ENVIRONMENTAL

SUSTAINABLE EU TOURISM
Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow

BEST PRACTICE: VALENCIA, SPAIN

Key Challenge

Climate protection and climate change mitigation.

Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Digital Solutions; Investments in infrastructure and product development; Research and innovation.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Urban

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 134.6 km²

Population | 792,492 in 2022

Type of Tourism | Coastal, maritime and inland water; Cultural; City; Business; Gastronomy; Cruise.

Tourism Organisation | Local Destination Management Organisation (DMO) is a Public-Private Partnership.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local authorities/ government; All tourism service providers; Technology providers; Research and Development (R&D) organisations.

Additional Challenges Covered | Appropriate local tourism strategies and policies to accelerate the transition to sustainable and resilient tourism; Lack of stakeholder management; Resilience and crisis management; Measurement and monitoring of sustainable tourism.

Context & Background

From the mid-1990s onwards, Valencia, a former industrial centre, experienced rapid tourism development. In 2023, almost 5.5 million overnight stays (2.3 million arrivals) were generated, 64.1% of which were international. In addition, around 500,000 cruise ship passengers visited the city. Tourism is an important economic factor, accounting for 15% of GDP and 11.8% of employment in 2023.

Key Challenge

Valencia repeatedly experiences droughts, with climate change exacerbating the situation in the region (as in many other parts of Spain). The last droughts occurred in 2022 and 2023, after which water-saving measures were implemented. Favoured by political measures (adopted by the green party in charge), climate protection was given high priority.

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Implementation of Solutions: Climate protection in tourism takes place on two levels. It is based on (1) strategic considerations and visions, and (2) the technological and innovation-friendly infrastructures necessary for climate protection, together with other accompanying measures.

SOLUTIONS

- The *Valencia 2030 Climate Mission* (created 2018 - 2020) aims to transform the city into a climate neutral and smart city by 2030, with a focus on sustainable urban mobility, energy efficiency, and green infrastructure. It was developed within the framework of the EU City Missions by the local government of Valencia in collaboration with various stakeholders, including environmental experts, urban planners, community representatives, and contributions from regional and national authorities. In addition, Visit València has *declared a Climate Emergency* as part of its membership in the Climate Emergency Alliance.
- In 2019, Visit Valencia developed a *Carbon footprint measurement system* in collaboration with environmental specialists, becoming the first city in the world to calculate the carbon footprint of all its tourism activities. This made allowed to identify and analyse the main sources of the total 1.3 million tons of tourism-related carbon emissions. No development costs incurred, as a scientific consulting firm, with which the city has collaborated for 50 years, developed this as a global business model.
- The carbon footprint measurement system allows to establish a clear path to achieving climate neutrality and to take measures to reduce tourism-related emissions, such as:
    - Infrastructures' improvement, including the expansion of renewable energy, electric public transport networks, and green spaces to increase CO_2 absorption.
    - Cooperation with airlines to promote the use of sustainable fuels.
    - From 2023 to 2025, companies will receive free energy audits and technical advice on energy saving.
    - *Assessment of risks and vulnerability of tourism to climate change* in Valencia.
    - In planning: Implementation of a digital carbon footprint management system using blockchain technology to track emissions from the tourism businesses. These emissions will be recorded using smart tags and entered into a digital platform for monitoring and management.

Replicability potential: High (requires strong political will).

Cost & funding source: The first steps to plan and develop a climate strategy were funded by the city council. Further projects were included in the Sustainable Tourism Destinations Plan, which has a budget of 7.5 million euros from the NextGeneration EU Fund.

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Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Smart technologies to measure carbon footprint; Available financing; Close collaboration between community and stakeholders; Creating a "green story" that companies are happy to follow; Change in awareness in society towards more sustainability.

Barriers: Dependence on external technology expertise; Conservative mindset of some stakeholders who need to be convinced to invest in climate protection (slows down the process); During the pandemic it was almost impossible to focus on climate change; No forests in the region to facilitate carbon offsetting.

Results and Impacts

- CO_2 emissions decreased by 8% in one year (2023-2024).
- Data helped to finance carbon offsetting.
- The entire tourism industry is involved in tackling climate change (sense of community).
- Climate protection efforts are recognised by customers, resulting in changes in the destination's image.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- As a tourism agency, it is crucial to ensure coordination with authorities and other sectors in the city.
- Networking with tourism stakeholders increases the awareness of the tools and knowledge already available in the destination.
- Investments in technology are highly recommended.

Useful Links

Sustainability, a pillar of Valencia's tourism strategy | Carbon Footprint Calculation of Valencia tourism activity 2021 | Valencia 2030 Climate Mission

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