

ONLINE WORKSHOP

European Blueprint for a Sustainable Tourism for Health

event organised in collaboration with Athens Reference Site and ProMIS

Title: European Blueprint for a Sustainable Tourism for Health



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1. Tourism for health: outlining a new opportunity

In early 2021 Athens Reference Site, on behalf of the Reference Site Collaborative Network (RSCN), ProMIS and NET4Age-friendly came together to evaluate approaches across Europe to Tourism for Health with a view to:

- a) developing a shared vision on Tourism for Health; and
- b) outlining a roadmap to strengthen the Tourism for Health offering by conjugating innovative services and added value activities which could contribute to improving health and wellbeing.

This initiative was born within the framework of the EIP on AHA, in a synergic effort between Action Groups A3 and D4, RSCN, SHAFE and ProMIS networks. It was further developed thanks to the collaboration with EUPHA.

Arising from this work the RSCN organized an online Tourism for Health Workshop on 22nd July to present a number of Tourism for Health initiatives implemented by European regions. 2021. The event was attended by 45 participants.

In the introduction to the event the moderators highlighted that the combination between tourism and health has long been part of our history: for example the use of thermal therapies to improve health and wellbeing can be traced back to the Roman Empire. Health is recognised as society's greatest wealth, and this has been re-emphasised over the last 18 months, or so, with an increased awareness of public health as one of the most important assets we share in the EU. The networks that are collaborating to develop the concept of Tourism for Health have been developing their activities in the framework of health promotion and disease prevention inside and outside the health care systems, and this is where we see an opportunity to conjugate a number of services bringing an added value for several of health dimensions: nutrition, physical activity, mental wellbeing, social interactions. We believe in collaborative approaches for sustainable development, and tourism for health can take advantage of the diversity and sociocultural richness of EU traditions.

2. Supporting the development of Tourism for Health through EU funding

The current EU Multiannual Financial Framework provides a number of opportunities that can support renovation and modernization of infrastructures, in line with accessibility requirements



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and integration of digital solutions, as well as reskilling and upskilling of human resources to strengthen the EU tourism sector as a whole. Such investments allow the development of an attractive ecosystem where regions take advantage of the services for health and wellbeing promotion and disease prevention targeting the entire lifecourse, as well as sociocultural traditions to diversify the tourism offer and therefore increase the attractiveness of a range of destinations, including lesser known areas. This approach has been pioneered by several EU regions, as highlighted in a recent RSCN survey which helped map good practices in Tourism for Health Tourism.

The latter was also explored by the HoNCAB project - facilitating the creation of pilot networks of hospitals for cross border patients, focusing on administrative procedures supporting health service provision.

The pilot sites involved in the HoNCAB project were mostly recognised holiday destinations which meant the majority of the healthcare services provided to cross-border patients were also offered to tourists during short temporary stays. Research extended to also include cross-border healthcare services delivered to tourists and this highlighted potential issues in identifying the funding available to cover the costs of treatments for wellbeing and/or general health improvements. The project case study analysis concluded the availability and quality of healthcare services are important criteria in informing tourists' choice of holiday destination, and can supplement other material to promote and market a region's tourism attractiveness. In February 2018 the ProMIS Network organised a Tourism for Health workshop in Rome. Participants at the event defined the concept of a tourist's "Proximity Hospital", being a hospital within the tourism location, that provides all levels of health services, including those for complex conditions, 24 hours a day to many and diverse patients. Such services would be expected to include: urgency-emergency services (i.e. Emergency Room, Basic Surgery Room, Renal Unit, ICU unit); maternal-infant path, diagnostic services, health prevention and health promotion services.

3. Tourism for health and the networks: the perspectives of ProMIS, CEFPAS and SHAFE

A S.W.O.T analysis was also carried out by the ProMIS network at the event in Rome. This highlighted particular opportunities for Thermal Therapies, and Food and Nutrition as key dimensions of health and wellbeing within a Tourism for Health offering by regions. Research into the development of opportunities for these areas was seen as being enhanced through existing international collaborations by universities and research centers through a range of networks.

Conversely, the S.W.O.T. analysis revealed that the fragmentation of the stakeholders in the tourism sector as an issue, as well as the weak collaborations between public and private sector organisations in developing and implementing tourism strategies for a region. A further issues could be the availability and suitability of technology, and tools and training available to those working in the in the sector.

In order to maximise the opportunities Tourism for Health can bring CEFPAS developed a proposal for a Charter to develop a shared approach to sustainable Tourism for Health. This was presented to the ProMIS and RSCN network member regions to secure support and identify next steps towards developing an operational plan.

SHAFE – (Stakeholders Network on Smart, Healthy Age-Friendly Environments) have been working with regions and municipalities to identify and use the opportunity of Smart Health Age Friendly Environment in facilitating Tourism for Health. From their work with stakeholder SHAFE have identified a number of key elements to help exploit Tourism for Health opportunities:

- Age friendly environment: accessible, environmentally sustainable, Lifecourse approach to health and wellbeing, services are suitable for and accessible by all ages;
- Balancing services that bring a collective added value with the opportunities to personalise the offering such as: food/nutrition, adapted physical activity, brain health, services for the caregivers, silver tourism & easy access to specific health services;
- Engage local communities to identify and agree the added value;

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- Invest in research: strengthen scientific evidence supporting innovative services (thermal therapy, forest therapy, digitally supported services etc);
- Invest in training: ensure all those working in the sector including health and care providers, hospitality sector, activity providers etc. have the skills and competences to provide for the health and wellbeing needs of tourists.
- Strengthen internationalization efforts to develop and promote Tourism for Health.

4. *Tourism for health & Universities: the study of Udine and La Sapienza*

Generating evidence that supports specific services for tourism which brings added value for health and wellbeing is important to scaling-up and exploiting Tourism for Health opportunities within broader regional Tourism strategies.. This will require sufficient levels of investment in research to help quantify the benefits, not only the economic benefits to a region but also the health and wellbeing benefits to individuals and society. A recent study on Forest Therapy carried out provided new insights. The research compared the key-features of the Japanese FTBs – Forest Therapy Stations/Bases, which represent a landmark in this research field, with those of the early FTB operating in Italy. The similarities that exist between the Japanese and the Italian experiences were analysed, resulting in specific ideas to exploit the opportunities arising from the benefits of forest therapy in health tourism.

Further research by the University of Rome “La Sapienza” considered the effectiveness of thermal therapy applied to respiratory disease. The benefits of thermal medicine were shown, using Crenotherapy targeted to respiratory disorders, and demonstrated the inhalation crenotherapy and climatic-environmental aspects represent a valid aid in the treatment and prevention of COPD. In addition, Thermal therapy can be integrated and alternated with drug therapy. Not only does this lower the frequency of possible side effects for the patients but it can also generate potential financial savings of healthcare providers.

5. *Conclusion*

The emerging, successful approaches to sustainable Tourism for Health balance patient safety with providing health and wellbeing offerings that provide added value to a region. It is recognised however, that the evidence and experiences gathered to date are limited and before a shared plan can be developed there is a need to fully understand:

- regional approaches to Tourism for Health and its relationship with broader Tourism Strategies,
- how it is being implemented across Europe, and
- how evidence-based experiences can be shared to further develop this as an opportunity for regions,

The RSCN are undertaking a survey to help identify this information as a first step to developing a shared plan for regions. The survey is available at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/TfHSurvey2021>

The survey will assess:

- ongoing, successful examples of Tourism for Health offerings accessible to older adults and citizens with special health needs;
- the identification and implementation of innovative services and activities to improve health and wellbeing;
- additional health and care services to be provided (Local, Regional, National levels)

