

# 2nd International Congress on Ethics and Tourism

Quito, Ecuador, 11-12 September 2012

## Conclusions

The *2nd International Congress on Ethics and Tourism*, organized by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in Quito, on 11-12 September 2012, was held with the chief objective of promoting responsible, sustainable and fair tourism development at the global level, for the benefit of all sectors of society, and within the universally accepted reference framework that is the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* of the UNWTO, endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2001.

Within this ethical framework for tourism, the 2nd International Congress supported and disseminated the concept of *Conscious Tourism*—insightfully developed by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador—which constitutes innovative thinking based on the same principles of sustainability and ethics promoting the values of peace, friendship, respect, and love for life as the essence of the practice of tourism.

The more than 350 participants from nearly 40 countries who attended, representing governments and national and local authorities, international organizations and NGOs, the business sector and education and training institutions, analysed and discussed opportunities and challenges that are facing responsible tourism development today. In-depth discussions were held, in particular, on specific issues related to the protection and respect of human rights (especially the rights of women, children and indigenous people) and social inclusion, universal accessibility and tourism for all (focused above all on persons with disabilities or reduced mobility and the elderly) as well as the crucial role played by the private sector and enterprises to ensure the sustainability of tourism and corporate social responsibility.

The keynote presentation, given by Mathis Wackernagel, creator of the concept of “ecological footprint”, warned against the overexploitation of the Earth’s natural resources, whose consequences—such as deforestation, water scarcity, ever-increasing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions into the atmosphere, among others—are unsustainable for our planet in the long run.

## Conscious Tourism

The first session of the Congress was fully devoted to *conscious tourism* and highlighted the need for human beings to view trips and travel as transformative life experiences that generate personal growth and enrichment, and which—as the Republic of Ecuador’s slogan “love life” indicates—are transformed into a celebration of life and into a quest for

happiness. The application of this concept in practice contributes to raising the “good-living index”, guiding us along the paths of light and harmony, and ultimately, making us better persons.

With a change in paradigms and behaviours, conscious tourism offers a pact of coexistence between host communities and visitors, and cultural and natural heritage. It also helps redefine the factors of consumption and to measure prosperity more in terms of spiritual values rather than material goods, always fostering beneficial and distributive growth at the social level.

It was also put forward that the application of the concept of conscious tourism in business activities should contribute to improving competitiveness in a society that is increasingly committed and aware, since the benefits of tourism should not be viewed only from an economic perspective, but also in terms of its social contributions.

#### An ethical framework for responsible tourism

In the second session of the Congress, devoted to *an ethical framework for responsible tourism*, it was concluded that the concept of “conscious tourism” fits in perfectly with the principles promoted by the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism of the UNWTO, which aims to serve as a roadmap to guide all of the sector’s actors towards the responsible and sustainable development of world tourism, reinforcing its positive impacts on society and attenuating as much as possible its negative effects on the environment, destinations and host communities.

Although not binding, it was decided that this ethical framework that is the Code represents a response to the search for a set of internationally shared norms and values to govern human relations and activities in tourism, as well as to guide the tourism development policies of any region of the planet or to define the business strategies of every tourism enterprise, governed by the parameters of ethics, responsibility, and sustainability in its social, economic and environmental dimensions.

In the area of business, in particular, emphasis was placed on the importance of applying this ethical framework to tourism enterprises, with a view to ensuring that the companies of the sector adopt ethics as part of their corporate culture, and that they implement ethics in their policies and business operations so that they can be conducted transparently and in accordance with principles of responsible business that not only comply with national regulations and voluntary standards, but also lead to investment in the community, the development of human capital and respect for human rights.

#### Human rights and social inclusion

The third session of the Congress addressed the topic of tourism as a promoter of *human rights* and *social inclusion*, and the debates revolved around the subjects of gender equality, the protection of children and the participation of indigenous communities in tourism activities.

In the area of gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the tourism sector, emphasis was placed on the need to develop training programs focused on women entrepreneurs and professionals, facilitating access of women to land, credit and financial resources, reinforcing their legal protection, supporting women micro-entrepreneurs, and promoting female leadership at all levels.

With regard to the protection of children in tourism, the sector was called upon to work towards the prevention of all forms of tourism-related exploitation of boys, girls and adolescents, in particular the sexual exploitation of minors. To that end, governments are urged to adopt, implement and toughen laws protecting children, to improve cooperation and coordination at the national, regional and international levels, and to work in partnership with the private sector and with civil-society organizations. Tourism enterprises are also urged to include aspects related to children's rights in their corporate social responsibility policies.

The participation of indigenous communities in tourism activities and in the benefits derived from tourism involves not only the training of the members of these communities, but also, and above all, proper planning and impact studies to safeguard the identity and intangible cultural heritage of indigenous populations. Promoting community-based tourism, while at the same time incentivizing the responsible use of the living heritage of local communities for tourism purposes, can generate additional employment opportunities, help alleviate poverty, curb the rural exodus among the youth and cultivate a sense of pride among the members of a community.

#### Accessible tourism for all

The fourth session of Congress focused on *accessible tourism for all* and the importance of the facilitation of tourism travel for persons with disabilities as a key element of any policy of responsible tourism development. Persons with disabilities and the growing proportion of people with reduced mobility or special needs due to the ageing of the world population, who want to travel but cannot do so because of lack of infrastructure, tourism products and services that are universally accessible, present both challenges and new opportunities for the tourism sector.

In this regard, the Congress made a special appeal for all stakeholders in the public and private sectors of tourism to abide by the universal rules and the initial concept of "design for all" in order to make transport infrastructure, establishments and resorts accessible to the elderly and to persons with disabilities, and provide them with suitable accommodation at no extra cost to them; to keep whole and operational the different links of the accessibility chain of the destination; to provide special training courses for tourism personnel and prepare them to attend to people with special needs; and to publish clear and factual information about the level of accessibility of the tourism facilities available to receive persons with disabilities.

To make a destination accessible for all, it is essential to develop close cooperation and coordination at the political, municipal and business levels, including at all times groups

and organizations working for the rights of people with disabilities, in order to operate within the pertinent legislative, planning, implementation and decision-making framework.

#### Commitment by the private sector

In the fifth and final session of the Congress, the participants debated the ethical challenges that the private sector and tourism enterprises have to face in order to be able to combine business with the concept of sustainability and of *corporate social responsibility*.

It was underlined that ethical policies and strategies of corporate social responsibility should not be seen as mere obligations but represent significant investments of the company in its staff, suppliers, investors and business partners, their social environment and the environment in which they operate. Noted in particular was the use of the surplus of the value chain of the tourism business as an important method to combat poverty in disadvantaged areas, promote development in tourism host communities and create wealth through technology and knowledge transfer.

Also emphasized was the need to have a solid partnership between the public and private sectors in order to achieve equitable and inclusive tourism development, in which communities can associate with each other, where the environment is respected and whereby tourists and travellers are provided a true life experience.

Upon the conclusion of the event, the participants of the 2nd International Congress on Ethics and Tourism applauded the initiative of the companies and business associations that took part in the public declaration of observance of the ethical principles of the Code, and which formally signed the *Private Sector Commitment to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism of the UNWTO* in the context of the Congress. The signatory entities were: Destino Punta del Este (Uruguay), FIASEET (Federación Internacional de Asociaciones de Ejecutivas de Empresas Turísticas) and Hoteles Decameron Ecuador.

Quito, Ecuador, 12 September 2012