

Dear Mr. Governor - Dear Representatives of National and Local Authorities

It is my pleasure to be with you today, amongst old friends like Mr.Grebenarov, Mrs.dgieva, Mrs. Enylova and many others, participating in this Conference. Before I start my speech I would like to congratulate the hosting Authority for the excellent organisation. I have said before that the “heritage” of “Neebor Project” is alive and yet has produced a very capable team gathered under new challenges and topics.

I have mentioned – during the last conference in Granada - that it is more than clear to everybody our Region is very rich in terms of the number and variety of Natural and Cultural resources. The important question is whether we have the capacity to respond to every different touristic demand and to serve special target groups like tourists with disabilities, or senior tourists for instance. We must bear always in mind that senior tourists are travellers with habits, preferences and goals similar to those of the general population. While these individuals do have specific needs and demands in some respects, only a small portion of these travelers require sophisticated services or equipment.

As it is quite difficult for us to compete with many world-famous touristic destinations in Greece in terms of massive tourism, we are convinced that a totally new process of tourism development should begin for the region - beyond the typical sea-and-sun motif that dominates the entire country. The central and main objective of this new tourism development policy must be the quality of tourism and the so called ‘updated’ individualized provided services rather than its quantity scale. And that is the critical point where our project is mainly focused; on developing improved models and practises and approaches towards a development of a new policy for the senior tourists. The challenge is our project also to serve as a platform for new ideas and credible sets of potentially offered services.

Before I pass to the specific practices of ours, please let me present my personal point of view about the objectives of the practices on tourism for the specific target group. What we must have in mind is:

- To raise the level of awareness on the importance and significance of making travel accessible to everyone and more specifically to senior tourists.

- To promote greater accessibility for all tourism services for senior travellers.
- To facilitate – after all -the exchange of know-how and knowledge among Tourage Partners.
- To enable regional and local authorities and other stakeholders to improve their policies, methods and capacities in the area of senior tourism. For example, the administrative center of our Region - city of Komotini – is mainly focused the last two years in another tourism target group. Those with disabilities.
- Enhancing promotional and marketing capacities in public bodies
- Ensuring the capacity building of local public bodies through a cooperative horizontal approach.
- A strengthening of institutional-stakeholder governance of the system through commonly-defined balanced actions
- The establishment of a system for identifying stakeholder concerted actions and ideas

Please let me now share with you some good practises of our region concerning senior tourism services: It would be quite unfair in my personal opinion to choose and present only one.

1) In **Kavala Regional Unit**, the senior tourist should definitely experience the **MUD BATHS of KRINIDES**. The whole idea is connected to health-care services by taking advantage of thermal clay mud which act as “nature’s sustainable laboratory”, for tens of thousands of years, producing with admirable accuracy this substance, so valuable for human’s health, especially for the older ones who face various health issues. The global fame of the thermal mud baths at Krinides is based to confessions by hundreds of people, in Greece and abroad, who were cured of chronic ailments and aches. Another famous thermal spring resource close to mud baths is the **spring baths in Eleftheres** which is now renovated under the supervision of Region East Macedonia and Thrace in order to provide excellent services in modern facilities.

2) Xanthi’s **“OLD TOWN FESTIVAL”** (Regional Unit of Xanthi) which takes place constantly since 1991 during the beginning of autumn every year attracts visitors from all over Europe. The most significant part of these events is realized in the traditional settlement of Xanthi, (so-called “Old Town”), like concerts with famous

singers and groups, animations taking place in alleys, traditional products expositions and several other events. Old town's festival is connected with the annual carnival fest which gathers more than half a million people in the beginning of spring. The reason why the festival attracts thousands of senior tourists is not other than the idea of visiting another era with considerable architectural interest and feel the authentic and unique atmosphere of past centuries.

3) The unique beauty of Rodopi Regional Unit also attracts many senior tourists because except of the blue flag labels which ensures water quality and beach safety (which are not crowded but peaceful), ideal for quality and relaxing vacations the surrounding coastal area has hundreds of cultural sources to provide since ancient cities were based during all historical eras. This interesting **CULTURAL PATH** will be our priority for the next period.

4) **GREEN TOURISM** in River Evros' Delta and National Park of Dadia in **Evros Regional Unit** constitutes one of the most important wetlands, not only in Greece but also in Europe. In Evros' Delta hundreds of thousands of birds find shelter and food all year round, while it constitutes a very important natural resource for the local community, because of its value for fishing, stock breeding, agriculture, climate, flood protection, education, recreation, science. Protected by International Ramsar Convention and Natura 2000 the area offers to elderly tourists a unique opportunity for fishing, stock breeding, agriculture, climate, flood protection, education, recreation and science in calm and protected environment. In connection with the National Park of Dadia Virgin Forest is an ideal destination for senior tourists.

5) Last but not least, **Regional Unit of Drama** except from the natural beauty of **RHODOPE MOUNTAINS** (with ski resort in Falakro Mountain) attracts hundreds of thousands of senior tourists since provides a variety of actions for elder travellers like for e.g. walking tours on mapped trails and paths, soft climbing, horse riding, visiting of **MAARAS CAVE** (or Aggitis Cave) Another innovative action - part of the same best practice – is the production of local, traditional products by **women's union of Kokkinoglia**. Those products are of high quality, made the same way like they used to be hundreds of years ago and are indeed popular amongst senior tourists.

One of the main challenges of our Institution today, is to set the framework for proposing an IQM (Integrated Quality Management) model for fostering strategies for developing different kinds and products of Tourism. As today's tourists are increasingly demanding, the quality, diversity and specific environmental and cultural attributes of tourism supply constitute a key factor of its competitiveness. The sustainability of tourism is an ethical requirement and factor of competitiveness in our area bearing in mind the specific ongoing economic conditions and the vulnerable natural, cultural and social heritage. This IQM strategy will support new local employment and economic growth redistributing existing tourism pressure over an extended season and toward different market segments drawn from local cultural and natural diversity. All stakeholders have a shared responsibility to make tourism sustainable: they will work together for a "total quality" approach, embracing ethical, strategic and commercial criteria that will hold the key to the competitive quality of destinations.

Let me please now refer to the "tools" of our Region which are focused on the objective of Tourism Development:

- First of all, since Jan 1st 2011, a new institutional position has been established in order to promote tourism issues and this is the **Position of Deputy Governor for Development and Tourism**, who is appointed (not elected like R.U. Deputy Governors) every two years. His seat is at the R.U. of Kavala which as you might know absorbs more than 80% of the annual number of our visitors, including seniors.
- Another important "tool" concerning tourism in REMTH is the "**Committee for Tourism of the Region**" including not only Regional Councillors but Professionals as well, like for e.g. Hoteliers, Restaurant owners, Travel Agents etc who present their views and ideas since they are directly dealing with every tourism aspect. This Committee is taking place often in several cities with agendas carrying different issues. Needless to say that Committee for Tourism is fully informed for the results and the expected deliverables of our Projects which concern tourism of the region.
- As far as the financing sources and tools is concerned, our Touristic Promotion is part of **Regional National Strategic Reference Framework**

2007-2013 having special code (programme-line) for that reason entitled “**touristic promotion**” approximately sum is 6.000.000 (?) € (Μάλλον γύρω στα 800.000 είναι).

- Also projects financed by ERDF are submitted and implemented almost during every call. Among those projects are: **TOURage and REVERSE** which ended a few months ago and were mainly dealing with the promotion of Natural Sources as attractions for the development of the tourism in our Region. **CHORD and SHIFT**, two successfully implemented MED Projects, **JTI-TARGET** which is a project under bilateral trans-border cooperation GR-BG, dealing with new technologies for the promotion of touristic sources, natural and cultural. Also **RECVLTIVATOUR**, in which our Region is regional associated partner and Burgas Regional Tourist Association Agency is a Project Partner. Our view is that throughout Objective III Projects, except the expected delivered outputs, a very important parameter here is the know-how exchange. Really important for regions like ours which seeks innovative ideas for the promotion of the tourism. Exchanging experiences and cluster cooperation through the project activities strengthen decision-making, vision, governance and impact at local level
- Last but not least, let me refer to the Long-Term Strategic Plan of our Region which is at the moment under construction aiming to put the objectives for the next years till 2030 and to that through its composition we are trying to reach every aspect of Touristic Development, including the transport networks in South East Europe making accession to our attractions easier for our neighboring and other countries of Balkans and Black Sea Basin.

I would like once again to congratulate you for the excellent event. I am sure that our works for the next two days will be crowned with success.