

## **CONFERENCE ON LEISURE TOURISM AND CONSUMER PROTECTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.**

### **CONCLUSIONS OF PANEL 2.**

**Panel 2 focused its tasks and discussions on International Standardization of Tourist Services.**

**To begin with, the new scenario that consumers have at their disposal for choosing and purchasing tourist products was outlined, a framework representing a huge transformation in just a few years that justifies the intense international debate and excitement among the representatives.**

**For the first time, consumers have the possibility to create custom products that better fulfil their expectations of lower costs, without the need to resort to the standardized products of commercial circuits. In this respect consumers are more independent and have more possibilities for choice and fulfilment; however, they lack references that would allow them access to information and guarantees about the characteristics of the products they acquire.**

**In order to analyse different perspectives of this problem, various agents were represented in the Working Group. On one hand, two of the major international organizations for standardization: ISO (Ms. Elena Ordozgoiti) and CEN (Mrs. Maitane Olabarria) explained their points of view, approaches and requirements for the standardization procedures they carry out, which have much in common. The main points are:**

- Standardization procedures are tools for creating markets of greater transparency that provide more information: to consumers, on what they are going to buy and, to suppliers, allowing them to be more specific about the products or services they offer.**
- Standardization can not by any means be considered an administrative obligation, nor should that be its objective.**
- Consequently, it is convenient and therefore, requested, that the involved parties participate in the process in order for the rules to cover all requirements, of supply as well as of demand or technical requirements.**
- These are laborious processes aimed at achieving a market reference (standard) and obtained through reasonable consensus between the parties.**
- Their application is voluntary and of international scope (worldwide in ISO, EC in the case of CEN) though the CEN standards entail the obligation of the member countries to eliminate other regulations that may contradict the obtained standard.**

**Both organizations have recently initiated their standardization processes (parallel standardization in both systems is compatible) in the tourism sector, relatively late in comparison to other economic activities; the first results are becoming visible in areas such as Scuba Diving, Health resorts and Spas, though with great controversy.**

**Ms. Elena Ordozgoiti expressed concern over the strong presence of industrial sectors in the TC ISO 228 on Tourism and Related services, and the meagre presence of institutions that defend consumer interests; both organizations manifested that the participation of institutions representing consumer interests in these processes is not only desirable but essential in order that those interests be adequately taken into consideration at the outcome. Therefore both organisations expressed the need for greater participation in the processes currently underway in the area of tourism.**

**Another model for the standardization process was offered by the representative of the Moroccan Administration, Ms. Aicha Hamzaoui, who talked about the interesting experience of the Kingdom of Morocco, of tackling the standardization process of various sectors related to tourism. This involved different parties (industrial, consumers) and was led by the Administration in order to guarantee a balanced development within a binding framework, seeking high levels of quality and aimed at achieving tourism development with concrete goals.**

**A very interesting contribution was that of an industry representative, Nicasio Pérez-Menzal, President of a company related to the tourism sector and Vice-President of the European Spas Association, who explained the motives which led the Spas industrial sector to favour development of a standard within the ISO Committee. For this industrial sector, the standardization process represents an opportunity for, voluntarily, having an effective management tool that works to fight unfair competition, reduce consumer insecurity -which makes people more disposed to acquire services- and promote quality and motivation of the persons who carry out the services, eliminating improvisation and increasing professionalism.**

**Finally, Arnold Pindar, member of ANEC and BSI, explained, from the consumer representatives' point of view, the importance of their presence during the standardization processes. This was an interesting discussion of the challenges they face, in terms of resources and means, when up against other parties having a greater range of interests and means. He also described the major organisations working in this field: ANEC (European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representation in Standardisation) and ISO/COPOLCO (International Organization for Standardization/Committee on Consumer Policy), as institutions that embrace initiatives for defending the interests of this sector.**

**The main conclusions of this Working Group are:**

- Standardization processes are not conclusive, rather they are tools for providing a more transparent market that facilitates transactions and gives consumers access to the greatest possible amount of information, so that reliability and safety are increased.**
- These processes are not directed against any of the agents and they also offer safety features for suppliers, such as information about and barriers to unfair competition.**
- Therefore a balance must be achieved in creating standards, with the presence of all involved parties so that the standards will be of use to everyone (suppliers and buyers).**

- **In the field of tourism, an intensive process of standardization is noticeable, which probably responds to the new conditions affecting this economically very important sector.**
- **In these processes, until now, there has been a lack of proportion between representation of agents on behalf of suppliers, and the significantly lesser presence of buyer representatives.**
- **It is important there be a stronger active presence of the latter so as to ensure an adequate and balanced establishment of standards that respond to the interests of all parties.**
- **To this end, greater participation is required in the organizations that channel consumers' perspectives and interests so greater equality with respect to the other parties must be promoted.**
- **In this respect the Public Administrations must give more support to consumer representatives, and the latter should be made more aware of the need to actively participate in the forums where standards are being established that will affect the rules of the highly important tourism market.**