all that comes with such management. Because of the high-level invitees a special care on protocol has been adopted. At the same time, we have been contacting the possible speakers to invite them in time, sharing main points of the conference, dealing with their travel arrangement if needed. Without detailing much my tasks, basically I inquired people for their data then the travel agency made the reservations based on the gathered information.

Preceding the conference, during the preparation period we had to consult with members of the European Parliament several times. These were meetings that I initiated by starting contacting the MEPs' offices. At the meantime I could draft a document which was sent later to the other party. This served as an indication for us but also for them on the given meeting's theme. Such document was divided into subtopics: background and aim of the meeting, about NECSTouR, discussion paper, agenda/discussion points, and NECSTouR synergies with the given organisation/office in the specific question. The whole system of this document was designed to give an overview for the person whom NECSTouR meets with. At the preparation for the AGM I had to initiative some meetings with the potential speakers. We met with the cabinet of Mr Ujhelyi, Ms Tapardel, Ms Monteiro, and Mr Wagner. Normally MEPs are entitled to have their travel expenses covered. With all this in mind some of them asked and some of them didn't for covering their stay. At the end only Mr Ujhelyi could make it to Seville. Ms Tapardel and NECSTouR agreed on sending a video message, while Ms Monteiro and Mr Wagner had other meeting with the mother party, the European Peoples Party. Although I had some experience in the environment, keeping contact with offices as an external organisation which can be seen as a lobby activity is not always easy. These moments thought me how to initiate contact, how to communicate, and what kind of language to implement. The workload in the EP varies from the actual placement of the plenary sessions, which is why it was relatively difficult to organise the meeting. This was also the reason why we had to consider the "Strasbourg week" whenever planning meetings or events whit MEPs. However, meeting with the

assistants or policy advisors was most of the times possible and even more advantageous during plenary sessions. As politicians have a team composed by several people it means that sometimes one or two colleagues stay in Brussels while the member is accompanied by others to the other building. During those more calm moments a message can be passed in a better way, when actually it reaches its 'destination'. It is well known that lobbyists are targeting offices in a very huge number. They are registered with their badge under certain organisation which gives them the right to enter into the parliament. This is an advantage but also a disadvantage as the image of the lobbyist is very negative. Although the sector that we represent is not especially a 'typical' lobbyist sector but it can get offices suspicious. NECSTouR has made a lot of interventions, co-organised events and in recent years it has been organising several milestone events. This could help to create an image that truly reflects the organisation's work. Its heritage could be experienced in the Institutions in a very positive manner. NECSTouR is known, it's clearly stands for something that is representative and true. It is not directly financially driven it represents entities which need help, which are not always recognised enough in national level, in the Union. My task was eased in the sense that the network was more popular among the MEPs dealing with tourism so I had only introduced myself as policy assistant but not the network. Many years of hard work makes NECSTouR a true and acknowledged partner in the institutions.

During the events my tasks were more focused on the ad-hoc duties and to ensure the right flow of the events following the agenda.

The first day, 30 March was a full day for members including future or new members. This is an internal way to meet, talk, discuss about common challenges, overview the actions taken during last year. The programme ensured that members can learn and vote about new memberships, accounts including the financial report of last year and the budget of the ongoing year. The 2016 activity report was distributed by me at the entrance with the agenda and with supporting documents included. Preparation of the agenda for the first day and its printing was concluded in Brussels by me and was transported to Seville the day before. As I have edited the 2016 Activity Report I was asked to give a few highlights about it to the members during the morning session. I spoke about the events depicted in the report because it is the best example to show how much and how effectively the network and the secretariat done its job. I was also asked assisting with social media staff to the communication officer. The morning session was closed by the lunch which was linked with the so-called membership ceremony. I assisted members in social events. The

afternoon programme was for me more active as the working group I supervised had its workshop under the title "Regions Driving Intercultural Dialogue Through Tourism: What Tools?". I had to edit the support for this workshop and to inform and coordinate the whole event.

The organisation phase of the workshop has started with defining the topic where I have participated the most actively. There has been internal discussion about the possible themes but the main line was to prepare ourselves to the thematic year focusing on the people and tools which can enforce dialogue. The main idea was to propose some sort of package to the European Commission in regard of tourism for the cultural heritage year. At the end a composition of multiple topics were accepted such as gastronomy as a good practice for intercultural dialogue, the city cards, and modern media tools such as podcast. The selection of moderator and representative of strategic alliance was harmonised with invitees of the next day joint conference with UNWTO. Therefore we have agreed with the working group leader, Mr Jose Luis Maestro that I ask the regional manager for Europe of UNWTO if he is willing to moderate the workshop. After that Mr Peter Janech accepted our proposition for moderating, I have contacted with the responsible policy officer from the European Commission Directorate General Education and Culture, Ms Anne Grady. The conversations with her have gone well however, at the early stage it was not clear what to do as content for the workshop. Theoretically the first day's workshop would give a food for thought to the second day's workshop. Together with the working group leader we have consulted many times and the time when the programme of the workshop has been close to be finalised we have invited our moderator for a short video conversation. Thanks to his professional manner he has required many details that we were happy to provide him in order to have an interesting, and active session. Indeed, he did an excellent job, as he was moderating the workshop with proficiency, letting panellists and guests have their speech but reminding them to stay on track when it needed. The whole session was concluded by the moderator and the working group leader, then at the end the conclusions were shared in the common room with all the members. I wrote a short speech to Jose Luis, highlighting the importance of gastronomy, the future of tourism on the one on one basis. The event was followed with a cultural visit in the *Alcázar de Sevilla* and a gala dinner in the gardens.

31 March was the day of "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development: Smart Tourism Destinations' contribution for the Planet and its People" co-organised with UNWTO (see Figure 9 above). The conference was welcoming guest from all over Europe

in the same venue, at Fibes Palace of Congresses and Exhibitions. Registration was starting at 9:00 where guests were hand-out badges with their name, based on the online registration beforehand. I supervised this process with the results of the online form. Often I could guide the participants to the conference room and help them to find different facilities.

After clarifying some doubts and ensuring that the video message with the slides are ready, panel 3, THE PEOPLE: INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR TOURISM QUALITY EXPERIENCES has started moderated by Christof Kienel, Head of Unit, European Committee of the Regions – NAT Commission. This panel was that I contributed to the most, during the preparation. Unfortunately, few days before the event we had a regretful message from the cabinet of MEP Tapardel, saying she cannot come to the conference due to some political difficulties in her home country. The original idea was to have a fast paced interesting dialogue where to have a video message is absolutely not convenient. 2 local examples were presented first “Your roots in Europe” by Susana Ibáñez Rosa, General Secretary for Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Regional Government of Andalusia and second “The Tourism Ambassadors” Françoise Guaspere, EU Policy Advisor Île-de-France Europe. The first case was explaining the program called “Your roots in Andalucía, Your roots in Europe”. The framework of this initiative was that in 2015, 244 million people lived outside their country of origin. They believe tourism as a factor of territorial cohesion, coexistence between people, and as a factor of social dynamism. Furthermore there is indeed a multicultural exchange which can break down barriers and stimulus dialogue. On the top of that it can promote values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. Identification of the three main target markets is the main objective of their analysis. Work plan consisted a mix of tasks or promotion, communication, marketing, advice and creation of products. They are planning to establish a centre for tourism product creations. They are in close cooperation with the private sector – she underlined. Then she has come up with a proposal for all Europe based on the Andalusian example because Europe’s history hides great opportunities for replicability. There are huge migratory movements therefore there is a great potential for Europe promote European citizenship. This idea would be named “Your roots in Europe. A short video was showed to the audience. It stated information about the ancestral home of a large Jewish community, how the region has Jewish roots and that is why they invite Jewish visitors from all over the world to come “home”.

Figure 9. Opening panel



(source: author, 2017)

Next was Ms Guaspere, presenting the idea of Tourism Ambassadors from France. Due to the high level of security and the shocking and unfortunate terrorist attacks the region needed to establish a campaign to visitors. They have recently launched a city pass which englobes different reductions for tourists. Also a website, a one-stop-shop was established. They offer English language courses for the participant of the industry such as bus and taxi drivers, tour operators. The volunteers are there to visit the tourists with a smile, a personal approach. They recruited young people as volunteers mostly students. English was the main criteria but experience in tourism sector was also considered. The mission was to welcome visitors and to help them plan their stay; also these volunteers wear purple jackets to ease their visibility. Their future is to recruit even more volunteers for the summer and winter holiday period. It was concluded by Mr Kienel that these are excellent examples on how the ideas and policies are actually implemented on regional level. He continued with their initiative of the so-called Citizens travel card which I am elaborating in the other chapters.

The first intervention after the video message of Ms Tapardel was Anne Grady's, Policy Officer Culture, Heritage and Artists mobility, European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). She shared the plans of DG EAC regarding the thematic year of European Year of Cultural Heritage as Europe is a key cultural destination, one of the World's largest concentration cultural sights which accounts half of UNESCO's heritage list and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the intangible heritage list. The goal is

to encourage the sharing and appreciation of Europe's rich and diverse cultural heritage. Tourism should be in the centre of this promotion of cultural heritage. Focus on Tangible and intangible will be focused, also social practices. Shared resource and common history and values is the idea of the year. Button-up approach has been agreed for the coordination of the year.

DG GROW's representative started to underline the commitment of the European Commission in the SDG implementation. Ilona Lelonek, Policy Officer Sustainable and Responsible Tourism, European Commission Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs mentioned the initiative implemented since 10 years: European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN). She pointed out the support for development for cultural tourism in transnational thematic tourism products encouraged by this project such as routes, itineraries, or trails. They have been cooperating with other organisations such as UNECSO, Council of Europe on cultural routes, European Travel Commission on promotion, or the UNWTO. Linking the next year's thematic year, the selection of 2017 is focusing on the cultural destinations.

Jean Marc Mignon, the Representative from the World Committee on Tourism Ethics, UNWTO briefly spoke about the vision of the committee. He confirmed that cultural heritage is one of the principal motivations for travel. Furthermore, empowerment of host communities, minorities and indigenous people is essential to preserve authenticity and integrity. Mr Mignon added that the WCTE is working on a set of recommendations on the sustainable development of indigenous tourism. He raised the question on how to get the right balance between development of tourism, and quality of life of the local populations.

The speech was followed by Antonio Massieu, Chair of INRouTe International Network on Regional Economics and Tourism who highlighted from his point of view that measuring culture at subnational levels can also be focused as a subset of visitor flows, culture and tourism are territorial based activities, and that proper measurement of culture is far behind that of tourism. He added that cultural tourism as a term is probably not the best to refer on the topic we want to identify as culture being the main purpose of a trip.

The last but probably the most surprising presentation was invitee of NECSTouR, Mr Richard Eltvedt, Director of Governmental and Citizenship Affairs at Euro Disney. Indeed he received some questioning regard from the audience. He explained that the Disney universe is deeply rooted in French and European culture and history. This heritage is

kept alive, according to him, at Disneyland Paris with a unique atmosphere and a range of rare skillsets and talents. Employees are over 100 different nationalities therefore cultural diversity is at the heart of Disneyland Paris' social model. Disney gives a change to young people from all over Europe and the world, Disneyland actively promotes intercultural dialogue – he added. At the opening of Euro Disney park they took into consideration European heritage, European culture therefore it is not just a copy of the American version. The park's places required to employ professionals from all over Europe who are masters of very old professions which do not practiced elsewhere. They have based every building and decoration on the traditional way of craftsmanship. The session was closed with the conclusions driven by Mr Kienel.

Concluding and closing panel was composed by Mr Francisco Javier Fernández Hernández, Regional Minister for Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Regional Government of Andalusia; Octavi Bono, NECSTouR Presidency, Director-General for Tourism of the Government of Catalonia; and Dr Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

I would only add my conclusion that it was an excellent opportunity to meet with many high-level professionals and representatives of the tourism industry. I have been in contact with decision makers from European level, helping them and cooperating with them was a lifetime experience. UNWTO's delegation responsible for the event made a huge impression on me, their experience and professionalism is exemplary. One thing that I will probably never forget is the opportunity to meet with the secretary general, Mr Taleb Rifai (see Figure 10). He's a true leader, with the dedication in his eyes you are immediately feel you could listen to him for several days. All ideas shared by him are mind openers and true food for thought. Meeting with him in person therefore was an even bigger joy, receiving from him a pin of the thematic year is definitely the best memory to take home from Seville.

Figure 10. Between Taleb Rifai (UNWTO) and Jan Korthoudt (VisitFlanders)



(source: author, 2017).

I would categorize the following tasks between internal and external actions: the drafting of the activity report.

4.2. Internal tasks

In each year the permanent secretariat prepares an activity report. This document englobes the achievements of last year, in a detailed way. In the previous years the document was in a traditional format containing several pages of plain text. We had a discussion with the team and I was asked to produce the activity report for 2016. I proposed an idea of a brochure which would better represent the success of the year. Deciding on the content of this tool was made in cooperation with the secretariat. The working groups and different topics were assigned to the members of the secretariat. During the executive committee meeting it has been shown to the ExCom members and they have approved the content. At the meantime I contacted with the acting president Mr Torrent and with the vice-president and ambassador, Mr Korthoudt for a little quote from them. These were pasted as forewords on the very first page after the table of contents. On the next page the members of the executive committee and the academic committee were listed, with the name of they represent. This page included the presidency, vice-president, secretary general, treasurer, the eight members of the executive committee and two academic committee members. On page number six a little text is explaining the

membership section. It explains the strategy 2016-18 to attract new members and keep the existing ones. 5 new regions are listed: Valencia (Spain), Canary Island (Spain), Wallonia (Belgium), Gabrovo (Bulgaria), Central Denmark (Denmark). University of Málaga is a new associated member. It also points out the membership intention of ETIS destinations (European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management). At the bottom of the page we added the eye catcher sentence: "In 2016 NECSTouR counts 64 members covering 18 European countries, 31 regions and 33 associated members." In addition a map was attached to the next page. Next chapter is about communication, the new website and the strategy of social media was explained there, with numbers on the other page. Working groups are the most important topic at NECSTouR therefore this section should have been the one that draws the most attention. This I tried to reflect in the design. For each working group subchapter the logo and an image from the most important event related to that working group were placed in the middle. The text flows above and below these pictures. The system is the same for all working groups: "The European context; Objectives and activities; the leader; number of followers; full and associated members; Working group presence in 2016 events; What is next?" These were filled out accordingly the history of each expertise group. The European context part explains the important milestones of the European Union in the given sector. This introductory line simply put into context the reason for existence of the working group. Objectives and activities of the working group were put including future challenges. More chapters were following: events with internal and external ones with a special attention to the ones organised by NECSTouR. Last section of the report was dedicated to the projects. Left page was presenting the NeZEH (Nearly Zero Energy Hotels) while right side page was presenting Spirit Youth. The very last page was a general page on social media and with the family photo. This was requested by the communication officer. It depicts the hashtag word of "go far, go together" the network's slogan, the email and website address, and the logos of social media sites. The booklet counts 28 pages in total. It was printed in Seville therefore I had to give all the instructions to the responsible colleagues. The report was distributed on the first day of the AGM in Seville. Also, it was presented very briefly by me on the podium in front of all NECSTouR members. I have received a very positive feedback on my work especially because visually it was something new that they never had an opportunity to do. Hopefully it will be a tool to attract more members in the future. At the beginning I wrote it is internal but equally external. For members it shows their work in a different point of view and it can be used as a PR tool for gathering new members or promoting the network. Either way, to

produce such document I had to be very familiar with the work and achievements of NECSTouR. When we see the construction of the document we can understand the whole functioning of this network. It gives a perfect overview on it and it gave me too. This task helped me to not only develop my editing and graphic skills but at the same time to perfectly get familiar the actions of last year and NECSTouR in its totality. I am therefore totally ensured that such brochure will be useful for promotion purposes in the ongoing year or even later too.

Similarly to the previously mentioned I was responsible for the editing of the NECSTouR Work Programme 2017, also. This is basically a presentation for the members on the future direction we want to take. The main axes are the collection of solid tools, actions of working groups, alliances especially cooperation with UNWTO in the framework of International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The programme is composed by membership, communication, and expertise strategies. As it is still representing a working document of the network and it contains internal information, sharing more details on the content wouldn't be appropriate. The drafting of this document was not different from the activity report's although it helped me to gather information for my recommendations at the end of this report.

One can see that the tasks lead me toward more and more to the practical knowledge after I learned the basics about NECSTouR itself. Of course my inputs of my internship were diverse, and in most cases I learned by doing it, as they say. This was especially true for the project side.

Contribution to the ongoing NECSTouR projects was also one of the skills that I could master. The Spirit Youth European project co-funded by the programme COSME that I mentioned earlier before is required more intervention during my internship. It gathered 7 partners from 5 countries committed to develop a European transitional tourism itinerary for young people around the concept of spiritual tourism. Firstly, I would like to mention the Spirit Youth workshop on 1 December 2016 in Barcelona, Spain. It was preceded by detailed preparation choosing speakers, drafting the programme and making travel arrangements. This job has increased my expertise in event management because I have participated in the preparations. I was dealing also with the registrations of the participants, all including accommodation and travel tasks. Some duties for the catering was done by me too. During the event social media was unforced with my participation. The itinerary of the project covered three countries: Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. The

testing of the Spirit Youth pilot project third part was taken place in the Netherlands, South-Limburg region. The four day-long test phase was to test activities chosen for the target group and then provide an overall note. My participation in the pilot project aimed to give a useful feedback to the project leaders. It has been good to see the background of the project and the project itself in action. Being part of both I could understand better how a European project is organised and also how it is brought to life. As the future of the project is depending on the project leaders, including NECSTouR it is important to understand the demand-offer relation and also the marketing strategy behind the new concept. The test phase included the invitation of 25 youngsters (age 18-30) from all around the European Union. These youngsters' travel and accommodation expenses were included in the projects. The South-Limburg example could welcome young people from 8 different countries. The spiritual experiences were organised in such way that those with none or little experience but also who already had some can enjoy it well. Visits were concentrated on religious and historical buildings in the surroundings. I would only underline one activity which was a so-called Barefoot Park (Barefoot Park, 2017).

This out-of-ordinary park has a several hour long path in the wild which needs to be walked through without shoes on. The idea provides a unique contact with the nature around. The experience has been completed with the different kind of games leaded by the owners. Besides the participation of the project it has been agreed with the team that I help in the sustainability plan of the project. The initial idea here was that the project needs to be continued whenever the financing from the European Commission is over. Moreover the consortium is planning to generate income with this model probably involving stakeholders from the industry. Multiple meetings were organised in order to gather suggestions from the group of experts regarding the future steps. All these ideas were represented in the sustainability report. At the end, celebrating the success of the project and closing it and of course to give the first possibility to the stakeholders to introduce their initiatives the final conference was organised in Rolduc Abbey, which I had the chance to visit. It has been a very rewarding experience to have a detailed view on a European project. Indeed I could not assist from the beginning but taking part in the pilot project testing, sharing my opinion with the partners during the meetings, supporting the project manager in creating the report, organising multiple conferences was an excellent opportunity. I would also underline the important fact that partners are committed to continue the project, commercialising it and providing something new for the European youth community. Even before the end phase of the project, the management has been in

touch with a fresh, Belgian start-up called *itinari* which wished to promote destinations standing out the crowd, offering something new, experiences out of the beaten track (itinari, 2017). Many thought that partnership between destinations, activities proposing very unique experience would go well with a company offering a selection of such practice. The outcome of the future project will be proven by the time although I think if many experts from different areas have agreed on many points, partners can wait positive results. It can be important to mention those experts who were dedicating their precious time to advice for the project. Besides the project leaders from NECSTouR many experts were coming from member regions such as from the South Limburg Tourism Boards, Tourism Directorate General of the Tuscany Government, Turismo de Galicia. Some were representing the different European organisations such as the European Institute for Cultural Routes, European Committee of the Regions, European Tourism Association, European Sweets Itinerary project, International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism IGCAT, Travindy website.

During my internship it has been a huge pleasure to meet with all these excellent professionals from all around Europe. The fact that they are all committed into a better tourism for the future makes them even greater. The project itself has many potential which has been discovered to possibly connect with existing or planned projects in Europe.

One of these ideas for cooperation was to become partners with the European Youth Card initiative. It is a non-profit organisation which englobes 36 countries providing discount in different areas for more than 6 million cardholders (EYCA, 2017). It has been mentioned during the Barcelona workshop that partnering up with such card could have many advantages. As the target group of the project is potentially part of the cardholders group. Furthermore, the participating stakeholders could have a bigger visibility in the European scene of young travellers. I could attract more spiritual youngsters to exchange the card or vice-versa.

The other idea worth to mention was born out of an almost accidental meeting with two very well-known activists. I have had initiated and attended a meeting with MEP, Mr. Istvan Ujhelyi to discuss about the EU-China year of Tourism 2018, the Annual General Meeting and multiple topics. Vincent-Immanuel Herr and Martin Speer are two young German activists who wish to achieve their goals to create a better Europe for the youth. They are the originators of the free train passes. Their idea is to convince the European

Commission to provide free, Interrail tickets for all young Europeans at their 18th birthday (Herrundspeer, 2017). The opinion had been widely celebrated among the members of the European Parliament and had been published by many online media providers all around Europe. Around November 2016 the idea and the two young gentlemen were invited by multiple political party members to Brussels. This was the occasion when I could meet with them. The ongoing project of SpiritYouth was mentioned by the coordinator of NECSTouR which has been shown much interest by the invitees, Martin and Vincent-Immanuel. The common points in the projects were discussed such as the young audience and the mode of travel. In many occasions besides the plane tickets, train tickets were issued for young people testing activities of Spirit Youth. Within this mind, it seemed a good idea to reduce the cost that in the future only train tickets would be issued for the participants. As Interrail offers (Interrail, 2017) 30 European destinations it could be the perfect transportation mode for the youngsters. The travel by train was initially included in the project idea by the managers therefore it was a greater pleasure to discuss this idea with the people becoming the face of free travel passes. For me, it was also an honour to be present there and have a quick chat with these people.

I could also learn some insights at project management, related to the finalisation of some other project. It was a knowledge gained more on the introduction of the final budget line to the European Commission. I helped to verify some figures in order to arrive to the final approved budget. After all, it was a perfect opportunity to see and understand the background of European projects: how the importance lies in the details, how all piece of proof is necessary to store for financial aspects, how difficult is to lead different project partners from different geographical situation. Most of the European projects are not directly called for tourism related goals therefore to see and in some way to participate in these ones was delightful. It is however important to note that project management is a completely different profession where our expertise in tourism can aid but definitely cannot lead a project.

4.3. External tasks

The other half of my duties can be categorized more like external tasks. This would be more characterized by lobby activity or other kind of external event participation. Keeping contact with the European Institutions has multiple levels of duty. First, it is important to discover the background of the given theme and understand the importance of the initiative, policy, or event. These meetings were conducted with a detailed preparation on

the content. It was indeed something new for me that I had to learn by doing it. The practice of the organisation is that they prepare a meeting document that is shared with the partner preferably before the meeting. The document aims to help identify possible synergies besides providing introductory information about the network and its working groups. The synergies focus on fields or concrete themes where the institution is expected to cooperate with NECSTouR or the other way around. These strategic alliances provide the access to influence tourism policy therefore important for NECSTouR. The preparation and participation on these meetings were one of my first assessments. I have conducted meetings with multiple members of the European Parliament in connection with different future initiatives (e.g. European Capital of Tourism, EU-China Tourism Year 2018) or events (Annual General Meeting). Furthermore with some policy officers dealing with tourism from DG GROW and also keeping contact with the cabinet of Mr. Navracsics, commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. In a few occasion NECSTouR contributed its knowledge in case of providing an opinion of the Committee of the Regions. I will mention the detailed actions in the next chapter as all these actions were partly or completely related to European tourism policy. Communicating with high-level politicians and decision makers required a mind-set that I did not or partly have. Their work environment is fast paced which results on selective communication from their side. This includes the lack of prompt replies and sometimes emails are not followed-up at all. For this reason I have fast learned that if we need some information or confirmation we need to be persuasive and push for receiving an answer. To find the right balance is difficult, especially as the status of such organisation is often considered as lobby.

Participation on external events were also challenging because of the fact that I am representing a network. This duty makes the representative valuable and it forces him to behave respectfully. If we think about it, by representing such a huge network the attendees will indirectly judge the network based on the person. One of such events were The European Week of Regions and Cities is an annual chain of events organised by the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission's DG for Regional Policy. European cities and regions have a chance to show their capacity in job creating and growth, cohesion policy, and good practices in connection with European governance. I had the opportunity to participate some of the workshops in connection with a view of interest for our regions namely workshops as: "Efficient and effective use of ESI Funds (*European structural and investment funds*): regional best practices; EUSALP (*EU Strategy for the alpine Region*): an engine for Europe growth; Supporting S3 strategies

through Horizon2020 and ERDF (*European Regional Development fund*): synergies, barriers and best practices". The outcomes and shared information were summarised and provided up to date data for members. The participation, formulation, and collection of concerning information was my task.

Representation as an activity was completely new for me. I had a second opportunity to fully practice it after the previous event. Romanian MEP Ana-Claudia Țapardel supported an event in the European Parliament with Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (ADRBI) following the European Week of Regions and Cities 2016. It was organised under the title of Opportunities for Regional and Urban Development: the Contribution of European Funds to the Bucharest-Ilfov Region which could offer some practical information for our members and a potential opportunity to gather new members. With this in mind I have participated and changed contacts with some of the representatives of Bucharest-Ilfov region. This occasion was the first that I have approached a representative of a region. I have introduced myself and I have said a few words about the work of the network. I have been introduced to the expert who deals with tourism and we have changed contacts. As they seemed to show interest towards the work of NECSTouR following the event I have sent them an email. The brochure and the website of the network were attached. After consulting with the coordinator, she explained me that previously she met with the president of the umbrella organisation of tourism organisations from the same region. It was then also a task to obtain some information on their membership or cooperation with the previously known network. From this early experience I have learned the basics of approaching people and representing the network.

Probably the most challenging on this list of external representations is the one occurred in the European Parliament, several times. Not only by the personal meetings with MEPs but by the Committee Meetings. We had multiple times gone to the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism Committee meetings. One particular Tourism Task Force meeting aimed to present a study requested by the Committee itself. "From responsible best practices to sustainable tourism development" was presented by Prof. Peter Peeters from Centre for Sustainable Tourism and Transport, NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands. This paper explains the findings of the research about sustainable tourism development and the lack of up-to-date data on environmental and social effects of tourism. It notes the main environmental and socio-economic issues, examines a few case studies as much as European tourism policy and makes

recommendations especially in sustainable tourism transport, destinations, businesses, services and products, equally improve tourism monitoring and research. On this meeting I have represented the network and made a summary of the paper for member regions. Such summary is part of the service which member regions are paying for in the network therefore it was essential to provide them a comprehensive, brief explanation of the meeting. This mentioned study is one of the supporting papers of my research therefore a detailed review can be read in the literature review chapter.

At the end of 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved to adopt the year of 2017 as International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Its official launch was organised during the International Tourism Fair of Spain, Madrid (FITUR) on 19 January 2017. The thematic year aims to contribute the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with several actions during the thematic year. This kind of events give huge visibility to the industry and draws attention to the necessary actions therefore NECSTouR agreed to sign an agreement with UNWTO. Dr Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of UNWTO has personally signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the President of NECSTouR on his visit to Brussels. The agreement aims to advance the contribution of Tourism to sustainable regional development in Europe. With the signature both parties recognised some needs in cultural and sustainable tourism development fields and economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions for regions. Commonly established objectives will identify similar interests between the 2 organisations; strengthen the cooperation in tourism policy, exchange knowledge in the field of sustainable tourism especially on regional level. Tasks from the preparation phase until the signature have been assigned to me. Keeping contact with the UNWTO delegation and organise the signature's preparation was partly my duty. Again for these communications a professional way was required that I had to practice in action. The European department at UNWTO is a highly professional team that is used to such events. I had to accommodate to their way of working, their quick responses, and punctual planning. Preceding the meeting and signature that we had to agree on some protocol issues that due to some political heat. The ensuing meeting has been a prophase for a long-term cooperation between NECSTouR and the UNWTO which has been successfully achieved by the event co-organised within the framework of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development at the end of March 2017 in Seville, Spain. The professionalism of the UNWTO delegation is exemplary and can be a good lesson for

everyone. One thing is for sure I could learn professional attitude from them that I carry to my next workplace.

Following the line of ideas in from the European Parliament I had conducted several other meetings in order to strengthen the cooperation between network and MEPs. In particular cases the network itself was invited to meet with the cabinet if the above mentioned member. Based on the success of the nowadays more and more recognised initiative of European Capitals of Culture ongoing since more than 30 years now (European Commission, 2017:3), MEP Muselier and MEP Ujhelyi have introduced this idea to the European Parliament at the beginning of 2017. The preparatory action has been voted by the EP and separated 2.5 million euros for the next three years (Jlag, 2017). The network and I have participated on the first brainstorming event organised by Mr. Ujhelyi. The project is backed by the European Commission, European Committee of the Regions, MEPs, and tourism stakeholders. The main idea was to create an award with multiple sub-categories in order to give visibility to European cities, regions in a touristic point of view. The interesting part was without any doubt that regions were included in the original proposal. It has been achieved by the permanent consultation with the network. The inclusion of 'regions' showed the positive mind-set towards European regions and their influence towards tourism in European level.

During the sessions it was openly discussed that they would give the award to cities and regions lesser known at this moment. For all the participants it was ensuring that the meeting was held at the time when Taleb Rifai, the Secretary General of UNWTO was in an official visit in Brussels. Mr Rifai welcomed the idea and ensured the group that they will support the project. For the participation of NECSTouR several ways were suggested by MEP Ujhelyi. At that time, due to the heavy workload and some political fears the network did not take a clear position in the management. My task as policy assistant was very clear in this process, as NECSTouR was clearly supporting the idea and was ready to contribute. Attending the meetings and drafting speeches just like preparation of background documents have been done by me. It was relatively good to participate in the birthing of a new project which could help many regions of Europe to enjoy an economic growth thanks to tourism. Especially, it was heart-warming to see that European politicians can put aside their party principles and create something together, agreeing on needs for the industry (Mr. Renaud Muselier is from Marseille, representing Republicans in the Group of the European People's Party while Mr. István Ujhelyi is from Hungary a

Socialist, grouped in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament).

The European Commission decided to strengthen the ties with China in regard to the tourism industry. In 2016 Jean-Claude Juncker and the Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang announced that the year of 2018 will be dedicated to (European Commission, 2016) the EU-China Tourism Year (European Commission, 2017:1). It is indeed clear for not only the experts that the Chinese market is one of the strongest player in the industry. "In total, only about 10.2 million Chinese visited Europe in 2016, according to data by the European Travel Commission (ETC)" (Politico, 2017). The European Travel Commission was selected to lead the campaign. Several conferences have been held in Europe to give more visibility to the thematic year. At European level it has been agreed that 100 stakeholders will be selected to represent Europe in China. As NECStouR englobes many regions that are well frequented by Chinese arrivals it showed a perfect opportunity to join. However until the end of my internship the partnership has not been agreed on with specific details. There were many personal meeting between the executive director and the coordinator of the network. I have been doing research, writing informative summaries to the members and informing them about this future possibility. Creating good relations with parliamentary assistants and employees working at ETC was primary to be able informing members with useful data. Since the announcement of the initiative not much progress can be seen from the side of the Commission. From the network some member regions are expressed their interest in it, such as: Catalunya, Tuscany, Flanders and Limburg.

Tourism Manifesto for Growth and Jobs were holding a conference at the beginning of 2017 at the NECSTouR premises. Several private and public stakeholders were creating a document made available to the public. In this document they were underlining EU policy priorities for the future. Main chapters of this document were competitiveness, digitalisation, good governance, and joint promotion, reduce seasonality, skills and qualifications, sustainability, and transport connectivity. Momently, 41 organisations are supporting Manifesto in addition to MEPs and the European Commission. To take part, we have hosted the meeting in the building. The content of the meeting was focusing on new trends as the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018, and the Capitals of Tourism (actually named to European capital of smart tourism).

There was an action which would be difficult to define between the lines of internal or external tasks. A defined goal of my internship would have been to gather new members for the network. The network wanted to spread to the Central-Eastern European side. It was discussed during numerous meetings that the initial problem with that part of Europe is the historical differences in the regional recognition. While in Western Europe regions have more power in various areas (enough to think about Italy), Central and Eastern Europe is not that present. It is true though due to the NUTS 2013 (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) classifications of the European Commission every country is divided into regions. In some countries, including Hungary this system stayed purely for statistical purposes. The division of 12 cantons does not match with the regions that is why I and the network faced some difficulties. Ideally, I would have contacted some regions and convinced them to join NECSTouR. Together with the directions we have set the focus on two regions: Lake Balaton and Debrecen city. The first target is the second most touristic region of Hungary while Debrecen had some project experience with NECSTouR and they were about to reform their tourism strategy. I have spent several months with targeted communication for the city of Debrecen. At the end the long process it had no success in gathering new members. The city based their decision on lack of financing for such membership. The Balaton region was even more complicated. Not having a central representation it was challenging to have a general overview about whom to contact. I had some help from the European Parliament, MEP Ujhelyi once invited some representatives from the regions, we had a fruitful discussion in person but the interest had stopped from their side.

Not being disappointed I have proposed another region where I saw opportunity for partnership. I used my contacts from my previous employer to have a direct channel to the permanent representation of Serbia. It has a department which is the representation of Vojvodina region. After a few email exchanges I had a meeting in the Serbian embassy with the head of the department and his policy advisor. I represented the network and this was the moment where all above-mentioned skills were implemented. I have briefly explained the purpose and goals of NECSTouR. They welcomed the idea of membership. Following our fruitful meeting they have contacted the tourism board of Vojvodina, and then we had a direct communication channel to the Vojvodina Province tourism organisation. NECSTouR was awarded with a prize during the Belgrade Tourism Fair, in Serbia. Our communication officer travelled to represent the network and receive the prize. I have initiated a meeting with the Vojvodina tourism director at their stand. The

meeting had been excellent and they have been already present as new members during the Seville AGM. This membership had opened doors for both sides. Firstly, Serbia is a candidate country of the EU, actually in negotiations status (one of the most promising future members in my opinion). Therefore taking part in the work of a European network means much more for them. It is a sign of appurtenance to Europe, it is a sign of willingness. For the network itself it opened a larger stage gathering a full member in the Balkans. Vojvodina is an autonomous province having the legal basis for tourism. This meaning that NECSTouR did not decreased its initial goal having members from NUTS 1 and 2 regions. Being the initiator of this new membership it certainly was an excellent opportunity to prove my knowledge about the network, and use it for gather a new member. This experience was one of the most rewarding during my whole internship. I truly hope that both the region and the network will profit for long from this partnership and the membership will be advantageous for all other members.

My description of the performed work does not describe the entirety my internship. It would be quite difficult to put on paper all performed tasks. On the previous pages I have written down the main events and my contribution to those events, however my work was not limited to those. As the team of the permanent secretariat consisted of 3 people, my tasks were often ad-hoc and various in natures. The everyday work in the office required a rigorous attitude, being at disposal for any kind of task. Tasks were various from delivering post packages to receiving guests at the office. Because of most of those things were new experiences for me it was an excellent opportunity to try myself in different duties. All these improved my skills set.

4.4. Conclusion

To conclude I need to add a few things which would explain those inputs I have learned. My knowledge of European policy making was believed sufficient and good however I could learn many new things not about the process but more about the preparation of it. This was reinforced with some insights from excellent experts from this area. The European policy making seems to be a slow and overregulated environment where the original idea is less powerful at the end of the process. In this space many tends to forget the origins and all the good actions taken are coming from experts who are extremely committed in change and better frameworks. Seeing these people in action discussion the most recent aspects of tourism made this internship valuable. In order to get to action and have a result in policy things needs to move fast. It requires recognition and research of

the initial problem: it was something I could experience. Ideas coming from stakeholders were recognised and backed by policy-makers. We could learn things in theory but all these have a origin and being part of this is I had chance to. From previous experience I could see one side (policy-making) of such process. Now, I could see the other side (stakeholders) influencing the others. These are not always seen from the distance and in the end result they are often not even mentioned. Cooperation of experts from all over Europe under the aegis of NECSTouR proving the initial idea of union can teach a lot. The opinion of these people it is accountable. The following chapter will contain the research I conducted to successfully present some recommendations for NECSTouR. Combining my observation, the outcome of literature review and the following research will offer NECSTouR and its leadership some point to consider in order to stay a leader in this field. Knowing more about the background, investigating the objectives, learning the mission, examining the possible challenged needed to be considered for this research. Administration of NECSTouR was asked to contribute their knowledge for my research.

5. Research

The purpose of the following research is to get insights from respective experts being part of the NECSTouR leadership. As my internship provided sufficient access to very internal and specific points therefore the questions should be also organisation oriented. Results can offer some recommendations to the leaders taking into account the needs of the industry and the predicted challenges. The decision of any action inside the organisation is decided by the Executive Committee. Therefore the number of actual decision makers are less than the whole network. For this reason I choose to select a small number of interviewees as it can eventually reflect the directions of the board. The difficulty conducting such research lies in the wide-range of themes to be discussed in order to obtain a useful result. That is why my questions were more specific, structured.

5.1 Methodology

The context of this research is that tourism policy was seen as a less necessary topic in the EU institutions. Slowly at the end of the last century researchers proved that tourism is an equally important economic sector as others. From the early 2000s, European institutions started to recognise the economic contribution of tourism so tourism slowly gained its legal basis. Nowadays tourism faces many challenges which need coordination and committed leadership especially in the EU to maintain its leading position on the globe.

Research will investigate in the strategic goals, future challenges, *raison d'être*, and fulfilment of its mission of NECSTouR. Some questions can have been put forward in connection of the necessity for such organisation: How successfully NECSTouR influences European tourism policy? How successfully NECSTouR does increase the visibility and the role of touristic regions? How does NECSTouR develop projects with its partners due to the lack of EU funding for sustainable? The general interview question would be: What does NECSTouR want to achieve?

The topics of the interviews will be around the following points: Strategic goals of NECSTouR; Main obstacles, challenges, adversaries; Future of tourism policy and Sustainable tourism policy; Fulfilment of its mission; Members, membership profile, workforce.

You can find transcript of the interviews in the appendices; now I will share the results of my analysis. Such few interviews led me to gather results from a combination of interview answers plus the knowledge I gathered during my time at NECSTouR.

Interviews were selected with the advice of the coordinator, therefore they were: Mr. Patrick Torrent, NECSTouR presidency, and Ms. Ana Moniche, Indicators Working Group leader and NECSTouR Ambassador.

5.2 Analysis and discussion

The aim of this research was to have a better view on how the members of NECSTouR recognise the success of the network. Furthermore, I wished to point out those elements that I found interesting or insufficient during my internship. All this gathered data will serve for an overall recommendation for the network for the future period.

Responders both agreed on the successful recognition of NECSTouR by the Institutions. The fact that NECSTouR is still present in this arena proves the important role of the regions where implementation of sustainable measures are exemplary. Furthermore, they said that European Institutions need the expertise of NECSTouR. This expertise incorporated into the wide range of working groups makes the network valuable. All these expert fields are jointly representing the regions at EU level, not only for promoting those regions as destinations but also in fields as management, planning, or sustainability. NECSTouR provides an integrated approach to tourism governance and the necessary link between the regional level of governments and the European level.

Armed with the support and the recognition, NECSTouR wished to make tourism, sustainable tourism, and competitive tourism more visible in the European Agenda. This includes the right approach for preserving culture and environment together with stakeholders where the right policy would guide all level of governments.

Strategic goals of NECSTouR were agreed to be reflected in the actions of the working groups. More precisely: Maximize the investment on Tourism at the EU level, improve tourism sustainability accounting for all its dimensions (environmental, cultural, social, governance, innovation...), working towards a better measurement of all these dimensions, integrate the analysis and the correct management of new stakeholders within the tourism sector (Digital platforms, Online Travel agencies (OTA's),...), improve the accessibility of European destinations, integrate the knowledge of Universities and

Research Centers in this process. NECSTouR can help for its members to gain access to European funds.

NECSTouR – in its policy influencing – should take into account all possible legislative areas to obtain the right results in tourism policy. The multidimensional nature of tourism does not let any other choice but to influence all relevant sectors. It was noted however that identification of an independent and relevant strong tourism sector is still a necessity.

My proposition for NECSTouR going from influencing European tourism policy to influencing together national/regional tourism policies based on the best practices of its members had been partially agreed: first, regulation competences are still better in regional level furthermore the good practices and successful implementations at regional level could suggest policies at European level.

The future of European tourism policy will be shaped by sustainable tourism models including limitation of tourists in certain destinations. The emerging presence of online providers, online travel agencies will certainly have an effect on policy. Most importantly changes are predicted by respondents in the security areas such as safety management, too.

All agreed on NECSTouR's action fulfilment. Respondents were on the same opinion that NECSTouR is now an important stakeholder for European institutions, and also at the international level. NECSTouR is growing in influence among the European institutions and the UNWTO. To prove examples were mentioned such as: participation of NECSTouR presence in the official Side Event EU Tourism for Blue Growth of the Oceans Conference, the high level event this September in the European Parliament, the event in the Committee of Regions or the role of NECSTouR as a driver of the Joint Promotion project by the European Commission, NECSTouR presents at the 6th UNWTO International Conference on Tourism Statistics, 13 NECSTouR's Regions among the top 20 tourism destinations in the EU.

Concerning the number of members the representatives did not deny the possibility of adding more members as actually the system works well and the balance is right between quantity and quality. I pointed out the fact of inactivity of certain members, which did not meet agreement in the answers. Although the facilitation of member's access to actions was slightly touched as a topic, no one could fully agree with my perceptions.

Enlarging the topics within the working groups is also a necessity and it is continuously happening (Tourism-phobia and residents 'attitudes towards tourism).

Respondents clearly denied my vision on influencing European tourism policy towards harmonisation driven by regions is implying contradiction in such dissentious area in the time of Brexit, 'two-speed Europe' and anti-EU thoughts. On the contrary it was seen as a positive movement for the following reasons: the network gathers not only EU member regions, and the community spirit is well present in the network. Different network cooperating and working for a common goal is seen as a perfect example of cohesion. It can be a good benchmark for European citizenship and working together in Europe. In addition, such network can play the role of a bridge between the regions and European Institutions.

Challenges for the network were seen differently. The common point was that the main obstacle is the level of bureaucracy of the European Institutions. One main challenges is in the difference of 'speed': NECSTouR is about to keeping track with the new needs in tourism and react in time while the policy making of the EU institutions can be seen as a slower process. The same issue can be seen in official statistics bodies where measurement of new situations takes more time than it should. Another challenge is convincing the European Institutions about the transversal importance of tourism for the economy.

More internal type of questions about the Permanent Secretariat's workload is unanimously seen from the potential increase of fees. This could support the augmenting work of the secretariat. It will be one of the main discussion point of the Special General Assembly. In order to keep the quality of the services, members should face with a decision of increasing their financial contribution towards the network.

For the purpose of my internship report the question of financed internship option had an importance. Answers were not convincing therefore it is a question that remains after the Executive Committee decision on structural changes.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

All things considered, I wish to conclude my overall experience of my internship described in this report:

First of all, I wish to mention that my communications skills improved a lot. English was the primary language of communication in the office; however phone calls and emails arrived in other European languages. For the purpose of minutes of different meetings that I described above, my listening skills ameliorated. During meetings, protocol events, I had to actively use nonverbal communication skills I acquired in my past experiences, here I could use them. Clarity and friendliness boosted with a little confidence were excellent skills during the high-level meetings, when politicians and decision-makers were present. Several other communications skills had to be learned and used during the uncountable occasions.

Working in team was not a new skill as during the on-site teaching and in my bachelor degree we had to work multiple times in teams. The small team has its advantage but also its disadvantage: more work, and more cooperation is needed. The biggest challenge for me was the constant request of details in order to understand the background or the know-how of the given task. I have jumped into an environment that I had small knowledge of (on-going projects, policies of the network). At the beginning I was not able to proceed without support. The difficulty was the fact that everyone around me was busy therefore consult with them on every little detail was quasi impossible. The kindness of my colleagues helped me to easily overcome this difficulty. Due to the openness and professional attitude of the team, I have always accepted the feedbacks of my work. The way those have been addressed by the coordinator taught me to praise those comments. While answering questions of members or third parties, I used similar skills to customer service. For example during the preparation of events and conferences, I played the role of a bridge between the network and interested people. On one hand, it required a detailed knowledge of the events to be able to answer all kind of questions. On the other hand, I had to store and report back to the network about interested members, experts to keep everything under control. Showing empathy and support in moments when financial tools were not available to cover all participants all expenses was extremely important. Rules on travel and accommodation budget left little room to negotiate therefore taking responsibility and turning down requests had to be made politely and professionally. I think everyone can imagine that such unfortunate situation, especially in case of high-level

invitees is more than challenging. For sure the biggest challenge from all was the public speech, at the Seville conference. Speaking in front of tourism leaders, experts, guests from all over Europe, having more experience than my age doesn't exactly put one in an ease. I had to show them confidence and professionalism as I was talking about important figures. The largest part of my internship helped me to develop and strengthen communication skills. As it was in the subject of tourism gave me an even bigger joy.

Second of all, besides communication skills, similarly important soft skills were also acquired. Flexibility was one of the skills I had to apply the most. High workload and always changing priority of tasks made me to get flexible and proceed with the most important task. Prioritising was a skill that I fully learned at NECSTouR. On multiple occasions I couldn't fully work on one tasks as many other has been assigned to me. In those times I needed to identify and prioritise the work. For some projects, skills like creativity were essential. The most memorable occasion was the creation of the Activity Report. Not only the technical skills but creative thinking was necessary. The content was given; the visual part had to be made out from scratch. I had full permission to create the visual part. Due to the lack of time I was not able to fulfil my plans but for me it was pleasure to see the satisfaction of the board.

Third of all, most importantly the internship was an excellent opportunity to experience tourism industry from multiple aspects. I could see the top level of European tourism decision-making such as the European Parliament or European Commission. I could also the side of the national and regional tourism authorities and their power in the whole decision making process. Furthermore I could see the very end stakeholders, especially SME's representation. These different levels of the industry could provide me a holistic view on the things happening in the Union. One can understand that the policy makers have an extremely difficult task: to cover all challenges and opportunities on a European level. The Union is composed from countries with very different attributes, many of them is divided into regions, again with different attributes. This can mean an overly complex situation to follow and advice. Regions not so active in tourism can profit from strategies helping tourism development while regions with high number of incoming tourists can follow schemes to decrease seasonality or apply sustainability measures. On the other hand, there are many regions which wish to influence European tourism policy to the better. Their voice is not always heard at higher level. For this purpose a network with appropriate communication channels toward the EU institutions can help a lot, like NECSTouR.

There is another perspective in the whole procedure which is the unfortunate burden of bureaucracy. This applies especially for the financial helps, originated from the Commission. Many smaller destinations that do not have the possibility to follow available EU funds or programmes do not have sufficient information regarding opportunities. It can happen that they have basic information but the whole process of applying for funds seems difficult that they do not even try to apply for those calls. The support of such network can be a consortium which is strong enough to win calls. Regions or destinations alone would not be allowed or able to do it but with the coordination of organisations, they are. NECSTouR has shown in the past its capacity to gather consortia for European projects successfully. I had the possibility to take a look on the final stage of a European project and its coordination by the permanent secretariat (Spirit Youth). I could see the advantage of such project on small destinations that can mean a great change in the future. The example of Spirit Youth is exemplary in the sense that the project leaders worked on the sustainability model, meaning to keep alive it after the official closure. I have learned huge parts of EU projects are completely terminated after the official project deadline and being not verified they do not maintain in live those. It could seem as a vaster of energy and financial contribution.

Working with regions offered me learning details of their internal planning. Seeing examples of Europe most appreciated destinations such as Ile-de-France, Catalonia, and Andalucía provides insights that people only on the field are able to see. As the European Commission advices, the sharing of best practices is a great tool for sustainability it is especially true in such network. Without exaggeration I can admit that from the enormous amount of good practices available on the portal, any destination can find initiatives to follow. This collection of knowledge for regions makes NECSTouR competitive. And it is important to highlight that we talk about regions and countries. Due to the different form, sometimes (more in Western/southern Europe) regions have stronger influence. This is the point that often not well represented in European initiatives, policies, and funds. The acknowledgment of capability, strength of regions by the Institutions is equally important for all as whole Europe could profit from their advancement. I have actively participated in the workshop of collaborative economy in Barcelona, which is a question of modern tourism despite that the EU struggles to decide on regulation or deregulation. Therefore it is understandable if regions are more recognised at European level; national authorities could apply easier the already proven policies of regions. That is why the network tries to influence European policies. Such activity is highly related to tourism but it is not taught in

any school. This activity can be seen as a lobbyist activity which has a relatively bad image in the "EU bubble". I have seen that the representatives of NECSTouR work for the good while keeping the transparency required. Working with them and seeing the result of long days spent in amending opinions, suggesting ideas for decision makers is fruitful. The document that I am referring is the Opinion *"Tourism as a driving force for regional cooperation across the EU"*, Rapporteur: H-P Wagner. The cabinet of Mr Wagner kept a close cooperation with us during the consultation on the content of the opinion. As the European Committee of Regions represents regions it was relevant for them to receive up-to-date advice on tourism related challenges from member regions. It is equally important for NECSTouR to be recognised by CoR, be included in their paper. Cooperation is not only limited to European institutions but also academic institutions from all over Europe. I could see how groupings, as Manifesto assembles important stakeholders and how such cooperation for good can transform the image of tourism. One lesson can be learned from this partnership is that if we wish to achieve a goal but we do not have the modes, we can still achieve it together with others. I truly think this is particularly true for tourism stakeholders as they are mostly small and medium enterprises.

It is needed to be mentioned, the knowledge I took from the first year of this master was more than useful along this experience. I could recognise theoretical ideas from the first two semesters in action. For example, understanding the indicators which I had prior knowledge thanks to the MSTM courses. Marketing studies helped me to follow the actions of member regions. Not to forget that financial aspects have been touched during my internship while doing accounting or verifying the budget of a European project. Naturally, ideologies and methods of sustainable tourism were the most useful knowledge at NECSTouR. As basically all the activities of the network are linked to sustainable tourism it was primordial to have a good, deep knowledge of the topic. This was fully provided by the master course. To conclude, I would only add that the master programme equipped us with a theoretical knowledge in sustainable tourism that I could apply and further examine in action at my internship. Therefore we can say that the two experiences completed each other making my 2 year-learning into one, global comprehension of sustainable tourism.

Finally, I would like to have the following lines to stand here as important recommendations for all NECSTouR members, the presidency, Executive Committee, and the Permanent Secretariat, or anyone whom it may concern.

My internship report wanted to investigate in the area of sustainability with a regard within European tourism policy. I was curious about the policy arena where NECSTouR is taking actions. The outcomes of the literature review clearly shows the necessity of a similar organisation as NECSTouR. We could see how slowly the European tourism policy evolved to the actual phase. But this phase is not the final, and neither satisfies it the actual needs of touristic regions or many stakeholders. Sustainable development views opened-up a new direction where the tourism policy started to slowly turn to. Estol & Font proved that without the introduction of sustainable development initiatives into the tourism policy, it could not have evolved to its actual stage. Sustainable tourism is now seen as an important part of tourism however there is a serious lack of expertise. "In spite of these limitations, what is undeniable is that sustainability is widely accepted as a feature of tourism, to the extent that it is now inseparable from the notion of contemporary tourism" (Torres-Delgado & López Palomeque, 2012, p9). Imperfections and lacks were discovered in this actual state that probably will be challenging to solve while the need is increasing. Furthermore, sustainable tourism is not well represented in EU legislations. For successful actions, experts should take the lead such as regions which are implementing sustainable measures with proven success. Stakeholders are keeping their influence on the table and pushing for revisions. From past experiences, the hope for a fast change is not probable. One thing is for sure, the actual policy making is in need for expertise and good practices. Choosing the good direction of change is essential and it will define the future of sustainable tourism.

Despite all above mentioned challenges, NECSTouR could stand out from the crowd. Part of the literature review, my research and success prove that NECSTouR is recognised by many stakeholders and most importantly by European Institutions. The network should keep its role of collective expertise to be able to shape the future of European tourism policy. Such network carries actually more than it many could recognise for the first sight. It is the notion of appurtenance and unity. In nowadays' Europe, it is more important than ever. Regions with different culture, history, language are working together for the good: this is exactly what makes NECSTouR unique but also more competitive. In many cases, regions carry more potential than countries in legislative point of view. That is why I would encourage the network to grow and attract more regions to join. However, I need to urge the leadership of NECSTouR to apply a system of cooperation among its members which would encourage members to better participate in the common work. The idea of working

groups seems to work and it should be continued with an active focus on new emerging concepts on the online sector.

Moreover, I see enormous challenges in the work of the Permanent Secretariat in case of more active involvement in European projects or growing network. This should be an absolute priority to decide on the partition of the work. In this question my results show very little possibility to solve the situation without not increasing the workforce of the Permanent Secretariat in some way. Based on the research results I see two options for the enforcement of the office. The network needs to reconsider the fees of memberships and the linked, offered services. Increase of the membership fee could generate enough financial support for employing experts. Similarly, the ExCom should examine the option of offering an internship placement in line with the local employment law requirements. Such offer is often practiced by European Institutions and other organisations. This would surely facilitate the work of the whole secretariat while it would increase the visibility of the network on a very competitive European traineeship arena.

Ideally, NECSTouR is in the position of understanding the needs of sustainable tourism policy-making. This advantage should use to fulfil the needs of the industry such as statistics, academic research, promotion of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, due to the policy influencing work of the network it could be beneficial for any researchers if the academics of NECSTouR could make a complete analysis on the influence of sustainability guidelines on the regions tourism policy. This could be equally conducted with a European measurement on Member States, or possibly analysing the whole European tourism policy's sustainable aspects in a chronological way.

The actual membership scheme is outdated for multiple reasons therefore surely there is room for improvements.

The achievements of NECSTouR are already exemplary therefore it should keep up the good work and strengthen the scare scene of tourism lobby in Brussels.

7. Supplementary

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7.2. Appendices

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7.2.1. Detailed description of the NECSTouR Annual General Meeting and Conferences

The main yearly event in the life of the network is the Annual General Meeting. Thankfully due to the positive attitude of the permanent secretariat, the date was chosen in a way that I could assist and actively participate. After accepting the proposition regarding the date, the network has discussed on the venue. Andalusia proposed to host the event in Seville. Following the discussions the organisation has started in both sides. The 2 day-long conference's programme was ruled out in a close cooperation with Andalusia and the permanent secretariat. The tasks were shared respecting the expertise of both parties. The secretariat was responsible for the promotion of the event, finalising the programme, preparing and sending invitations to speakers and invitees too, leading discussions with panellists, creating the discussion papers, managing travel and accommodation expenses, and being the first contact point for all interested people. Registration website was created by a local travel agency which was also issuing plane tickets and hotel rooms. The complexity of tasks was well known from the beginning. The local team was dealing with the venue and all that comes with such management. Because of the high-level invitees a special care on protocol has been adopted. At the same time, we have been contacting the possible speakers to invite them in time, sharing main points of the conference, dealing with their travel arrangement if needed. The conference was divided into two days as it was the case in the previous years also. The first day, 30 March was a full day for members including future or new members. This is an internal way to meet, talk, discuss about common challenges, overview the actions taken during last year. The

programme ensured that members can learn and vote about new memberships, accounts including the financial report of last year and the budget of the ongoing year. The 2016 activity report was distributed and the work programme of 2017 has been presented during the morning session. The working group of EU funds for tourism hold a session discussing with Mr Christian Gsodam from the European Committee of the Regions online. He has presented the initiative of EU- Regional Tourism Investment Platforms included in the opinion "Tourism as a driving force for regional cooperation across the EU" by the rapporteur Mr Hanspeter Wagner (CoR, 2016). As the members of NECSTouR are regions this topic was highly interesting for attendees. NECSTouR itself, in consortia or its members are often participating in projects (NECSTouR, 2017). Project highlights were presented namely Spirit Youth, MITOMED+, Hiking Europe, BRANDtour. Breaking with the traditions a new, virtual AGM was voted for the end of the year 2017. Members voted on the next AGM and its organisation has been offered by the region of Île-de-France. The morning session was concluded by the lunch which was linked with the so-called membership ceremony. This was to introduce and celebrate those members who were joining between this and the last AGM or whom addition was accepted. Five full members were welcomed: Central Denmark Region, Denmark, represented by Mrs Vibeke Dyrvig Eisenhardt, Tourism Development Officer; Ringkøbing-Skjern Municipality, Denmark, represented by Mr Thomas Andersen, Chief of Staff; Brittany Region, France, represented by Mr Michael Dodds, Director; Lazio Region, Italy, represented by Mr Paolo Giuntarelli, Director; Vojvodina Region, Republic of Serbia, represented by Mrs Nataša Pavlović, Director. Furthermore eight associated members could present themselves in one minute each: University of Malaga, Spain; Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Multidimensional Tourism Institute, Finland, Represented by Mrs Eija Raasakka, Project Manager; Technical Educational Institute of Epirus, Greece. Represented by Mr Kostantinos Solakis, Adjunct Lecturer; responsible Tourism Institute, Spain, represented by Mr Patricio Azcárate Díaz de Losada, Director; Hotel and Tourism Studies CETT, Spain, represented by Mrs Elena Ridolfi, Member of the Research Group on Tourism, Culture and Territory. Same rules applied for ETIS destinations: Province of Barcelona, Spain; Municipality of Barcelona, Spain, represented by Mr Joan Torealla, Director of Tourism Department; Municipalities of Torroella de Montgrí-L'Estartit and Llançà, Spain, represented by Mr Josep Capellà, Tourism Advisor. The afternoon session was divided into two parallel thematic workshops. The programme was communicated for members beforehand so they had the opportunity to choose among the different workshops depending on their interest. Each working group was delegated for a workshop. In

addition they could invite a moderator sometimes a member, sometimes a professional from outside. Furthermore, it was highly advised by the secretariat to invite experts from "strategic alliances". The first two thematic sessions were baptised as "Smart destinations" and "Indicators: measuring sustainable tourism at sub-national level". The second session was organised by the digital and cultural working groups, named "Digitalisation of Tourism: Challenges and Opportunities" while the other was trying to find answers to "Regions Driving Intercultural Dialogue Through Tourism: What Tools?". The sessions were closed by a common conclusion held in the large conference room where the working group leaders told the outcomes of each thematic workshop.

During this day my tasks were diverse. As I have edited the 2016 Activity Report I was asked to give a few highlights about it to the members during the morning session. I spoke about the events depicted in the report because it is the best example to show how much and how effectively the network and the secretariat done its job. I was also asked to take pictures during the event and providing it to the communication officer who was updating followers on the social media sites. Of course I have helped occasionally with the organisation with minor things connected to such event like this. I have been delegated to support the cultural heritage and sustainability working group. This group has organised the second thematic workshop on intercultural dialogue. While during the conference itself my tasks was partially limited to taking pictures and dealing with the visual support, the time before the conference was spent with a lot of work. I would like to elaborate more on this topic. The organisation phase of the workshop has started with defining the topic. There has been internal discussion about the possible themes but the main line was to prepare ourselves to the thematic year focusing on the people and tools which can enforce dialogue. The main idea was to propose some sort of package to the European Commission in regard of tourism for the cultural heritage year. At the end a composition of multiple topics were accepted such as gastronomy as a good practice for intercultural dialogue, the city cards, and modern media tools such as podcast. The selection of moderator and representative of strategic alliance was harmonised with invitees of the next day joint conference with UNWTO. Therefore we have agreed with the working group leader, Mr Jose Luis Maestro that I ask the regional manager for Europe of UNWTO if he is willing to moderate the workshop. After that Mr Peter Janech accepted our proposition for moderating, I have contacted with the responsible policy officer from the European Commission Directorate General Education and Culture, Ms Anne Grady. The conversations with her have gone well however, at the early stage it was not clear what to

do as content for the workshop. Theoretically the first day's workshop would give a food for thought to the second day's workshop. Together with the working group leader we have consulted many times and the time when the programme of the workshop has been close to be finalised we have invited our moderator for a short video conversation. Thanks to his professional manner he has required many details that we were happy to provide him in order to have an interesting, and active session. Indeed, he did an excellent job, as he was moderating the workshop with proficiency, letting panellists and guests have their speech but reminding them to stay on track when it needed. The workshop was opened by the moderator who gave the floor to Jose Luis Maestro who said a few words about the aim of the session and the work that they are doing in the Cultural Tourism working group of NECSTouR. The first presented tool was gastronomy shown through the example of the member, Catalonia (Catalunya, 2016). Ms Blanca Cros from Catalonia has presented the outcomes and experiences from the year of 2016 when the region was selected as the European Region of Gastronomy. This award is granted to two or three regions different regions per year aiming to increase the visibility, cohesion, credibility, viability in the region. Partners are able to form some kind of community where exchange of knowledge is possible. The initiative was introduced by IGCAT (International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism). It has been agreed that gastronomy is a perfect tool to gather locals and visitors. Through gastronomy people can share an experience on the same way regardless their cultural, historical backgrounds. It was followed by the presentation of the city cards involving the example of Barcelona. Probably the most surprising and immersive discussion was led by an ICT expert. He has explained the way tourists chose their destination and more specifically the sites to visit in the given destination. Big, online search engines are focusing on the most visited touristic sites. These are offered on the first place therefore it is self-explanatory that new arrivals will follow the suggested sites. The expert added if we all make our plan on those suggestions we miss the essential sites, in addition we do not make much intercultural dialogue with the locals. For this purpose he and his students created a platform which shares authentic experience for visitors. They have based their guidelines on the concept of podcast. It was told that the future of influencing and attract tourists is by podcasts. The idea comes from the fact that we have lesser time to read, educate ourselves on possible destinations. Therefore such source of information would open up our knowledge of culture, gastronomy, and local people of the selected destination. This particular podcast is published by the locals of Seville to destroy the stereotypes of the city, like flamenco. The whole session was concluded by the moderator and the working group leader, then at the end the

conclusions were shared in the common room with all the members. I wrote a short speech to Jose Luis, highlighting the importance of gastronomy, the future of tourism on the one on one basis. The event was followed with a cultural visit in the *Alcázar de Sevilla* and a gala dinner in the gardens. This event was somehow the opening of the next day's international conference as all the high level guests were attending. Here, when the UNWTO Secretary General Dr Taleb Rifai arrived with his delegation and the ministers a very short press conference was held.

31 March was the day of "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development: Smart Tourism Destinations' contribution for the Planet and its People" co-organised with UNWTO. The conference was welcoming guest from all over Europe in the same venue, at Fibes Palace of Congresses and Exhibitions. Registration was starting at 9:00 where guests were hand-out badges with their name, based on the online registration beforehand. The site was created by the travel agency dealing with the registrations however I had to register many times members and the colleagues from the office. The online registration form was created such way that different guests could see different content. The categories were distinguished by NECSTouR Member, NECSTouR Invitees, and guests. Difficulty lied in the fact that members finance their own expenses and are invited to both days because of the general meeting. Guests were invited by NECSTouR sometimes were covered by Andalucía, and attended both days. Usual guest were only invited to the international conference but not for the first day, reduced price accommodation was not proposed to them. At the venue the registrations were verified and with the badges the invitees could go the main conference room. The opening session was starting after the signature of the MoU between Taleb Rifai and Octavi Bono, where the local press was present in a large number. The panel was composed from the illustrious guest listed above: Octavi Bono, NECSTouR Presidency, Director-General for Tourism of the Government of Catalonia; István Ujhelyi, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair, Committee of Transport and Tourism of the European Parliament and Chairman of the Tourism Task Force; Edward Zammit Lewis, Minister for Tourism, Malta, Presidency of the Council of the European Union; Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO); Susana Díaz, President of the Regional Government of Andalusia. A short video message from Karmenu Vella, the Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission was screened as he could not be present. The director of INTOUR and professor from the University of Bedfordshire Mr Peter Burns had the pleasure to have the keynote speech

about the topic of the thematic conference: Smart Tourism Destinations' contribution for the planet and its people. As it is clear the conference wanted to show the two most important aspects of this concept: the planet and the people. The panels were selected in line with this idea. The first panel was dedicated the first one, the planet, "Smart Coastal and Maritime Tourism Management – Contribution to the SDG 14 Implementation". Of course the title was agreed to be inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN, 2016). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015 and after the Paris Agreement on climate change entered into force. The historical agreement is dedicated to tackle issues in the following fifteen years. From a policy point of view, the UN goals are not legally binding. Countries are free to adopt them or align those with their own standards. Goal number 14, "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources" is targeting the sustainable management of our waters. In this sense they were organising the so called Ocean Conference in June 2017 in the United Nations Headquarter, in New York (UN, 2017). This panel was a preparation for this conference. The government of Sweden was co-hosting responsibilities of the Conference, therefore NECSTouR member from Sweden was asked to present their good practices. The moderator was Ms Zoritsa Urosevic, Representative of the World Tourism Organisation to the United Nations at Geneva. She underlined the fact that regional policies need to be influenced by these goals. Then she asked to see how regions are currently dealing, creating policies and actions into details. Also she raised the question on the measurement or monitoring of progress for future development. Regional good practices session started with Ulf Eriksson's presentation on Regional Development Maritime Strategy inspiring the Swedish Model. Mr Eriksson is the Vice-President of the Committee for Regional Development and Tourism of Västra Götaland, Sweden. He explained they are focusing on six points: maritime operations, marine biotech, seafood, tourism, ocean management, and marine energy. He added that one of the main goals is to establish a venue for innovation and development within tourism and experiential industry. After learning how local communities and SMEs can tackle the actual goals the next good practices were shared by Andalucía. Ms Inmaculada Gallego, from the Statistics department of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Regional Government of Andalusia described the Andalusia Tourism Indicators System in the Mediterranean context through MITOMED+ project. She confirmed of usage official statistics to be able to compare destinations and preserve continuity in time. Due to the cross-sectoral aspects of tourism it makes it evident that destinations need to take into account other SDGs also. Regis Lopez Lang, Delegate of Europe-Latin America-Caribbean "Odyssey 2020

Growth and Blue Tourism” started his speech mentioning a Communication paper from the European Commission, namely COM(2014) 86 final on “A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism”. In that paper the main objective was to give some recommendations and he shared the most important points of this communication because all European regions need a strategy. He also underlined the need of synergies and specialised training in these maritime regions. Coastal regions has a huge environmental pressure not only because of its highly concentrated population but also because of its visitors in summertime. Many European funding is available for increasing the employment in the tourism and maritime sector. Examples were mentioned like European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Research, innovation and competitiveness (COSME, Horizon 2020, Blue Growth), Education, training and culture (Creative Europe programme, Erasmus+), Environment, climate change and other funding (LIFE+, EU Environment Action Programme, EU climate change adaptation strategy). Virtually connected was Ana Tejedor Arceredillo from WISE-Marine Coordination and Cooperation with Regional Sea Conventions, European Environment Agency. She elaborated more on the marine value for tourism question. Mr Ivan Kožić, Management Board Member of the UNWTO Croatian Sustainable Tourism Observatory shared their experience on environmental accounting. This initiative is a long process, which proves if the growth is indeed sustainable. Claudio Mantero, representing CIVITAS DESTINATIONS Coordinator, Horarios de Funchal Transportes Publicos Funchal, Madeira Portugal highlighted the links between sustainable tourism and transport modes and its future.

Panel 2 was continuing on the same aspect of the UN’s goals called “The Region’s Sustainable Behaviour: Contributing to The SDGs”. Moderated by Mr Malcolm Bell, the director of Visit Cornwall, the panel started with a video of #Tourism17 Challenge (YouTube, 2017). The video was a call for challenge, for committed people to record a video of 360 degree and turn 17 times around to represent the year 2017. The footage showed a group of young individuals from all around the world showing beautiful environments. The first speaker, Mr Karoly Kovacs, Chief of Statistics of International Trade in Services Section United Nations from New York introduced their work and its impact on tourism. He has quoted from the 2012 Resolution of “The Future we want” *“130. We recognize the need to support sustainable tourism activities and relevant capacity-building that promote environmental awareness, conserve and protect the environment, respect wildlife, & flora, biodiversity, ecosystems and cultural diversity, and*

improve the welfare and livelihoods of local communities by supporting their local economies and the human and natural environment as a whole.” He also pointed out the accessible indicators supported by the UN. The panel continued with the presentation of regional good practices from NECSTouR member regions, firstly Visit Flanders. Mr Jan Korthout brought a study made by his colleague on the Residents attitudes towards tourism. The research was conducted on the attitudes of locals towards tourism. The outcome of the study showed three kind of empowerment for locals: psychological, social, and political. Its recommendations are calling for making more citizens proud, proving the positive social effects of tourism, giving residents a voice, trying to eliminate the negative impacts, communicating about the positive impacts. As a second example, Mr Lee McDonald, International Partnerships Manager of VisitScotland, elaborated on ““Social Tourism: Making Tourism more Inclusive and Competitive”. He showed an excellent project example of helping to those who wouldn’t be able to participate in tourism. It contributed to several SDGs. VisitScotland got involved as an answer to the need of the Scottish. This common project with stakeholders asked for donation of companies to provide it to the people in the sense of tourism. The outcome of the initiative is that it has helped tourism to be more inclusive and help tackle the effects of inequality, to boost the wellbeing of the families involved. The next regional case was “The Governance as a key factor for Sustainable Tourism” presented by the Executive Director of the Catalan Tourism Board, Mr Patrick Torrent. The director stated that only with intelligent governance model on tourism can they achieve sustainable tourism. The 2020 plan is based on public and private partnership, furthermore the alliances with other destinations, like NECSTouR. Example was shown through the partnership of city of Barcelona and the province of Barcelona. Catalonian example provides in this year all marketing tool for free of charge for companies with sustainable certifications from GSTC (GSTC, 2017). The director for Competitivity, Tourism Department of the Government of Galicia brought a case of “Protecting the Environment for a Sustainable Destination”. José Luis Maestro elaborated on goal 13 + 15, as half of the visitors come for the nature and the landscape. They have made it even more accessible to the tourist with a train-pass for tourists. The last regional case was baptised as “Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Experiences” told by Teresa Caldarola, Tourism Policy Advisor of the Government of Tuscany. Her presentation was based on the food tourism, restaurants who are cooperating with the tourism office. They have introduced a label for the purpose of the communication campaign, including a multilingual website. The main message was that they will continue this project while a regional tourism law aiming the sustainability dedicated to the linking

user, consumers and the sellers, SMEs to maintain the short chain of local products. The expert on the EU Ecolabel, Ms Susanne Heutling was representing the European Commission from DG for Environment. She briefly introduced the European tool, to transformation to a green economy. She went into details with the Ecolabel contribution to the SDG number 12, “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”. Transparent marketing approach helps to the tourism accommodations, also bearing in mind the training of the staff in order to be able to keep the sustainable goals together. Empowering consumers is also part of the guidelines. EU Ecolabel is in line with the guidelines regarding being relevant, clear, transparent, and accessible. EU Ecolabel celebrates its 25th anniversary during this year. She mentioned the events in connection of the celebration. Then the style of the panel became more of an active dialogue involving the audience where they were sharing experiences.

After the networking lunch panel 3, THE PEOPLE: INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR TOURISM QUALITY EXPERIENCES has started moderated by Christof Kienel, Head of Unit, European Committee of the Regions – NAT Commission. This panel was that I contributed to the most, during the preparation. Unfortunately, few days before the event we had a regretful message from the cabinet of MEP Tapardel, saying she cannot come to the conference due to some political difficulties in her home country. The original idea was to have a fast paced interesting dialogue where to have a video message is absolutely not convenient. 2 local examples were presented first “Your roots in Europe” by Susana Ibáñez Rosa, General Secretary for Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Regional Government of Andalusia and second “The Tourism Ambassadors” Françoise Guaspere, EU Policy Advisor Île-de-France Europe. The first case was explaining the program called “Your roots in Andalucía, Your roots in Europe”. The framework of this initiative was that in 2015, 244 million people lived outside their country of origin. They believe tourism as a factor of territorial cohesion, coexistence between people, and as a factor of social dynamism. Furthermore there is indeed a multicultural exchange which can break down barriers and stimulus dialogue. On the top of that it can promote values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. Identification of the three main target markets is the main objective of their analysis. Work plan consisted a mix of tasks or promotion, communication, marketing, advice and creation of products. They are planning to establish a centre for tourism product creations. They are in close cooperation with the private sector – she underlined. Then she has come up with a proposal for all Europe based on the Andalusian example because Europe’s history hides great

opportunities for replicability. There are huge migratory movements therefore there is a great potential for Europe promote European citizenship. This idea would be named “Your roots in Europe. A short video was showed to the audience. It stated information about the ancestral home of a large Jewish community, how the region has Jewish roots and that is why they invite Jewish visitors from all over the world to come “home”. Next was Ms Guaspere, presenting the idea of Tourism Ambassadors from France. Due to the high level of security and the shocking and unfortunate terrorist attacks the region needed to establish a campaign to visitors. They have recently launched a city pass which englobes different reductions for tourists. Also a website, a one-stop-shop was established. They offer English language courses for the participant of the industry such as bus and taxi drivers, tour operators. The volunteers are there to visit the tourists with a smile, a personal approach. They recruited young people as volunteers mostly students. English was the main criteria but experience in tourism sector was also considered. The mission was to welcome visitors and to help them plan their stay; also these volunteers wear purple jackets to ease their visibility. Their future is to recruit even more volunteers for the summer and winter holiday period. It was concluded by Mr Kienel that these are excellent examples on how the ideas and policies are actually implemented on regional level. He continued with their initiative of the so-called Citizens travel card which I am elaborating in the other chapters. The first intervention after the video message of Ms Tapardel was Anne Grady’s, Policy Officer Culture, Heritage and Artists mobility, European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). She shared the plans of DG EAC regarding the thematic year of European Year of Cultural Heritage as Europe is a key cultural destination, one of the World’s largest concentration cultural sights which accounts half of UNESCO’s heritage list and ¼ of the intangible heritage list. The goal is to encourage the sharing and appreciation of Europe’s rich and diverse cultural heritage. Tourism should be in the centre of this promotion of cultural heritage. Focus on Tangible and intangible will be focused, also social practices. Shared resource and common history and values is the idea of the year. Button-up approach has been agreed for the coordination of the year. DG GROW’s representative started to underline the commitment of the European Commission in the SDG implementation. Ilona Lelonek, Policy Officer Sustainable and Responsible Tourism, European Commission Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs mentioned the initiative implemented since 10 years: European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN). She pointed out the support for development for cultural tourism in transnational thematic tourism products encouraged by this project such as routes, itineraries, or trails. They have been

cooperating with other organisations such as UNECSO, Council of Europe on cultural routes, European Travel Commission on promotion, or the UNWTO. Linking the next year's thematic year, the selection of 2017 is focusing on the cultural destinations. Jean Marc Mignon, the Representative from the World Committee on Tourism Ethics, UNWTO briefly spoke about the vision of the committee. He confirmed that cultural heritage is one of the principal motivations for travel. Furthermore, empowerment of host communities, minorities and indigenous people is essential to preserve authenticity and integrity. Mr Mignon added that the WCTE is working on a set of recommendations on the sustainable development of indigenous tourism. He raised the question on how to get the right balance between development of tourism, and quality of life of the local populations? The speech was followed by Antonio Massieu, Chair of INRouTe International Network on Regional Economics and Tourism who highlighted from his point of view that measuring culture at subnational levels can also be focused as a subset of visitor flows, culture and tourism are territorial based activities, and that proper measurement of culture is far behind that of tourism. He added that cultural tourism as a term is probably not the best to refer on the topic we want to identify as culture being the main purpose of a trip. The last but probably the most surprising presentation was invitee of NECSTouR, Mr Richard Eltvedt, Director of Governmental and Citizenship Affairs at Euro Disney. Indeed he received some questioning regard from the audience. He explained that the Disney universe is deeply rooted in French and European culture and history. This heritage is kept alive at Disneyland Paris with a unique atmosphere and a range of rare skillsets and talents. Employees are over 100 different nationalities therefore cultural diversity is at the heart of Disneyland Paris' social model. Disney gives a change to young people from all over Europe and the world, Disneyland actively promotes intercultural dialogue – he added. At the opening of Euro Disney park they took into consideration of European heritage, European culture therefore it is not just a copy of the American version. The park's places required to employ professionals from all over Europe who are masters of very old professions which do not practiced elsewhere. They have based every building and decoration on the traditional way of craftsmanship. The session was closed with the conclusions driven by Christof.

Concluding and closing panel was composed by Mr Francisco Javier Fernández Hernández, Regional Minister for Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Regional Government of Andalusia; Octavi Bono, NECSTouR Presidency, Director-General for Tourism of the Government of Catalonia; and Dr Taleb Rifai, Secretary-

General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The regional minister welcomed all the guests, and representatives in the room. On behalf of the regional authority he thanked for the conference in order to enrich tourism. A more fair way of doing tourism should be achieved after collecting the good practices of this meeting. Two words have been conclusions: opportunity and sustainability. These are the basis that we need to create, and we need to continue to apply these. After the words of the regional minister, it was Mr Bono who started to share his view on the conclusion. Regions are the drivers of sustainable change therefore the conference should have a huge influence on regions. We can all learn from each other about tourism from the regional cases. NECSTouR calls for a pan-European dialogue for all the stakeholders, all governance levels, consumers and all the citizens to discuss about smart-destination strategies, innovations, blue job creations and coastal sustainability. He added that the future of tourism for regions is in the hand of the network. After thanking he gave the floor to the secretary general, Mr Rifai. Out of respect this is a part that I wish to include in a more detailed way. The thoughts of Taleb Rifai without exaggeration are far more the most important ones for the whole industry. He started his intervention with his experience regarding the feeling of appurtenance to a family, family of the industry. There is competition between the parties but after the conference all members leave as friends. Then he focused on three main points: cultural affinity or communication between cultures, habitants; growth and sustainability; Europe and smart specialisation. Following this he went into the details of each point. On cultural diversity he strictly refused the acts of building walls and the division of culture especially certain countries in Europe and North America. Make people not able to travel and making people mistrust in each other raises an important question: "whose agenda are we serving?" closing borders and restricting travels are serving the "forces of darkness" he stated. Therefore a collective stand is needed to demolish this kind of attitude. He added we need to look back to the time of our ancestors who were living in harmony and besides some conflicts they were united and they coexisted. In connection to the second point he underlined that tourism is growing unstopably and no one can stop people to travel. Travel has become a way of life like families are dividing their income not only for food or housing but also for travelling. Looking at the number of travellers after the Second World War and comparing it with the data of last year there is an enormous growth. He says probably future generations will look at this period and think of it as the age of travel similarly as we do now of the age of industrialisation. This growth has to be controlled therefore sustainability is essential. We need not to forget the downside of tourism as any human activity has a down and upside. Child and sexual

abuse, child trafficking, child labour, smuggling and stealing of artefacts, or the wildlife of Africa, destruction of local cultures and local communities are crimes committed under the name of tourism. He continued: growth is not an option, it is a destiny. The agenda of sustainability therefore should base on the three pillar of the United Nations' definition: economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability. Sometimes we tend to downsize the first in favour of the two other however it is not fair, so we should be balanced towards people and the planet. Mr Rifai also said that tourism is the third largest industry in the world, after fuels and chemicals, comes tourism. The most important duty of ours is to try to keep the most of the generated money inside the given country in favour of the local communities. Based on the research of the UN every single direct job created in tourism creates a 1,4 jobs outside the industry. The tourism jobs have not good image yet. Linked to the environmental sustainability he highlighted the fact that tourism is polluting due to the transportation. His third main message was about the European tourism. Europe as a continent is a leader in tourism mainly because of historical status. There is a need to shifting from the occupation of the largest market share into becoming the leader in responsible, ethical, and sustainable tourism. Europe has to face with a reduction of the market share as the other destinations are gaining popularity in the world. This does not mean however that we, as Europe should lose the leadership in tourism. UNWTO's suggestion is that this leadership should maintain with two tools: sustainability and innovation. He went on that tourism is seen as a classical industry and not very innovative. Hotels are still run the same way as several hundreds of years ago. He added the following anecdote to illustrate how old-fashioned is this industry: "We were able to put a man on the moon before there were two wheels on a suitcase". Following this he talked about the Sustainable Tourism for Development and as it is an opportunity to show to the world what Europe is able to achieve. Its 5 pillars are: economic inclusiveness, social, environmental, preservation of culture, peace and stability. As closing remark Rifai reminded the importance of travelling, meeting with cultures and people as it is the best tool against hatred and racism. Burns then closed the conference officially. I would only add my conclusion that it was an excellent opportunity to meet with many high-level professionals and representatives of the tourism industry. I have been in contact with decision makers from European level, helping them and cooperating with them was a lifetime experience. UNWTO's delegation responsible for the event made a huge impression on me, their experience and professionalism is exemplary. One thing that I will probably never forget is the opportunity to meet with the secretary general, Mr Taleb Rifai. He's a true leader, with the dedication in his eyes you are immediately feel

you could listen to him for several days. All ideas shared by him are mind openers and true fruit for thought. Meeting with him in person therefore was an even bigger joy, receiving from him a pin of the thematic year is definitely the best memory to take home from Seville.

7.2.2. Primary interview questions for NECSTouR leaders:

Guide for interviewees: My thesis investigates in the modern, European tourism policy's focus on sustainability. It has been a long way that the EU recognised the importance of tourism in the legislative arena. It is in this where NECSTouR tries to influence and make regions more represented in tourism. Strategic goals of the network have to be in line with the needs of regions and sustainability. The path is beset with many obstacles and difficulties that need to be overcome. Is NECSTouR fulfilling its mission and how bright is its future?

Questions:

1. NECSTouR was called to life by the Commission Communication '*Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism*' in 2007, was recognised in '*Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe*' in 2010, and was stated as an example for cross-border tourism cooperation through regional platforms in the CoR opinion '*Tourism as a driving force for regional cooperation across the EU*'. Do you think that these entries prove the success of NECSTouR?
2. In your opinion, do European Institutions and tourism stakeholders recognise NECSTouR as a leader in sustainable tourism?
3. NECSTouR is not the only organisation in the sustainability arena nor the only European network of regions dealing with tourism. What makes it more attractive than others?
4. My paper focuses on the imperfections of European tourism policy, especially in regard to sustainability. What are the goals of NECSTouR while influencing tourism policy to emphasise the sustainability aspect? What are the changes that NECSTouR wishes to achieve?
5. Could you provide some details about the strategic goals of the Network?
6. What are the main obstacles, challenges, and adversaries to achieve those, as you see it?

7. What is that NECSTouR can do in the topic of facilitating access to EU funds for tourism initiatives?
8. In your opinion, which direction will the European tourism policy go into in the near future?
9. Should NECSTouR continue influencing tourism policy or should it directly influence policy areas with more legislative power (such as transportation)?
10. While I made my research, one possible alternative came into my mind: shouldn't NECSTouR go from influencing European tourism policy (as researchers think that harmonisation is not achievable without regulatory power on European level) to influence together national/regional tourism policies based on the best practices of its members?
11. One thing is to include sustainable tourism in tourism policies and one is to make tourism policy sustainable. What is NECSTouR's vision on this?
12. NECSTouR represents regional destinations while the Commission only recently started to recognise regional competences and often privileges still talking about 'Member States'. In the period of Brexit, 'two-speed Europe' and anti-EU thoughts, how could a representation of regions turn a fragmented Europe into a single destination? Influencing European tourism policy towards harmonisation driven by regions isn't implying contradiction in such dissentious area?
13. Does NECSTouR fulfil its 'mission'? How do you illustrate that? (Examples, etc.)
14. At this moment, NECSTouR has 35 regional members. Acquisition of new members figures among the goals in the 2017work programme. How long would NECSTouR attract members? In your opinion couldn't it backfire in the sense of "quantity over quality"?
15. More members generate more knowledge which could be shared among members. Theoretically, having more members could be an advantage for the whole Network. I've seen that some members are extremely actives while others are more than passives. Do you experience the same? If so, do you think of it as an issue that requires a solution? What would that be?
16. NECSTouR Indicators Working Group is more active than ever. Based on this success and to lower the number of competitors, would it be possible that NECSTouR adds competencies to its strategy (ecotourism, social tourism, responsible tourism, etc.)?

17. Different positions in the tourism industry, different cultures, and different languages: these are all true about members of NECSTouR. All these suggest a challenging coordination in addition of promotion, lobbying, and event management conducted from Brussels. The permanent secretariat is working with a very low number of employees for all aforementioned tasks. Is the permanent secretariat in a position to sustain the successful work while the objectives and number of members are planned to increase?
18. European Institutions, NGOs, lobbies have the tendency to employ more and more trainees under the Belgian legal requirements. Why doesn't NECSTouR offer payed internship for young professionals?
19. It is a membership-based organisation, and its financing is mainly from the membership fees, partly from projects. Does NECSTouR plan to change its source of income?
20. Mentioning membership fees: the access to useful source of information does not require high financial commitment from members compared to other networks. Is NECSTouR considering increasing its membership fees in proportion of its successfulness?

7.2.3. Interview answers of Patrick Torrent :

1. Yes, I do. In my opinion, the European tourism policy must to have the right connection with the most important regions in Europe in terms of tourism, and NECSTouR plays the perfect role to coordinate it. Is in the regional level where the tourism policies can be decided and implemented. Is in the regional level where the sustainable and competitive model of tourism can be built. Then, the European network of regions for a competitive and sustainable tourism must be the right player.
2. Yes. The European Parliament, the European Commission, the Committee of Regions, the European Travel Commission and most of the main tourism stakeholders in Europe are recognising NECSTouR as the necessary partner to implement strategies to develop a more sustainable and competitive tourism.
3. Probably the dynamism of the network and its members. The NECSTouR regions and associated members are very active in the main discussion fields: smart destinations, indicators, energy saving, cultural and social sustainability, skills, EU funds for tourism...

Our working groups and our events are the best ambassadors for NECSTouR as a network.

4. One of the changes that NECSTouR wishes to achieve is to put tourism in the centre of the strategic discussion in the European institutions. Tourism, a sustainable and competitive tourism model, needs to improve its visibility as a key industry and deserves to be part of the European strategy. Regions should play a priority role in this process, and NECSTouR should be the perfect vector to cooperate with the European institutions in order to create an European tourism policy inspired in a sustainable and competitive model.

5. The NECSTouR members are experts in different fields: EU funds for tourism, sustainability indicators, smart destinations, tourism for all, climate change, digital platforms... The NECSTouR working groups are providing information and conclusions that suppose a valuable contribution for the European institutions to create a tourism policy. The role of regions, thanks to the efforts of the NECSTouR members, is becoming increasingly relevant.

6. The main challenge is to convince the European institutions about the transversal importance of tourism as a driving force for European economies, and the key role of regions in order to ensure a good governance for tourism in our continent.

7. NECSTouR was created ten years ago as a regions platform to share good practices. Today it is still important to share experiences in accessing to the European funds for tourism.

8. We think that's clear that a competitive and sustainable tourism will be the model that will inspire the European tourism policy in the near future. NECSTouR will be there to support this process.

9. Tourism is so transversal that the networks like NECSTouR must take into account all legislative areas that could influence tourism: transportation, environment, infrastructures, and security, among others.

10. As the regulation competences used to be in the regional level, the best practices exchanges and the research activity of NECSTouR could inspire the regional policies. In fact, when we are discussing, for example, about digital platforms, tourism for all or

sharing economy, the answer to these challenges from some destinations, could become a good reference to other regions in the moment when

11. For NECSTouR our priority is to include sustainable tourism as the unique way to build a European tourism policy. Tourism of the future will be sustainable or it will not to be.

12. We think that, in the tourism area, the activity from the regional level could be a key factor for building a stronger Europe. In fact, NECSTouR is open to regions that are not part of the European Union. Brexit and two-speed Europe doesn't suppose any risk to achieve our goals as a network. The European institutions often have the need to know the vision of the destinations when they are thinking in tourism policies. The member states, directly or through platforms like the European Travel Commission, use to facilitate the participation of regions in the European discussion about tourism in order to improve the destinations representability and the value of the research results.

13. Definitely yes. NECSTouR is growing in influence among the European institutions and the UNWTO. The NECSTouR participation in the Oceans Conference in United Nations last June, the high level event this September in the European Parliament, the event in the Committee of Regions or the role of NECSTouR as a driver of the Joint Promotion project by the European Commission are good examples of this influence.

14. We think that's more important the NECSTouR representability than the quantity of members. 10 of the 15 first European tourism destinations are members of our network. One of our goals is to spread the NECSTouR presence to the Eastern Europe and some regions from countries that could have a good contribution in the tourism model debate. Our main objective is to ensure the best services to our members in order to ensure the most comfortable membership possible to the European destinations.

15. One of our challenges is to facilitate a more proactive participation of our members in our working groups. We think that members must to take advantage of its membership and, for that, it's necessary to stimulate its participation in the different activities and platforms organized by NECSTouR.

16. In our opinion, we can't manage what we can't measure. When we are talking about sustainability, we are thinking in environmental sustainability, but in social, cultural and

economical sustainability as well. The excellent work developed by our members in the indicators working group is thinking in the whole sustainability concept.

17. The main asset of our network, apart of its members, is our Permanent Secretariat. They are doing an excellent job. During the last two years, we have had the opportunity to reinforce our structure, but our challenges are really ambitious, and the network must to take some important decisions in order to ensure our future. In order to not to depend excessively of the European projects, and to focus our team exclusively in the strategic priorities of NECSTouR, we need some financial autonomy. Increasing membership fees could be part of the solution.

18. Different internships are options that will be studied by our Executive Committee in order to give solutions to the NECSTouR structural needs.

19. The next Special General Assembly of NECSTouR will touch this point as one of the main goals, because this decision must be taken before the 2018 member budgets approval.

20. Yes. NECSTouR is stronger than ever and offers interesting levels of visibility and good options of good practices exchanging to its members. The fee is exactly the same than when the network was created in 2007. It's time to suggest to our members a change of fees to achieve a better balance between cost and services provided.

7.2.4. Interview answers of Ana Moniche:

1. This fact proves that NECSTouR has been able to seize the opportunity given within the framework of the 2007 Agenda for a sustainable and competitive Tourism. The presentation of NECSTouR as an example in 2010 document places the network in the right place and the right time, and this is, indeed, as success. However after 2010 NECSTouR has also been working hard to achieve more and it is proving to be a critical actor for successful Regional presence in European institutions.

2. In my opinion, it is already recognised as leader in sustainable tourism among main European Institutions. In the near future a more intense recognition will sure be coming, given the various important projects NECSTouR is already involved. There is still some more work to do with regards to NECSTouR visibility at Country level and with private stakeholders.

3. Precisely the joint concept between tourism, sustainability and Regional level. Many of countries members of the EU have their Tourism competences delegated at the regional level, therefore Regions need a presence within European Institutions, not only with regards to the promotion of destinations, but also in terms of management, planning, sustainability... NECSTouR provides an integrated approach to Tourism Governance and the necessary link between the Regional Level of Government and the European Level. In addition the wide fields of expertise that the different working Groups integrate, is a real strength of this network.

4. Tourism and the environment have a multidimensional relationship. While the environment and the culture of the destination are main attractors for tourists, they are also affected by their arrival. The right balance in this sense is to be found not to deplete tourism assets. Under this view the right policies for tourism affect need to address not only the tourism industry, but also to achieve the right coordination with environmental, cultural and transport stakeholders, the local population and with different level of governments. Under my point of view this are the changes NECSTouR need to catalyse.

5. Maximize the investment on Tourism at the EU level, improve tourism sustainability accounting for all its dimensions (environmental, cultural, social, governance, innovation...), working towards a better measurement of all these dimensions, integrate the analysis and the correct management of new stakeholders within the tourism sector (Digital platforms, OTA's,..), improve the accessibility of European destinations, integrate the knowledge of Universities and Research Centers in this process.

6. Tourism is a rapid changing sector, where new technologies have penetrated very easily. The design of policies usually is a lower speed process, therefore NECSTouR needs to respond and react in order to influence policies timely. This same difference of speed is applicable to official statistics bodies, where measurement of new situations are usually taken into account after the first concerns have arisen. New actors are also gaining positions and therefore, regulating their actions becomes also more difficult.

7. No answer.

8. Regulation of online platforms and OTA's. Management of excessive tourism pressure in specific destinations. Safety management and collaboration with security bodies at the EU level.

9. Both directions are necessary, given the multidimensional aspect of the Tourism Sector. However it is still necessary to work towards the identification of a strong Tourism sector at the EU level as an independent and relevant industry.

10. Both instruments you mention are good options for NECSTouR. Influencing European Tourism policies must be also based on best practices of the members, by suggesting policies that have already prove the effectiveness in the regions.

11. We need to make destinations sustainable, not only addressing the tourism sector, but under a integrated vision of the territory. In this sense it is necessary closer cooperation with other sectors.

12. A cooperation and a joint work of different and diverse Regions is undoubtedly a good sign of cohesion. This is a voluntary network where Regions contribute with their staff and expertise. My personal view is that this network is an example that the idea of a common sense of European citizenship has a strong presence in the Tourism sector.

13. Yes, of course. NECSTouR is now an important stakeholder for European institutions, and also at the international level. Some examples: 13 NECSTouR's Regions among the top 20 tourism destinations in the EU. NECSTouR presents at the 6th UNWTO International Conference on Tourism Statistics. NECSTouR presence in the official Side Event EU Tourism for Blue Growth of the Oceans Conference. And many more...

14. Based in my personal experience, and also focusing in Indicator WG, NECSTouR members are quite active, so at the moment I think we don't need to worry on the balance between quality and quantity with respect to full members.

15. Same as above

16. Ecotourism, social and responsible tourism are integrated within the concept as sustainability. At the moment we have quite a few of strategies to continue working. However we find every time new paths to follow, for example it is opening now a new line of collaboration for different working Groups which is the Tourismphobia and residents' attitudes towards tourism.

17. Permanent Secretariat needs more support as NECSTouR role is becoming more important and more active. The increase of fees is a real option now.

18. I cannot answer to this question since I do not have knowledge about the internal administrative and internal management of NECSTouR

19. Not to my knowledge at the moment.

20. Yes, we are considering it.