Italy's Big Six join forces in pioneering sustainable tourism network

While the mere sound of places like Rome, Florence and Venice might invoke a state of dreamy yearning in many people, local authorities have to deal with quite worldly challenges in meeting the demands and coping with the effects of growing tourism in their municipalities. Since many metropolitan areas in Italy face similar challenges with regard to tourism development and competitiveness, the public authorities of Italy's most important cities Milan, Rome, Florence, Venice, Napoli and Rimini formed the network of Great Italian Destinations for Sustainable Tourism (GIDST) in 2013.

Sergio Daneluzzi, Head of Unit within the Tourism and Marketing Department of the City of Milan, sums up the premises that led to the creation of GIDST: *"The founding city members all agreed that in a country like Italy, both extremely beautiful and very fragile, sustainable tourism was the only way to develop tourism at all for the future. One needs only to think about destinations like Venice or Florence to understand the dangers of uncontrolled mass tourism. So from the very beginning the emphasis was on our six members to be representative at the national level, knowing that any shared achievement in the field of sustainability or political initiative in tourism is bound to be significant for the whole country."*

Spotlight on ETIS destinations: Venice

Famous touristic attractions often suffer greatly under the strain that is put upon them when many people try to access a location within a limited amount of time. While preference is given to very few attractions, equally beautiful spots in the city are also worth discovering and yet remain unvisited.

In an attempt to disperse tourist flows more uniformly across the city, Venice has introduced the "Fuorirotta" project, inviting tourists to follow "Venice's other Map" that focuses on sustainable travel and unusual attractions all over the city.

Other cities such as Naples, Rome and Milan have adopted the project, providing specific tourist itineraries that can be followed on foot, or point out other "Second-level itineraries" which are alternative to the main ones but just as interesting.

Acting as a network that accounts for just under 30% of all tourist arrivals in Italy, the GIDST cities are currently implementing the European Tourism Indicator System ETIS with the support of the National Authority for Statistics (ISTAT), as well as national and regional level environment authorities and local stakeholders. Their support proved indispensable in acquiring the relevant data for the ETIS toolkit.

"The involvement of stakeholders is fundamental during the assessment, but it is a very complex endeavour when large urban destinations are concerned. As a group we were interested in indicators that can be relevant for tourist destinations characterised by at least one million tourist arrivals per year, but these destinations don't necessarily have to be cities to be eligible for inclusion into the GIDST network. Different kinds of destinations could be present at the same time and we recognise that some of Italy's relevant destination brands are not cities but areas such as Lake Como", Sergio remarks.

While national political recognition and the inclusion of new destinations are proclaimed goals of the GIDST network, its members also aim to be benchmarked against comparable destinations in other European countries. The liaison with the European Commission is therefore especially vital if the network is to be perceived as a pioneering initiative to support the development of sustainable tourism development that inspires similar destinations.

Further information:

Grande Destinazioni Italiane Turismo Sostenibile GDITS
http://www.sustainable-tourism.org/

Turismo Milano
http://www.turismo.milano.it/

Venice's Fuorirotta project
http://www.comune.venezia.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/EN/IDPagina/73185

Spotlight on ETIS destinations: Rome

So-called "Water Houses" have been introduced in Rome as a GIDST measure to provide fresh, good drinkable water (still or sparkling) for both locals and tourists to refill their bottles at various fountains throughout the city centre. The goal is to eliminate the need to buy drinks in plastic bottles that end up in the rubbish bin (or on the streets, or in the sea) and have to be collected with considerable expense and effort.

More Italian cities such as Venice and Milan, which boast a network of over 120 and almost 500 public "fontanelles" have joined the programme and introduced specially designed bottles that can be refilled and taken home as a souvenir.

Spotlight on ETIS destinations: Milan

In 2015, the city of Milan was home to the Expo. The Universal Exposition attracted over 22 million visitors to its innovative exhibition grounds that were conceived as a Smart City. Smart and sustainable decisions were also at the heart of much of the preparatory work in the entire municipal area of Milan ever since 2008, focusing on a complex urban sustainability programme that puts information and infrastructure management first.

Tourist information

Faced with the prospect of millions of additional and first-time visitors, Milan's city authorities decided that the greater part of brochures, leaflets and tourist guides would be available in digital format only, saving paper and printing costs. A full range of materials was devised: introductory guides to the city in five languages, Milan event and tourist itinerary apps, a Walking Guide to Milan, as well as guides in downloadable E-book and PDF formats.

The city's signposts for touristic attractions also became smart: a brand new system of around 300 signposts was made available in Milan, integrating QR codes that push information to tourists' hand-held devices in up to nine different languages. Provided with so much detail and tourist resources, visitors have largely taken to discovering the city on their own.

Infrastructure

Air quality is a great concern in many metropolitan areas. In 2012, Milan introduced a congestion charge for the City Centre that has reduced traffic in the city by 7% and pollution in the restricted inner city area by 30%. To provide infrastructure for alternative and non-polluting modes of transport, Milan implemented a sustainable mobility system that now comprises 200 kilometres of bicycle lanes, 250 bike stations and 4,500 public bicycles (1,000 of which electric), which are used by more than 10,000 cyclists daily. Through the addition of a new underground line (metro n.5), the public transport system has been expanded, serving the North Eastern suburbs of the city. The offer is completed by an urban car sharing system that makes more than 2,000 vehicles available to its 300,000 subscribers. A scooter-sharing system also finds avid users.

Milan has also taken further steps in waste disposal, where it has a leading position in Europe. 53% of its municipal waste is now recycled, making the city confident to achieve the EU's circular economy waste recycling target of 65% by 2030.