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Preface

Anyone travelling any distance nowadays will see human activities aimed at attracting tourism everywhere they go. These activities are almost always associated with accommodation and catering, without which it is clearly impossible to keep tourists in any place for a reasonable amount of time. Furthermore, these activities are increasingly related to the sale of locally crafted products which the tourist purchases without paying too much attention to the price.

The halls and departure lounges of international airports are packed with shops. The stressed traveller today shows less interest in the savings that can be made on 'duty free goods', and is quite content to purchase products that, in reality, can probably be procured at lower prices in their home town. The commercial activities of the large international airports are becoming more and more like shopping centres and, indeed, constitute huge business with an enormous turnover. The arrivals lounges, however, have not by any means been fitted out to such a degree with regard to luring the traveller's currency: they are now tired and less interested in shopping than when they set out.

The tourist's main interest is, of course, the place visited. Traditionally this involves man-made attractions: ancient monuments and cities; architectural and technological innovations and their local inhabitants. Climate is an important reference framework with regard to the enjoyment of most tourists. Landscape depends on climate, which accounts very much for the character of the place visited. Climate, natural and cultural landscape are becoming increasingly important elements of a type of tourism which demands environmental quality as a reference framework for the enjoyment of the tourist, at the same time as coping with ever-increasing numbers of people.

Besides establishing a precedent, the first International Conference on Sustainable Tourism in 2004 in Segovia, Spain, highlighted the fact that cultural and natural tourism is playing a vital role in mass tourism. Economists are starting to realise this despite their initial incredulity. This is noteworthy in countries with a longer tradition of tourism such as France, the United States or Spain, but it is much more so in countries where the natural environment is still well conserved and constitutes the basic 'offer' to a type of tourist who is now more cultured and demanding. Protected natural areas, like National Parks and Biosphere Reserves, are receiving growing numbers of visitors and their nature preservation centres

must make a greater effort to offer the 'ecotourist' quality information from a scientific and cultural perspective.

The tourism offered and the tourism demanded constitute opposing ends of a delicate balance in terms of sustainability. Tourism will not favour sustainability if the environment is not considered a conditioning factor and nature conservation a horizon in this balance. Human well-being truly depends upon this. Tourism managers and the governments of countries that have long operated in this sector of the economy ought to pay much attention to this situation, heed the experts' opinions and act intelligently. Both are obliged to pass on their expertise in this sector to less-experienced countries, which have great possibilities for developing the activity on a conservation basis and to promote their natural and cultural heritage in a sensible fashion.

The Editors,
Bologna, 2006

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