

STATEMENT ON THE CHALLENGES & RISKS OF HERITAGE AND TOURISM

The 5th meeting of the EHHF in Paris in June 2010 calls upon European national governments and partners to act on the central role of heritage in tourism.

The main challenge for public authorities is to continue to tackle the challenges and risks in balancing the often conflicting needs of heritage and tourism.

Tourism is a major economic catalyst in all European countries and the role of heritage is crucial to this. About 20% of European domestic and international tourism is driven by people's desire to visit and experience their own or other's natural and cultural heritage. There is a danger that heritage is seen only as an economic driver in this context, overlooking its intrinsic value (historic, scientific, artistic and spiritual). Therefore it is necessary to find and identify the optimum balance between tourism, authenticity, respect for local communities and regions and heritage.

Heritage is a fragile and non-renewable resource and not only used as an economic tool to the detriment of its authenticity. We must avoid situations where heritage becomes a victim of its own success.

Cultural and local identity - we recognise the valuable relationship between local people and owners, and their tangible and intangible heritage. Their knowledge of local history, tradition and culture is vital as key actors in presenting the authenticity and identity of the historical sites, their vicinity and wider landscape.

- We need to have a better understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of tourism on historic sites, landscapes and local communities. There is a need for training and continuing education to empower local actors to tell their story and encourage their involvement. We need to foster a dialogue between decision-makers and local actors and stakeholders in the interpretation and presentation of the site to the public.

Quality vs. quantity? – we recognise that in Europe today there are two distinct trends; on the one hand mass tourism which leads to the deterioration of the site and the quality of life of local residents and visitor experience; and on the other, high quality heritage sites with a lack of tourism and revenue. Authenticity is the key component of the quality of the site and the visitor experience. It is possible to use new media to bring the sites to a wider audience and allow access for all, which may help reduce the pressure of heavy traffic on the sites themselves. We also recognise that digitisation offers a different experience of the site.

- We need to have a better understanding and analyses of the short and long term impacts of tourism on historic sites, as well as different categories of visitors and their needs. Well presented and interpreted sites give a return on investment. We believe a more sustainable model for heritage tourism needs to be developed. We must include the local population, tourism professionals and stakeholders when developing the management and presentation of sites and the supporting infrastructure.

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The members of the EHHF, here present, recall the need:

- to call on governments, the tourism sector and stakeholders to recognise the pivotal role that heritage plays in generating tourism, and vice versa
- to call on governments to include heritage in the development of European and national policies and strategies for tourism
- to call on governments and the tourism sector to redirect a substantial portion of the revenue generated by tourism into the protection, conservation and presentation of the heritage and in addition to encourage the re-use of historic buildings
- to develop sustainable and practical management structures and tools for presenting historic sites and landscapes to the public within larger tourism policies, in close collaboration between heritage professionals, tourism experts as well as the local authorities, communities and owners
- to share qualitative and quantitative data gathered by the tourism sector that is relevant for the heritage sector on the habits and needs of the tourist
- to continue to improve the provision of information and the quality of the historic authenticity of the site for the visitor, to encourage a high level of understanding and appreciation of the heritage site and landscapes
- for the EHHF to continue to share information and exchange ideas and good practice in the area of heritage and tourism.