



A.T3.3 Development of policy recommendations and strategies for the positioning of the Alpine Space as health tourism destination

D.T3.3.4 White paper on strategies and policy recommendations

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An undisputed strength of the Alps is their unique natural and cultivated landscapes – waterfalls, dense forests, pure mountain air, meadows full of flowers and herbs, and much more besides. Promoting the beauty of these is a strategy – while recognizing their healing power and thus developing health tourism offers is a successful strategy.

With its unique mountain world, diverse climate, outstanding biodiversity and cultural heritage, the Alpine region offers numerous opportunities for empowering and enabling people to make life choices that benefit their health.

Overall, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, there is a myriad of challenges to up-scaling and out-scaling of health-promoting tourism solutions in practice. The analysis has looked to some of the most important challenges it is facing regarding maintaining an effective aggregate transnational policy universe that keeps up to its promise of promoting a sustainable tourism ecosystem within the Alpine Space. Although there is a growing body of research in EU tourism policy, critical analyses into the structures, processes, efficacies and controversies of tourism policy formulation, implementation and practice are sparse. This report tried to address this void.

Certainly, this is a daunting task given the changing nature of current environmental challenges on the tourism industry at large. Nonetheless, research on these challenges and how they affect the efficacy of policy instruments applied has become ever more important should the “European project” survive its institutional crisis and overcome the general atmosphere of disillusionment on many levels.

Critically, on the level of principles, interventionist schemes of EU tourism policy are under pressure as government protection and support is a controversial means to regulate markets and seem to have in-built biases towards failure. Indeed, a combination of complexity, uncertainty and volatility is characteristic and explains a lot of what is unique about today’s tourism practice and therefore why policy is distinctively challenging.

Secondly, policies to stimulate demand and uptake of nature-based health tourism offerings in the Alpine Space are emerging, including more substantive measures to instigate transformative change towards sustainable tourism. These are definitely needed to address many of the systemic challenges in the tourism industry in the region.

In fact, international policymakers have lately been successful in embedding sustainability into policies to address climate change and biodiversity loss and the EU has invested considerable resources in largescale demonstrations of the benefits of nature-based market economies across Europe. In the interim, the climate and biodiversity crisis won’t wait.

Therefore, we advocate for sustained public sector investment in nature-based health tourism in the short term, accompanied by longer term transformative change measures in systems and processes to instigate the necessary shift towards a nature-based economy at large. Investment in NPT should be accompanied by measures to ensure such investment leads to direct economic benefits in terms of increased innovation, enterprise and job creation in the private sector supplying sustainable tourism. Policy support programmes shall further be inspired by gaining insights on “actionable knowledge” from health tourism practice. This enhances “implementable validity” and “instrumental impact” by discussing

critical challenges enterprises face in the process determining most effective paths of organizational innovation. We also wish to promote further research efforts on the health effects of nature-based health tourism products and services and help disseminate the research findings.

Thirdly, we propose lowering entry barriers of accessing funding opportunities at all levels of nature-based health tourism. In our view, this is necessary and shall help stimulating the establishment of networks of expertise on issues of health tourism in the Alps. Knowingly, these networks encompass a wide range of people which would all contribute to a better dissemination of knowledge across the board: local and regional administrations that have a legal competence for spatial planning and territorial development, chambers of commerce, industry or agriculture, labor market agencies, trade unions, employers' associations, private and public transport organizations, universities and education institutions, agencies for tourism promotion, institutions managing natural resources and environmental organizations, cultural organizations at regional and local level, small businesses, SMEs, and more. The targeted funding of regional coordinating bodies that manage the selected regional development paths in the form of a mediator for the various stakeholders, considering the three dimensions of sustainability, can also represent an important step forward in funding. Finally, more information for the Alpine regions themselves on how to use these EU programs for an innovative development of health tourism should be part of the future politics.

Ultimately, arguments for and against public intervention into health tourism markets need to be based on resolving conflicting issues about the effects of political measures that promote it. This means that public policy activity on the tourism market must first be evaluated on the basis of the extent to which the measures are suitable for strengthening economically disadvantaged actors for competition, preventing concentration processes that restrict competition, and booting economic opportunity in markets which lack financial resources.

In fact, it is necessary to examine whether public policy intervention contributes to ensuring market diversity while promoting ecological standards and meeting SDGs (in particular SDG3 to focus on health and wellbeing) while supporting health tourism activities.

Certainly, effective governance plans through means of direct subsidies for supporting a whole industry will first have to identify the big picture when aiming to resolve problems of an ailing or otherwise to be supported post-COVID tourism industry, all the way from setting clear and realistic objectives to measuring the effects of subsidy-impacted industry performance and output. This is not an easy task, as SDGs greatly challenge touristic performance as measured by appropriate value frameworks. As a corollary, this implies this requires the establishment of a strategic policy, budget, and monitoring/controlling framework for effective health-promoting tourism investments in the Alpine Space.

In all, actions in favor of nature-based health tourism are not just about achieving better health outcomes for tourists. Instead, the governance rationale, design, measures and instruments, procedures, and ensuing impacts shall benefit the whole health tourism ecosystem and all its players involved. Only this integrative approach will improve the

accountability of policymakers for health impacts at all levels of policymaking. It includes an emphasis on the consequences of public policies on health systems, determinants of health, and social well-being at large. It also contributes to sustainable development and the implementation of new strategies and practices for further strengthening Health-in-all Policies (HiAP) in the EU. Based on this rationale, we suggest a range of further concrete actions required to improve alignment across EC policies in support of nature-based health tourism market stimulation.